Rival Obsessions

As she pursued her options, the rivals were considering what they had learned about her, and how she could be of use to them. They were quick to regard her as a desirable consort. They were just as quick to sense each other’s interest, and she immediately became the object of a personal rivalry between them. But their ambitions faced a common obstacle. As a psychic, it would be far easier to kill her than turn her, but her immunity to their powers had known limits. A fact that created the possibility of resolving the major and minor conflicts between them. Once the wager was agreed upon, the two set out to lure her into their trap.

The rivals returned to propose a new solution to Morgan. Since she only needed proof of her childhood ordeal, or just that the killing was justified, she only needed to trap and bind the demon for inquisition and later destruction.

After making the arrangements, they brought her to a party to "take her mind of her problems for a night" and carefully seduced her. Ironically, Morgan was more than willing to be seduced, desperate to find out if sex with another man would traumatize the man in her. She had already discovered, to her chagrin, that she had become attracted to other women, and that the man in her delighted at having all of her to "himself". At times, it had seemed there was nothing safe she could do with her hands, and she had to pay strict attention to what they were doing at all times. Through the evening, her reactions seemed very encouraging, and eventually she found herself in bed with the two men that had taken such a keen interest in her plight.

There was a serious undertone to their foreplay, however, as they brought up her mission again, testing her determination with various probing questions. They built up to their veiled proposition, did she desire the power to hunt down and defeat her childhood demon on her own? Morgan had to say yes. Even with the power she had gained from her fusion, she lacked the skills and knowledge to capture a demon on her own. If they could provide that, she would give far more than one night of intimacy. Morgan was not wrong in sensing that they wanted something from her, but she would never have guessed that they would do what they did. In the heat of passion, they had bitten her, releasing their venom simultaneously into her blood. Morgan nearly passed out from the erotic, euphoric wave that eclipsed the pain of their piercing bites. Too late, she realized what her lovers were, as the pleasure and poison left her helpless in their embrace. Too late she understood why two men who seemed eager to kill each other over her had decided to share her instead. Because she understood the horrible choice they had forced on her. But, she was not the weak psychic she had been. She focused inward, determined to fight off the infections and preserve her humanity.

An unfortunate girl chosen as the focus of a wager between a vampire and a were-tiger <…>

- They were locked in a war to determine who would rule Ruins’ Deep

She was an initiate in her final year at the academy, dragged to a party during the autumn festival that the immortals crashed

She had caught the eye of the rival immortals previously, becoming a focus of their rivalry and thus the focus of the wager made that night

- They both flirted with her, luring her aside where they could coax or seduce her into playing her part in the wager

She had been slipped spiked drinks to lower her guard and arouse her, but even drugged she sensed a deadly undercurrent

She sensed she was in mortal danger, but found herself unable to resist the consummation of their desires

- They bled her dry after administering their corrupting kisses and feeding her a morsel of were flesh and a drink of vampire blood

She knew a victim had to be on the verge of death to be turned by the bites of a vampire or a were

She knew a victim of both bites never survived, unless one bite proved far more potent than the other

- They left her body, the posed victim of a brutal slaying giving no hint of their involvement, to be found by her friends

She was trapped in a deathlike paralysis, in a heightened state of conscious awareness she had never achieved through meditation

She helplessly endured her post-mortem evisceration and embalmment, the perfect reconstitution of her flesh, and the awakening of her hunger

- They returned to the morgue as they sensed the conclusion of her turning, eager to find out which way she had turned

She sensed them approaching her temporary crypt, but even with her hunger raging, could not shake off the repose of death

She realized they were the only ones who could save her from being buried alive, and made a desperate effort to show she was still “alive”

- They realized, once she signaled them, that she was still in the throes of the struggle between their rival powers of corruption

She was discovered by rivals to her sires’ authority who conspired to foil the wager through her destruction by exposing her to the sun

She was startled when the sunlight suddenly restored her vitality, swiftly restoring her to a perfect semblance of her former life

- They discovered her absence, learned of the plot, but the absence of her ashes prompted a general search

She had wasted no time wondering at her return to life, setting out at once for the aid and counsel of her instructors

She had almost reached the haven she sought when night fell, and her vitality began to drain away, until she literally dropped dead in the street

- They followed the rumors back to the morgue where she had been delivered after her body was found in the street and abducted her again

She could do nothing but listen to their arguments and speculation until the next morning when an experiment was conducted

She revived once more in sunlight where she was confronted by the were-tiger, but an explanation for her condition was not reached

- They kept her “alive” by keeping her in a brightly lit room when night fell and continued to study her

She discovered she could take the edge off her hunger through normal food and drink, preferring fruits, vegetables and water

She was a prisoner, by virtue of her condition and knowing the truth about her sires and their subordinates

- They probed at her until she was forced to relive her death, discovering her last desperate attempt to save herself by calling on healing magic

She discovered she could leave her body during her nightly death, and roam like a ghost—and that her death lingered if no light touched her during the day

She discovered that nothing could completely alleviate her hunger and thirst, which afflicted her even when she separated from her body completely

- They deduced that her odd condition might be the result of failing to feed properly, so they limited her to a choice of blood or raw meat

She was expected to reveal what she had become by the nature of what her hunger compelled her to consume, but she was drawn to both offerings

She tried to resist the meat and blood, but they kept her locked in the light with no way to escape her hunger and thirst

- They thought she was deliberately trying to spite them by consuming both offerings when she finally broke down

She discovered that she was able to command her dead body after feeding, and that by feeding it was undergoing new changes

She also discovered that feeding only increased her hunger and thirst and light seemed to accelerate the changes she experienced

- They discovered, once she was feeding regularly, that her sensitivity to sunlight was increasing, that she might slowly be succumbing to vampirism

She found herself shying more and more from intense light, particularly direct sunlight, but drawn to low light, especially moonlight

She discovered that her powers of regeneration were growing, she could literally watch her wounds erase themselves

- They concluded that the interference of her desperate magic was finally wearing off, sufficing only to sustain her through the worst of the conflict

She realized that her desperate attempt to heal herself had tapped into something dormant within herself, or some aspect of their infections

She was encouraged in her plans to escape by the same dissidents who first exposed her to the sun

- They discovered her escape and pursued her, only to witness as she succumbed to her need to hunt and finally expressed her true nature

She was startled by the melding of her vampirism and transformation into a tiger, sating her hunger for flesh and blood all at the same time

She still depended on light for true vitality, and feeding to retain it and fuel her hybrid powers, but too much light, or not enough fuel were dangerous

- They were forced to accept that she had somehow melded their infections into one, and gained certain benefits as a result

She was immune to the normal enthralling influence of her sires, and capable of seeming more alive or more dead than any other vampire

She was more sensitive to sunlight and silver, but could endure exposure to either longer than a normal vampire or were before taking damage

- They concluded that the initial wager was a draw, modifying it so that he who succeeded in dominating her would dominate the ruins

She was severely disciplined for her attempt to escape, warned that she would not be allowed to roam the surface until she was lost to human memory

She discovered that she shared her cell with another victim of dual infection, a living corpse, forever trapped in the death struggle it provoked

- They were shocked by her success at reviving her cellmate, a soul long since written off as an unfortunate victim of some past quarrel

She found her new companion her only true friend and ally, and like him, ached to somehow return to her old life

She learned her companion was once a mage hunter, a man trained to slay immortals and gods, and according to him, there was one chance for them

- They summoned their elders to reveal what she had accomplished, in herself and with the man who had been condemned to a living death

She clung to the new hope her companion had revealed to her, once again plotting to escape and seek out the aid of the goddess

She was brought before the elders to testify about her unique accomplishments, and face judgment

- They realized that their elders might well seek her destruction as an abomination, or worse, if the reaction of one of them was fully considered

She was approached by the one elder excited by her and her accomplishments, offered certain insights and promises if she submitted to him

She learned some stunning secrets about weres and vampires from her companion, including the purpose of his former vocation

The original focus of the story was Morgan's transformation into a vampire-were-tiger. It opened with the events that brought her to the attention of her sires and ended with her exposing herself to the sun. That made her transformation the main focus of the plot. The movement of the plot takes her from the City of Avon to the heart of Ruin's Deep, moving from a human community to the center of vampire and were communities. The most significant part of the story unfolds during her arduous turning, presenting a space where she is presented with the decision forced upon her and the outcome of her transformation. It is also a time when she faces the beginning of her indoctrination into the mysteries of weres and vampires. It is plausible to have her turning complete prior to her escape, assuming that she could be cured at any time up to the point where she feeds, in which case more emphasis can be placed on exploring her introduction to the immortal clans. There, we can witness the modification of the wager, where Morgan becomes the personification of Ruin's Deep. Possession of the lost city could only be achieved through possession of Morgan, upon whom the mantle of authority rested until another conquered her.

This approach also opens a window for Morgan to question the impact her transformation has on her mission. Most importantly, her turning might even occur prior to her admission to Ruin's Deep. Thus, it is possible to give the plot significantly greater depth. Obviously, that would present two stages in Morgan's evolution, her initial fusion of were and vampire natures, and the acceleration of the refinement of those natures when she confronts the dawn. It is even possible that her flight to the sanctuary of the goddess is based on a misunderstanding, an obscure belief that vampirism can be undone on sacred ground--when in fact there is simply a rite that can be conducted on sacred ground that allows a vampire to revert to a dormant state closely approximating mortal existence. Morgan's motivation ultimately would be to sustain her humanity, which would make feeding on human prey her breaking point, the point past which she cannot find redemption. So, instead of trying to prevent her transformation, she moves in the pursuit of redemption with the hope of returning to her original life. She strives to control her impulses, feeding on animal prey--which is made easier by virtue of her tiger aspect.

