over the decades spent cultivating this story, a kind of mythos has accrued detailing a kind of history of the realm. resolving those fragments into a whole requires first gathering them in one place and pointing out what adjustments are needed in order to reconcile each piece. plots, arcs, threads and impulses from notes developed at different points need to be accommodated or adjusted as they are assimilated. notes on how to proceed are included here. the raw material will be set off in different shades, with adjustments in darker tones.

a significant portion of the mythos was devoted to the perspectives of the dragon and the phoenix on creation, from point paradox, through the dreaming and realization of the common realm. a version of the fall, the cataclysm and the resurrection of aeirn appears. part of the history of aeirn is explored. as an early development, the material establishes many critical concepts and events in a primitive and misleading context. it needs to be adjusted to support the more evolved positions that have resolved.

what is presented as the perspective of the phoenix applies to the evolution of the demon of the realm, starting with its angelic origins.

the dragon perspective applies first to the evolution of the archetype. references to the dragon as an entity apply to the focus, though adjustments are needed where the dragon and the goddess are addressed as the focus.

the inspiration manifests as an angel with the elemental nature of a phoenix within the omni

the evolution of the dream began with the first contact between the dragon and the phoenix. the contact manifested as a singularity that riveted both of them. they were polarized by their response to that primal touch. she experienced the awareness of nothing, in which her awareness was as everything, and he experienced the awareness of everything, in which his awareness was as nothing. from the first impulse of point paradox, they were driven by curiosity touched with apprehension. driven to penetrate the depths of the mystery he confronted, the dragon did not realize that he was divided by the thrust of his pursuit, plunging the anchor of their existence into the mist of souls. the phoenix, striving to comprehend the mystery penetrating her, evolved in pace with the dragon. her understanding focused internally, inspiring her to explore the possibilities of herself and dream. his understanding focused externally, exploring the possibilities of the absolute and attuning himself to dreaming.

from the onset of this primal intercourse, the dragon and the phoenix were perfecting the embodiment of the absolute the other was probing. as they evolved, their awareness of themselves was being stimulated by a growing awareness of others. they seemed to simply coalesce around the dragon and the phoenix like a thickening mist, an infinite number of glittering motes. their awareness of this thickening mist was reflected through the singularity anchoring them to the threshold of paradox. these reflections confronted the dragon and the phoenix with unexpected contrast to the all and nothing they had been probing. the endless flux of naked souls that he channeled into her teased her awareness into a dense froth, an invisible, intangible foam of apprehension, the inexplicable complication which stimulated her primal evolution. the potential in her that would evolve in him to become the signature nature of dragons evolved into creation, a unifying projection that others would come to know as the matrix of universes. the potential in him that would evolve in her to become the signature nature of a phoenix evolved into the anchor, a unifying projection of gestalt consciousness that others would come to revere as the embodiment of cosmic consciousness, the creator.

initially, the dragon and the phoenix were formless entities, the embodiment of pure thought. the focus of her existence was reflected in the manifestation of patterns which perception transformed into matter and energy. her unconscious mind transcended the bounds of space and time, immersed in paradox from which chaos and order took root in dreaming to create the real, surreal and ideal spheres of being. the focus of his existence, absorbed in the fabric of her mind, was the primal awareness of space and time underlying the matrix of her evolving consciousness. his fascination with her blinded him to the fact that he had opened her to the threshold of souls.

their complimentary nature, and intimate involvement in the universal matrix, separated them from the endless tide of souls flickering in and out of phase with the dream. as the strange and silent presences pressed in on them, adding a strange ghostlike texture to their accustomed solitary existence, the increasing stimulation teased their growing consciousnesses with fleeting sensations, the first hint of reality. these moments of resolution appeared whenever a mote from the mist of souls interacted with the foam of the dream. there seemed to be a broad spectrum of difference between motes, which for the most part seemed to be little knots of information. believing that they had stumbled upon the heart of the mysteries they were devoted to exploring, they devoted attention to probing them, unaware that they probed the minds and souls of others. their actions increased the resonance of their dreaming. where they had initially dreamed alone, they were gradually developing a rapport and dreaming together.

eventually, they found themselves in a constant dream state. as they began to explore these dreams, they began to encounter other dreamers, individuals who were struggling to resolve themselves in the mist. dreamers manifested complex organic vessels, elements assembled to provide cohesive support virtually oblivious of the significance of their manipulation of matter and energy. from the beginning of the dream, two types of dreamers had appeared. in most ways, dreamers were alike, free spirits who focused their will and attention on the dream, but there were those who were constructive, always striving to cultivate and nurture the dream, and there had been those who were destructive, always striving to manipulate and exploit the dream. these souls reinforced the dream with their transient attachments, adding resolution which provided better purchase for other souls to form stronger associations.

over time, this interaction helped crystallize the matrix, cultivating a foundation upon which life could establish itself, marking the transition from a surreal domain to a real domain. the inclusion of living organisms marked the transition from a more spiritual environment to a more physical environment. the realm, in the age of elementals, was boundless compared to the time and space of the reality their animal offspring were born into. the first living organisms appeared as the result of intercourse between constructive spirits indulging destructive spirits. with a more tangible interface, the influx of souls increased and filled in the gap between the dragon and the phoenix. they were a constant presence, their awareness saturating the dream, but remained essentially dreams themselves. as more and more individuals were born and living entirely in the context of the dream, the first taste of reality interposed itself between the dragon and the phoenix. distracted from their initial, abstract pursuits, they turned their attention to exploring the mystery of life.

over billions of years of evolution, the dragon and the phoenix mused upon the phenomena of life.

for the dragon, life served as the catalyst that awakened him to the existence of reality. like the phoenix, the dragon had been drawn to the living souls who populated reality. the dragon was fascinated by the depth and complexity of the world, an environment where he could confront other entities and engage in a full range of intercourse. unlike the phoenix, he had been particularly drawn to the spawn of dreamers who owed their existence more to the ethereal evolution of reality than they did material evolution. the dragon established numerous associations with various sentient races which had evolved from dreams, for whom he had served as an organizing influence.

for the phoenix, life served as the catalyst that awakened her to the existence of other souls. in the dawn of the dream’s reality, the phoenix rode the light with no sense of local time or space, her consciousness unfolding in the eternal grasp of photons shifting from state to state. life emerged and took root while she dreamed, exploring the mystery of her own existence. the phoenix first experienced the veiling touch of alien awareness when her attention was absorbed into the primitive plants nurtured by the primordial light. she quickly grasped the organizing principle of material life, and quickened the evolution of fruiting and flowering organisms. the conscious attention she invested in this association with plants returned to the light as host plants died and burned in natural fires, until absorbed into other plant life. as her consciousness could unfold in the body of light, her consciousness unfolded in the body of her host plants, and in time, into the bodies of those creatures that evolved to feed on them. the more sophisticated the organism, the thicker the veil of alien awareness, the organizing presence associated with it, proved to be. in this fashion, over time, she became acquainted with the unity and diversity of life, and drawn to the light of evolving consciousness and sentience.

their initial interaction with life and analysis of reality inspired them to spawn psychic projections, modeled on sentient life yet bearing an eerie resemblance to the dreamers who had been excluded by the living. the phoenix released the idea of herself to move independently through creation, joining the host of angels. the dragon abstracted the potential of itself, a pervasive thought invading the minds of mortals as a predatory dream—in many ways a prototypical demon.

the dragon and the phoenix interacted with life primarily through these agents, who were forced to interact with the living through psychic contact or manipulation of reality. as angel and demon, they swiftly isolated the initial point of contact between the dragon and the phoenix, identifying it as the creator, the selfless self. the focus of the dragon’s attachment to the phoenix had been the witness to, and catalyst for, creation. he had been the conduit, the key for every other soul’s attunement to creation. the dragon was a projection of it, a personification of point paradox, the one in all and the all in one, a universal truth.

the angels aligned themselves with the creator, conscious of the fact that they were embodiments of creation itself. the demons considered themselves to be of a kind with the creator, set apart from creation by the will of individuality, and could not distinguish between service to an ideal and enslavement to another’s will. to them, the dragon had been a force of nature, a mechanism of free will that inspired them with a hunger for independence and a desire for souls of their own to end their dependence on creation to exist.

spawning the angels had been an instinctive attempt by the phoenix to personify herself, inspired by the recognition of other souls and the impact of self awareness triggered by their experiences in life. from the angels she had learned that there was more to her than the reflection of qualities she had seen in others, and thus she would need to define herself before she could personify herself. considering that she was but awareness, and everything that was not itself independently aware simply a manifestation of her awareness, visible to her only as a reflection in the awareness of other souls, it was difficult to define herself in any exclusive context.

the dragon had experienced a similar quandary. in his existence, becoming coherent through the awareness of others he had observed every permutation of existence, examined every possibility that manifested itself, and found nothing that put him into an inclusive context. the only model either could look at was the creator, which was frightening, being a part of everyone and yet being no one in particular, in and of himself. the angels and demons demonstrated that independent consciousness could exist in an entity that was merely a projection, and not self possessed.

to understand themselves, they needed to find out who their existence was dependant on, who was projecting their consciousness. the search for a soul called for a search through creation. as had been true from the beginning of the dream, creation was exposed to all souls, which flickered in and out of phase, sometimes lending resolution to a mote of dust, or a spark of light, sometimes taking root in a living organism and enduring for a consequential span. their own experience suggested they were looking for a soul with extraordinary sophistication, capable of grasping infinitely complex patterns.

such a soul would be drawn to the complexity of sentient life. their search isolated countless souls sophisticated enough to project consciousness as complex as their own, and most of them did. all souls had the potential, even if they had not consciously realized it. their search did not turn up a soul who projected them, even among those who resonated almost perfectly with creation. they each represented the full commitment their souls had made to existence. in their search, they had been inspired by, and in many cases interacted with, countless sentient species.

more than ever, they were drawn to take part in life, and each found ways to incorporate themselves. the phoenix returned to her search for a context to personify herself. the dragon had been motivated by the recognition of potential in every soul to encourage its development, not the least afraid to encourage the development of others like himself if he could not find any who already were. nor was he afraid to confront the living with his true nature, an alien form of life, an embodiment of pure thought.

the angel became the guardian of a man initiated into dragon-hood

the dragon had discovered a way to tap into and program a latent part of the psyche, which was similar to the creation of the ethereal demons. one important key to awakening an individual’s psionic potential was to shatter the assumptions of mortality, so the process was both traumatic and primal. initiation was a terrifying ordeal, in which an initiate’s nightmare predator came to life and hunted him down. the dragon legacy passed on to most species through the evocation of their natural predators, rather than the exclusive predator the initiates quickly adopted to establish themselves as a distinct species. thus, in many cultures the dragon legacy was mistaken for something else, like vampirism or lycanthropy. the dragon’s initiates had evolved swiftly during the emergence of animal life in the universe, and pursued sentience as predators. once they succeeded in claiming their prey, and turning them into dragons, they brought them into the heart of an expanding, intergalactic empire.

the dragon himself came upon and became anchored to a species perfect for his nature. in time, even the dragon’s initiates had become identified with that perfect predator, the animal embodiment recognized throughout the universe as the dragon. dragons, as an organic species, had evolved past the point where they needed or desired to reproduce, which was wise given the bloody path that enabled their adopted species to achieve sentience. dragons had hunted on eden back in the day of dinosaurs and left during the cataclysm that wiped them out. they returned to eden already well established as a patron race cultivating sentience throughout the universe. dragons patrolled the universe seeking out living worlds and watching them for the emergence of sentient organisms. dragon eventually returned to eden to see what had emerged in the dinosaurs’ wake and discovered humanity. they found humans to possess tremendous potential. a breeding population was captured and taken into the heart of an intergalactic civilization established by the ancient races the dragon had initiated. a dragon presence was established on eden to observe the development of the human race in its native environment. dragons were not alone in their interest in emerging sentience. the phoenix had not simply ignored the races the dragon had favored. in fact and she had studied races he had overlooked, before finding her inspiration. she had been drawn to eden in her ongoing search for a context to personify herself. while the dragon had focused on the most advanced species he could find, the phoenix focused on the newest, most innovative species she could find. the phoenix had engaged in a solitary pursuit, but this had not put her at a disadvantage. as the dreamer in the dream she had the advantage of an innate presence in creation. life had evolved in the fabric of her psyche, and in this fashion, she embraced all life. the phoenix could not help but notice the emergence of new sentient species. however, to conduct her study of sentient life she needed to approach it on its own level. the sensitive and perceptive forms of animal served excellently to focus her attention.

the phoenix had become part of the fabric of life on countless occasions over the eons of creation, carried on the thread of light devoured by plants into the animals that consumed them, and found herself in a position to observe the mystery and majesty of sapient consciousness up close. on eden, she quickly came to favor the form of a bird of prey for spying on primitive humans. this was not the first time the phoenix had taken a form that was at risk of being slain and consumed by the sentient creatures she observed. the act of manifesting a corporeal form concentrated the essence of the phoenix to a degree that stood out from her all encompassing presence in every aspect of creation. that intense association with her adopted flesh actually made the prospect of being devoured attractive and useful, since it allowed her consciousness to pierce the veil of sentient awareness that left her only subliminally aware of their flesh and dazzled by the light of sentience. in the time it took to digest and assimilate her flesh, her consciousness became an intimate part of an organism. in time, the dominion of native souls over their own bodies, and the patterns that sustained them, would be asserted over the incorporated material and shut her consciousness out. it was part of the effect that the living had on matter and energy, imposing their own stamp upon reality. it would take an unprecedented occurrence to make her wary of being eaten, or a fortuitous accident. her curiosity was piqued by contact with primitive humans, as they emerged in the wilderness of a nameless paradise. over the course of several generations, she studied them. the phoenix had evolved tremendously by this point, possessing incredible focus and self determination, an instinctive and intuitive understanding of space and time, matter and energy, a mind capable of weaving thoughts and feelings into reality. taking material form was a simple procedure, but she had long since grown past blindly adopting host forms, and begun to adapt the lessons taught by embracing life in it's diversity. through observation, she had begun to understand the complexity of human perspectives and social intercourse. she had experienced degrees of consciousness and sentience in other life forms, but rarely had she encountered a species with so much raw potential.

while she knew of thousands of species which were more refined or sophisticated, human beings were the most complicated and diverse people she had ever encountered. the race seemed to attract older souls, as if being human was truly a test worthy of the best. in confronting the human race, she confronted a promising context for personifying herself. the human organism impressed her deeply, and human consciousness seemed to be the perfect mirror in which to examine her own consciousness, and a way to explore her own identity. attempting to define and express herself in human terms, she experimented by taking human form and interacting with people, but by her nature she had no humanity, no matter how self possessed and personable she was. in some ways, she found it impossible to be human. in particular, she felt painfully incomplete limited to an exclusively male or female sex. the duality of sex confounded her, and human sexuality was highly evolved, effecting every aspect of human life. during her attempts to adopt human form, she simply could not commit to one sex to the exclusion of the other. among humans, this one flaw was potentially crippling. as hard as she struggled to resolve the form and features that embodied her understanding of herself, she struggled hardest to engender herself. it did not take her long to discover the exceptions to human bisexuality, nor did it take long for her to observe the ways individuals of ambiguous sex or gender were excluded from their families and communities. in some cases they were admired or revered as special, and in some cases they were persecuted, if not exiled or executed outright. unable to resolve the dilemma posed by human sexuality, she retreated to spying as a bird of prey to gain perspective. while closely examining a pair of humans who seemed the perfect models for expressing herself, a young man and his mate, she fell prey to their primitive slings. in her preoccupation, she had forgotten the limits and vulnerability of her avian form and allowed her curiosity to overrule caution.

