Hunger and Thirst

Origins, A Normal Girl

Morgan seemed a fairly normal girl, the daughter of a muse and an artist. Unfortunately, her mother had not been a normal muse, nor her father a normal artist. Her parents, born into rival houses, were recruited and trained as agents of their houses. Her mother was also a maiden of Arden and her father a monk of Arduin, or in common terms, a witch and a witch hunter. Both of Morgan’s parents had possessed the talent and potential for advanced magic, but neither exiled house could openly sponsor them to the academy and both failed to convince House Avon to do so in their behalf. This nearly prevented them from receiving formal training, in spite of testing higher than their peers. Fortunately, the academy prized such talented children and wasted no time in recruiting them.

Morgan's parents were raised to believe that they were enemies fighting against each other for the restoration of their native houses. Morgan’s parents were both conditioned to conceal their true affiliations, so initially there was no obstacle to their friendship when they encountered each other at the academy. The teachings of the academy also encouraged them to overcome their prejudices. As their intimacy grew, however, it became inevitable for them to confide in each other. Inevitably, her parents had learned the truth about each other. By that time, they had already become an accomplished team, an artist and a muse paired by the academy by virtue of their extraordinary compatibility. After graduating, they had become protégés of a powerful Ardean psychic who taught them a few things even the academy remained ignorant of.

The revelation of a common foundation for antagonistic schools of magic, which played a part in the feud between their houses, helped them overcome the last remnants of their natural enmity—and partially accounts for the untimely and inconvenient outcome of their union. At the time of her conception, Morgan’s parents had joined forces with their mentor against a wizard, a man who had mastered conjury, magery and sorcery and was determined to establish a new order in which most people would be subordinate to those more evolved; psychics like himself. A former colleague of the Athean wizard, their mentor was firmly opposed to the wizard’s radical agenda. In a climactic battle, Morgan’s parents were forced to pool their resources as an artist and a muse to an exceptional degree to survive a battle with their mentor’s nemesis.

Their intimacy, immediately following the conflict, burned away the remaining obstacles between them, causing them to enter a deep psychic rapport when they conceived Morgan. After the trouble they had gone to prevent such a thing, it was an unfortunate and untimely occurrence. They were both twenty-seven by this point. Her father was a married man with several children. Because her mother was a courtesan, the girl was considered a legitimate, if embarrassing addition to her father’s line. 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.

When she was seven, the Athean wizard once again threatened her family. In the course of the crisis, she endured a very personal confrontation with him as he was probing her psychic potential and she turned the powers he unleashed against him in desperation. Following the crisis, she became the protégé of the Ardean psychic. Outside his private tutelage, she continued to learn from her parents, including mastery of her mother’s gymnastic fighting techniques and her father’s arsenal of weapons. Her primary training as a psychic gave her certain advantages in learning what her parents could teach, but presented a serious obstacle to learning any kind of magic.

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

Morgan's calling allowed her to participate in training generally offered only to boys, a situation which stripped a girl of every shred of modesty—conveniently provoking the protective instincts of her fellow initiate, Logan. Morgan first met Logan at age eleven when he was brought from the orphanage to the academy. After some intense, initial rivalry, they became close, intimate friends, their partnership spiced by good-natured competition and uncanny chemistry. Given the closeness of Logan and Morgan, the children were left ignorant of the engagement that had been arranged prior to the death of Logan’s parents, both to keep the sisterhood ignorant of the commitment until the last minute and to allow nature to take its course in welding the pair into a couple.

Because of their compatibility, their mentor concluded they were soul mates, and they received special training to pool their resources. They were well matched, equally talented at getting into and out of tight scrapes, some mere mischief but often enough sobering misadventure. A penchant for exploration and exhibition caused them to become involved in crime, Logan's identification with street orphans—as an orphan himself—combined with challenges against Morgan, in particular her gender and ability, conspired to lure them, unwittingly at first, into cat burglary. Once they got in over her head, in danger of being drawn into the shadows, Logan compromised himself willingly in order to help her escape further exploitation. Through his sacrifice, she was able to extract herself from her criminal careers, but not before both had been marked.

The first class of psychics formed as Logan and Morgan turned thirteen, made up primarily of others their own age since puberty was one of the more common catalysts for manifesting psychic ability. Logan and Morgan, like the other cadets, were occasionally called on to help the soldiers complete a mission, and occasionally the cadets were the only ones suited to a mission. As time passed, Morgan’s preparation to assume her mother's mantle, as a maiden of the goddess, became an even greater priority. This came directly into conflict with her betrothal to Logan, arranged before either was born—back when it was assumed she would never be called to serve in her mother's stead.

As their initiation neared its end, the adversary was working to break them up. Soon enough, the pair became first rank initiates facing the final year of training and testing. They also were confronted with their betrothal and were formally engaged. While understanding that marriage would cost Morgan her calling, and result in Logan inheriting Morgan's legacy, the estates and titles claimed by her mother and held in trust for her, the fact was that they were in love and certainly had been lovers.