When the opportunity comes, when she discovers the possibility of a cure, she attempts to reach the sanctuary only to be waylaid by a band of rogues. During that fight, she loses control of herself and ends up feeding on her assailants, recovering from the euphoria of feeding on human prey in the depths of the sacred forest, or on the cliffs overlooking the ocean, but ultimately one step away from where she will die. Even employing the phoenix origin of Morgan, the prospect of snatching the future incarnation of Morgan to host the refined ember remains viable. At the time of her transformation, Morgan was already a fusion of Dusk and Dawn, and the embodiment of Morgan's masculinity withheld from her by the demon--waiting to serve as a catalyst for turning Morgan into the demonic-angelic singular duality. If "Morganna" is drawn into the story, it will be because it serves to feature the refinement of Morgan's hybrid nature, give substance and meaning to Morgan's sacrifice, and fully merge the psyches of Dusk and Dawn. Given that, the ocean *was* featured in her "arrival" after Morgan is consumed in the fire of her absolution, reduced in a couple of breaths to a single ember that floats out on the breeze to be cast upon the waves. Her witness, Logan, would approach the site of her immolation and look out upon the ocean to see Morganna materialize around the ember and fall into the water.

Looking back to one of the oldest influences on the evolution of this character, the first step in her life of adventure was the tragic death of her lover. That element survived as the tragic theft of her lover's body. However, the plot evolved to feature her death and rebirth, diminishing the prospects of a quest to recover the lover's body. So, once again the original impulse proves to be correct.

Her bloody metamorphosis

Her trial and sentence

Her reprieve

Her shady past

Her appeals

Her paramours

Her death

Her unexpected rebirth

Her hunger and thirst

Her hope and despair

Her destruction

I think the most disturbing part of the whole ordeal was mourning the death of my former selves and struggling to figure out exactly who and what I was. I spent the duration of my imprisonment reflecting on the night of my metamorphosis, trying to understand what happened and how it could have created me. I know I was as shocked as my examiners to discover I was not entirely human. I appeared human, yet I had become an androgyne--neither male nor female but encompassing aspects of both, like an angel or a demon. Of course, I was declared a demon and accused of devouring my former selves. I tried to tell the story of Morgan of Avon and Morgan of Arduin, but even the testimony of my--their--former mentor, detailing how my former selves had been soul mates--two halves that somehow came together to create me--did not sway my judge and jury. Maybe some of them believed my story and decided something like me should not exist. Whatever the reason, they did not hesitate to condemn me to death.

Fortunately, I was not a demon, and the wards they erected to imprison me had no effect on me or my powers.

However, it was not enough to escape execution. I was certain to be hunted down, so my only hope was to somehow prove my innocence. The long hours I spent dwelling on the memories of my former selves had given me two fragile leads to pursue. I clung to those clues desperately, because they offered an explanation for my creation and the creation of my duplicate. I had only had one glimpse of my "twin" and did not remember even that much until I figured out why I had been found unconscious in the pool of blood. The memory of my reflection assaulting me was my first clue, and when combined with the second, I had a possible explanation for what had happened.

When she was seven, Morgan of Avon--or Dawn, as the other Morgan dubbed her--had been abducted and offered as a sacrifice to a demon. Somehow, she had managed to fight its possession long enough for her mother to come to her rescue. Dawn was never sure about what really happened, but her assumption had always been that her mother had sacrificed herself to save her. Her mother had offered her own body to the demon, after she prepared it with wards and poison to trap and kill it. The only thing I can think of was that the demon had somehow rooted itself in Dawn before taking the bait, and that tenuous thread was enough for the demon to cling to through the death of Dawn's mother. It was not a strong enough foothold to allow the demon to take possession of the girl, especially since its earlier attempts to conquer her had awakened Dawn's psychic abilities.

Morgan of Arduin--or Dusk, as the other Morgan dubbed him--had always been fascinated by angels and demons, and studied all of the lore about them. In all that information a few key things stood out to my mind. There was an odd parallel in the relationship between angels and demons and the relationship between males and females. In effect they were members of the same species. They were all the same sex--neither male nor female, but encompassing aspects of both--but it took one of each kind to spawn a new angel or demon. Humans were similar in that their nature encompassed both angelic and demonic aspects. If the demon had clung to the shadow of Dawn's psyche, it could have exploited Dusk and Dawn's unusual compatibility to blend their masculine and feminine characteristics together in an attempt to reconstitute itself. It seized half of that pooled potential, and from the other half, I was born.

I had no idea what I was going to do about my twin, but it made sense to go back to the place where the demon came from to collect proof of what had happened to Dawn and gather information about my nemesis from its prison. Once I had something to go on, I hoped I would be able to come up with a plan about what to do next.

About the only thing I had going for me from the outset was the fact that I still had the same basic form and stature I possessed as Dawn, with slightly better musculature. Even nude, I could still pass for a flat-chested, athletic female, and as long as I wore pants that concealed my hips I could possibly pose as an adolescent boy. It would help me in Avon to be recognizable as one of my former selves.

Morgan had no idea how absorbed in this effort she became, losing more than a day fighting the demon within.

Morgan had no intention of surrendering to her infections just because she could not risk fighting them. Even without the threat the demon posed, she realized that fighting both infections directly would have quickly exhausted her and their combined, unopposed effect would have killed her soon after. Her chances of surviving were greater if she could regulate the infections, allowing them to run their course but employing her resources to control their progress. By exploiting the regenerative properties of vampirism and metamorphism, she could prolong the ordeal almost indefinitely--at least until she exhausted her personal resources. Instead, she had to trust that her natural regeneration would be enough to at least stall the progress of the infections while she attempted to escape from her sires and reach the temple of the goddess in the hope of receiving a proper cure.

Ironically, the strongest of the abilities manifested by Morgan during her childhood ordeal was natural regeneration, which by itself was sufficient to assimilate the were-tiger and vampire infections. Her regeneration served as the catalyst to make her a hybrid vampire-were-tiger.

The initial result of her turning left Morgan on the cusp of life and death. Depending on her level of arousal, her altered body could take on a perfect semblance of life or death. As Morgan adjusted to her ability to become morbid or vital, she discovered her lust for flesh and blood, her hunger and thirst. While normal food and drink were enough to sustain her the way she was, nothing she was accustomed to consuming would satisfy those cravings.

By the time she emerged from the ruins and set off for the sanctuary of the goddess, she was already feeling the emergence of hunger and thirst as the price of her gradual transformation began to assert itself. When her need to hunt became overpowering, Morgan fell prey to the influence of her inner demon. First her vampiric nature took over, and she set out into the night in pursuit of prey. As she stalked through the forest, her metamorphic nature came into play, her body and senses shifting gradually to those of a feline predator. Somewhere in the dead of night, she took down a stag and began feeding, gaining warmth and vitality from the blood she drank, and then devouring her prey's flesh to fill the aching void that had evolved somewhere within her. By indulging her need to hunt, Morgan had deviated from her determined path. Morgan's prey had lured her deep within the sacred forest. From there it was possible to approach the sanctuary without passing through the city. Because she was a mess from hunting and feeding, she stopped along her way to rest and bathe at a natural pool.

Exhausted and sated on blood and meat, she slipped into a deep sleep, during which her transformation reached its penultimate conclusion. In the early hours of the morning, Morgan awoke to discover what she had changed into during her hunt. It was at this point that her pursuing sires caught up to her. Morgan's condition troubled them, as it left the conclusion of their wager indeterminate. It never occurred to them that an initiate might apply herself to integrating the infections instead of fighting them. Contrary to the implied acceptance of her transformation, once Morgan was coached through the transition back to human form, she refused to return with either of her sires. The vampire dragged Morgan to shelter reminding her of the impending dawn, while the tiger simply observed in silence, waiting to see what Morgan would do with her new immortality.

Her escape was an abysmal failure and the only thing she accomplished was to turn herself into a hybrid vampire-were-tiger. In spite of this, she continued to resist, trying to preserve her humanity while her sires debated over the significance of the outcome of their wager and instructed her in what she had become.

It did not take long for Morgan to realize that she had no choice but to feed, though she found she could exploit her new animal form to hunt and feed on forest stags. Once she seemed to have adjusted to her new life, she was permitted to … the ruins … but she faced obstacles … For one, she could no longer venture out in daylight, but more annoyingly, she found herself being set up as the embodiment of Ruin's Deep. It was not so much that she had been chosen to rule, as she had become the symbol of rule. Thus, to claim Ruin's Deep, it was necessary to conquer her.

So, once again, her only option was to escape and her thoughts turned back to the prospect of a cure. Which she found much easier to do in her new state. The only problem was, a party of brigands with a score to settle caught her alone in the pale of night and tried to gang rape her.

The fight aroused Morgan's hunger and thirst, and the next thing she knew she was standing naked over the scraps of her feeding frenzy. Traumatized by what she had done, she wandered to an isolated spot and stood there waiting for the sun to rise.

As horrible as her actions were to her, she did not want to die so much as she believed it was necessary for her to die, while she could still possessed enough humanity to understand her crime. It took everything she had to stand there as the sun engulfed her.

Morgan, plagued by the feeling that there was something incomplete about her transformation even though it had progressed past the point where it was reversible, found herself riveted by the approaching sun.

After an inner struggle, she resolved to face the dawn, to accept her fate and do the only thing she could to ensure she would never feed on human prey. To her surprise, the sunlight seemed to be what was missing--light, it turned out, was the catalyst for vampiric and metamorphic powers. Vampires shunned the sunlight because even the faintest of starlight was sufficient to sustain them, to grant them their inhuman powers. Standing in raw sunlight opened a floodgate of power, accelerating the process of physical refinement every vampire went through, the firing of damp, mortal clay into crystal fine, immortal ceramic. Something a new-fledged vampire could not possibly endure, lacking the training and discipline to harness and channel the power unleashed by the sun. The power did not come from the sun, but from within Morgan herself, she realized. The light was just a catalyst. It was not just power, either, but untapped potential that bathed her psyche in a flood of insight and information.