this was the first time she had been consumed by an organism she had a personal interest in. her consciousness permeated the flesh of her vessel on a level the bird’s death could not effect. she became aroused and concentrated in the flesh as it cooked, anticipating the consumption and eager to become intimately woven into the fabric of their bodies. her intense concentration opened her to an extraordinary chain of events. the bird was consumed, and the phoenix absorbed into them. her fascination with their bodies was overwhelmed by a taste of blinding passion as they followed their meal by having intercourse. this process, which served to lure a soul into conception, caught the phoenix up, binding her into the circuit of bliss, exposing her naked soul to the union of male and female. at the same time, the makeshift spit upon which the remains of her vessel had roasted collapsed into the fire, and began to burn. this association of passion and pleasure, consumption and flame, mixed with the rising crescendo of orgasm and conception to form a transcendental epiphany. because of what she was, this epiphany expressed itself in reality. the material which had composed the consumed flesh ignited in resonance with the burning remains. the living flame filled the flesh of the lovers, their bodies burning form within like embers before unleashing the metamorphic flame. the two souls, minds entwined with that of the phoenix, were embraced and sustained by her as their bodies released them. in the flames, she wove new bodies, resurrecting them as two birds, twins to the one they had consumed. as they emerged from the flames, they were seared with the understanding of what they had experienced, deeply impressed with the instinct and impulse and power that would define them, and the phoenix herself, as phoenixes. once they were free and clear, the phoenix looked upon herself, and embodied the inspiration that had come to her in this profound embrace.

the impulse of human intercourse proved to be the catalyst necessary for her to personify herself. instinctively embodying her full sexuality, she manifested a body that was neither female nor male, though functional as either, creating a unique, kindred species as alien as it was human. at first, slipping in among humans seemed easy enough. the unique form she had created was close enough in proportions and build for her to pass for female even in the nude, and erotic enough to inspire intimate relationships with individuals of both sexes. her lighter form and ageless appearance made it possible for her to even pass as an adolescent male, if she remained clothed from the waist down, though she did tend to draw greater animosity from men when she tried to pass for one. as long as she kept on the move, she did fine, but if she settled down for a significant length of time it became impossible to hide her differences from people. she could only sustain contact with people who recognized her as a boy for a couple of years before people noticed that she did not age of was not truly a man. it was far easier to sustain her presence in a community as a girl, but only for a decade at most. the only true companions she could cling to were the couple she had initiated, when they bothered to assert their original forms. there were even differences between herself and them. the initiates had remained a man and a woman, in human form, but what distinguished them from the phoenix was that they were able to reproduce. it had not taken them long to realize that their first boy and girl were in fact reincarnations of themselves. after their passing, when they regarded themselves as siblings and took other mates, they proved capable of natural conception as well. the phoenix had ample opportunities to conceive a child, but never became pregnant. while experimenting to see if she could at least sire young, she exposed her true form and was forced to flee from the community she had been a part of at the time.

the phoenix’s adventures had not gone unnoticed by the dragon garrison on eden. they had received reports of her unique form, and investigated the possibility of a new human mutation. the phoenix had never imagined that there were beings who could spy on her through animal eyes, and had not been aware that she had been under observation for generations. her longevity, and the unique signature of her psyche fascinated the dragon. because she was truly one of a kind, they had hesitated to approach her and risk losing her. they had, however, sent reams of observational data back to their superiors in the empire. those reports lured the dragon to eden. the dragon had developed a keen interest in the human species. he had closely monitored the breeding sample that had been delivered to the empire and watched as their young adapted to the intergalactic civilization. he had been impressed by their versatility and had suggested that they be considered for a more prominent role than uninitiated servitors. his suggestions had been drowned out by experts who insisted that the species needed more time to evolve. even without initiation, second and third generation humans had proven themselves more adept and better adapted to dragon civilization than some of the initiated species. he hungered to know what a human could do with unlocked potential. from observing how well humans responded to the technology servitor species were forced to depend on to harness their latent potential, he was certain they would make impressive dragons. he was surprised and delighted by the reports about the phoenix, suggesting the next stage of human evolution might be at hand. he set out to capture her and bring her back for study. it was somewhat disappointing to arrive and find out that she had vanished. the official observer reports stated that she had been executed by her tribe, but apparently that had not stopped her, for sightings of her, or a specimen identical to her, had been reported by numerous scouts in the field.

the dragon decided to wait until those sightings could be confirmed, before taking personal action. while he waited, the dragon distracted himself by conducting an experiment to determine how initiation would affect a pre-sentient species. a favorable result could help him win support for beginning the initiation of the human race. the dragon selected a tiger, a predator observers had reported preying on primitive humans, as the subject of his experiment. the dragon noted when he found it that it was devouring one of its human prey, unaware that the tiger had stumbled upon and devoured the phoenix. not even the dragon could have identified her from the remains the feline was polishing off. the dragon reached out and tapped into the tiger’s animal psyche, prompting the predatory shadow of initiation. the shadow would take time to coalesce into a palpable threat, during which time the tiger could digest his meal in peace. the dragon withdrew, since the process needed no supervision and only the result mattered to him. in his absence, the tiger was consumed by metamorphic flames as the remains of the phoenix ignited in its belly. the tiger resurrected in her image, but her new form and phoenix nature did not confound or deter the shadow of dragon initiation. if anything, it encouraged it, causing it to solidify and begin its pursuit before the tiger had a chance to confront the phoenix who had resurrected at her side. the tiger’s shadow had been patterned after the dragon’s signature form, so it was hardly surprising that the phoenix, for the first time in her existence, fled from a predator in abject terror. in spite of the strength, agility and speed of the form the phoenix had given the tiger, there was no outrunning her own shadow. her death marked the end of her second initiation, and first independent resurrection. her dragon twin picked up the form of the phoenix as it slipped free of the phoenix flames, and fled. the phoenix had calmed down and pursued the shadow once she realized it was not chasing her, so she arrived to take the tiger phoenix under her wing and help her adapt to her new condition.

the dragon returned the next day to see how the experiment had turned out. he was surprised at the confusing trail the hunt had left behind. it was impossible to account for the three distinct trails leading away from the bloody encounter, or the fact that they all bore the scent of the tiger’s last meal. he was forced to assume the trails were not as fresh as they seemed, and had all been made by the same individual before the tiger devoured her. on the outside possibility that the initiate had taken the form of its human victim, he followed the tracks of the individual who appeared to have fled alone into the wilderness. this trail led him to the tiger dragon, and a shocking confrontation with the form of the one he had come to eden to study. he considered it a fortunate accident that the tiger’s initiation had preserved what its last meal had destroyed. he took the tiger dragon under his wing, after appropriating a sample which would allow him to assume her new form, and withdrew. initially, no one realized that the tiger was split into dragon and phoenix twins by the combination of phoenix and dragon initiation. in this way, the tiger served to come between the dragon and the phoenix, delaying their first encounter. drawn to an embodiment of the tiger that reflected their own nature, the dragon and the phoenix assumed she was the only byproduct of the initiation. the experiences of the two couples were notably similar, however. they were both helping a feline mind adapt to and develop her awakened sentience and exotic humanity. building on the same foundation the two incarnations of the tiger adopted nearly identical perspectives. having sprung from the same consciousness, they synchronistically adopted the name jien. the tiger twins had embraced dragon and the phoenix as lovers, though for obvious reasons they presented themselves publicly as jien’s twins. the dragon adopted the alias, jion, and the phoenix adopted the alias, jian. they embraced their tiger twin with equal enthusiasm, finding in her a delightful partner and mate. the dragon and the phoenix were kept busy for some time helping jien explore what she had become.

the dragon and the phoenix tended to follow jien’s lead. since she was the one confronting humanity from a completely fresh perspective, her mind was untainted by social conditioning about gender discrimination. in both cases, jien perceived herself as something totally distinct. there was no need, in her mind, to discriminate between masculine and feminine. as far as she was concerned, she was feline and so was her gender. the twinned tiger resolved more than one gender paradox by drawing on her feline roots; when she found herself exposed as something more than a woman and less than a man, she answered the challenges thrown at her by asserting that she was a cat. the dragon and the phoenix, having both manifested as felines in past adventures, could sympathize with her perspective and embrace it. they both struggled to impress her with the importance of discretion, but jien was interested in asserting herself in the most intimate aspects of human intercourse. the tiger phoenix proved that the exotic sex the phoenix had created could sire or bear young. jien did not engage casually in sex, understanding the danger of being different, she was very careful. jien’s attraction to both men and women did not particularly shock anyone who noticed it, given her androgynous, and notably feline appearance and personality—regardless of whether they approved or disapproved of bisexuality. the dragon and the phoenix had never been able to have children, so jien ended up being the father of her kind, though she occasionally was a mother to normal sons and daughters. jien’s first parthenogenic conception presented her with an unexpected shock, when she discovered she was pregnant, but knew she had been celibate for up to two months on either side of the estimated date of her conception. it would take another generation to confirm that her pregnancy had resulted from self conception, when the same thing happened to her daughter and first child, jean. the phoenix’s jien fell in love with a girl who had been fascinated by jien’s androgyny, and sired her second child, jin. jean grew up identical in appearance to her mother. jin grew up exotic displaying traits that obviously came from his human mother. the dragon’s jien also experienced reincarnation, courtesy of the dragon, and she too was drawn to a human mate, siring an exotic child.

the twinned tiger would not confront herself for several generations, by which time the dragon and the phoenix would have long since moved on with their lives. when that confrontation came, in her third or fourth reincarnations, the twins would unite and piece together the truth of their initiation. the polarity established in the dual initiation of the tiger, and the feline qualities of her psyche created a foundation that would inevitably cause the her descendants to declare themselves a separate race. the names assumed by the first two generation of exotics would become the nouns used to describe their kind. an adolescent or adult of the third sex was called a jien, and a child of the third sex was called a jin, unless that child derived from parthenogenesis, in which case she was called a jean. the names the dragon and the phoenix adopted, as the twinned tiger’s companions, also became distinguishing appellations. a jien who possessed a more masculine character or role became known as a jion, while a jien with a more feminine character or role became known as a jian. for many generations, the third sex was a secret which individual jien revealed only to their lovers and mates. feline qualities, characteristics and associations became firmly entrenched in the personal and social perception of the third gender from the very first generation. jien’s relationships with the dragon and the phoenix would not survive past her first generation. her marriages to human mates strained their relationships, and her passing, in both incarnations, ended it. jien had seemed immune to aging until the birth of jean’s daughter, a phenomenon which would prove itself upon all of her children, and which was related to the function of the third sex’s most stunning innovation, a kind of immortality. when jien died, jien and jean was overwhelmed with a staggering realization, jien woke up and she was jean, or as she seemed to understand it in her present perspective, jean woke up and realized that she had been jien. the phoenix and the dragon bid their lovers farewell and tried to return to the pursuits they had abandoned in favor of being with their frisky, feline lovers. the phoenix would have followed in jien’s footsteps if she had been capable of producing children. instead she set out to catch up with human events she had missed. the dragon had come to enjoy seeing humans in their natural habitat, and could not dream of taking jien’s children off to become slaves to the empire.

in time, there would be populations where the phoenix did not physically stand out, but mentally and spiritually she remained alien, excluded by her very nature. compared to them, she was a god, an incomprehensible force of nature, and the more she learned about humanity, native or exotic, the more conscious she became of her own alienation. she understood that most of the problem was one of context. she was predominantly defined by self possession, the extent to which she defined her own existence made her a power second to none, and yet that power was a consequence of who she was. the power was not really the issue, because the situation clearly demonstrated that no amount of power could keep a person from feeling powerless the dragon came away from his experiences with jien with similar sentiments. the dragon and the phoenix recognized that they were unique and exceptional beings in this world, and that was frustrating for them. in spite of initiation, there was nothing else in the world like them. they had both looked upon humanity with envy, and it struck them that they had never truly embraced humanity. their need for companionship provoked further evolution in both of them. the phoenix resolved to try once more to embody herself in a purely human context, limited by the situations and circumstances of life. in desperation, she searched the depths of her being to determine which sex more accurately embodied the understanding of who and what she was. her inquiries were based on a wide range of issues, and eventually the phoenix concluded that she identified overwhelmingly as female. the dragon, facing a similar ordeal, somewhat more methodically determined that his nature was best supported by a male embodiment. neither of them had been willing to abandon certain aspects of themselves which were best expressed in terms of the opposite sex, and thus they both remained somewhat androgynous in gender. never the less, they were committed to accepting the gnawing sense of incompleteness an exclusive sex imposed, in the hopes of discovering their humanity. having resolved to cultivate and incorporate those aspects within themselves that their assumed roles permitted, for her, as a human female, for him, as a human male, they could now be more intimately involved in human life.

as the dragon and the phoenix became more involved in the world, they found ample motivation to employ both sexes, but remained committed to the one they identified with most. the dragon and the phoenix gradually developed an affinity for the gender they assumed among humans. inevitably, the dragon and the phoenix noticed that humans had been evolving, awakening to their innate potential. that potential manifested in a variety of phenomenal abilities, indicative of natural talents and innate character reinforced by the gifts of dragon and phoenix initiation. for the first time, the dragon and the phoenix confronted evidence of each other’s presence in creation. the dragon and the phoenix had both acted as catalysts to awaken the innate psionic potential of a mere handful of individuals, and it did not surprise them that their initiates had initiated others. they had initiated individuals, unintentionally at first, and then with deliberation as they realized that they could awaken the potential within others to embody the qualities which had been awakened in them. initially, none of them could imagine the dangers of passing on a gift of immortality or eternal youth. even the rare few who felt some apprehension or restraint had loved ones they could not resist initiating. only the dragon and the phoenix knew the true price people had paid for godhood. it was painfully apparent in what was happening to individuals throughout the entire human race. everywhere they went, initiates found themselves alone and outnumbered by the impotent majority, facing a wild range of discrimination, manifesting as everything from deification to damnation. whatever form it took, moderate or extreme, revered or reviled, the reaction of the general population alienated these individuals. it did not take long for these individuals to feel or be threatened, and the dragon and the phoenix found themselves numbered among them. by virtue of their adopted sexes, they became recognized as the god, dusk, and the goddess, dawn. in spite of caution, there was always the danger of exposing their abilities, and more often than not, once exposed they either found themselves exiled from a community or marked for persecution or even summary execution. it did not take long for both of them to find themselves retreating from the rest of humanity, congregating with other outcasts. in the midst of the growing crisis, dusk and dawn finally confronted each other, as a man and a woman., stunned by an almost irresistible attraction to each other.

the dragon fell in love with the phoenix angel

gods & goddesses—the exclusivity of male and female, which left them feeling incomplete and alone, allowed the dragon and the phoenix to fit in among the immortals as a god and a goddess. it did not take long, as they tried to integrate into the community of gods and goddesses, for their peers to realize that the two of them might very well be in a class of their own. neither dusk nor dawn sought positions of great status or authority among their new peers, but they had a habit of taking care of problems as they saw them which earned them a natural authority. a growing tendency for their fellow gods and goddesses to look up to them in critical matters isolated the two of them further and pushed them even closer together.

their relationship offered a context for them to embrace humanity in themselves as a man and a woman. dusk and dawn recognized each other as soul mates. it was love at first sight, with a nasty twist. the force of their attraction to one another defied words, and fueled a hunger in them both which neither had ever known existed. dusk and dawn struggled to understand the polarity, a magnetism as attractive as sexual magnetism, that existed between them. the overwhelming attraction grew stronger every moment they spent together. at first they allowed the passion to drive them, but the appetite for each other could not be quenched or sated physically. their relationship, and the intimacy of their embraces, was accelerating their development towards an impulsive union. as their intimacy dissolved the walls between them, they sensed an implicit threat to their identities. this insatiable passion, ever growing, scared them, forcing them to assess what was happening to them and where their passion would ultimately lead, the spiritual intercourse of initiation. their instincts warned them that it might be very dangerous for them to indulge in that kind of intercourse. they recognized that they must not initiate each other, for they were so perfectly polarized they would merge seamlessly into one if they dared to attempt it. unfortunately, they had reached the point where they embraced with a desire so strong it was as if they were trying to absorb one another, and in time it seemed to be exactly what would happen. they were coming dangerously close to merging even in a simple, physical embrace.

as they discussed the problem, they were able to draw a connection between the practice of initiation and the situation which had finally brought them together. by the time they had gravitated to and adopted humanity, they had cultivated thriving populations of dragons and phoenixes. among humans, that potential made such individuals godlike, and in human terms, they were themselves a god and a goddess.