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 Mentor and his Adversary

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Cult of Morduin

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

The Age of Empires

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

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

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

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

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.

A Handful of Possibilities

Even though there are impulses requiring Morgan to develop in male and female incarnations, and a device to engineer them, nothing contributing to the general arc of the epic presents, or requires, Morgan having the use of her male embodiment. For family, the girl is noted for having a mother and grandmother, and yet there are impulses for Morgan to grow up as an orphan or outcast, abandoned or isolated by parents who had defied an ancient feud to embrace one another only to realize that they, and any children they had, would certainly be targeted for punitive assassination. It would be easy to adjust the pool of ideas to present a male first incarnation, presented as an accidental offspring of both houses by virtue of his mother preserving her cover as a courtesan—when in truth she had been a maiden of the goddess. Of course, his father’s lineage was also deliberately obscured, allowing him to claim his son in order to train him. At the age of seventeen, he would fall prey to a particularly cruel assault at the hands of his half-brothers and cousins of his father’s line. Motivated by the discovery of Morgan’s maternal lineage, and armed with an ancient artifact of the House of Arduin, Morgan’s assailants turned him into a girl that they proceeded to rape. Shattered by the experience, Morgan seemed to have become stricken by total amnesia. Found by her father, who had been told about what happened to Morgan, she was taken to her mother and introduced as the newlywed bride of his son, who had been murdered before her eyes—a story intended to explain her amnesia. Morgan’s mother was of course told the truth, and exploited the cover story to bring Morgan into her household. Except she was not really Morgan anymore. The ring slipped on Morgan’s finger had held the soul of the last champion to wield the ring, and the demon that was the source of its powers.

Variants: Introducing the ring at the same time as the infection could overcomplicate things. Even though it establishes a later event in which the boy Morgan confronts becoming the girl Morgan, it would be just as feasible to feature it as a background event. It would be plausible to follow an earlier notion which had Morgan finding the ring in the ruins and becoming displaced for twenty years by a male reincarnation, manifesting herself in the wake of a sexual encounter with the demon, or adopt the alternative of having a prior male incarnation who was forcibly changed by the ring only to be expelled by the demon in a female reincarnation. The latter would build on a foundation that could as easily establish an entirely normal, singular female incarnation. The object would be to prevent having Morgan possess sexual polymorphism and a third twin. Starting with a male Morgan, the demon is free to exploit the shock of transformation and rape to take possession, later expelling Morgan as a daughter to rid itself of the ring’s hold. Thus, the female Morgan would be an orphan alleged to be the unintentional offspring of the male Morgan who becomes adopted by his mother and trained as a courtesan. The male Morgan was the child of a forbidden affair between the heirs of Av Arden and Av Arduin, subjected to the transformation and rape as a punitive response to the discovery of his true lineage. The female Morgan was trained as a muse, but by virtue of her childhood misadventures had ties to the underworld and the ruins. In the hope of escaping the life of a temple courtesan, she sought adventure by presenting herself as a guide for the ruins. That, combined with the consequences of the demon’s orchestration of the were-vampire war over the ruins, conspired to bring her to the attention of the rival immortals, Roark and Harkin. Not surprisingly, the ordeal Morgan endures helps reawaken her former self. He was, naturally, the source of her lifelong nightmares about rape—as well as the martial training she was officially denied as a girl. To have the male incarnation second, it is necessary only to flip and modify a few points. The girl’s history would remain virtually the same, except she would not have been an orphan. She would simply find the ring during one of her excursions into the ruins, become displaced and reincarnated male as a matter of expediency. The male Morgan would be presumed the offspring of his host mother’s husband. Morduin, the night he lay with the woman, had told her she would have a son named Morgan. When the son was born, she felt compelled to name him Morgan. Since the intimate encounter with the demon was the cause of the girl’s reawakening, the demon might as well be the cause of the transformation that came with it. Morduin had a whim to reveal the boy’s true identity to him, taking the full measure of Morgan’s virginity, while setting her up to take the fall certain to come as the result of being unmasked by the immortals, Harkin and Roark. In essence, Morgan lost everything as the result of finding the ring and obeying the temptation to try it on. One moment, she is lying in her bed, contemplating the fortunes of her future, and seemingly an instant later, she finds herself in the most intimate position with a male version of herself. It takes a while to sort out the memories of the intervening life, during which time simple passage of time provides proof of those memories. The basic need to eat, combined with a powerful reluctance to exploit her options as a muse because of her memories of being a boy, forced her to advertise her services as a guide, not knowing that the past twenty years had seen the prohibition of such expeditions as suicidal. Still, because she advertised through underworld channels, she received an invitation to be interviewed by an interested party. Arriving at a literal party, she is confronted by a former mentor risen to the status of patron and things begin to unravel on her. The rival immortals close in on her, moving while she is incapacitated by drugs and drink, and the rest is history.