Sated, she fell asleep, reverting to her former self in the early morning light.

To her surprise, after overcoming the shock of waking up naked under a sunlit sky, Morgan discovered that she was back to normal. The sunlight did not stir up flames within her flesh. She was not slipping into a deathlike state when distracted or morose. She did not have to work herself up to remain lively. She tried to return to her former life, but as the day progressed, the hunger and thirst gradually resurfaced.

Clips

To her shock, their path led her to what seems to be a thriving community amid the ruins. Those she had been tracking had already been "welcomed" by the denizens of the Deep, and detained indefinitely as guests. An obvious tension between two populations, clearly reflected in the two men flanking Morgan, was explained as the result of an ongoing territorial dispute. Two different groups had seen the buried city as the ideal place to establish their own communities suited to their lifestyles and beliefs, and Morgan's two rescuers were the leaders of the two groups. Under most circumstances, a mission like hers would have never gotten off of the ground. However, living here gave them an appreciation of the danger the demons entombed here represented. When released, they were a danger to all. As each leader learned of the true purpose of her mission, to hunt down one of those demons, each decided to accompany her and see to it that she did not stumble across their people. Having both enlisted under her, however, they were forced into a state of truce at a time when they had needed to break the cycle of retaliation. Each had sent word to their people to have them assembled together for a type of summit. Having seen the party stragglers flee into the restricted area, and having seen the lengths Morgan would go to in order to preserve them, they had been forced, finally, to reveal themselves to her. To confront her with the ultimate price of her discovery, to remain a prisoner among them, or to regain her liberty as one of them.

Evening, Day Nine

Initially, neither Morgan nor her remaining companions recognized the true nature of the inhabitants. After a significant time kept under lock and guard, while the leaders of the two tribes engaged in their negotiations, they were brought out to participate in a celebration. Part of the celebration was in honor of the demon slaying, part in honor of the upcoming initiation of Morgan and her companions. When asked, the two men confided that a tentative agreement had been reached between the leaders to settle their dispute. Morgan reprimanded herself for stumbling into the middle of a war over Ruin's Deep.

Over the course of the celebration, the remainder of her party split up for private entertainments with the locals leaving Morgan alone with the two leaders. The conversation was difficult to follow at times, such as when Morgan asked what was happening to her compatriots and she was told they had found their sponsors and were being initiated into their new tribes. In her own case, she was told--tongue in cheek--that she would be choosing her own tribe, since both tribes had chosen her. As the pair tried to seduce her, Morgan gained her first glimpse of the situation as the two men argued over which of them had the right to "take" her first.

Night, Day Nine

The argument made no sense to Morgan, until they reached a sudden agreement that disturbed her. Morgan found the situation particularly ridiculous and frustrating when she realized that she had become the focus of a wager. That her presence had increased the stakes of the contest the vampire and were-tiger were engaged in. Morgan was hardly delighted by this, but she had also heard clearly as they both revealed the fate of any human caught trespassing in this little underworld, and understood that her options were severely limited. What she had not grasped was their intention to settle both disputes by infecting Morgan at the same time, a test of the powers of a vampire and a ware to turn their victims. With an odd look they decide to "share" her and proceed to kiss and caress her together. Before Morgan could resist the attention, the pair of them sank their fangs into her.

Her mind was invaded with thoughts and images from both of them, rehashing their earlier debate in disturbing flashes. After fighting at her side, the two men had finally recognized that their respective interest in her was great enough to endanger the truce under which they had been negotiating an end to the war. Ironically, their dispute over her suggested a way to settle the conflict. Because of her psychic abilities, Morgan possessed a degree of immunity to vampire or were infection, but if her system was overtaxed by joint infections--normally a fatal proposition--there was a fair chance that she might be overwhelmed and thus be turned by one of them. Morgan fell into their trap, helpless as her body and soul became the battle ground to determine the outcome of the were-vampire war.

To speed her transformation, she was bled to the brink of death while receiving their corrupting kisses, the venomous bites of the vampire and the were. Because weres and vampires were immune to each others venom, the possibility of producing a were-vampire never occurred to them. It was more probable that she would simply perish from the conflicting infections.

Day Twelve—Day Twenty

Following her infection, Morgan was locked away to suffer through the transformation that would claim her. Morgan was contacted mentally by the demon in her ring, tempted by it as she lay dying. Only her natural regeneration, a facet of her innate psychic ability, made it plausible for her to endure the battle for dominance of her flesh and spirit. At some point during her molestation, she had blacked out, and on awakening she was not clear on what exactly happened to her. Her assumption was that both men had been vampires, and they had been arguing over the right to sire her. This belief made her confident her powers would resist the infection, so she concentrated on making her escape.

At first it seemed that Morgan had fought off both infections, unaware that her system had been forced to assimilate the infections to prevent their combined effect from annihilating her. Her sires were sensitive to the subtle changes afflicting her, her conversion proving slow but inevitable. Faced with this unexpected result, Morgan remains the focus of the wager for Ruin's Deep--the sire to conquer her conquers all. As was common in fledging new wares and vampires, Morgan's sires exploited her ignorance of her new condition to strengthen their hold over her, though in her case neither was certain of what to expect. Their initial assumptions had not supported the possibility of Morgan becoming a hybrid. Assessing her limits and abilities demanded a level of cooperation unheard of between a vampire and a were who were not bound in a master-servant relationship. The gestalt effect of her dual conversion granted her greater resistance to the unique vulnerabilities of weres and vampires, immunity to either sire's thrall, unparalleled powers of regeneration and the enhancement of her natural psychic talents. Playing along with her belief that she had resisted their corruption, the sires treated her as the slave her other option allowed her to be. In that way, she was introduced to the vampire and were communities. She possessed a kind of status, as the symbol of victory to either side. The subjects of her sires possessed a role of their own in her seduction, embodying the community Morgan would be joining when she submitted to one of her sires. Through observation, she was introduced to the customs of vampires and weres, their culture, their society, their justice. She was also made conscious of what her fate was to be if she rejected both of her suitors. Her choice was a favored existence under a powerful patron as a pet, or endless abuse at the hands of anonymous predators seeking to sate their inhuman appetites. Morgan was hardly surprised to find herself too sickened by it all to eat. It took her some time to realize that the food itself made her sick, when her body proved it would only tolerate water, the rarest meat, and the merest traces of anything else. When the nausea passed, and she found herself able to eat again, she was disturbed to discover it would not satisfy her hunger.

Morgan was stunned to discover what her sires had both already realized, as the hunger seized her. Aware that the greatest danger now was feeding, for if she did it would no longer be possible to cure her of vampirism, Morgan resisted the temptations presented to her. But as the hunger continued to grow, she transformed into a tiger, proving that she had been turned simultaneously into a blood-drinker and a man-eater. She did not know if the same rules applied to were infections as vampire infections, but the change alerted her to the fact that she had run out of time. She had to escape and reach help before the hunger drove her to feed. Her new form aided her escape, however, and she did not hesitate to exploit it. Guessing her remaining companions had been turned or slain, she did not concern herself with their fate. The last time she came to their rescue, they left her in the lurch. That was their last chance from her. Without the extra baggage, Morgan was able to make her escape and return to the surface. All the way, she could feel the strain on her system from the infection. Emerging into daylight, she was disturbed to discover a painful sensitivity to sunlight. The shock and agony triggered a transformation back to her normal form. The occurrence also made her aware of the improvement of her regenerative abilities, as the burns healed before her eyes. According to her training, a vampire only regenerated from burns at a normal human rate, if with inhuman perfection over time. Her rapid healing had to be due to her own ability or came from also being a were. Which was supposed to be impossible. Not that she cared, since all she wanted was to be cured of being either. There was only one place she could even appeal for that kind of aid, and technically, she had no need to go to the temple to seek it. Forced to wait out the day in the ruins, she prayed to the goddess, opening her mind for true communion.

Morning—Evening, Day Twenty

To her relief, the goddess deigned to respond to her supplication, and Morgan explained her situation, how she had been bitten by the pair and her fear that it would overcome her immunity. The goddess advised her on what to do to prevent the change from becoming permanent if it took full hold. She assured Morgan that she could cure her if she had done not succumb to the thirst first.

As night fell, Morgan realized she would be hard pressed to resist the growing hunger and thirst, not sure if it was caused by the drain of fighting the infection, or if the change was complete. She had no idea how long it would take for the infections to completely overwhelm her immunity. She had to make haste and avoid all distractions in reaching the temple. Unfortunately, distractions did not avoid her. As she raced along, still naked after reverting to human form, she caught the attention of a band of brigands. The highwaymen pursued her, and eventually cut her off.

Midnight, Day Twenty

Morgan was stunned. She had come this far, only to be gang raped by a rag-tag band of thieves. She was not going to let that happen! Naked and alone, she was still armed and dangerous. She tore into her assailants, astonished by the rush that seized her, turning her bare handed onslaught into a blood bath, and once that blood splashed her, the instincts of what she was becoming took hold. What happened next was a blur, as Morgan lashed out passionately, her body changing into something even more lethal, and an appetite for raw flesh and blood consumed her.

It was much later that she regained her senses to confront what she had done. The pleasure and satisfaction of sated hungers was unmistakable, as were the remains of her feeding. Whatever she had become, it was worse than she could have imagined. Images of what she had been and done started to trickle back into her brain, and the horror caused Morgan to flee the scene. Morgan confronted what she had become and without so much as thinking of it, set out to expose herself to the dawn. Dwelling on the seductiveness of human prey, unaware of having already made a decision, she became absorbed in an internal debate over the need to end her unnatural existence before she damned herself by succumbing to it.