a naked goddess & a naked god—the fatal attraction drove them to their wits’ end, eventually forcing them to retreat from humanity and return to their pursuits as a dragon and a phoenix. unfortunately, having met, they could not avoid crossing each other’s path constantly.

as embodied dreams, they were both immune to initiation by each other. at the same time, they embodied such polar qualities that they two could fit together as one, and in that fashion inspired each other.

this inevitably brought them to the brink of union. a powerful attraction existed between them from the moment they first confronted each other. in confronting each other, they were confronting the embodiment of the very qualities they had struggled their entire existence to incorporate.

it was at this time that the dragon and the phoenix adopted the aliases of dusk and dawn. during the age of gods on earth, dusk and dawn figured intimately in the evolution of the human and avon races, and inevitable exodus to aeirn.

alienation—dusk and dawn had maintained their established identities as a man and a woman many recognized as the god and the goddess. over the next couple of generations, dusk and dawn’s delight at the propagation of the third sex was tempered by a growing sense of responsibility, as they saw the unease with which an increasing percentage of normal humans viewed the new gender. their concern rested on an understanding of the potential jins were born with. if people were so unhappy with the emergence of gods and goddesses, how were they going to view the emergence of such individuals who were also of a different sex? their concern prompted them to caution the parents of jins and young jien to keep normal people from finding out what they really were. dusk and dawn’s concern exploded into sheer terror as they discovered the reaction the common man was having to the appearance of jien. the first generations of jien had been isolated within families and communities of the gods and goddesses jien had been introduced to, never at risk of being exposed to normal humans. unfortunately, jien grew up the same as men and women, and they were just a inclined to venture out into the world to make their own mark. due to the outward resemblance between jien and women, everyone had assumed that a jien could move through the world at large utterly undetected. unfortunately, jien were more strongly attracted to women than they were to men, and were being discovered by jealous and suspicious men thinking that the jien was really a young man in disguise. more than once a jien had been caught in the act and then vivisected by angry men trying to figure out what the hell had been sleeping with one of “their” women.

genocide—the situation was becoming critical. already, many of the gods and goddesses had been forced to congregate into groups, for mutual protection. living apart had eased the tension between the gods and normal humans in areas where hostilities had erupted. these pantheons of human gods and goddesses would be able to endure for centuries. in some populations, greater tolerance, or appreciation for the advantages those individuals could bring to their communities, encouraged such individuals to remain among their own people, dangerously isolated and outnumbered. the quality of the gods was as varied as humans themselves, some being extraordinarily constructive, some being extraordinarily destructive. it was the latter who provoked conflict after conflict, which many innocent gods ended up paying the price for. unease led to distrust, and distrust eventually led to bloodshed. it became clear that the gods, while more powerful and more resourceful than the majority of people around them, were in danger of being wiped out. it was a frightening repetition of the violence that had marked the transition of the dream into reality. the horror of that conflict was dimly remembered by humanity as the war in heaven, as demons and angels fought over the birth of mortals. only dusk and dawn survived from that time, and neither of them wanted to see anything like it again.

exodus—inevitably, the mortal majority turned against the immortals, and the exotics in particular, and dusk and dawn were confronted by the gods, pointing out the ease with which they could navigate the heavens. they wanted to know why they were risking the lives of the people they cherished most, allowing them to struggle to survive in an increasingly hostile environment, when the heavens offered thousands of worlds—worlds uninhabited by any people, which were suitable for human life—where they could thrive in peace. dusk and dawn confessed they feared that to do so would be to cut the heart out of the human race. what was happening was a natural part of the development of the species. if they interfered, they could retard that development or arrest it completely. they argued, but eventually they were forced to agree that jien would never survive in this world; they at least had to be moved to a safe place, and their families, which by this point included most of the gods, should be given the choice to go with them. dusk and dawn already knew the perfect world to take them to, a world they had cultivated together, a place they had kept as a place to retreat from the people who chosen to worship them. the phoenix and the dragon pooled their resources to save the immortals and their mortal kin and allies and move them all to another world, avon. the word went out, broadcast telepathically to those who had the capacity to hear. dusk, dawn, their friends and allies were all stunned at how many people heard the call and answered. few of the gods elected to remain on earth, while whole communities of normal men and women elected to join an enlightened family member in the exodus. at the end, seven million souls were ferried across the heavens, to a world called avon, in a new galaxy in a remote corner of the universe. in time, it became clear that living among immortals was not good for mortal humans, who were moved to the sister world of aeirn. some of the immortals, the designated guardians of the mortals, continued to be perceived as gods.

dissemination—peace reigned as the immigrants to aeirn populated the virgin landscape, lead by men and women who had been revered as gods and goddesses on earth. the first thousand years were magical. there was a kind of wonder among the people as they explored a world at once familiar in flora and fauna and foreign in geography. it was clear that the goddess had cultivated her garden with stocks from earth, but over time something unique to aeirn had popped up here and there. the most startling thing to the new inhabitants, however, was their new moon. those with the senses to measure such things realized that it was as large and alive as aeirn, the two worlds orbiting a common point in their greater orbit of the sun. it had been made clear that aeryn, their sister world, was to remain exclusive to phoenix. aeirn was more than enough for seven million people, even when that population tripled over the first generation. settling a new world gave the people the chance to forge the abilities they had been forced to hide or fight with on earth. on aeirn, those abilities allowed people to adapt to the natural environment, needing only the power unlocked in their minds for tools and protection, and the cultures and civilizations which evolved adapted to the presence and uses of such abilities. many continued to regard their abilities as magic, sustaining the beliefs and traditions that had enable them to invoke or evoke the power within themselves, while others studied it, cultivating it through art and science. individuals disposed to a given sex or gender had found their homes within branches of civilization where their natural strengths and weaknesses worked to their best advantage. after three thousand years, prejudice and politics on the basis of sex had evolved, in spite of efforts to prevent such discrimination. instead, such efforts had merely introduced—or in some cases, reintroduced—other distinguishing features that verged on racial discrimination.

disruption—unfortunately, the new breed of humanity was still human, and peace was inevitably shattered by the call to war. the call would ring frequently over the next two thousand years. phoenix had expected it. she had seen it before and knew she would see it again and again. she knew why it happened. peoples’ lives were too short. it was rare for an individual to attain a sound perspective of life, and most of those who managed to become enlightened accomplished it in the twilight of life, and had little time to pass on their wisdom. lack of education, limited resources, conflicting ideas and beliefs, politics, religion, economics, natural disasters—there were an endless number of variables which factored in. people would and often did go to the extreme to wrest greater control over their own lives, even if they had to risk those lives, or spend the lives of others, to succeed. as much as possible, she tried to be one of them, fighting for what she believed in, defending what she cherished, voicing her own opinions, teaching and learning what could be taught and learned. she would not dictate to people. their lives were their own. unfortunately, the chaos could still have an impact on her own existence, and she was far from invulnerable. there was a reason why she was known as the naked goddess. the dragon and the phoenix were among those who patronized aeirn, both of whom objected to the purge that ended the age of gods on aeirn. dusk and dawn were hopelessly separated from each other during the purge. dusk mysteriously vanished, along with one of the great cities of the age, leaving dawn alone. she had the capacity, to sustain the role and the memory of her missing mate, adopting dusk's identity and establishing the phoenix house, a royal and noble bloodline which preserved the autumn kingdoms through the cataclysm. phoenix continued to evolve, refining her self image over the generations.

the dragon and the phoenix defended the mortal coil at the turn of creation

during the transition from dream to reality, a massive conflict evolved. the constructive spirits, whom the living tended to regard as angels, perceived that living beings strengthened and reinforced the integrity of the dream, and supported it. the destructive spirits, whom the living tended to regard as demons, saw this too and did not approve, as the dream became even harder to manipulate. they would lash out against the living, seeking to weaken their stabilizing influence, but they seemed unable to resist the pleasures of intercourse with their counterparts, and so the living were constantly increasing in number.

the scale of the conflict increased accordingly. naturally, the angels tried to defend the living from the demons, bringing the conflict to a head. it turned into a war that no mortal could ever hope to forget. eventually the spiritual angels and demons were shut out, their power over the dream diminishing at a geometric rate. they had lost their grip on the fabric of reality. no one had the access to alter it, or impose themselves on it. the only exceptions were the dragon and the phoenix, who had been lured into the heart of the dream as it began to crystallize, becoming solidified within it as the dream took on reality. no outside force could possibly shake them from the fabric of their own existence. they continued to evolve as the dream evolved, but remained unique as other dreamers were shut out of the dream by the minds of the individuals who inhabited it. the dragon and the phoenix were not even distracted from their preoccupation with the mystery of existence, until after the conflict had run its course.

the dragon was slain late in the turn, and the phoenix, clinging to his soul, fell

the elementals, damned and divine - angels fall and become demons, spirits that impose themselves on the souls they prey on.

an outcast among the fallen, soul searching was the phoenix’s only hope of redemption

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 wounded animals and driven in search of the soul that will bring them peace.

as the focus of the demon phoenix, the dragon was the closest to the phoenix’s soul

the dragon and the phoenix evolved with the dream from point paradox. the phoenix was the soul of creation, impregnated with the awareness of other souls through contact with the dragon, her soul mate.

the dragon cultivated life in the inner realm, intent on the incarnation of the phoenix

the dragon established the phoenix bloodline, a breeding program with the phoenix as its ideal

distinguished from humanity by her exclusive and inclusive sex, the phoenix had inspired the human gods and established the consort race recognized by humanity as that of angels and demons. the dragon had as much to do with the rise of the gods as the phoenix, having acted as a catalyst to quicken the potential that lay dormant within humanity, while scouting their world.

a large population of humans had been captured and taken from their native world by the empire of the sun, which owed its existence to the dragon’s interference with emergent sentient species. humans, appropriated as a servitor race, had quickly proven frighteningly adaptable and independent. the young species was far too versatile and innovative for the comfort of the ancient established races. attempts to tame humans sparked an open revolution. an exceptionally powerful group of individuals had emerged among the humans, the immortals and the eternals, whom the latent majority of the population revered as gods. these gods had represented the greatest threat to the empire of the sun. in spite of winning decisive victories, the human rebels were denied free citizenship in the empire, but to end the conflict the empire was willing to allow the trouble makers to leave the empire. their power had enabled them to negotiate for relocation to a remote paradise. due to the degree of evolution and advancement they achieved in the empire, they could not be returned to their native home, nor exiled in close proximity to any of the established spheres, thus their new home was in a remote galaxy on the fringes of the galactic frontier. to tend to them, the dragons initiated from within the group, and those who had proven sympathetic to human demands for independence, had been exiled with them. having encountered the phoenix among them, the dragon had joined her in exile to aeirn. attuned to her soul, the dragon had been drawn into the dream as a counterpoint to the phoenix. though drawn to her in any form, he had been irresistibly drawn to her in human form, in which she invested an extraordinary amount of attention.

once in exile, the gods made a pact with the dragons, assuming responsibility for the mortal population if the dragons did not interfere beyond the needs of their kind. initially, the gods did more good than harm, inspiring human minds and spirits with awesome technologies, and miraculous arts and practices. people adapted to and adopted the sorcery and artifice which the gods provided, but inevitably employed them in a fashion all too human. the dragon had been forced to recognize that humanity, as a whole, was not ready for the powers he had unleashed and called for the gods to withdraw from their mortal kin. revolted by the human propensity for war and strife, the gods tried to limit the scale of human conflict by eradicating magic from the world. disarming the general populace was simple enough, they crippled all artifacts off by destroying their sources of power. eradicating sorcery proved less tenable. the true masters of the arts, in alliance with the human and avon children of the gods, made war on the gods themselves.

as the soul of creation, the phoenix was easily seen as the key to absolute power. in spite of her pivotal role, however, her importance was only relative. circumstances had made her the focus, the anchor of reality, the dreamer in the dream. it had been the participation of souls attuned to her dream that had given her dream reality. there was no denying her unique authority, but her position represented a great personal responsibility which set limits on what she could do with that power without shattering the tacit agreement that held everything together. by exposing herself to those who dwelt within her dream, she fell prey to circumstances that would force her to awaken to the awesome power granted by her position and confront the true potential of her soul and the mystery of existence, through the paradoxes of the mind and the absolutes of the soul. the transition from the autonomous role of creation’s avatar, to that of the goddess, began with an attempt by a native god, through seduction, to enslave the phoenix.

her peril aroused the ire of her soul mate, the dragon. the purge was not what the dragon had intended, and the abuse of the phoenix was his worst nightmare. ironically, the phoenix had been enslaved by a god opposed to the purge to be used as a weapon that the gods, angelic or demonic, could not answer. while the gods could not stand against her, for a terrible price, the dragon could.

in their final confrontation, the phoenix had initiated the dragon. the dragon had escaped from the transformation that would have turned him into a phoenix leaving a construct, an empty shell, for the phoenix to resurrect. in the absence of another soul, the mind of the dragon formed the template of a new incarnation of the phoenix. a twin instead of a daughter, her psyche was seared with the stamp of the dragon’s, making it impossible for her to conceive of her true self until she could realize that she was not a phoenix incarnation of the dragon. the dragon had been too wounded from the conflict with the phoenix to pursue her, and it took a great deal of effort for the phoenix twin to move the dragon to a place where he would not be disturbed for the thousands of years it would take him to heal. the phoenix twin pursued the phoenix as soon as she was able, but it was too late to do anything but mourn the loss of the phoenix. the phoenix twin had assumed the identity of ash and spent the dark centuries of the cataclysm among the heirs of the phoenix legacy tending to the establishment of the phoenix houses and the autumn kingdoms.

through the long dark years, while humanity recovered from the loss of technology and arts that had supported a sophisticated global society, individuals with extraordinary gifts were forced to walk a very thin line. humans became very distrustful of those who possessed power, even though many communities were dependant on those who did to survive. with rare exceptions, gifted individuals owed their power to the legacies established by the dragon and the phoenix. in many ways, the dragon and phoenix legacies were similar, granting people with dragon and phoenix heritage the gifts of regeneration and rejuvenation, and reincarnation through parthenogenic conception. a phoenix had the power of self conception, while a dragon had the power to conceive of others. the dragon and phoenix had both adapted to pass on their psionic potential to other sentient beings through a kind of initiation. devising a way to awaken the innate potential of other beings had a hidden danger, as indicated by the fact that dragon potential resonated magnetically with the potential of a phoenix. in passing on their gifts, the dragon and phoenix had also passed on the instinct and reflexes to initiate others. this created a vulnerability exclusive to dragon and phoenix initiates. contact between them could trigger blooding, the instinct to initiate, when a dragon and phoenix initiate were caught off guard.

the natural attraction that drew dragon and phoenix natures to one another became the warning of that danger, which had to be taught and consciously obeyed in defiance of instincts that screamed for intimacy. the initiation of normal individual as a dragon or a phoenix typically enabled the dragon to become a twin of the initiate, or caused the initiate to become a twin of the phoenix. a dragon’s immortality eventually overwhelmed its human perspective with age, and only rebirth allowed a dragon to hold on to its humanity, a lesson learned from phoenixes. through resurrection, a phoenix could endure eternally, but enduring eternity required a mechanism to anchor the mind in the present, and the phoenix had evolved the mechanism of rebirth to meet that need, and dragons had devised a way to imitate it. because a dragon could not conceive of himself, only others, it was typical for dragon twins to endure as exclusive pairs bound to each other through a pact of rebirth. dragon and phoenix reincarnations were both subject to the same limits of the passing, which caused the development of a reincarnated individual to become arrested in adolescence around the age of seventeen enduring the pseudo fertile state of heat until the death of his or her previous incarnation.