Dawn, Day Twenty-One

She had no idea where she was going or what her intentions were until the goddess suddenly appeared to confront her. Once questioned, Morgan realized she had sought out a place where the sun would find her instantly, and from where she could not reach any shelter before its light consumed her. Her conscience, gibbering and shattered, was driving her to her death, to absolute atonement. Upon reflection, she decided it was for the best. Exposure to the sun seemed the most obvious and certain way out, as she had been forced to witness such an execution--never realizing that it was the victim's ignorance that made such exposure fatal. She was too honest to deny that, if she did not end her unearthly existence immediately, she would be tempted by her hungers again, and having submitted once, there was no salvation. To go on would inevitably mean surrendering to what she had become. The goddess could not talk her out of it, nor could Logan. Unable to sway her, they waited with her as she waited for the sun. When dawn broke, the pain overwhelmed Morgan in seconds, and then she began to burn. Oddly, the flame did not consume her or else her flesh was renewing itself as swiftly as the fire ate at her. It was as if the light pouring into her turned into power and that power fed itself into regeneration, rallying her psychic defenses, allowing her to assimilate the vampire and were venom.

Breakdown

Adopted in Open Update 03-15-2004

Returning from the Academy determined to end her nightmares and lay her demons to rest, Morgan found passage on a ship bound for her home port and set out for the only haven available to her. The Sword & Sorcerer Inn on the road to the ruins.

Her curiosity about her traumatic childhood ordeal brought her to the Sword & Sorcerer Inn to consult with her elders in the Order of the Ruins. Her dreams had helped her to remember some of the details of her abduction, but she needed to explore the ruins in order to confirm those dreams and discover what really happened to her ten years earlier.

Her childhood ordeal made her an unofficial member of the order of the ruins, and the Sword & Sorcerer was owned and operated by an official member of the order. She sought aid and advice in penetrating the ruins to gather her proof, but the first time she proposed such an expedition she was confronted by two patrons of the inn. Logan and Roark, meeting on neutral ground to discuss the war over the ruins, had overheard her petition for help exploring the ruins. They set their dispute aside to try and discourage her interest in the ruins, only to discover that she was motivated by something more than a thirst for adventure.

Logan and Roark had introduced themselves to her the previous summer, and resumed flirting with her upon her return. With some effort, they drew her out, suggesting that they could provide her with valuable resources and assistance if her mission was worthwhile. As they courted her, they learned about her life and training at the Academy. Paraphrasing as much as she could, Morgan explained her childhood ordeal, and its unexpected consequences.

At the same time, the rivals were considering what they had learned about her, and how she could be of use to them. Both of them still regarded her as a desirable consort, and she was certainly the object of a personal rivalry between them. As a psychic, it would be far easier to kill her than turn her, but her immunity to their venom had known limits. A fact that created the possibility of resolving the major and minor conflicts between them.

Her psychic awakening allowed Morgan to turn the tables on the demon, imprisoning it in the depths of her mind instead of driving it out. However, the purpose of her sacrifice was to give the demon a vessel in which it could escape from its prison. Those who conspired to free the demon waited for the opportunity to complete their task, when Morgan completed her initiation as a muse and permanently left the protection of the Academy. In the interim, they became aware of the conflict between the weres and vampires of Ruin's Deep, and devised a scheme to exploit it to give their god full possession of Morgan. Ironically, Morgan had also caught the eye of the rival immortals, Logan and Roark. Her escape from the ruins as a mere girl brought her to their attention, and both of them watched her grow up, each waiting for her to come of age with hopes of making her his consort.

As the cult's agent in the Port of Avon, and the third party in the war over the ruins, Lloyd approached Logan and Roark under truce and proposed the wager to exploit Morgan's training to determine who would have dominion over Ruin's Deep. A muse-initiate possessed the talent and training necessary to resist vampire or were venom. But, in a joint infection the muse would be forced to divide her resources fighting both infections--and ultimately die--or concentrate her resources on neutralizing one infection and succumbing to the other. Thus, the wager had three possible outcomes.

Once the wager was agreed upon, the two set out to lure her into their trap. An invitation from Lloyd promising information about her childhood abductors was sufficient bait to lure her to the party he was hosting.

During the party, Morgan had a private audience with Lloyd, where she was told that her abductors were members of a cult that worshiped a demon god of death, and that she was supposed to have been offered to their god as a sacrifice. Shaken by this revelation, Morgan returned to the party in a daze where Lloyd's servants had no difficulty slipping her a drugged drink.

Logan and Roark met her at the party encouraged her to stay, claiming it would help take her mind of her problems for a night, and carefully seduced her. The drug and drink lowered her inhibitions and aroused her, making it very easy for the rivals to seduce her. At times, it had seemed there was nothing safe she could do with her hands, and she had to pay strict attention to what they were doing at all times. Through the evening, her reactions seemed very encouraging, and eventually she found herself in bed with the two men that had taken such a keen interest in her plight. There was a serious undertone to their foreplay, however, as they brought up her mission again, testing her determination with various probing questions. They built up to their veiled proposition, did she desire the power to hunt down and defeat her childhood demon on her own? Would she become one of them to get it?

Morgan had to say yes. Even with the power and training she had gained from her ordeal, she lacked the skills and knowledge to capture a demon on her own. If they could provide that, she would give far more than one night of intimacy.

Not realizing what becoming one of them would mean, she accepted. Morgan did not know there were actually two communities, or that the one she joined would claim the ruins. Unknown to her, the details of the wager were revealed to the vampires and weres, and the party itself was in honor of the occasion.

Morgan sensed that there was more going on, even that she was in over her head, but she would never have guessed that they would do what they did. In the heat of passion, they had bitten her, releasing their venom simultaneously into her blood. Morgan nearly passed out from the erotic, euphoric wave that eclipsed the pain of their piercing bites. Their venom sending Morgan over the edge into bliss and disorientation.

Too late, she realized what her lovers were, as the pleasure and poison left her helpless in their embrace. Too late she understood why two men who seemed eager to kill each other over her had decided to share her instead. Because she understood the horrible choice they had forced on her. But, she was not the weak psychic she had been. She focused inward, determined to fight off the infections and preserve her humanity.

Morgan woke to discover herself in her own bed, summoning a stray memory of the men she was with bringing her home. Her own regenerative abilities concealed the immediate evidence of the bite, but it did not take Morgan long to realize that she was sick from more than drugs and drink. Over the course of the day, her illness became worse. As someone who had become immune to disease and injury, Morgan was immediately suspicious about her condition, concluding she had been poisoned or worse. Straining her brain to remember what happened to her after she was drugged, she picked worse. The men who had seduced her had bitten her. Unfortunately, she had no idea if that meant they had been vampires or weres. Certainly, the whole evening had been a set up, so Morgan collected herself and returned to Lloyd's mansion to confront him about it. Lloyd was waiting for her, and dismissed her outrage to explain that her abilities made her uniquely suitable for resolving a conflict that had been raging out of control in the city's underworld.

He carefully explained the wager to her, detailing her options. To settle their conflict over Ruin's Deep, they could infect the object of their current conflict and see which of their bites Morgan succumbed to--winner take all.

His rivals were both immortals. Roark was a vampire and Logan was a were-tiger. The two of them had been rivals since they were mortal cousins--and half-brothers--in an era when the favored sons of Arden were still her lords and masters. They were the bastard sons of bastard twin sisters who had been seduced by the proud young heir of their domain's lord. The two had been turned in their nineteenth year when their rivalry brought them into a conflict between ancient rival factions. As years turned into decades, and decades finally turned into centuries, their rivalry mellowed a bit as they each became the other's only link to the past. Over time they both became more powerful and eventually became lords over their kind. This ultimately resurrected their old feud, as their friendly rivalry was strained by their attempts to claim dominion over Ruin's Deep for their people. No compromise was acceptable to their followers, and a blood feud followed. The longer it went on, the more unexplained deaths occurred, and the greater the risk of drawing the attention of the greater mortal community.

This was the situation Morgan had unwittingly stumbled into. She had appeared just as the two leaders were struggling to minimize the conflict, pitting them in a personal rivalry reminiscent of their mortal conflict.

She could not resist the combined effects of their bites, which were fatal, but she could fight off one of their infections, determining which of them would win the wager and become the lord of Avon's underworld. She, in turn, would become an immortal one way or the other. Morgan could not believe that Lloyd thought he had done her a favor by choosing her as the object of the wager, and accused him of deceiving her. To her shock, Lloyd assured her that he had not lied to her except through omission. As she was collapsing from her illness, he revealed that he had been the man responsible for her abduction.

When she was seven, Morgan was abducted and offered as a sacrifice to a demon of death. The trauma of that ordeal awakened her psychic potential--trapping the demon within her--and led to her initiation as a muse. Her training as a muse made her a perfect candidate for Logan and Roark's wager, but there was a hidden threat. Her struggle to survive a dual infection was supposed to leave her vulnerable to possession from within. The manifestation of that threat was what distracted Morgan from actively resisting her infections.

Morgan found herself trapped in a traumatic nightmare, confronting her childhood demon again for the first time in a decade. She remembered its attempt to rape her mind and conquer her body and soul, and her desperate struggle to protect herself. As the demon bored through her psyche and touched her naked soul, power beyond comprehension had flooded into her and she had attacked her tormentor with a rage born of terror. The demon had thrust itself too deeply into her psyche for her to spit it out, so she essentially chewed it to pieces and swallowed. Banished to the depths of her psyche, the demon had languished for ten years, waiting for the opportunity to assault her directly again. While it waited, it had haunted her nightmares, torturing her from within, tormenting her with obscene and terrifying promises. Finally, it posed a legitimate threat. Morgan realized that while she was fighting off one of her infections and succumbing to the other, she would be too weak to stop the demon from taking possession of her. In that moment, she realized the true purpose of Lloyd's plot. The only way to prevent it from succeeding was to devote all of her effort to fighting the demon while her infections slowly killed her. Deciding she would rather be dead than become enslaved by a demon, she committed all of her resources to fighting her childhood nemesis.

The demon was not pleased by her intentions, but moved immediately to turn the situation to its advantage. When Morgan tried to force the demon back into its prison, it surprised her by pitching in causing both of them to be thrown down into the dreamscape where the demon had been trapped for the past decade. It was a world created from her unconscious mind where the demon confronted her with a shocking first blow. In the dreamscape, her demon confronted her as a male version of herself. While trapped within her, the demon had laid claim to the latent aspects of her potential, starting with her masculinity. The more he was able to assimilate, the more influence he had on her psyche. The contest between them was for control of their prison, but it became evident that direct or indirect assaults on each other could have a serious impact on the balance of power. Morgan was quick to suspect that the quickest way to lose was to succumb to the reality of the dream. If she allowed herself to accept the reality he created, she would become subject to it--imprisoned by it. She was about to learn one of the fundamental differences between men and gods. Demons were natives of a surreal environment, and thus quite at home in dreams. They were also adept at creating and shaping worlds. He would work on seducing her with a believable world, and she had to counter by making it surreal.

Morgan had no idea how absorbed in this effort she became, losing more than a day fighting the demon within.

Morgan had no intention of surrendering to her infections just because she could not risk fighting them. Even without the threat the demon posed, she realized that fighting both infections directly would have quickly exhausted her and their combined, unopposed effect would have killed her soon after. Her chances of surviving were greater if she could regulate the infections, allowing them to run their course but employing her resources to control their progress. By exploiting the regenerative properties of vampirism and metamorphism, she could prolong the ordeal almost indefinitely--at least until she exhausted her personal resources. Instead, she had to trust that her natural regeneration would be enough to at least stall the progress of the infections while she attempted to escape from her sires and reach the temple of the goddess in the hope of receiving a proper cure.

Ironically, the strongest of the abilities manifested by Morgan during her childhood ordeal was natural regeneration, which by itself was sufficient to assimilate the were-tiger and vampire infections. Her regeneration served as the catalyst to make her a hybrid vampire-were-tiger.

The initial result of her turning left Morgan on the cusp of life and death. Depending on her level of arousal, her altered body could take on a perfect semblance of life or death. As Morgan adjusted to her ability to become morbid or vital, she discovered her lust for flesh and blood, her hunger and thirst. While normal food and drink were enough to sustain her the way she was, nothing she was accustomed to consuming would satisfy those cravings.

By the time she emerged from the ruins and set off for the sanctuary of the goddess, she was already feeling the emergence of hunger and thirst as the price of her gradual transformation began to assert itself. When her need to hunt became overpowering, Morgan fell prey to the influence of her inner demon. First her vampiric nature took over, and she set out into the night in pursuit of prey. As she stalked through the forest, her metamorphic nature came into play, her body and senses shifting gradually to those of a feline predator. Somewhere in the dead of night, she took down a stag and began feeding, gaining warmth and vitality from the blood she drank, and then devouring her prey's flesh to fill the aching void that had evolved somewhere within her. By indulging her need to hunt, Morgan had deviated from her determined path. Morgan's prey had lured her deep within the sacred forest. From there it was possible to approach the sanctuary without passing through the city. Because she was a mess from hunting and feeding, she stopped along her way to rest and bathe at a natural pool.

Exhausted and sated on blood and meat, she slipped into a deep sleep, during which her transformation reached its penultimate conclusion. In the early hours of the morning, Morgan awoke to discover what she had changed into during her hunt. It was at this point that her pursuing sires caught up to her. Morgan's condition troubled them, as it left the conclusion of their wager indeterminate. It never occurred to them that an initiate might apply herself to integrating the infections instead of fighting them. Contrary to the implied acceptance of her transformation, once Morgan was coached through the transition back to human form, she refused to return with either of her sires. The vampire dragged Morgan to shelter reminding her of the impending dawn, while the tiger simply observed in silence, waiting to see what Morgan would do with her new immortality.

Her escape was an abysmal failure and the only thing she accomplished was to turn herself into a hybrid vampire-were-tiger. In spite of this, she continued to resist, trying to preserve her humanity while her sires debated over the significance of the outcome of their wager and instructed her in what she had become.

It did not take long for Morgan to realize that she had no choice but to feed, though she found she could exploit her new animal form to hunt and feed on forest stags. Once she seemed to have adjusted to her new life, she was permitted to … the ruins … but she faced obstacles … For one, she could no longer venture out in daylight, but more annoyingly, she found herself being set up as the embodiment of Ruin's Deep. It was not so much that she had been chosen to rule, as she had become the symbol of rule. Thus, to claim Ruin's Deep, it was necessary to conquer her.

So, once again, her only option was to escape and her thoughts turned back to the prospect of a cure. Which she found much easier to do in her new state. The only problem was, a party of brigands with a score to settle caught her alone in the pale of night and tried to gang rape her.

The fight aroused Morgan's hunger and thirst, and the next thing she knew she was standing naked over the scraps of her feeding frenzy. Traumatized by what she had done, she wandered to an isolated spot and stood there waiting for the sun to rise.

As horrible as her actions were to her, she did not want to die so much as she believed it was necessary for her to die, while she could still possessed enough humanity to understand her crime. It took everything she had to stand there as the sun engulfed her.

Morgan, plagued by the feeling that there was something incomplete about her transformation even though it had progressed past the point where it was reversible, found herself riveted by the approaching sun.

After an inner struggle, she resolved to face the dawn, to accept her fate and do the only thing she could to ensure she would never feed on human prey. To her surprise, the sunlight seemed to be what was missing--light, it turned out, was the catalyst for vampiric and metamorphic powers. Vampires shunned the sunlight because even the faintest of starlight was sufficient to sustain them, to grant them their inhuman powers. Standing in raw sunlight opened a floodgate of power, accelerating the process of physical refinement every vampire went through, the firing of damp, mortal clay into crystal fine, immortal ceramic. Something a new-fledged vampire could not possibly endure, lacking the training and discipline to harness and channel the power unleashed by the sun. The power did not come from the sun, but from within Morgan herself, she realized. The light was just a catalyst. It was not just power, either, but untapped potential that bathed her psyche in a flood of insight and information.

Sated, she fell asleep, reverting to her former self in the early morning light.

To her surprise, after overcoming the shock of waking up naked under a sunlit sky, Morgan discovered that she was back to normal. The sunlight did not stir up flames within her flesh. She was not slipping into a deathlike state when distracted or morose. She did not have to work herself up to remain lively. She tried to return to her former life, but as the day progressed, the hunger and thirst gradually resurfaced.

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Note: this inner conflict would easily bring to mind the Matrix or the Lathe of Heaven, and by the conclusion of the story leave the reader wondering if Morgan won and woke up to her miraculous survival, or lost and accepted a dream as her reality. Her nemesis would taunt her about this, undermining her belief in herself and her purpose.

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Pulled : Duplicate

Open Project Development : Imperatives

Morgan was confronted by her goddess <…>when she attempted to expose herself to the sun. Whatever hope she had of accepting her transformation into a vampire were-tiger were dashed that night, when she succumbed to the hungers that suddenly drove her during her escape from her sires. In spite of the fact that the brigands that ambushed and attempted to rape her deserved their bloody demise, it was the loss of her humanity as she was feeding that drove her to commit suicide. Even the thought of avenging herself on her sires for what they had done to her was flushed from her mind by the fear that confronting them would only hasten her corruption. Besides, given what they were, their actions were perfectly reasonable compared to the fact that her goddess had spoken through Morgan, perhaps in an effort to prevent them from slaying her outright, inspiring the feuding immortals to wager the outcome of their feud on the result of an attempt to turn Morgan into one of their own. Rationally, the dual infection should have resulted in certain and unpleasant death, but her sires had confided, after her resurrection as both vampire and were, that the goddess must have suspected that Morgan would survive the ordeal when she goaded them into making the wager. Any attempt, then, to avenge herself on the true author of her damnation could only be more damning. The only salvation Morgan could hope for was to destroy herself while she still possessed enough humanity to see the necessity. Yet her goddess begged her to reconsider, to return to the temple for new instruction that would change Morgan's opinion about what she had become. Morgan refused to listen, facing the horizon and fighting the instinct to flee from the pre-dawn light. Her mind tried to comprehend the meaning of Arden's warning, that she was not ready to discover the truth. Even more frightening, as the sun emerged from the ocean, was Arden's sorrowful apology that neither of them could revoke the promises they had made to each other--a reminder of Morgan's promise to serve the goddess, and her promise to protect Morgan.

It will be dawn soon.

I can't remember the last time I watched the sun rise.

You don't have enough time. I was afraid you would not make it. If we hurry, there's still time to reach shelter.

It doesn't matter anymore.

I understand this was a difficult time for you, but I promised I would help you. And I will, but you have to work with me, Morgan.

You don't understand. It's already too late.

Don't be so pessimistic. Put this on.

I am not going to need it.

Morgan.

What? Don't tell me I need to explain it to you. You must have seen. You have to know it's already too late.

It's never too late.

No. I thought, maybe… I mean, why wouldn't you forgive me? It's your fault after all. What, you didn't think they wouldn't tell me, did you?

Morgan, if I had not intervened, they would have killed you outright.

They killed me anyway. Now, I am damned as well as dead.

Those men deserved to die.

This isn't about them.

I know what this was about.

Then you know why I have to do this.