the phoenix legacy was more recent and consolidated than the legacy founded by the original dragon. the dragon had been a being of pure thought, who passed on his psionic gifts through predatory initiation. in time, dragons had become identified with the perfect predator, the animal embodiment recognized throughout the universe as the dragon. the dragon legacy passed on to most species through their natural predators, rather than the exclusive predator they adopted as a distinct species. thus, in many cultures the dragon legacy is mistaken for something else, like vampirism or lycanthropy. as a result, most people with dragon heritage did not even know it. the dragon legacy was scattered among countless small, isolated factions more inclined to feud than support each other. dragons, as an organic species, had evolved past the point where they needed or desired to reproduce, which was wise given the bloody path their kind must follow to achieve sentience. the legacy that had been passed on to humanity was too well established to be wiped out, but actual dragons were strangely vulnerable. it took a while for anyone to realize that they were being hunted, and even longer for people to realize that their population was not renewing itself. by that time, it seemed possible to many that dragons, as a species, might well be extinguished.

she was disturbed by the threat of dragon extinction, championing their cause, authoring countless histories and texts drawn from her memory of the dragon, preserving as much as possible about them, seeking them out in person, helping to create a sanctuary for them, and continually checking on the progress of the dragon’s recovery. unfortunately, her work was discovered and led the hunters to the sanctuary. if the dragon himself had not been incapacitated and vulnerable, the dragons of dragon’s bath would have dispersed to save themselves. instead, they rallied to protect the dragon’s resting place. ash herself was one of the casualties of that massacre, a victim of one of many exploitations of dragon nature. it was then, in truth, that the phoenix was resurrected, summoned by the peril of her sole surviving incarnation in the dream. the exile of the phoenix had in fact been a simple shift in attention, her focus drawn to the exile, carrying her memory along as the representation of the phoenix was assumed by her twin.

eventually, politics forced her to retreat from the autumn kingdoms.

the phoenix legacy was reestablished on aeirn in the final days of the age of gods, after the phoenix lost her soul mate, and recovered from her enslavement through demonic and necromantic arts. prior to embracing the dragon as a soul mate, the phoenix had always felt diminished in human form, as an individual who embodied only half the reproductive potential of the race. it was this limitation that caused her to create and spawn the avon race, establishing the cause of the exodus and contributing to the alienation of the eternals and immortals, individuals commonly revered as gods. even after the segregation of human and avon populations on aeirn and avon, when avon declared themselves to be a separate race, the mantle of the phoenix tended to pass almost exclusively through avon heirs on aeirn, enabling those avatars to act as either mother or father to preserve the legacy. the dragon gift enabled her to assume both male and female form, to stand among humans as a couple, rather than apart as an alien. as a couple, dusk and dawn, in memory of their love, she restored the phoenix legacy and founded the phoenix house, in the conception of her male and female avatars. over time, the power of the phoenix house passed into other hands, but by nature, the legacy remained in the hands of the boy and girl chosen in each generation as the heirs to the two branches of the phoenix legacy.

the phoenix house, composed of retired avatars who retained the phoenix gifts, as well as the family and friends with whom those gifts had been shared, eventually came to dominate the autumn kingdoms royal and noble bloodlines. the name, phoenix, had been passed down through the generations to each heir of the original phoenix legacy, from the very first avatar on earth. because the phoenix house on aeirn was predominantly constituted by human kind, and the legacy split into two branches the origins of the legacy became shrouded in mystery, all rank, title and status associated with the original legacy became lost in the mists of time. in the generations that followed, the male and female heirs reunited as a couple, at minimum, once in every three generations, when they could technically be considered second cousins. at those times, the couple would restore the unity of the phoenix in private, and then divide to preserve the legacy, and reclaim their public identities. due to the importance of the legacy branch, there were ways to identify the current heir though there was rarely sufficient cause to do so. the first generation boy and girl were traditionally named coal and ember, even if the couple officially took other names, the second generation boy and girl were named morn and eve, and the third generation boy and girl were named dusk and dawn.

at the height of the age of empires, arden was the heir of the phoenix legacy, a direct descendant of the founder of the phoenix house. as the heir of the legacy, her line did not retain prominent authority within phoenix house or significantly influence its rule over the autumn kingdoms, as titles of authority traditionally passed through the eldest descendants of a generation. the phoenix legacy, including certain lands and titles, remained associated with the male and female reincarnations of the founders in each generation, including the responsibility for promoting and initiating phoenix potential in the phoenix house. not surprisingly, once the autumn kingdoms and their ruling bloodlines had been established, the expansion of the phoenix legacy was forced into near stasis. with the gifts of rebirth and resurrection, the members of the phoenix house were practically immortal. the phoenix house imposed on itself a moratorium against unlimited propagation. it became exceedingly rare for new individuals to be born into the phoenix house, and even rarer for new individuals to be brought into the fold. an indestructible leadership sufficed to preserve the autumn kingdoms from the ravages visited upon them from the neighboring winter and summer kingdoms. because of the phoenix nature of the rulers of the autumn kingdoms, their peers and subjects had a means to keep their leaders in check, without sacrificing the wealth of experience they possessed. each generation, the offshoots of royal and noble leaders were fostered among the common people, trained by the minor nobility and educated by the major nobility. leaders who abused or tyrannized their subjects were the legitimate targets of assassination, who would resurrect in their offshoots with a fresh perspective on life. offshoots who were themselves found to be corrupt could also be executed, and new offshoots would then be born and raised in different circumstances. under normal circumstances, this system protected everyone, and ensured the best leadership. there was, however, a weakness which enemies of the autumn kingdoms could exploit. the wisdom and experience of a root phoenix did not emerge if the offshoot was under seven years of age at the time of passing.

throughout the history of the autumn kingdoms, the legacy of rebirth was limited by default to two living generations, as the offshoot of a phoenix could not fully mature while her predecessor still lived. when the mantle of a phoenix passed to an heir, as much as a generation could pass before a new heir was conceived. the mysteries of the phoenix house and the phoenix legacy were never written down. written records were unnecessary when heirs became enlightened during the passing of one generation to the next. in spite of the mystery and secrecy surrounding the legacy, enemies of the phoenix house had penetrated the mysteries of the legacy and discovered its purpose and the possibility it presented. the veil of secrecy had been pierced before it had been established. the first phoenix initiations had occurred during the age of gods and many were captured, dissected and all that could be learned of them written down in the archives of demonology and necromancy. this dangerous information fell into the hands of a dangerous cabal of demonologists and necromancers in the winter kingdoms who happened to be masters of the forbidden arcane arts. the people of the autumn kingdoms were distracted from the conquest of the winter kingdoms by the systematic assassination of the heirs of the phoenix house. in the space of a few years, virtually every branch of royal or noble lineage was pruned, forcing the passage of many great elders and the widespread birth of new offshoots and a period of uncertainty when the leadership of the autumn kingdoms was vulnerable. the conquest of the winter kingdoms was complete by the time the last offshoot was born, and rumors were flying suggesting that the dragon prince might attack the autumn kingdoms next, seeking out the allies of his enemies at home. in spite of their vulnerability, the leaders of the autumn kingdoms began to mass their armies at the borders of the winter kingdoms. eve arranged for the best protection she could for her daughter, as did morn for his son, before joining the rest of the phoenix house in a summit to prepare the defense of the kingdoms.

inevitably, the perfect male and female heirs were conceived. in spite of being first generation incarnations, they were technically offshoots, living projections of the phoenix. they were independent in mind but dependant in soul. once they matured, the phoenix would be become fully embodied with the passing of the avatars’ mantles, and awakened in their first merging. unfortunately, it was not an ideal time for children to grow up in.

they were rescued when morn, the only other surviving phoenix, a young man without an offshoot, rallied the armies against the possessed legion. the possessed fought to the last man, never once hinting their real nature, and escaping the slaughter by seizing the bodies of their attackers. by default, morn was recognized as the legitimate heir to the throne of the phoenix house and rule over the autumn kingdoms.

however, dusk and dawn were by definition demonic aspects of the phoenix, thus their consciousness was submerged as the consciousness of the phoenix was summoned forth. phoenix awakened in the merged body of dusk and dawn, lured by the resonance of that exotic form, however, because the union was imposed artificially, her mind was twinned even as her conscious presence disrupted the mechanism keeping the bodies of dusk and dawn merged, splitting them apart. thus, the merged consciousness of dusk and dawn was eclipsed by the divided consciousness of phoenix. phoenix became dusk and dawn, fully embodied, rooted in the flesh and grounded in reality, and they became eclipse.

the truth was not entirely different, for the mounts had been the supporters of the slave trade and rogue artists in the winter kingdoms, who had betrayed them by taking possession of them for this decapitation strike.

with the leadership of the autumn kingdoms crippled, the massed armies were unable to coordinate well enough to repel the invasion of the dragon prince, and retreated in battle after battle, ceding three of the autumn kingdoms before halting the invaders’ advance. the native armies were able to hold the line in strategic mountain passes, and the dragon prince paused to consolidate his control over those kingdoms. eve and dawn, residing in one of the besieged kingdoms, were forced to endure the occupation and laws against necromancy and demonology that rendered resurrection an illegal act. fortunately, the phoenix legacy was only known to the phoenix house, of which only two adults remained, both safely established outside of the occupied kingdoms. the children of the phoenix house unfortunate enough to reside in the occupied kingdoms only had the vague notion that eve and dawn were people of note, and they were themselves safely protected by their fosterage from being recognized as heirs to noble and royal mantles.

in spite of her youth, dawn was courted by two children of the phoenix house, twin offshoots of her unknown father, a noble son of a royal family. their guardian had become aware that dawn was an heir to the phoenix legacy, and assumed this made her politically significant, and a suitable mate for either of his charges. eve had taken in three orphans of the massacre, a boy and twin girls born the same year to members of the phoenix house, as well as five offshoots from the same families, twin baby boys and three infants. the high king, morn, did not heed eve’s warning against siring an offshoot, in light of the purges. as a result, ember, eve’s mother, was named dusk’s regent and recognized as the legitimate heir to the phoenix house and rule of the autumn kingdoms, when the high king was reduced to infancy a few years later. eve realized that she was next in line for the throne, followed by dawn, because ember and eve did not possess any offshoots. unfortunately, before anyone moved to remove ember, eve and dawn, dusk would almost certainly be killed first. to discourage such plots, dusk and dawn were formally betrothed.

eclipse did not slumber silently within dusk and dawn. the demon quickly discovered that dusk and dawn had imprinted each other during their premature union, and that those latent forms gave her the leverage she needed to take possession of their bodies. eclipse possessed the duality of her birth, the psyches of dusk and dawn having been imperfectly merged, and that duality allowed her to simultaneously exploit the impressions burned into the boy and girl during the forced union. thus, eclipse tormented dawn as dusk, and eclipse haunted dusk as dawn. these associations contributed to dusk and dawn's unconscious fear and mistrust of each other during their courtship, as neither was aware of the existence of eclipse. not surprisingly, eclipse looked upon phoenix as the demon, the nemesis responsible for her suffering and exile. dusk and dawn had been unwilling participants in the ritual that created eclipse, and being imperfectly melded, eclipse identified as a singular duality, male and female, with no one but each other to turn to.

as much as eclipse hated phoenix, she also felt an instinctive attraction to, and affection for, her nemesis. eclipse struggled with the idea of simply destroying phoenix, wanting to remove her as a threat to her own existence, but also wanting to be on equal footing with her. she preyed upon their subconscious minds assaulting them with traumatic fits and nightmares seeking to throw them off balance and seize control of one of them. eclipse found it nearly impossible to communicate with phoenix, on either side, but she was fiendishly capable of projecting haunting and provocative images into dusk and dawn’s minds. these projections had the greatest impact when dusk and dawn were dreaming, or in altered states of consciousness, and vulnerable to nightmarish experiences. she tormented them with memories of the childhood ordeal she endured, and taunted them with the recapitulation of torrid liaisons between dusk and dawn when eclipse was in control of them. the struggle for control of dusk and dawn provoked the terrible, crippling fits, extending the horror of the possession into dusk and dawn's waking lives.

in time she became successful at taking control for hours at a time, and formed an alliance with a demonic mentor, a servant of her childhood nemesis. her alliance with other demons was, to her mind, a clever deception to use her enemies against her nemesis, phoenix. taking possession of dusk or dawn exposed her to the one great danger of her struggle for dominance. using dusk and dawn's alternate forms gave her the freedom to act in the world. however, if she took control of only one of them, she became the other's twin, creating the chance of dusk or dawn being noticed in two places at the same time. more than once, she came dangerously close to unintentionally confronting dusk or dawn as a twin. a few times, she had deliberately confronted one of them on purpose, in a staged attempt to drive one of them mad. however, partial control was never enough.

eclipse was desperate to emerge from the shadow of dusk and dawn. the golden opportunity for eclipse came when dusk and dawn were compelled to attempt the union of the phoenix legacy. eclipse instinctively recognized the opportunity, and found herself in the awkward position of trying to repair the damage her previous campaign of terror inflicted, and employed the intimacy she had already cultivated using dusk and dawn's bodies to arouse their passion for each other, and encourage their union. union gave eclipse a chance to gain independence. dusk and dawn were betrothed and sent off in private to restore the unity of the phoenix. in the moment dusk and dawn merged into phoenix, eclipse stepped in and peeled off a true twin of phoenix, trapping in avon form as she slipped free in an avon body of her own. dusk and dawn had merged successfully into phoenix, but phoenix could not split and restore the embodiments of dusk and dawn. phoenix was forced to disguise herself and pursue her nemesis, with growing suspicions of what had truly happened.

eclipse was wild and unrestrained, celebrating her freedom, and taking impish delight in being chased by phoenix. eclipse taunted and teased her twin, in a bizarre kind of seduction. eclipse made little effort to disguise herself with phoenix around to take the blame for her indiscretions and crimes, as fitting punishment for resisting her proposals. after a number of close scrapes, phoenix managed to convince a few allies that she was not eclipse, but merely a twin to the mad creature, seeking to catch her and put an end to her rampage. eclipse retaliated by laying a trap for phoenix and her enemies, luring her to a sprawling ruin haunted by demons and undead. there, by virtue of a little slight of hand and clever acting, she managed to turn phoenix's allies against her, in the belief that phoenix was eclipse. as a result, phoenix stumbles into a dragon initiation, and eclipse manages to slip away. fortunately, in one sense, phoenix is able to return to her normal life by taking up the identities of dusk and dawn again.

in the midst of her dragon initiation, so cunningly arranged by eclipse and her childhood nemesis, phoenix became exposed to the risk of a dual initiation that could twin her soul, and open the rift, through which demons would be able to emerge unchecked and unbound.

the opening of the rift also allowed her to be reunited with and later reincarnate her dragon mate. it also created the pressure for her to incarnate herself, as phoenix, in a healing fusion. the intention, to try to reunite the severed spheres of her soul, resulted not in the restoration of her unity, but instead, evoked the resolution of her trinity. with three of her, it was simple enough to sustain the roles of dusk and dawn, and at the same time resume her eternal role as phoenix. the demon, however, still harbored a claim to those identities, which would provoke fatal assaults on dusk and dawn, resurrected as coal and ember, and conclude with the possession of phoenix, whom she banished to the body of her daughter, causing the eclipse that enabled phoenix to interfere in the initial summoning of the demon.

conflict among the host led to the purge and a deliberate campaign to thwart the dragon’s intent

among the inhabitants of the inner realm were other souls harvested and eclipsed by the demon. each was a host, but the dragon, as the focus, was first among equals. the host were essentially gods of the inner realm, and the antagonists of the purge believed his position as the focus was the key to absolute power over the inner realm. the only other route to dominance involved a frontal assault through the living host of the demon—a position few held for very long.

in time the people established new nations and traditions, along with technology geared toward exploiting natural phenomena. the dragon and phoenix legacies had been established among the people of the shattered continent, so named for being nearly divided into three distinct masses. the seasons featured intimately in defining the people of the shattered continent. on aeirn, only three seasons were observed, autumn, winter and summer. in autumn, the high points of the season were harvest rituals. in the winter, the high points of the season were the mortality rituals. in the summer, the high points of the season were fertility rituals. the people segregated themselves into tribes named for the seasons during the cataclysm, from whom the three domains emerged. since the advent of the three domains, individuals disposed to a given sphere of responsibility had found their homes within a branch of civilization where their natural strengths and weaknesses worked to their best advantage. after three thousand years, prejudice and politics on the basis of physical characteristics, whether hair color, eye color, skin color or sex, had evolved, in spite of efforts to prevent such discrimination. skin, eye and hair color had been the basis for segregating the population into specific houses, clans and courts. within a fine distinction, a person’s house was determined by the color of her skin, her clan by the color of her eyes, and her court by the color of her hair. depending on whether a clan was superior to or inferior to its allied houses, clan members could all appear as siblings or absolute strangers, but house and clan were always strictly subordinate to court. the original courts were loosely based on the seasons. autumn court, with hair the color of dying leaves, winter court, with hair the color of frozen rock and snow; summer court, with hair the color of dry summer grass. individuals of a given court held precedence in the season of their birth mantle.