I know you think that.

It is my purpose to destroy monsters when I find them. That is the purpose you gave me, the purpose I was raised and trained for.

This is not the time, Morgan. You have so much yet to learn.

They were right.

What?

You knew this was going to happen. You wanted this to happen.

My reasons are my own. I do not need to explain myself to you. Nor is it necessary for me to ask you to come. As a courtesy, I am not ordering you to return to the sanctuary.

What good is courtesy after you betrayed me?

You speak as if I have forsaken you.

You speak as if there is still salvation. You speak as if I had not forfeited my humanity.

You sound human enough.

For the moment.

What happened to you…

Stop it. There is nothing natural about what I did. I fed on them. I devoured their flesh. There wasn't anything human about me when I did that. I thrilled in it, I enjoyed it. I hunger to do it again. I can't even understand how I survived that. The thought, the memory… it's so obscene I want to tear myself to pieces. I can never allow it to happen again.

You can overcome these impulses. I told you…

Before, I could agree with you. When I was innocent, the hunger was terrifying. I could have fought it, you could have helped me. But now, there is no chance. I've tasted it. I know what I am, now. I have only one choice, now. I have to destroy it before it destroys me.

There are better ways.

I can't take the chance. It is taking everything I've got to just stand here! I don't know if I could do it tomorrow!

So.

So. Why are you even fighting me on this?

The promises binding us to each other are irrevocable.

If that is true, you have a strange notion of what it means to protect someone.

No stranger than your notion of what it means to serve.

Why are you making this harder than it already is?

That is not my intention. I only want to spare you unnecessary suffering.

Then let me end this, while I can. While I can still see the necessity.

Your integrity is admirable. I have to respect that.

Then you are done? You are not going to interfere?

I do not think you are ready for the truth, but I can not prevent you from confronting it. I just wish you had allowed me time to prepare you for it.

The truth? What are you talking about?

It is too late. Just remember, I tried to make it easy for you.

The sun is seconds away! How can you be cryptic at a time like this!?

There's no time like the present.

Just tell me what you mean!

And now, there is no time.

Arden!!!

And so it begins.

Morgan was surprised to awaken <…>at mid-morning, the trauma of her resurrection shed instantly in the realization that she was truly alive. In the moment of realization, she spots evidence of the previous night and concluded that the memory of her ordeal was not some nightmare. Examining the weapon in her hands, she confronts the sacrifice she had made in growing horror. Twice she had cheated death, each time at an increasingly terrible price her conscience could not accept. Her goddess might have purged her body of contamination, but the corruption of her soul weighed even heavier upon her mortal mind. She was guilty of murder and cannibalism, for which crimes she ought to be condemned to death. As a paladin, she could not deny this, nor could she deny the temptation to ignore her conscience and embrace her resurrection. It was as hard to resist as immortality, and possibly even more damning. The only encouraging thought was that mortality could be sacrificed with far less pain and trauma than she had suffered at dawn. As she moved to spit herself on the brigand's sword, a maiden of the goddess entered to check on her and raised an alarm. In haste, she awkwardly thrust the blade through her heart, collapsing in shock as death clawed at her brain. The last thing she was aware of was the hand of her goddess prying her fingers from the hilt and taking hold to withdraw the blade. When she woke moments later, she could feel the wound knitting closed and vitality returning to her rapidly. Crying out against this healing, cursing herself inwardly for attempting such a thing in the midst of a temple of healing--among other things--the goddess retorts that no one could go through what Morgan had without their natural abilities becoming enhanced. In truth, Morgan had always had amazing powers of regeneration. They were what had allowed her to survive the dual corruption of were and vampire venom. She also knew she gained that ability as the result of a terrible childhood trauma. She should have known her power might increase in response to dying twice. What she had done not know was if this evolution of her own power might grant as real an immortality as the powers that had been purged from her.

Will these nightmares never end?

…

It wasn't a dream.

Oh, you're awake. Let me fetch you a robe. Oh, Goddess! What are you doing!? Quick, someone! Help!

What's going on?

Send for a healer! She's impaled herself!

Goddess!

Oh, Morgan. Why are you doing this to yourself? [Book Break]

I need to die. Can't you see that?

I see nothing of the sort.

Why? You know what I did. Do you think you can resurrect me and my crimes will just vanish!?

No.

They why did you?

It was not I who healed you, Morgan.

What?

Think of the powers you gained as a child, Morgan. Did you imagine you could endure even greater trauma and not gain more potent powers?

You can't be…

Oh, I am quite serious.

I don't understand.

I know. Nor can I truly explain it to you.

This doesn't change anything.

I was afraid you would think that.

Is… is this what you were hoping for?

You want to know why I suggested it.

They told me I should have died. They never expected me to survive… but you did.

You want to know why you did survive. I meant to explain what happened to you, I was ready to show you the truth about what you became. Now we are well past that. Now there are no easy answers.

Tell me what you can, then.

You should already know part of it. There is a great deal of truth about the legends concerning the origin of weres and vampires. Because of the power you possessed, neither alone could have turned you. Your own gifts would have allowed you to fight off the infection. Acting together, your sires forced you to divide your resources in order to survive.

I did not survive, though.

No one does, technically. Death is part of the change for both weres and vampires. To put it properly, you were not destroyed in the process. Their venom is equally potent and mutually exclusive. A single drop of either venom would incapacitate human prey. It takes at least a pint of venom to turn a human into a full were or vampire. Now, a small dose of mixed venom is terribly lethal. The amount of venom that mixed in your blood should have produced enough poison to kill an entire nation. You should have been destroyed before the transformation process could even begin.

That can't be right. It took days for the bites to begin taking effect.

Why do you think that was so?

The venom did not mix in my blood?

That would protect you from the worst effect, but how do you think that could have been managed?

I don't know. My body heals itself automatically.

Regeneration. It was the one power common to vampires and weres, Morgan. A power you already possessed.

And that is why it has become so much stronger?

Just so.

Strong enough to purge the infections from my body?

Strong enough to do even more than that. Now do you understand why I asked you to wait?

But, it still doesn't change anything.

Morgan ends up confined to her quarters <…>under a death watch after proving her determination to kill herself. It took very little time for her ingenuity at exploiting the fatal properties of any object she got her hands on to force her wardens to strip Morgan and her room entirely bare. Even naked, she was far from harmless, especially since the increase in her strength and power mandated her guards and chaperones be formidable men, lest she easily overpower her wardens and escape. Unable to subdue them, she resorted to seducing them, thinking to earn the displeasure of the goddess by breaking her vow of celibacy. The poor men could hardly be blamed for succumbing to her advances, of course. Even a dead man would have found it difficult to refuse her, as she had already learned. Ironically, her rebellious indulgence also served to prove that there was so much to live for, making her intentions even more bitter. The problem remained figuring out a way to end her life and then finding an opportunity to execute each method she devised. She attempted to drown herself during her bath, and later wove the stuffing of her sleeping pallet into a rope to hang herself. The drowning had done not work, and the rope took time to braid. By the time she was ready to hang herself, Arden's patience had been exhausted. The goddess intruded just as Morgan was preparing the rope, confronting Morgan for their least civil conversation to date. Even as Arden forgave Morgan's indiscretions and appealed to the girl to remember her obligations, Morgan slipped the noose around her neck and kicked away the stool she perched on. To Morgan's horror, not even breaking her neck and severing her spinal cord was sufficient, nor was suffocation any more effective than drowning. As soon as she lost consciousness, her body swiftly restored itself to perfect health aided by her telekinetic gift. Arden repeated her claim that Morgan was saving herself. Regardless of whatever guilt or blame she tried to damn herself with, deep down she clearly had done not wish to die. Morgan retorts that she knew that, that the problem was her desire to live, no matter what the cost. Wanting to live had done not change the fact that she deserved to die.

There is an issue of timing <…>that is not to be ignored. Morgan and Logan would have completed their initiations in the eve of their sixteenth year, turned seventeen in midsummer, and returned to the Academy in the dawn of their seventeenth year for advanced training. That marks the time of inception for Morgan on the Autumn Equinox, possibly a significant time conducive to both Logan's experiment and Morgan's delving. Morgan's pregnancy follows a normal course from inception, permitting the child to be exposed to vampire and were venom in vivo--approximately a month later--and act as a "catalyst" allowing the pair of them to modify the effects of their infection. The effects on the child are responsible for Morgan being mistaken for a vampire or a were posing successfully as a human. When her humanity is discovered, the illusion is blamed on inoculation, a practice that enables psychic to become immune to infections by either. The process usually caused the subject to develop and exhibit faint echoes of were or vampire traits. It was possible to overcome such immunity by overwhelming it, such as through prolonged exposure while the victim was kept on the brink of death, or by forcing it to fight off the conflicting infections of a vampire and a were. The debate leading to this observation inspired the wager to exploit Morgan as the solution to the major and minor feuds between the leaders of the two groups. After her infection, her pregnancy is discovered and perceived to have acted as a catalyst that enabled Morgan to assimilate both infections into a hybrid conversion. Technically, the child was inoculated as the result of Morgan's infection. The child did not share her mother's immunity, but Allannah was exposed indirectly through the filter of the placenta and the womb. The bleeding and threat of miscarriage were symptomatic of that process, though the ward that protected the child exploited the most common element of both infections to grant the child greater powers of regeneration in order to survive the devastation of the placental interface. That was where the hybridization started, making it possible for Morgan to assimilate and adapt both initiations. Her transformation is slow, and only on the verge of completion when she offers herself to the sun. That ordeal also serves as a catalyst, taking her transformation past the point of hybridization and into the realm of gestalt as the trauma provokes the manifestation of more of her psychic potential.

Morgan fell prey to a conflict between a vampire and a were-tiger <…>. This occurred early in the first trimester of her pregnancy, revealing the fact that Morgan was pregnant, thus within a month of her temporal displacement and within weeks of her tragic wedding night. Prior to the demon's escape, Morgan was tortured by the return of memories of a childhood trauma. The trauma of the demon's escape unlocked more of the memories, giving Morgan a clue to the demon's origin. With the hope of discovering a way to retrieve Logan's body and banish the demon, Morgan set out for Avon intent on exploring the ruins of Aeslyn Tear. Unfortunately, those ruins were the object of a war between the vampires and weres of Avon. Her interest in the ruins--in particular, gathering the information necessary to probe them successfully--brought her into their midst. Ironically, she only succeeded in penetrating their circles as deeply as she did as the result of her past and future moving into convergence. The vampires and weres each mistook her for one of their own, an individual particularly skilled in posing as a human. This earned her an invitation to a unique gathering, a kind of summit at which the vampires and weres intended to resolve their dispute before the conflict exposed them fully to the untamed human population. With both groups present, in particular the leaders that had developed an interest in Morgan, it was inevitable that they would question which side Morgan was actually on. Morgan was not confronted directly, but she was the subject of an intense discussion in which it was determined that she was not aware of what any of them were.

As a result of assuming Morgan was posing as a human, any vampire or ware interacting with her had been restricted to maintaining human appearances as a matter of form or etiquette. A little discrete probing revealed the fact that Morgan was a psychic, and the survivor of a demonic attack or possession. As the details came into focus, the two leaders came up with the notion of wagering dominion over Ruins' Deep on the conquest of Morgan. It was known that a psychic was immune to vampire and were venom, but if exposed to both at the same time, the victim would be forced to submit to one infection in order to fight off the other. They lulled her into a position where they could infect her simultaneously, and then waited to see which way she turned, thus indicating which of them would possess Morgan and Ruins' Deep. Assuming the process was inevitable, they withdrew to await the outcome, abandoning her to her ordeal. Neither of them knew of, or took into account, her pregnancy. Under such circumstances, a child would usually be aborted as the result of either infection. A child that survived, however, benefited from the indirect exposure to the venom, and the mother's immune system's response. The mother's system broke down the venom before passing it on to her child, making it easier for the child to adapt to and assimilate most of the beneficial effects, while filtering out most of the detrimental ones. Because the child in this case was the embodiment of Morgan's past, Morgan herself already possessed the results of "Allannah's" infection. The foundation of her psychic ability had been laid during this ordeal, and she had gained certain immunities which helped her resist the full effects of her corruption.

Each infection was designed to alter its victim in certain ways to cultivate specific aspects of human potential, angelic and demonic aspects. The cultivation of one aspect often resulted in a taint or contamination from the latent aspect. "Allannah" was spared this gaining only marginal traits of a vampire or were-tiger and leaving most of their exclusive powers dormant. The "repeated" exposure "Morgan" endured in direct exposure to the undistilled venoms triggered the full manifestation of the characteristic abilities of a vampire and a were-tiger. This catalytic effect enabled her to encompass the full potential of a were-tiger and a vampire, for a price. To manifest the powers of either, she also became subject to most of their limitations. At the same time, it also greatly enhanced the unique abilities she possessed. To an observer, Morgan seemed to succumb, bit by bit, to both infections, as if her resources were divided, slowing both infections and giving her system time to assimilate each. Her pregnancy was threatened by constant hemorrhaging, though she and the baby both regenerated swiftly enough to compensate for the trauma. Together, they made it possible for both of them to survive these changes, each becoming something unique as suited their relative positions. Unfortunately, Morgan was the observer to her own transformation, and she was horrified by what she was becoming. She feared she would ultimately succumb to the powers and appetites of her sires, and that she had been diverted from the path of her paradox. One way or the other, she anticipated her demise, if she failed to fight off, or be cured of, these infections. More than once, she was startled by the way the powers and qualities she was gaining overlapped and merged. Her sires, observing from a certain distance, were also startled by the progress of her initiation and drew closer.

Open Notes: In Hunger & In Thirst

The focus of In Hunger & In Thirst is the ordeal of transformation Morgan endures as the focus of a wager between a were-tiger and a vampire. The questions the story must answer start with: who are the people essential to advancing the story, why does Morgan become the subject of the wager, when and where does she become associated and entangled with the rivals, what prompts the wager itself and how does she survive the ordeal.

The best answers evolve from the natural course of events. In most cases, a human infected by a were and a vampire would be killed by the combined effects. However, vampires and weres have one power in common, regeneration. In the original approach to this story, Morgan already possessed the power of regeneration as a component of her psychic ability and her dual infection results from simply surviving through the deadly transformation. Alternatively, the ordeal itself causes a psychic awakening during which Morgan calls upon the regenerative qualities of both infections to compensate for the damage they do to her.

*The evolution of the wager elaborated on the relationship between Harkin and Roark but neglected to detail how Morgan became its focus in a practical and plausible way. It specified only that the rivals had become infatuated with her, each determined to make her his consort. Since their intentions had included turning her, they agreed to take her at the same time as a test of their power or the potency of their venom. Yet, how did this situation come to a head?*

*It is practical for their interest in Morgan to originate with their interest in Logan. It is also plausible for Morgan to stumble into the situation, to be at the wrong place at the wrong time. Particularly if Morduin were to return from the Academy and begin her campaign to seize Ruin's Deep. She could be caught up in the middle as a sacrifice, a victim never intended to survive the ordeal. If she were identified as the protégé of a hunter, a common enemy, they might plausibly team up to strike a blow at him--capturing her and then killing her in front of her mentor when he attempted to come to her rescue. The hunter's ring could also be the seal of the ruins, the key to the domain they both coveted, and that ring would be passed from the hunter to Morgan in a desperate attempt to save her even at the cost of the hunter's own life.*

A more functional solution calls for the division and representation of Morgan as a normal boy and a

In Hunger & In Thirst

Project Options

One of the governing impulses of this story is to take a character from normal roots and have her become caught up in the middle of extraordinary circumstances that force her to explore her full potential. In Morgan's case, the process started when she was seven. She was abducted and offered as a sacrifice to a demon of death, and the trauma of that ordeal awakened her psychic potential. That event trapped the demon within her and led to her initiation as a muse.

Her training as a muse made her a perfect candidate for Logan and Roark's wager, but there was a hidden threat. Her struggle to survive a dual infection was supposed to leave her vulnerable to possession from within. The manifestation of that threat was what distracted Morgan from actively resisting her infections. Ironically, the strongest of the abilities manifested by Morgan during her childhood ordeal was natural regeneration, which by itself was sufficient to assimilate the were-tiger and vampire infections. Her regeneration served as the catalyst to make her a hybrid vampire-were-tiger. With the demon playing such a key role in making Morgan into such a unique individual, the inevitable question arises. Why was she singled out as a sacrifice? The answer to that question comes down to an accident of birth. Some of Morgan's potential can be traced through her mother to an ancestor descended from the angelic goddess Arden, but some can be traced through her father to an ancestor descended from the goddess's "brother" the demonic god Arduin. Certain qualities passed on through Arden and Arduin had combined in Morgan to make her a suitable host for the demon "father" of Arden and the "mother" of Arduin.

The focus of the story is Morgan's transformation into a vampire-were-tiger. It opens with the events that bring her to the attention of her sires and ends with her exposing herself to the sun. That leaves her transformation as the main focus of the plot. The movement of the plot takes her from the City of Avon to the heart of Ruin's Deep, moving from a human community to the center of vampire and were communities. The most significant part of the story unfolds during her arduous turning, presenting a space where she faces the decision forced upon her and the outcome of her transformation. It is also a time when she faces the beginning of her indoctrination into the mysteries of weres and vampires. It is plausible to have her turning complete prior to her escape, assuming that she could be cured at any time up to the point where she feeds, in which case more emphasis can be placed on exploring her introduction to the immortal clans. There, we can witness the modification of the wager, where Morgan becomes the personification of Ruin's Deep. Possession of the lost city could only be achieved through possession of Morgan, upon whom the mantle of authority rested until another conquered her.

This approach also opens a window for Morgan to question the impact her transformation has on her mission. Most importantly, her turning might even occur prior to her admission to Ruin's Deep. Thus, it is possible to give the plot significantly greater depth. Obviously, that would present two stages in Morgan's evolution, her initial fusion of were and vampire natures, and the acceleration of the refinement of those natures when she confronts the dawn. It is even possible that her flight to the sanctuary of the goddess is based on a misunderstanding, an obscure belief that vampirism can be undone on sacred ground--when in fact there is simply a rite that can be conducted on sacred ground that allows a vampire to revert to a dormant state closely approximating mortal existence. Morgan's motivation ultimately would be to sustain her humanity, which would make feeding on human prey her breaking point, the point past which she can not find redemption. So, instead of trying to prevent her transformation, she moves in the pursuit of redemption with the hope of returning to her original life. She strives to control her impulses, feeding on animal prey--which is made easier by virtue of her tiger aspect.

When the opportunity comes, when she discovers the possibility of a cure, she attempts to reach the sanctuary only to be waylaid by a band of rogues. During that fight, she loses control of herself and ends up feeding on her assailants, recovering from the euphoria of feeding on human prey in the depths of the sacred forest, or on the cliffs overlooking the ocean, but ultimately one step away from where she will die.