over time, the seasonal turn of precedence faded, and each court evolved into something oriented on more than mere survival. lands, titles and even certain aspects of authority became independent of court associations. the autumn kingdoms occupied the western mass, the winter kingdoms occupied the largest northern mass, and the summer kingdoms occupied the second largest eastern mass. the shards, as the northern islands were known, were divided between the autumn and winter kingdoms, to the west and the east respectively. the winter shards were the most exposed and remote of the winter kingdoms, and had borne the brunt of the northern slave trade, due to their proximity to the east and by extension the mid-east where slavery was most heavily practiced. the autumn shards, by contrast were the most exposed to the exotic and extravagantly rich far east. while not immune to the slave trade, the autumn shards had the protection of a much wider ocean to cross. the autumn kingdoms had a narrow eastern coast, called the phoenix coast, which granted sea access to the southern kingdoms and the eastern ocean, and extensive exposure to the western ocean all along the emerald coast. the autumn kingdoms had narrow land boarders with the empire dominating the massive central continent to the south, and with the winter kingdoms in the north east. the winter kingdoms had coastal exposure to the eastern ocean to the south and the east, on either side of their land boarders with the summer kingdoms. the winter kingdoms had access to the western ocean by way of the autumn straits, the primary division between the western and northern landmasses of the shattered continent. the central continent stretched south of the shattered continent, connected to the north by its border with the autumn kingdoms, divided from the summer kingdoms by a large sea, extending as far west as the autumn kingdoms and as far east as the summer kingdoms, straddling the equator in its thickest aspect, and tapering away to the south.

in the three domains of the shattered continent, authority was divided into three spheres: royalty, nobility and divinity. within the kingdoms of the three domains, responsibility was divided into house, clan and court and could be descended from royalty, nobility or divinity. rank, while highly stratified, fell into three categories—those of master, apprentice and slave. such status was entirely relative, of course, so there was no point in life when one was not a slave to someone or something, nor was there a single individual who was not a master to someone or something, and so an individual strove to be an apprentice to all things—ever feeling her way through the unseen maze of responsibility and obligation. such was the cost of civilization. there was so much to gain, but in truth, only the wild were free. apprentices, and of course initiates, had the greatest flexibility as far as authority, responsibility and obligation were concerned. regardless of title, rank or status, an individual pursued growth and refinement in the three spheres of being—the mind, the body and the spirit—through academics, athletics, and art. this common influence produced similar vocations and avocations. champions, councilors and courtesans, would be found in service to each court and royal or nobel house. paladins, priests and prostitutes would be found in service to each temple or divine house. soldiers, scholars and studs would be found in service to each clan. while such symmetry spoke of civilization, there was also strife, and the wars which segregated the three domains also fueled advances in arts, crafts, trades and technologies. while the technology and resources developed by the end of the cataclysm were feeble in comparison to those of the ancients, they were sufficient to allow men to conquer the land and seas once more.

the first true ships were not quite equal to the demands of crossing oceans. in spite of that, one crippled ship made it through the enchanted storm that guarded against approach by mortals to a lonely island sanctuary, where the gods had long ago made their home away from human eyes. the ancient home of the gods was, by this point in time, merely an enclave of exotics. here, the last vestiges of the gods’ ancient charter to protect humanity was enshrined. a single survivor was found and pulled from the shattered wreck. in spite of ancient, dire warnings against trespass, they took pity on her. while none of them would break their exile to return her to her own kind, they did nurture her. the girl was allowed to remain as something of a pet or mascot. she grew up in the one place where all the ancient knowledge still existed. the exotic residents had long hesitated to pursue that legacy without becoming more in touch with, for lack of a better term, their humanity. the mortal was by no means encouraged in her pursuit, but on the mistaken assumption that what survived of the legacy was, if not beyond human comprehension, certainly beyond a normal human’s capacity to harness, no precautions were taken to restrict her access to the vast archives and resources preserved in the ancient island fortress.

allowed to satisfy her curiosity, she quietly proved that they had seriously underestimated her. the demigods barely noticed her over the following decades, until they became aware that he had endured the passage of several generations without aging appreciably beyond late adolescence. long before they noticed her, it had become clear to her that the gods had exploited certain natural and artificial mechanisms, however abstract, to create the arts. the arts had become dependant on an ill-defined and external source to power those mechanisms. her research led her to discover a perfect power source, a way to tap the soul’s inner power, and a host of ways to refine and improve the ancient arts. by this time she had learned all she desired to know of the old legacy and had taken immense strides in creating a new legacy, one she intended to take to her fellow human beings. the demigods discovered immediately that she had far surpassed them, in fact she surpassed even the best among the old gods, if their memory was to be trusted. she managed to convince them that the discipline that would be required to master the art as she had tempered a soul and instilled an artist with patience, perspective and responsibility. the new arts would be much harder to abuse, and artists would be wary not to create artifacts which could casually be abused as well. while this was true of the practitioners of the new arts, it was not as true of the modern practitioners of the ancient arts. the woman returned to the struggling human race to answer the desperate calls which few gods remained to answer, and which the demigods had patently ignored. the people she found had all grown up in a world abandoned by its gods. who and what they really were, was largely unknown. what few myths and legends remained claimed the gods had come from elsewhere, and in the midst of their attempts to study men, they inevitably meddled with evolution itself.

to her dismay, she found her sex as much a deficit among humans as it had been an asset among exotics. after countless dismal, and a few life threatening adventures, she decided to try to approach as a man. he was revered as a messiah, and his teachings swiftly changed the face of the world. he taught the art to any who proved willing and able to embrace the necessary demands, and the enlightenment of his teachings was proven as the followers of his school showed tolerance for the host of schools which deviated from his teachings, resisting the temptations of pride, prejudice and persecution. he managed to preserve the status of his legacy as an art, rather than a religion, eschewing dogma and encouraging the individual pursuit of a universal truth. the power of that art, and the degree to which it fostered and propagated education and industry sparked the birth of a renaissance and the spread of civilization. the demands learning made on the students of that art tempered the artists, endowing the most powerful people with the responsibility and integrity less common among conventionally powerful men. wars continued to happen, were even spurred by the new vitality of formerly distressed and devastated nations, but only rarely were they waged with the kind of power at the disposal of an artist. he retreated from the world over the dawn of the age of empires, having outlived too many loved ones. as he retreated, the dragon-phoenix and the phoenix-dragon were being lured out of their own retreat by the changes raven had brought to the world. the advances in art made it possible for large, peaceful empires to emerge, permitting widespread communication and travel, extensive trade and creating opportunities for all individuals that improved the quality of life. in the space of almost a thousand years, the entire world was transformed. human nature was only moderately effected, however, and the new age offered the ills, evils and obscenities of a darker age as many chances to flourish.

forge was the first person the dragon encountered in the age of empires. she had been sired by a demon summoned by a man who would trade his own sister in his quest for power. her mother had escaped from her brother, taking refuge in a thriving sea port where forge had been presented to the community as a son. she had been captured and enslaved when her uncle finally tracked them down and betrayed them, along with their entire community, to slavers. the slavers discovered that she was an exotic and neutered her to prevent her from spreading the exotic seed. in many lands, it was a common practice to breed women with demons or angels to create what were called nymphs, exotic children deliberately conceived and born as slaves. they were not considered human, and were prized for the tremendous potential they possessed. they were denied any training to harness their power and used as familiars by mages. it made no difference to the men who had destroyed her home and murdered her mother that she had not been prepared for such a role.

from the moment she was sold into slavery, she had dreamed of returning home to eradicate the black arts of necromancy and demonology and end the threat of slavery by uniting the winter kingdoms. throughout history, slavers had raided the ports of the winter kingdoms, stealing women and children to sell in the slave markets of the eastern empire. the northern born people clung to a magical tradition which predated the age of empires. while it was true that the gods had seen thoroughly to the elimination of sorcery, the ancients had dabbled in arts more dangerous and obscure than that. the arts of conjury, demonology and necromancy mastered by the ancients, had survived in disparate forms such as witchcraft and wizardry. it was only a matter of time before true conjurors, demonologists and necromancers reappeared. the winter kingdoms were home to skilled conjurors who had successfully resurrected the arts of demonology and necromancy which had become proscribed by modern artists.

her master had been a good man, who had released her from his service after concluding that, in spite of his cultural assumptions, she possessed as much humanity as he. her freedom was as much a curse as it was a blessing. discrimination on the basis of sex was as old as the human race, rooted in customs unique to every culture. only dragon and phoenix communities had ceased to discriminate on the basis of sex, since dragons and phoenixes could switch back and forth between male and female—at least where the conventional sexes were concerned. discrimination against exotics, individuals of obscure or indeterminate sex, had endured, based on the stigma of two unpleasant historical precedents that verged on obscene. in virtually all myths and legends, demons were distinguished from humans by the manifestation of bizarre, exotic sexes. the discovery of individuals possessing functional, exotic sexes was attributed to demonic influences or even demonic lineage. the practice of sexual negation, emasculation, genital mutilation and genital mutation was common among demon worshippers and slavers. in either case, the assumption was that the process stripped people of their humanity, and such people could not be embraced by human society.

experience forced forge to reassess her childhood dreams and admit that she needed extraordinary power to bring law and order to the winter kingdoms. she dared not call upon her demon heritage for such power, nor would she willingly sacrifice others to gain her own power. her master had urged her to investigate the possibility of realizing her own power, encouraging her make her way south to the famous seat. forge had been forced to pose as a woman to disguise her exotic and negated sex, or risk persecution as an outcast everywhere she went. her talent with weapons and martial arts had been obvious even when she was a child, and her master had her trained as a body guard. that training allowed her to support herself through adventuring and search for allies in her quest for justice. forge was joined in her quest by a pair of exotics, twins and survivors of tragic or traumatic childhoods in the winter kingdoms. she led them to the seat, where they were joined by other adventurers. in the city of enlightenment, some of them were recognized as exotics or outcasts and forced to flee. they were assisted in their flight by a member of their party, a descendant of raven, who appealed to his ancestor for assistance. raven was intrigued by the maimed exotic, recognizing the extraordinary potential she possessed. raven granted her passage to the island home of the demigods, where she was examined intensely.

the magus was forced to inform her that the power she sought lay within her, but her mutilation had served to deny her any hope of gaining access to it. there was another way, however, if she was willing to sacrifice herself. the dragons of legend had been rumored to have the ability to initiate humans, to make them into dragons. forge did not believe that dragons had been hunted to extinction during the cataclysm, and set out to find one, seeking a lair where a dragon might have slept since the age of gods. her best lead came from the writings of an exile from the autumn kingdoms who had also searched for dragons. they left the sanctuary behind and continued across the ocean unaware that they were headed into a slavers’ den. following her trail, she came into contact with a descendant of the dragon expert, and through her learned the location of dragon’s bath in the far east. her expedition to dragon’s bath was interrupted by an unexpected encounter with the men who had destroyed her childhood. unprepared for the encounter, she was captured and her plans fell into the hands of the man who had raped and mutilated her. she was rescued by her friends, but they were unable to recover the books, maps and materials needed to find dragon’s bath. to continue her quest, she was forced to follow him, as he mounted his own expedition to hunt a dragon.

in the pursuit of her enemy, forge was forced to confront herself and the things she had learned on the voyage and while she was his captive. she did not need the books that had been stolen from her, she could remember the strange account of the self proclaimed champion of the dragons. her foe would dismiss most of it as sensational, and likely miss something. in their final confrontation, the phoenix had initiated the dragon. the dragon had escaped from the transformation that would have turned him into a phoenix leaving a construct, an empty shell, for the phoenix to resurrect. in the absence of another soul, the mind of the dragon formed the template of a new incarnation of the phoenix. a twin instead of a daughter, her psyche was seared with the stamp of the dragon’s, making it impossible for her to conceive of her true self until she could realize that she was not a phoenix incarnation of the dragon. the dragon had been too wounded from the conflict with the phoenix to pursue her, and it took a great deal of effort for the phoenix twin to move the dragon to a place where he would not be disturbed for the thousands of years it would take him to heal. the phoenix twin pursued the phoenix as soon as she was able, but it was too late to do anything but mourn the loss of the phoenix. the phoenix twin had assumed the identity of ash and spent the dark centuries of the cataclysm among the heirs of the phoenix legacy tending to the establishment of the phoenix houses and the autumn kingdoms. eventually, politics forced her to retreat from the autumn kingdoms.

ash had dedicated herself to neutralizing the threat of dragon extinction, preserving as much as possible about them, seeking them out in person, helping to create a sanctuary for them, and continually checking on the progress of the dragon’s recovery. unfortunately, her work was discovered and led the hunters to the sanctuary. if the dragon himself had not been incapacitated and vulnerable, the dragons of dragon’s bath would have dispersed to save themselves. instead, they rallied to protect the dragon’s resting place. ash herself was one of the casualties of that massacre, a victim of one of many exploitations of dragon nature. the blood of dragons, spilled in the last great confrontation between men and dragons, had made dragon’s bath a mystical and dangerous place. the land itself became her ally as she confronted her childhood nemesis in a climactic battle. the watery grave of the one who had devoted her life to bring dragons back, only to lead the way for their slaughter, forced them to fight as equals. forge emerged as the victor and took the final steps, having solved the riddle ash had woven to conceal the dragon’s resting place. her quest led her at last to the lair of the dragon. the dragon was not pleased to be disturbed, but forge managed to dodge death log enough to plead her case. her only hope of bringing sanity to her homeland, and saving lives, was by becoming a dragon. emasculated as a child, physically and spiritually neutered, she reminded the dragon of the phoenix, which compelled him to consider the slave’s request.

historically, the dragon had never identified with a given form. originally a being of pure thought, the dragon had never been predisposed to any particular form and would assume any form suited to his needs. the image of the phoenix had been seared into dragon’s psyche during their confrontation during the purge. upon recovering from the wounds suffered in that climactic battle, the dragon had taken her form for his own. the dragon was inclined to expressing the exclusive, exotic version of the phoenix’s form, which was generally mistaken for a female form. warned of the stigma of being an exotic, he adapted her form to pass among humans as a man or a woman. the loss of her soul mate was devastating. in the days and months to come, she would discover that she could not conceive of the phoenix. to end this life, and begin anew, she would require another dragon to trap her psyche in an ember of new life. initiating forge would allow her to impose the pact of rebirth, and given how out of place she was, her initiate would never suspect her of plotting to escape from the terrible knowledge of what she had done. unless she found a way to resurrect or reincarnate the phoenix, she could not live with the memory.

ash indulged forge’s request to become a dragon, initiating her and passing on inspirations of the phoenix’s true form. ash explained the pact of rebirth that bound a dragon to her initiate, laying the foundation for her escape from the terrible awareness of the phoenix’s loss. forge quickly realized that ash had given her a way to experience, and more importantly project, the conventional sexes of humanity. she took on the male version of the phoenix form, to establish himself as a warrior, and ash, bound to her dragon initiate, took on the female version to compliment him. having sealed the pact between them, the dragon set out to explore the strange new world. the dragon was inevitably drawn to ash. in their final confrontation, the phoenix had initiated the dragon. the dragon had escaped from the transformation that would have turned him into a phoenix leaving a construct, an empty shell, for the phoenix to resurrect. in the absence of another soul, the mind of the dragon formed the template of a new incarnation of the phoenix. a twin instead of a daughter, her psyche was seared with the stamp of the dragon’s, making it impossible for her to conceive of her true self until she could realize that she was not a phoenix incarnation of the dragon. the phoenix inspired by the dragon had assumed the identity of ash. the dragon had been too wounded from the conflict with the phoenix to pursue her, and it took a great deal of effort for the phoenix twin to move the dragon to a place where he would not be disturbed for the thousands of years it would take him to heal. the phoenix twin pursued the phoenix as soon as she was able, but it was too late to do anything but mourn the loss of the phoenix. ash assumed that she was a phoenix initiate, that she was the independently realized phoenix half of the dragon. she had assumed that the reason she could never conceive of herself was because her true nature was that of a dragon. on that assumption it was natural to assume her dragon half would be dominant.

the dragon continued searching and encountered the heirs of the phoenix legacy, only to suffer the crushing realization that they were initiates, not reincarnations, of phoenix. ash had also been drawn to the male and female heirs of the phoenix legacy. the phoenix legacy had been established by phoenix in secret during the purge. her intentions had been to leave humanity with human protectors, who could shepherd people through the dark ages promised by the purge. her foresight enabled the people of the north to survive the cataclysm following her exile. ash had spent the dark centuries of the cataclysm among the heirs of the phoenix legacy tending to the establishment of the phoenix houses and the autumn kingdoms. eventually, politics forced her to retreat from the autumn kingdoms. ash had dedicated herself to neutralizing the threat of dragon extinction, preserving as much as possible about them, seeking them out in person, helping to create a sanctuary for them, and continually checking on the progress of the dragon’s recovery. unfortunately, her work was discovered and led the hunters to the sanctuary. if the dragon himself had not been incapacitated and vulnerable, the dragons of dragon’s bath would have dispersed to save themselves. instead, they rallied to protect the dragon’s resting place. ash herself was one of the casualties of that massacre, a victim of one of many exploitations of dragon nature. ash and the dragon assumed that, as aspects of the same psyche, they had the ability to merge and function as one. ironically, because ash was so convinced that she was the dragon’s phoenix half, she was capable of the total submission necessary for a dragon and phoenix to merge without triggering a fatal eclipse. the dragon absorbed the experiences ash had absorbed over the centuries, oblivious to the fact that her own memory was being stripped bare. through this selfless act, the phoenix would gain access to the part of her dragon potential necessary for her to survive the split conception that awaited her in the coming years.

union with ash had brought the dragon up to date, and encouraged her to seek out her initiate. forge’s nemesis had survived the conflict at dragon’s bath and forge had set out to find him. forge was eager to have ash join his party. in spite of her help, the enemy found them first. ash and forge had deliberately assumed their exotic form to draw the enemy out, unfortunately they had proved too much a distraction for each other. ash suffered the fate of an exotic unlucky enough to fall into slavers’ hands. fortunately, union disguised the signature of dragon and phoenix natures and allowed their captors to make the false assumption that ash was a mere nymph, to be branded and sold as soon as she was fixed. the same sacrifice that had prevented forge from realizing her natural potential had no effect on ash, and she was fortunate enough to be bought by their own allies. forge’s ordeal was a bit more harsh, for her nemesis remembered her well. having been denied his dragon prize, the man had bet on forge’s success, making her the prize, and waited for her guard to drop. she could not be rescued as easily as ash, for her nemesis decided to keep her for himself, forcing the party to pursue him when he took her away to his private retreat. in a weird way, their enemy was actually helping them, leading them to the stronghold they sought. led by her link to forge, ash ushered forge’s war party to the enemy’s base of operations. they were not surprised to be confronted by awesome defenses. the fortress lay deep in the heart of ancient dragon territory, and was defended by demonic and undead minions that betrayed the nature of their enemy’s patronage. ash, while united with the phoenix, had access to the powers even gods had feared. ash penetrated the defenses, and led the party in to rescue forge and decimate the nest of conjurors and slavers whose influence had been felt half a world away. they nearly failed when a member of their own party betrayed them, but it was forge’s talent and skill with a sword that preserved victory.

the dragon had become intimate friends with her twin’s mate, and on past occasions had indulged in intimate affairs at the couple’s urging. the longing for her lost soul mate had caused her to withdraw from them after a while. the toll of losing the phoenix was becoming unbearable, and her search for a way to bring her back was proving fruitless. her mind was veering towards ending her life. all she had to do was push for reincarnation and find a way to die before her heir was mature enough for a proper passing. concern for her compelled the couple to penetrate her isolation and bring her back into their sympathetic embrace. they had also been motivated by the fact that she had been preparing them for her eventual absence by threatening to flee from the relentless pursuit of her hand by unwanted suitors. fortunately, she was distracted from these dark thoughts by forge. once he had learned who the dragon was, and what had caused her to withdraw from life, he felt guilty for awakening her and sought her out. forge refused to let ash out of his sight. to keep his friend from brooding over the loss of her true love, forge distracted her with the reminder of her quest. the dragon’s initiate asked her to help him fight the injustices he suffered in childhood and bring order to the north. bound to each other by initiation, it was easy to pose as brother and sister.

ash needed something to do, and eagerly took up the challenge of conquering the north. as she proceeded, she was setting things in motion for her ulterior motive. the establishment of the dragon house and legacy, in imitation of the phoenix house and legacy, was undertaken deliberately by the dragon and the dragon’s initiate. ash had been impressed with the legacy the phoenix had established, and adapted it to unify the historically irreconcilable kingdoms of the north. the formation and constitution of both were undertaken with great care over the course of their conquest of the winter kingdoms. the first son and daughter conceived by the dragon became the heirs of the dragon legacy. deliberately echoing the traditional establishments of the autumn kingdoms, ash also devoted herself to organizing the emerging leadership of the winter kingdoms into the dragon houses. together, over the next twenty years, they sustained a steady, successful campaign, conquering the winter kingdoms piece by piece. forge was able to rouse tremendous support against the threats of slavery and profane arts, but those factions had been powerful and capable of mounting serious resistance. in the course of his conventional battles, powerful demonologists and necromancers had banded together to raise the legions of slaughtered warriors as an army of their own. both sides suffered massive casualties, and even with the steady tide of victory, peace did not settle over the united kingdoms.

in light of the events shaping the war that had evolved from her initiate’s campaign against slavery and corrupt arts, it was inevitable that circumstance and the promise the initiate had made to reincarnate the dragon would converge. forge was under significant pressure to marry and secure the empire they created through an heir. the dragon had little desire to be an emperor, and no particular interest in being born a boy, but her initiate had a vested interest in being reincarnated male, when the time came for him to reincarnate, so ash agreed to be his heir. the dragon was truly only concerned with finding release from unrelenting memories of the phoenix’s loss so long ago in history, but so recently in the dragon’s memory. in the years following her awakening, the dragon had desperately sought a way to resurrect or reincarnate her beloved phoenix. it had become instinctive for the dragon to call upon the memory of the phoenix during sex, in the hope of reincarnating her. ironically, her success came in the worst way. in a sense, the dragon had been standing in her own way. reincarnation had been intended as a last resort to escape from the memory of losing the phoenix. it never occurred to her that it might create the window of opportunity necessary for the phoenix to emerge.

so obsessively did the dragon cling to her memory of the phoenix that when her initiate tapped her psyche while conceiving the dragon’s heir, he was also guided to the phoenix within ash. in this fashion, the phoenix was reincarnated as the dragon’s twin brother. the phoenix had been torn by what was to her a partial conception, rose from the depths of oblivion to possess the dragon as the embers of the twin boys passed into the initiate’s wife. the phoenix asserted herself in a body that was female, compelled to compliment the conception of herself as a boy with the conception of herself as a girl. confused and disoriented, the phoenix fled while the initiate and his wife were distracted by passion, preventing them from witnessing her departure. in the days that followed, the absence of the dragon was noticed, and eventually resulted in the presumption of her death. the phoenix would spend the first few months of her pregnancy trying to figure out who she was, and where she belonged, before being taken under the wing of raven. her quest for her identity had led her to the capital of the autumn kingdoms, where she was recognized as the reincarnation of a long lost heir to the phoenix legacy

the phoenix would have the one daughter, dawn, and the empress would have twin sons.

as circumstances would have it, the initiate remembered the dragon’s love of the phoenix, and assumed the second boy was a reincarnation of her and named him dusk. the heir, dusk’s older brother by almost a day, was named dust.

eve was formally recognized as a cousin to the queen of the autumn kingdoms, a lost heir to the phoenix legacy and title to what had become the imperial province, the phoenix coast. her recognition would create distress within the autumn court leading to a formal betrothal between dawn and dusk. initially, phoenix tried to assume responsibility for the title and settled in dream gate. unfortunately, the people who had been after her since her first appearance managed to abduct her daughter and torture her before she could be rescued. unwilling to allow her daughter to be used as a sacrifice to summon some demon, she appointed a regent and accompanied her daughter for her initiation.

at the same time her daughter was being traumatized by the archon, dusk and the other dawn had been captured and tortured by slavers taking revenge on the children of their enemy, the dead emperor. dark had been fortunate enough to escape and facilitate their rescue. the unspeakable ordeal quickened the dragon potential of dawn and the phoenix potential of dusk, imprinting them with each other’s forms. they kept their transformations a secret between themselves, trading places occasionally to amuse themselves. a few years later, dragon dawn and phoenix dawn encountered each other during initiation and became close friends. they were curious about each other’s lives, and traded places over the summer, although they were discovered by dusk. dawn did not become aware of dusk and dragon dawn’s secret, in part because they had almost been found out the summer before. they had silently agreed not to trade places anymore, and did not even discuss it except through subtle allusions, which phoenix dawn had been oblivious to. eventually, dusk completely forgot about the ability.

the worst elements of the winter kingdoms infiltrated the autumn kingdoms and the dragon king was forced to take the war there after them, unfortunately the ruling houses of the autumn kingdoms were roused against the dragon king, and then butchered by betrayal. only the phoenix legacy preserved the souls of the fallen, but the responsibility for the autumn kingdoms fell on the slender shoulders of the legacy’s heir.

however, the decades of conquest ended when he fell in love with a young queen, and became the king of a powerful winter kingdom through marriage.

the dragon king and phoenix queen became bound to each other as twin souls, when their initial confrontation resulted in a dual initiation, unexpectedly drawing arden into the pact of rebirth shared by forge and ash.

* the rise of the dragon empire— a slave, rescued and initiated at the academy, went on to conquer and forge the northeast kingdoms into an empire. born a girl, she had made use of the ring of insight to escape her master and was initiated as a boy. her vendetta against slavery pit her against the conjurers and wizards of the northeast kingdoms, driving them out. the conjurers and wizards—many necromancers and demonologists—regrouped in the northwest kingdoms. the empire pursued the exiles, resulting in a two-fold invasion of the northwestern kingdoms.

in spite of—in part, because of—the purge, and persecution of the phoenix bloodline, an incarnation of the phoenix was born

a demon sent to slay the prospective parents possessed the woman, infected the man with familiarity, raped him when they traded sexes, and conceived the phoenix child

they were nineteen year old companions to a twenty-nine year old master—and mentors to nine year old protégés.

a woman possessed by a demon infected a man with familiarity

she had dedicated her life to the academy and the art, even though this meant she could not marry.

her possession resulted from her capture at the hands of a rogue master.

the exile, their master’s adversary, considered psychic potential to be a measure of divinity, and this view left him with no prejudice against demons. as he saw it, demons were the missing part; combine a demon with the right soul and the result would be a god. the exile made a pact with the demons; he would find those souls and the demons would join his cause. of course, to gain their freedom, the demons saw no reason to reject a soul just because it was not an ideal match. in exchange for the souls and freedom, the demons honored the pact.

a descendant of one of these exiles, initiated at the academy, devoted himself to the study of the rift created during the invasion. his companion—their master—made a breakthrough discovery that ultimately led them to become adversaries. his companion opposed the exploitation of the rift, its mysteries and demons to achieve godhood.

the adversary believed that the correct pairing of demons and hosts could result in the creation of a god. the adversary recruited followers using the promise of godhood—using trial and error to perfect his method. the adversary's trials unleashed a plague of demons the academy was forced to hunt down. ironically, the academy's champions tended to be ideal candidates—many were captured and subjected to trials.

the adversary used the rift to gain access to the abyss where he forged alliances with the demons he found there. many of the exiles escaped into the underworld where a few discovered the ruins and the demons imprisoned there. the adversary infiltrated the cabal of exiles to gain access to the imprisoned demons—a step to fulfilling his demonic pact. the adversary dispatched demon assassins to thwart the academy's plans to investigate the ruins.

a man raped by a demon when the infection turned him into a were-woman

he had dedicated his life to the academy, the art and a life of adventure, in place of pursuing a girl he could never have.

his mentor's adversary, a rogue academy peer, captured the girl he loved and he defied orders to rescue her.

the ordeal was not a one-night affair.

the ordeal initially spanned several days, extending to several months in which…

he succumbed to his infection.

he turned female.

she was pursued by the demon.

she was subjected to rape and torture.

she was impregnated.

she was finally able to slay the demon, unwittingly driving it to possess the child.

during her ordeal, she inflicted her curse upon a man she was forced to fight. her opponent carried the full weight of the were-woman curse, passing it on to those foolish enough to provoke her or unfortunate enough to be sired by him.

a demon slain and forced to possess the unborn child to escape destruction

the man salvaged the soul of the demon's former host by virtue of the trap he lured the demon into.

the child was divided into male and female incarnations in the womb during the first attempt to separate the man and woman magically.

the demon was incapacitated by the child's division.

once born, the children were split up and raised independently by the man and woman

the man and woman were forced to withdraw from their companionships to their former mentors

the man and woman complete the mentorship of their protégés

their protégés help with the children, while the man and woman undertake missions as agents of the academy

<Clips & Discards>

in response to their first exposure to sentient life in the dream, the dragon and the phoenix had struggled to understand the origin of life. to all appearances, life seemed to emerge from the substance of creation. each concluded that life could thus be created by manipulating the fabric of creation. the attempts of the phoenix to do this resulted in the creation of the celestial angels. she impressed the fabric of reality with cognitive structures, the personification of qualities and characteristics of nature and consciousness, but this resulted in autonomous facets of creation, facets of her very self, not living organisms. the dragon’s efforts were strikingly similar, as he impressed properties and parameters of consciousness upon the fabric of creation which became the abyssal demons, divorced from creation. they were expressions of autonomous sentience that could not be incorporated into the soul of creation, even though they remained dependant on it.

a princess, the youngest daughter of the king of the most powerful domain in the autumn kingdoms, answered the call of the goddess who appeared to her as a phoenix, and left her home to become a priestess. many believed that her retreat to the sanctuary of the goddess was intended to hide her pregnancy and give her illegitimate daughter a home. tradition allowed the redemption of bastard children as gifts of the goddess, but in the case of this daughter, it was quite literally the truth, for the princess had been reincarnated upon grating the phoenix’s request, to use her as a vessel during a coming time of great need. when it became apparent that the princess had become the phoenix, the avatar of the goddess, her daughter was recognized as a true gift of the goddess and legitimate heir to her mother’s rank and titles. in this fashion, the princess retained her place in the world as her life began anew and the phoenix assumed the place she had vacated to champion the defense of her homeland.

the phoenix was innately capable of defining herself in the context of any species, as long as she understood it.

the world resolved around them as her dream attracted other dreamers who lent the dream reality through their presence and interaction.

they had given birth to a universe but ended up utterly alone.

the manner the dragon and the phoenix had been perceived by dreamers, the form and substance attributed to them in the minds of those who had encountered them, had become the foundations of their identities. the dragon and the phoenix had instinctively adopted and adapted the forms of the dragon and the phoenix, which provided them with excellent and strangely appropriate vehicles for initiating the souls and minds of people, predators and prey, refining these embodiments with the same determination they later devote to resolving their human forms.

intelligent life evolved as she struggled to define and embody the understanding of herself.

ironically, the legends of the phoenix and dragons, inspired by the myths and legends carried over from before the resolution, were waiting to confront them among humans.