Adjustments

One individual serves as the tie between Morgan's sacrifice to the demon and exploitation by the vampire and the were. Given that it is her breeding that makes her a suitable host for the demon, her father, Rogan, stands out as the best candidate. In essence, Morgan was conceived to be sacrificed to the demon. Rogan was the Cult of Morduin's first attempt at creating a vessel for their god, but both of his parents turned out to be descendants of the demon Arduin, so Rogan was initiated and given the task of fathering a suitable vessel. A suitable offering to his god, the demon Morduin, required the reconstitution of certain traits passed down from Morduin through Arden and Arduin, the demon's the offspring by the angel Aten. Arden and Arduin, identical except for the fact that one was an angel and the other was a demon, were the divine equivalent of fraternal twins. As a "son" of Arduin, that meant seeking out and bedding "daughters" of Arden. He was finally successful in his coupling with Moira, Morgan's mother. At the age of seven, Morgan was abducted by the cult and tested by the demon to determine if she was a suitable host. She was, but one detail had been overlooked.

Morgan had the potential the demon desired in it's host, but it's attempt to seize that potential provoked Morgan to seize upon it herself in an effort to fight for possession of her body. The cult had anticipated that might happen if Morgan were older, and had been trained to use that potential, but for her to do so at such a young age was unprecedented. Fortunately, Rogan had been careful not to compromise his relationship with his daughter by taking a direct part in her sacrifice. In truth, he had been occupied with establishing his alibi for her abduction, planning to "come to her rescue" once the sacrifice was over. Instead of acting as the chaperone for the demon while it's host matured, Rogan was left with keeping tabs on his daughter for the cult, waiting for the chance to free their god. Rogan was by that time a retired adventurer, a member of the order of the ruins, and his continuing interest in the ruins made him aware of the conflict between the weres and vampires. It was not difficult to establish himself as a neutral party, and eventually a mediator in the conflict.

Angels and Demons <…>

As men and women belong to the same species, divided and united by sex, demons and angels are likewise natural and necessary complements to each other. As men evolved from animals, gods--as either demons or angels may be called--evolved from elementals. They are not divided, as is often assumed, by good and evil, or even law and chaos--anymore than human beings are. Divided they are--humanity itself exists within the rift between them--and what distinguishes demons and angels from each other is a subtle distinction in what mortals would collectively define as dreams--the surreal and the ideal. The true distinction is primordial, a result of point paradox, and naturally polarizes demons and angels.

Angels are best distinguished by the fact that they are recruited and employed in a fashion consistent with their innate psyche, where demons are conscripted and fashioned into what is required of them, even though it is typical for them to be absorbed entirely into their function as angels. Demons are embodiments of a soul evolving within a naked mind while angels are embodiments of a mind evolving within a naked soul. Hence demons are predisposed to omniscience, knowing how to manipulate even the tiniest shred of power to the greatest effect, while angels are predisposed to omnipotence, capable of performing virtually any task with but the slightest impulse. This is what makes them the lords of the abstract and the absolute, demons acting from a collective over-mind to manipulate individual souls and angels acting from a collective over-soul to manipulate individual minds. Not surprisingly, the manifest is what exists between the extremes of the abstract and the absolute, though each is in its own way representative of the truth.

In their purest form, demons are ideas, the embodiment of information and can be roughly equated to programs or artificial intelligence, and a living demon a host organism possessed by the created or evolved design that defines it. In that sense, demons are commonly regarded as slaves as the soul or mind innate to the host is generally repressed or superceded by the functions of the demon.

In their purest form, angels are ideals, the embodiment of understanding and can roughly be equated to works of art or the characters in a play or story. Angels represent the design or definition in creation or evolution that they are innately suited to embody. In that sense, angels are commonly regarded as staff or servants employed in presenting or projecting the influence of their ideal.

Demons are instinctive; creatures of thought ruled by emotion. Angels are intuitive; creatures of emotion ruled by thought. Neither are exclusively good or evil. While men might be also be described as creatures of thought ruled by emotion and women might be described as creatures of emotion ruled by thought, neither is ruled exclusively by one quality. While men are more thoughtful in disposition, and women are more emotional in disposition, they both possess the complimentary quality and humans in general rely on both instinct and intuition to survive. The fusion of angelic and demonic traits in humans is as perplexing to the gods as their fusion of masculine and feminine traits is to humans.

The actual differentiation between demons and angels occurs at conception. The conception of a new demon or angel requires the union of and intercourse between an angel and a demon. Angels and demons are all capable of bearing young, through conception or inception. A new angel is conceived when it is sired by a demon on an angel, and a new demon is conceived when it is sired on a demon by an angel. An angel or demon may be reborn, in the "image" of the parent, through direct inception. This process is responsible for the hierarchies of heaven and the abyss. Newborn angels and demons are essentially prototypes, the mechanism of divine evolution. A prototype that survives to maturity becomes a new archetype. Other demons and angels vie for the opportunity to be converted to more successful archetypes, or to eliminate those that compete with or threaten established orders.

There is a third party to the equation, creation and destruction, from which the concepts of good and evil are derived as subjective evaluations. In the new faith, in which the gods were demoted to angels and demons, creation and destruction are embodied in the worship of a Creator and his soul destroying nemesis. The new faith has many faces, and proliferated through a number of different religions, but common to all of them is the singular embodiment of the Absolutes--the One, the None and the All (or Infinite), or God, the Adversary, and the Multitude (all other souls). Contrary to the teachings of the new faith, angels are not servants of the creator any more than demons are the servants of the Adversary. Like humans, angels and demons have creative and destructive potential. The war of the gods was a conflict between proponents of creation and proponents of destruction, with demons, angels and humans lined up on either side.

In common terms, existence is thus divided into three realms, heaven, the world and the abyss--though each is as vast as the universe. They are in fact the same universe, veiled one from the other by perspective.

In the kingdom of elementals, phoenixes were more primal and less evolved than angels or demons. That is partly evident in their principle avian manifestation on the physical plane. Though possessing intelligence, their evolution was not directed toward personification. Thus, while it was within the power of a phoenix to manifest a human embodiment, humanity remained an alien quality. The phoenix of this story, as a familiar, was exposed to humanity long enough to pose as a human being, but it took the lives of Dusk and Dawn to cultivate the human potential of that phoenix's soul. The fusion of Dusk and Dawn allowed Morgan to begin to tap into the potential that had been cultivated as a phoenix, but her dual infection by a vampire and a were-tiger stimulated the cultivation of angelic and demonic potential, forcing the awakening phoenix potential to act in a subordinate, catalytic role.

The Age of Empires <…>

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

Not surprisingly, the second age of magic introduced monotheism, aided by the division of the ancient gods into angels and demons. Creation itself was commonly considered the only incarnation of the One True God necessary, as no singular personification could be majestic enough for the Creator. Not that this prevented the anthropomorphism of God. In addition, many worshippers of the old gods declared their deities to have been agents of the One God, directing their worship through them. This assisted the transition to and evolution of magery, which was used to arm the human champion of God against the conjury of infidels. To distance the power of the church from the power of magic, to ensure that the power of the church could not fall into the hands of a single, ambitious individual, the foot-soldiers of the church were mere monks. In time, the public practice and exercise of magery became restricted to the suppression of conjury almost exclusively. Thus, magic became very uncommon and most mortals were forced to make do with more mundane resources and resourcefulness. At least, until the dawn of the third age of magic.

By their nature, the gods and their direct issue remained as much a part of the world as ever, gathering into communities as changes in the world freed them from obligations to various populations. Not surprisingly, the retreats of the gods were difficult places for mortals to reach, and yet it happened that one mortal child became shipwrecked upon the shore of one such island retreat. This orphan was allowed to live and grow among the gods, but the gods underestimated the child’s curiosity and intelligence. Aided by the archives the gods had assembled to preserve the lore and wisdom of each age, he was able to devise a new art, one which could be passed on to the common man. By virtue of his mastery of the art he created, he was able to take the art of sorcery to the world at large, teaching magic divorced from divinity to those with the determination and devotion to learn. Because the art he created was founded on the cultivation of personal integrity, it appealed strongly to the independent minded. It also had a built in limiting factor, a sorcerer’s power was limited by the depth of his devotion, his own sense of responsibility.

Ironically, while the Sorcerer was inspired to bring his magic to the world by his own perception of the end of the world, his action helped bring the apocalypse that much closer. On a general level, any profound conflict between the servants of the three arts could not help but place unbearable strain upon the world. The results of waging war with conjury, magery and sorcery could be cataclysmic. Of additional, and possibly greater danger, was the possibility of even two individuals merging conjury and magery with sorcery. But, that was a danger so specific as to be impossible to detect in advance.

Feuding Houses <…>

The goddess Arden and the god Arduin had founded the ruling houses of Arden and Arduin. While the two houses were originally allied, they evolved into rival nations bitterly divided over the role of men and women in society. This dispute eventually prompted the god and goddess to withdraw their support of the two monarchies and establish the neutral domain of Avon. It also left the nation vulnerable to the invasion of the new religion, and worship of the One True God. When the houses fell and the purge began, the heirs of both houses were sent to Avon to preserve the bloodlines. In spite of the fact that both houses were under persecution, pride and tradition prevented them from renewing their alliance. While both houses turned their attention to surviving the purge and tearing down the new monarchy, the feud between them became more intense. Because the two houses were so greatly diminished, they were forced to pose as commoners and accept the patronage of the House of Avon, in the service of which their children could be trained and serve the purposes of the fallen houses, both driven underground by the purge that followed the unification of Ar Doen.

A Surrogate Father <…>

Her father was only a few years older than her mother, yet he had turned out to have been a widowed man with several children. Unfortunately, he was convinced that she had conceived his child. He insisted upon marriage, but her mother was forced to refuse because of her official calling. As a courtesan, any child she gave a man was still considered a legitimate, if embarrassing addition to her father’s line even without marriage. As her mother’s eldest daughter—her mother had twins by another man a few years later—she was also considered the heir to her mother’s mantle, an honor she would eagerly have passed on to her younger sisters. It was odd, being at once her parents only, her mother’s eldest and her father’s youngest, daughter.