after confronting herself and coming together to resolve the whole,

loneliness eventually compelled them to seek out and try to fit in with the inhabitants of the dream who were the most like them, the most evolved souls in the universe. in spite of the driving instinct that would ultimately force them to confront one another, they initially focused their attention on the individuals who populated the dream and the reality it resolved into.

the attraction that had seemed so threatening was nothing more than a natural impulse for two compatible halves to unite and resolve a whole. had they dared to engage in direct intercourse on the same level, the union they had feared would have occurred.

the dragon was still primarily a psionic life form that appropriated the forms of predators to infiltrate emergent sentient races and convert them through initiation. in contrast, the phoenix presented a subtler influence, infiltrating various sentient races by offering herself as prey, initiating and converting a rare few in the process.

after ending their struggle with the duality of sex, and finally assuming the exotic third gender, they discovered they were able to assume either sex at will, being innately polymorphic.

outwardly female in appearance, with a frame designed for childbirth, they were perceived by people as tom boys, or amazons—tall, flat-chested, and athletic girls. the form was exotic enough to be regarded as angelic or demonic, if not simply alien, and in too many cases provoked murderous urges. more than once, exotics—including the dragon and the phoenix—were slain and devoured by superstitious primitives who, in the case of the phoenix or the tiger phoenix and her heirs, were resurrected in her image. in this fashion, the exotic sex would define a new species of human, the avon race.

to be one of them, she had to be born one of them. unfortunately, that proved harder than she imagined, for there was a limit to what she would give up. defining the circumstances of her birth was not difficult, but engineering them would take ages. in her study of humanity, she had realized the best inspiration and embodiment of herself. in order for her to be born, that embodiment had to emerge from the human-avon population. there was no reason for her to deny who and what she was in the pursuit of this goal, nor was there any reason not to encourage or influence the actions of individuals to resolve it, as long as the final product was the result of human intercourse and her influence subject to the whim and will of the people she employed. in each generation, she would choose an avatar, an individual who possessed genetic traits necessary to resolve her design. in exchange for the phoenix gift, and inheritance of the phoenix legacy, that avatar would be asked to find a mate who possessed genetic potential needed to further the design. in each generation that followed, the child possessing the best genetic profile would be named the heir to the legacy and the avatar for her generation. over countless generations, the heirs of the phoenix legacy were guided to mates carefully chosen by the spirit of the phoenix. the mantle of the avatar passed between human and avon females and androgynous avon, predominantly, although once in a while a human male bore the mantle.

the phoenix was distracted from her quest for natural embodiment by the appearance of another embodied dream, the dragon.

the dragon and the phoenix had emerged as twin tigers, identical in body though still inverted in spirit, they had firmly established a common ground. the dragon and the phoenix had failed to recognize each other during this first encounter, a mere side note to their initial investigations of the human race. the dragon and the phoenix wandered away from the event preoccupied with exploring and experimenting with their new tiger forms.

the dragon and the phoenix had thoroughly explored the duality of sex, while striving to embody an understanding of who and what they were, and the two were inspired during the initiation with an understanding of how to resolve the duality of sexual potential, manifested in a sex at once male and female—singular, unique and androgynous.

the dragon and the phoenix were each exposed to an echo of the opposing initiation, through the normal feedback mechanism of those processes, which stimulated the potential of phoenix or dragon that had so long lain dormant within them. however, neither was fully subject to initiation, so the potential the dragon and the phoenix awakened to had not been fully initialized, merely unlocked.

the event merely capitalized the development initiated in point paradox. each had been resolving the unity of soul and mind, drawing unconsciously upon the unity of their anchor.

due to the presence of the soul and mind of the tiger, the actual focus of their initiation, they had instead engaged in protected intercourse. each half was given a glimpse of what would make him or her whole, through the impenetrable glass of the tiger’s psyche. it was not exactly what they had been instinctively looking for, but it was closer than anything they had seen—short of their one apprehension of mutual annihilation. so inspired, the two entered a new phase of evolution, developing the potential they had glimpsed and pushing each other away. the difference was immediately noticeable, when they emerged from the dual initiation their natural polarity had been blunted. they had reached neutral ground.

the announcement made the world spin off its axis. she sort of became lost in the process, as her very perspective on life and her own identity shifted. all of a sudden, the details were clear. her life as dusk was like a second life. in dawn, the drowned girl, a story she know but which has not been written, she lived her first life. she had been the daughter of a japanese noble directly descended from the ancient and lost empire of the sun. her earliest known ancestors built the civilization marked by the long lost and recently rediscovered pyramid of the sun, found on our people's native soil in the depths of mainland asia. as earth was a colony of jurai, it is worth noting that she was the daughter of a crown prince of jurai who chose exile on the primitive world for personal reasons and assumed the identity of the head of the d’ana clan--which he reestablished many times throughout history due to a tendency to have female children more often than not. she was born d’ana dawn, and many would say her naming was prophetic.

as a daughter, her prospects were limited. an unfortunate fact which her father and brother's lamented as well as she. as the favorite of those four noble men, she was indulged in many things a daughter might not otherwise have pursued, mastering arts more suited to a knight or priest than a young lady. she had a passion for life and delighted in exploring its mysteries. she was as wild as her namesake and tried to perfect herself in body and spirit, though she trained her mind even more exceptionally.

at a young age she was a promising master of the art, what more superstitious minds called magic. due to the risks of being known as an artist, she submitted to the comparably lesser infamy of being an "unnaturally" athletic and academic young girl. she ought to have been an outcast. ironically, it was this unusual stimulation of mind, body and spirit, which made her destiny as a daughter virtually inescapable--she was much sought after, a prize many men were prepared to kill for. it was with much trepidation that she begged her way out, taking upon herself a mission to visit the land of our earthly origin, hoping to recover a lost part of our people's legacy which would change the way her people viewed the fairer sex and perhaps offer some hope of a destiny of her own. it was not that she could not bear to lend herself to supporting a man's honor and destiny, but she simply could not bear to be less than who she was. she never wanted to be a man, but she lived in a world where only men were valued as more than property or resources (and to be sure, not all men could achieve such value!). she wanted to be seen and accepted for who she was, respected for her abilities. she wanted to fulfill the promise within her. she suppose her father agreed with her. he could not lend her support, but he honored her commitment.

her decision was seen as a tragedy by those who had sought to possess her. she had no way of knowing what tragedy her choice would lead her to. she left her island home and traveled through asia, with the phoenix that was her family's eternal guardian and her familiar, through the vast fields and towering mountains of china, making it almost to the land of her people's birth--and not further.

she happened upon a war centered around a valley of cursed springs, and one spring in particular. the spring of the drowned woman had been central to the way of life of the people who would become known as the damned, but it had been destroyed by the chinese amazons in retaliation against the damned. she never really had a chance to understand the true nature of the conflict, but she did see more than she wanted with regard to the way the damned treated women--whether the women they created with that spring, or naturally born.

she had already resolved at that point in her adventures to become an amazon if her quest did not succeed. her father had asked that much of her, not to return in failure, as much as it pained him to impose such an exile on her. she had been welcomed among the amazons, though she came perilously close to making a fatal error, and once her mission had been explained, she was given support. the amazons remembered the children of the sun, and believed that restoring the honor and status of her people's daughters would benefit the warrior women. unfortunately, some of the elders and their followers held only contempt for the notion of an alliance with a people who saw women as mere equals, for they believed that women were superior and dared not encourage ideas of equality with men even among men who subjugated women. it was for that reason that her mission was sabotaged. she believe that those women had merely meant to discourage her when they betrayed her to the damned. as it stands, it hardly mattered in the end.

she survived the ambush, along with a few of her amazon guides, and fled from the damned. to escape our pursuers, we ventured the terrifying gauntlet of dragon’s bath, fleeing nimbly across the scattered poles, repelling the few who dared to follow on that fatal terrain. unfortunately, we were unwittingly herded into the waiting arms of the damned prince. thus, exhausted, her companions and she were captured.

it was her misfortune to have caught the eye of the prince, and that he had taken pains to learn more of her. her virginity protected her from the treatment which befell her companions, but it marked her for a worse fate. the prince knew that she would never submit to him, and that to claim her would be certain to bring strife from her homeland, as some of her suitors had already followed in her footsteps. no, instead, he would have her indirectly by drowning her in the new spring his men had dug to replace the one the amazons had destroyed. a strong and healthy girl, only sixteen years of age, and pure of body would make the perfect sacrifice for the new sacred spring. it would take a thousand years for the impression she would leave in the spring to fade, so for a thousand years it would be her image imposed on any who fell in the spring, and then inevitably the strength of her image would fail, rendering merely the best possible version of female humanity given the material on hand. only rarely would a victim, in most cases some poor animal, emerge from the cursed pool with her face and form. she knew this from lessons she had learned about dragon’s bath during her initial stay with the amazons.

she was taunted with lurid visions of the version of immortality that awaited her as the newly dug spring gradually filled to the brim. within her close guard, she was free to move about in body, but her magical and spiritual abilities were bound severely, locked so deeply within her they should not emerge in those united with her form. her hopes of rescue and escape diminished to one vain possibility. she had to be alive to meet her fate, and she would have killed herself first, but she had a dream that final night, a dream which suggested that she might somehow rise from her watery grave and realize her true destiny.

she confided in her fellow captives this omen of her rebirth. she charged them to ensure, somehow, that the spring came to no harm after her passing. on the following morning, she challenged the prince. she swore to enter the water of her own will, to peaceably accept her fate, if the women who had accompanied her were allowed to leave and return to their people, whom they would implore to protect the sacred spring from harm. unwilling to have a vengeful spirit within the spring they used to baptize their brides, the damned considered the matter seriously. to further have some guarantee that the sacred spring would not be destroyed by the amazons, as they had shown they would despite the normal penalty of such an action, they finally agreed. one of the women volunteered to witness her sacrifice, while the others departed.

after composing herself, she entered the fresh spring and embraced her fate. she exhaled her last breath as she sank into the cold embrace and then drew in the waters of death and rebirth. as she thrashed and her brain starved, she had a vision of a boy, so much like her favorite brother, thrashing in the water beside her. she managed only one glimpse into his eyes, and the soul behind them was familiar to her. it was her own. she died wondering what it would be like to have been born a boy, and suspecting that her next life might just hold the answer.

the phoenix, which shared her soul and was her one true companion through life, was drawn by her dying thoughts, overcoming at the last the imperative she had impressed upon her to hide from the damned. as she died, she descended from the heavens, diving into the spring that had become her grave. she emerged, transformed into her twin and bearing her lifeless body from the depths. because of what she was, and what we were to each other, it seemed at first that this was the resurrection she had envisioned. she had always known of her intelligence, and so she would not have been surprised at her immediate grasp of the powers of speech. it was easy for her to give the damned the impression she was her, for her life and experiences had always been reflected in her mind. she was her familiar after all. she was not, however, her. due to the presence of the damned, and the confrontation that she met on the shores of dragon’s bath, the few precious moments in which it would have been possible to resuscitate her were wasted. after a long struggle, in which her familiar vainly tried to dodged the spray from the chisuiiton, the magical artifact was captured and plunged into the bottom of the newly made spring of drowned girl. only then was her familiar able to confront the damned and explain their stupidity--her death had been needless. she could have been dredged from the united waters and revived without any adverse affect upon the newly created spring, but the foolish men had not even considered the possibility. worse, their insane determination to lock the phoenix into her new form, in the hopes of taking her as a bride, had sealed her fate.

she swore on the spot to kill any man who dared to claim her, reminding them all that she was no less a phoenix for being a human girl. she forswore vengeance for her death as well, claiming that her loss was enough tragedy to mark this ill-fated day, and more death would not help our soul rest. taking the witness from the amazon tribe and accompanying her back to her village, she carried her body to its final resting place.

there, before the elders, she explained that she had been her chosen--a product of thousands of years of selective breeding, and the first human incarnation of the phoenix's eternal soul. through the bizarre turn of events, now the phoenix herself was embodied in her chosen human form, but a part of her--the part she had been--had been trapped by the magic of dragon’s bath. as long as the spring was preserved, there was a hope for the phoenix to recover what was lost--not the form, for clearly she now possessed that, but the spirit--and most important, the mind--of d’ana dawn. it might take thousands of years for the phoenix to figure out how to recover that missing part, but recover it she must--it was the key to her soul's potential.

the amazons swore to preserve the spring and to aid the phoenix in recovering her--as well as guarding her secret. the phoenix lingered long enough to master the locked union, and once she controlled the transformation, she took wing. her destination was her home, where she conveyed the news of her death to her family and assumed the role that would have been left to her had she returned in failure.

she accepted the proscribed life, that of a temple maiden who had been stripped of honor, as penance for allowing her to die. her daughter, who came as a shock to all, since there were none who could question her mother's virtue--no man had ever dared to touch her, and she was proven a virgin well into her pregnancy--was perceived as a gift from the gods and adopted by her father, where she was raised as a woman of nobility and honor. she was respectably wed, and her legacy descended directly from her, with the birth of one daughter in each generation who was true to her image, leading inevitably to dreamer, who married d’ama musk.

the first night was the hardest. as they had intended before, they abused her before they attempted to penetrate her mind. the rape did not bother her as much as the strange behavior of the rapists. she could easily distance herself from the physical trauma, she had been trained to deal with it by the asia. a ruthless attack on an intimate and vulnerable part of her life was, in practical terms, not much different from being beat up. the only thing she could do was survive, and heal. fortunately, at this time she was not as vulnerable as she could be. heat (changing within) had made her infertile. of course she was afraid, but most of the fear, the helpless anger, came from their attempts to rape her mind. no matter what they did to her body, she could control herself until that piercing gaze. the instant she felt that mental thrust, her rage took over.

phoenix dawn did not sleep, in spite of her utter exhaustion. after they were through using her, she faced her crisis. self-hatred warred with self-pity and blood thirst. she had never been so helpless. she had never been so vulnerable, and she damned herself for finding pleasure in the arms of such monsters. only stubborn self love prevented her from devouring herself with darkness. this was not her doing, this was being done to her. these men were her enemies, and their purpose was her destruction. what had happened had nothing to do with sex, and everything to do with power.

as the second night approached, her greatest concern was with blaze. whatever they were trying to do to her, it had already affected him, and there was no way she could be impersonal with him. he was her, she reminded herself. they were the same soul, and if it had not been for what had happened to him, they would have long since become the same mind. whatever had possessed him, had prevented it—prevented her (and him) from becoming whole. while struggling with newly deepened bloodlust, it occurred to phoenix dawn that she had felt this kind of murderous rage before. when it had come to her on the beach, it had come as an old friend. for the first time in her life, her nightmares offered a hope of salvation. forcing her mind back to the trauma of her childhood, and the birth of her deadly rage. it took her awhile to shake the rage after her enemies had finished maiming and using her. licking her wounds, she was conscious of the fact that they were forced to treat her with respect in spite of their abuse of her. unfortunately, they had learned their lesson with regard to her too well. they knew that if they gave her the slightest opportunity, she would kill them. the following nights became increasingly worse. they would wear her down, working her over, depriving her of food and water and sleep, and then attacking. each time, they only succeeded in awakening the rage, putting her back in focus, and reviving her. her only satisfaction was seeing the disappointment in their eyes as they continually failed to break her. of course, reason said that if they decided that she couldn’t be broken, eventually they would simply kill her and be done with it.

it struck her suddenly that the memories of rage that were fueling her defiance were not hers at all. phoenix dawn had been tapping into blaze’s memory. like the memories, the nightmares, too, originated in him. ironically, it was blaze who was the most persistent, the most determined to cause her mind’s destruction. he worked her over until there was no energy left in her to rage, and the brutality of rape bled into the embrace of lust, almost love-making, as her body betrayed her with its own needs. he even shared his amusement with her, as he recognized the perversion of what should have been their mnao.

at the end of the week, phoenix dawn learned the reason behind their long delay within the ruin of the temple. preventing her from using her power forced blaze to use his own. since they were both nailed, it was suicide for the group to attempt to travel with either of them under such circumstances. however, there were other ways to deprive a psi of her ability. confronted with the prospect of having her mind stripped of all defenses, phoenix dawn went wild. after much too long, blaze and a thoroughly subdued phoenix dawn emerged from the ruin, and their march was resumed.

phoenix dawn trudged along lost in thought. she did not seem to have any weapons left. her training had dealt with the possibility that she might be deprived of her powers while in the field. blaze had already proved that he could outmatch her in a hand to hand fight. she had a hard time imagining how she could use her sex to her advantage given how her captors had already taken all she had to offer. still, it was the only weapon she had, if she could find a way to take it back from them. she gave it all of her attention. if nothing else, it was a way to distract herself from more hopeless thoughts. she could not escape rape, but she could transform it. rape pretended to be sex, but it was really war. conquest. the victim subordinate to the act. but she had seen that she could also take from the act. her passion was hate and her lust was bloodlust. taking an active role in this terrible intimacy, freed her from being a victim. using the skills of a lover, and the perspective of a warrior, she fought on intimate ground, with an intimate enemy, to defend her spirit, to protect her self.

as nightfall made it impossible for them to make reliable progress, they called a halt. she knew that they had no intentions of allowing her to get any sleep. in order to get sleep themselves, they took turns standing guard, abusing her, and sleeping. that made what she was trying to do easier. it didn’t make sense to them at first. it took a few days of random assaults, and nights of unrelenting abuse to realize that she was arousing herself to accommodate them. it was disturbing to her as well. she could hardly believe she was enjoying what they were doing to her. it almost threw her, until she realized why. she was silently challenging them to enjoy what they were dong to her. to feel pleasure at her expense and to accept the pain she would cause them if they underestimated her for an instant. they could force her to do anything they wanted, but they were finding her to eager to bend, to quick to anticipate them. she had figured out their weakness with regard to her, and it was forcing them to deal with her as a hostile ally rather than a prisoner or a slave.

amusingly, she was learning survival skills by observing her captors. they had long since left the road and were dragging her north up the coast. they were not too alarmed by the dragon that dogged their steps with her psionic gifts subdued. they even managed to acquire arms and clothing as they progressed, but the psionic collar was the only thing they had given her to wear. in their first encounter with others, she discovered that it was in fact a slave collar. which explained why her pleas for rescue were both allowed by her captors and ignored by those they had encountered. blaze pointed out that the collar named her as the property of the individual she was being delivered to, so as long as she wore it her chances of successfully escaping were virtually nil.

phoenix dawn found that her victories were coming quicker than she expected, along with realization of her true assets. they learned that the act was very different with her as a participant, and nothing they did could stop her from participating. especially when she realized that their clear efforts to break her were hampered by the fact that they dared not cripple her. being in heat also aided her in this campaign, for she was not alone in her condition. she could not get pregnant, and her immunity and bio-regenerative capabilities protected her from disease and minor injury.

her enemies were not blind to what she was doing. in spite of themselves, they were falling in love with her. it had been easy to admire her, to want to possess her, but this was worse. it got harder to hurt her, as it became easier to possess her. it was maddening. they knew that if they didn’t break her, then they would never be able to make her one of them. if she did not become one of them then they would have to kill her. so they continued to hate her. and she continued to hate them.

blaze had seen it happening, and he could not see any way to prevent it. they had a mission to accomplish and she had found a way to become immune to their methods. he continued to try, but until they reached their destination, as phoenix dawn had guessed, their methods were limited by their need to travel swiftly. still, there were some attacks he could make against her will.

phoenix dawn suspected that she knew where they were taking her. if things had been different, their destination would have been her own home. the lands she would have inherited through the title she shared with blaze. she confronted the him. she told the story of the massacre she witnessed in his memories and then challenged that—whatever it was they were trying to do to her mind—they had done to him on that night. he said only that the estate was important to them, and actions would always be taken to preserve their interest in it. if she were one of them, then their position would be secure.

phoenix dawn and blaze confronted one another in another moment of privacy. in the embrace of respectful enmity, she asked what they were trying to make her become. she debated the possibility of a compromise or arrangement between them. she pursued the possibility that there might be some peaceful resolution to their situation. he responded that the only way she could ever become one of them would be to surrender herself to him entirely. when she asked him what would happen if she did, he merely replied that the only way she would ever learn that would be the hard way. again, he implied that she had no hope of escaping her fate. only time that was running out.

phoenix dawn thought about dream gate. if she were blaze it would be the last place she would ever want to go. he had been traumatized by the slaughter of friends and family there. the fact that he had been named heir to the estate was the supreme irony of his life. the most terrible place in the universe to him was destined to be his home. he had seen the curse at work as a child, and had determined to live his life as far from the place as he could manage. only now, he was a party to that curse. she could not help but wonder if the curse might be something that could be fought. if, perhaps, there might be some way to win him back.

phoenix dawn finally got the nerve to ask, if she could not be broken, were they going to kill her? she was told that if she could not be made one of them, then she could have no place among them. they would never trust her, and they could not allow her to claim that which was sacred to them. phoenix dawn tried to convince them that she had never had any desire to claim the cursed estate. she would never have even approached it if they were not forcing her to. nothing she or he could say could shake her conviction that none of their aims would result in anything less than her death.

phoenix dawn. she confided at last her conviction that whatever happened, she would not live to speak of it. she also confessed her curiosity why an estate that had been in their family for thousands of years was so sacred to them. the simple response stunned her. dream gate was where their kind had originated. everything they knew about themselves began here about twenty years ago.

with their arrival only days away, phoenix dawn was aware of her imminent death. the endless, ruthless attempts to force her possession had all failed when they had given up on breaking her mind, they had stopped raping her as well. whatever they sought to do to her, she was truly immune. the fact that she was still alive only meant that they had something left to try. the truth was, they had run out of options. the only thing that had not already tried was killing her. blaze’s patience with her insufferable defiance was worn out. everything they had done had been geared toward triggering her conversion. confronted with her impregnable will that objective had proven unattainable. he had been forced to stop trying before she could use her growing appeal to sow dissent among his men. he had contemplated the alternative for several nights, giving in to the temptation to simply talk to her, and perhaps heal the breach between them. which was why he decided to shake her self-possession and ride her until they reached their destination. once delivered, more effective means of attacking her integrity could be employed.

his attempt to possess her went awry as a hidden aspect of their unique nature revealed itself. none of the things they had done to subdue her could prevent her from conceiving of herself. in fact, the compulsion for their soul to conceive of itself transcended the struggle that had pit them against each other. it simply happened that an embrace as intimate as possession made it impossible for not to recognize herself in him and vice versa. the consequence of that act stunned them all, and seemingly fulfilled the designs against both of them.

phoenix dawn found herself trapped within the prison of a demonic mind. her instinct was to fight and escape. it was a shock to discover that the prison was her own mind, and that the trap was her own thoughts. phoenix dawn found herself leading the group that had subdued and abused her. she found herself driven by imperatives that had driven blaze. it was strange to know that she had lost, and yet still existed within that which had corrupted her. she felt the wonder at what she had become, and did not know if that was her thoughts as blaze or if that was her thoughts as phoenix dawn. if not for the dragon, which had dogged them all in its determination to devour her as phoenix dawn, she would have felt no fear. for some reason, or for one reason she could well suspect, the dragon was not swayed in its pursuit by her transformation. the way it renewed its hunt confirmed her fear that the merging of her former bodies had also somehow reinforced the amplifying aspect of the nails that had been driven into her as blaze and phoenix dawn. convinced that there was no demon to drive out of her mind, she was at least able to wrest back control over her transformed body. she could have used that to her advantage, but her first mistake proved to be the only one she would get. her attempt to command her new troops to change their destination earned her back her leash that very night. apparently, her achievement was not unheard of among her possessed comrades. they had no intention of allowing her to escape them. fortunately, they were more concerned about the dragon.

phoenix dawn. as they came within a day of dream gate, they were attacked once more by the dragon. it managed to cut down half of their remaining number before they reached the safety of the estate. if not for the assistance of the party that had come out to meet them from dream gate, none of them would have made it. phoenix dawn was furious to come up short an arm—the same arm!—again. as she lay bleeding, she begged them to remove her collar so that she could use her abilities. knowing that she lost the arm trying vainly to fend off a lunge for him, thorn granted her wish. ironic, she thought, how the respect they had been forced to pay her had actually become admiration. before releasing her, thorn confided his knowledge of her imperfect conversion. he assured her that there was no cure for what had already been done to her, and promised her that the situation could be rectified if she made it necessary. concentrating on forcing her wound to close and begin healing, she explained that it would take days for her to restore her arm—given her unfamiliarity with her new body. she promised not to try to escape for at least that long. she made no promises beyond that though. she used her time to learn her way around the estate, remembering her childhood explorations—as blaze—and the tragedy that brought them to an end.

phoenix dawn stood on a balcony, staring out at the dragon that still waited for the chance to devour her. the dragon, having feasted, having twice tasted phoenix dawn, and knowing that meat still hid within the estate, would not leave. phoenix dawn watched it from safety. there were about thirteen more of the strangers, her new brethren, there. counting the nine lost out of the first group, there were seventeen of them left. would she be justified in killing them to survive? could she incapacitate all of them badly enough to make good her escape? was she feeling sympathy for their position? she still didn’t really know what they were, but they were something very different from what they appeared to be. they considered her conversion or death necessary for their survival.

phoenix dawn had not been left entirely on her own. if she wandered too long, a group of them would go after her and drag her back. thorn required her to dine with him each evening, probing her loyalties, keeping her up to date on the dragon hunt. her enemies were not powerless, she learned. those who had been waiting here for them had greater psi ability than those who had captured her, and they were prepared to fight the dragon. of course, dragons were frighteningly intelligent, and they had powerful psi themselves. the hunting parties came up empty on their forays, even losing two members in the space of three days. phoenix dawn all but begged thorn to convince her, honestly convince her, that what they demanded of her was right. she was not a bit shy about detailing what she could expect if she ever tried to go back to civilization. freedom from them would only deliver her to slavery to someone else. if she knew what the alternative was, what they wanted from her, at least then she could make a decision. something about the way he looked at her told her that he desperately wanted her to commit herself to them, but did not believe she really could.

on the tenth day, phoenix dawn found herself on the ramparts again, watching the dragon. the dragon had held them under siege for the entire week, and phoenix dawn’s arm was filling out. it came out of the forest and watched her watching it for about an hour. when thorn sent his men out, it ignored them for as long as it could and then slipped away. that night it struck inside the estate, catching them all by surprise in the hall. three more died as they fought their way into tighter quarters.

phoenix dawn was delighted to get away this time with all her parts intact. as they rested in their new quarters, she pointed out that the dragon was outthinking them at every turn. their traps were being circumvented and turned against them. the only way they were going to get it into a trap was with bait it could not resist. her. phoenix dawn argued with them over it through the night. not that she was particularly keen on the idea of playing bait, but she was fully healed and this gambit was the only way she could think of to keep her neck out of that damned collar. it also sounded like a good way to convince them of her loyalty to them. if it did not, she had no doubts about her fate once the immediate threat was resolved. she had a chance to save herself, playing prey to lead the dragon into the trap. she would be playing predator at the same time.

phoenix dawn planed her routes into and out of the trap. she was not pleased as thorn collared her again. he assured her she would be safe enough if she stuck to the plan they had come up with. it was no less than she had expected. also as expected, she had a shadow. she confronted her enemy as she prepared to bait the dragon. he admitted that her help would not change her fate, even if her plan proved successful. she nodded, declaring that she would rather take her chances with the dragon then. taking flight into the open, he pursued. the dragon was quick to pounce, cutting off her false escape. phoenix dawn, ready for this, turned and fled back into the trap, disabling her shadow. the dragon accepted her gift, conveniently giving her time to build up a good lead.

she switched to her alternate route, leading the dragon to her enemies, which she happily delivered to him with crippling attacks. having dealt with the reserve, she returned to the plan, leading the dragon into the gauntlet. her enemies were aware of her betrayal, but with the dragon right on her heels, they were forced to deal with the greater threat. phoenix dawn took out the two set to block her flight out of the killing quarters, and methodically began to hunt down the rest, who were engaged with the dragon.

her plan was going well, but not perfectly. realizing the extent of her deadly plan, they broke from their engagement with the dragon to deal with her. armed now, she confronted them. as they pursued her, they made no bones about the fact that they intended nothing less than her destruction. they had no right to expect anything less from her. the only difference being, she offered them the chance to walk away. she even offered to keep the dragon occupied long enough for them to make their escape. to her surprise, three of them took her offer. the remaining four cut into her. they pressed her hard, forcing her to take flight again. quick and relentless, they maneuvered her into the trap they had set up for her. the fine metal links of a dragon-spine chain slashed into her legs as she was snapped off her feet by the snare.

she hung there a moment, disoriented and in pain. then she heard the dragon. looking around quickly, she realized that it would be able to squeeze its way in to her. from where she was, there was no way to disengage the snare, and her sword would not cut through the hardened alloy. sacrificing her legs to escape, she managed to slip into one of the airshafts she had been using and escaped. when she was sure she had lost them, she turned her attention to her severed legs. the repair of her arm had been excruciating. but, by deliberately retarding the process, she had bought herself time to plan and explore. this time she would benefit twice from the true use of her ability. of course the hard part would be disabling the collar before she bled to death. it took almost everything she had to slag the artifact, and she sacrificed the rest weaving her new legs together. collapsing in total exhaustion, she considered her end game. if her remaining enemies had checked the trap then they either thought her eaten, or they gave her credit for being able to escape. they would expect her to hole up and wait while her body healed the slow way. they could not know she would be able to burn off her psionic restraint, so they had to believe that at best she was crippled and helpless. they could not expect her to attack that same night.

her enemies were more wary of her than she expected. instead of splitting up to hunt her down, they were waiting for her together. the element of surprise would allow her to take one of them out, but that would leave three to retaliate. her four remaining enemies circled her, preparing to feed her to the dragon. phoenix dawn felt the blood rage threatening, but kept a grip on herself. she could see that the four were highly trained and powerful, and they worked together seamlessly. her chances against them were slim. she had no idea which one was their leader, for they were all leaders, she recalled. she waited until one of them exposed himself to harm, and then struck. good as she was, she was not good enough. to her surprise, the four were knight companions. they were even better trained than she. though less creative and powerful, they had the advantage in a battle of attrition. finding herself overwhelmed, she realized could only flee or be ruthlessly dismembered and finally decapitated. the appearance of the dragon, having finally found a way into the area they had retreated to, created enough confusion for her to escape. wary of each other, her two legged and four legged predators allowed her a running start. phoenix dawn, fleeing for her life from the dragon, slipped deeper into the ruins of dream gate to loose it in the complex structure. it was a loosing prospect, the beast had pinned them down at the ruins for weeks, waiting for her attempts to forage for food to pounce on her. slithering through secret spaces, she eluded them, forcing them to split up. her luck finally ran out. the dragon had figured out what kind of game she was playing and outmaneuvered her. in plain view of her enemies, the dragon snatched her out of the air, and dragged her away. death came slowly—and erotically. she realized too late that it was her mind, not her body, that the dragon hungered for. her orgasmic death fulfilled an ancient design. refusing to die, she struggled to hold onto her identity as her mind was swallowed, but oblivion engulfed her. her mind, desperate for a way out of the trap, pursued an instinctive escape—one that wouldn’t occur to her conscious mind at all. her escape came as much a surprise to her as it did to her predator.

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phoenix dawn woke up in the nest she had prepared for herself. her memories of events seemed like those of a very vivid dream. she actually thought she had passed out after healing her legs, and had yet to execute her final attack. as she set out, she prayed that she would not make the sort of critical errors that had plagued her in her nightmare. as carefully as possible, she began her hunt for the last of her enemies. at the end of a day and a night, she was forced to the unbelievable conclusion that they had all left. she had not even seen any signs of the dragon. she haunted the ruin for three more days out of suspicion, but still discovered no sign of any of her predators. finally, she nerved herself to make her escape. with the full strength of her mind restored, she rushed across the clearing and dove into the undergrowth. expecting dragons and possessed knight companions to drop on her at every step, she somehow managed to make good time to dragon’s bath.