A child of paradox, variant

Both of them were named Morgan, so they adopted aliases. Dusk and Dawn become fused together and displaced in time to fulfill a paradoxical conception. Their parents, an artist and a muse, were forced to pool their resources to an exceptional degree to survive a battle with their mentor’s nemesis. Their intimacy, immediately following, burned away the remaining obstacles between them, triggering the initial manifestation of Morgan that drew the minds of Dusk and Dawn into the past. Dusk and Dawn adjusted to their displacement and shared existence, for once benefiting form a shared name. Their parents, one transformed into an angelic twin of Morgan and the other a demonic twin, approached her with assistance and advice during that initial ordeal, admitting responsibility for bring the couplet back in time, if not how or why. They nudged her toward their mentor, for the material aid and patronage they required in this time. Ironically, her parents had been hereditary enemies since birth, and remained natural enemies after their transformations. Two years later, the next step in the paradox would occur, when Morgan, or rather, Dusk and Dawn, became involved with another couple—Dusk’s mother and Dawn’s father by virtue of what happened next. During a liaison with his lover, Dusk conceived himself, triggering a reflexive conception of Dawn as she asserted herself in instinctive self defense. By this time, their personalities and identities were already merging, and they had been fighting to preserve their identities. Morgan’s pregnancy would complete the fusion of the minds of Dusk and Dawn. It also marked the beginning of her realization of the paradox. Dusk’s mother named her son after his father, who had fled from her bed never to be seen again, and Dawn’s daughter was named in her honor as Morganna—as she had been named before the trauma of her mother’s death prompted her to assume her mother’s name. In light of the situation that had developed, Morgan realized her death was imminent. When Morganna was seven, Morgan would allow herself to be slain to protect the girl. What she did not know was that this would cause her psyche to be divided between the boy and girl, awaiting the day they became lovers and consummated their union. On that day, Morgan would be resurrected, along with the demon she sacrificed herself to thwart. In that moment, Morgan would be forced to chose her default sex by choosing which body to surrender to her nemesis. One of the first ordeals she faced, after this ordeal, was becoming the focus of a wager over Ruins’ Deep.

This approach preserves most of the impulses of A Child of Paradox. Dusk and Dawn are male and female incarnations of the same soul. Dusk and Dawn are betrothed to fulfill the promises between the families of his mother and her father. Dawn is abducted to bait a trap for her mother, whom the cult of Morduin intended to use as a vessel to resurrect their god, a demon. Dawn witnesses her mother’s sacrifice, becomes her heir, and is raised by her father, who sends her to the academy where she meets Dusk and falls in love with him. The consummation of their union frees the demon and the looped incarnation of Morgan. Morgan is displaced into the past where she becomes a paladin in the service of a demon and an angel. She joins the cause of her true parent’s mentor and becomes involved with a couple betrothed to each other in her separate guises, becoming the father and mother of her split incarnations. As war erupts, she is among the champions called to the defense of Ar Doen. The enemy finds support in the Cult of Morduin, which perceives Morgan as the means to resurrect their god. By sacrificing herself, Morgan not only preserves her past and future, she also forces a break in the war. She awakens from her death, at the age of twenty-seven, in a struggle for possession of a seventeen year-old body and a chance to resume the life that paradox interrupted. While she is struggling to adjust to the resumption of her former life, Morgan is corrupted by the infections of a vampire and a were-tiger. Morgan is courted by her sires, but defies them in her effort to retain her humanity. The war begins to heat up again, as Morduin gathers the remains of his cult and the allies they had made.

Predator and prey

An eternal moment, bridging the beginning and end, now. A dragon’s initiation, a manifestation of power that devours the embodiment of the self. A phoenix’s initiation, a devouring of the self by a manifestation of power. The first is a consummation, a predator consuming its prey and assuming its form. The second is a consummation, consumption and rebirth in the flames. A dragon initiation does not specify the predator manifested, nor the method of consumption. A phoenix initiation can be prompted by the passionate embrace of death. A woman is often a man’s prey, his seduction never too far removed from the hunting stalk. Their union is unquestionably a passionate, mortal embrace. Thus, he is a projection of her, the embodiment of the one predator she fears and admires most. As the manifestation of her power, he is the key to unlocking her potential. In essence, he is the boy within her, the boy of her dreams. For him, that is the world he lived in until he was evoked. As for how he devours her, he is flesh born of spirit—her spirit—the consummation of their union would trigger the consumption of her flesh by that spirit, or, she would disintegrate and he would take her form. Or, more accurately, he would discorporate at the climax of their passion, causing her discorporation, and they would be incorporated together in her form. She would inherit his form as her alt. Arguably, the nature of the initiation would indicate the possibility that her ordeal calls for rape, that at the very least the boy should feel an impulse to rape and slaughter her. Clearly, there is a darker, deadlier impulse involved, but as such, it need not be so clear to him. He has a need to kill her to complete the ordeal, but perhaps not a desire to. Because he is her power, it’s reasonable to present him as a power, a man embodying the powers untapped within her, and by bringing those powers into their union, in his desire to possess her more completely, he can be a mere agent to the power’s need to consume her. So, the only remaining question, after all that, would be who initiates her and why. There is a possible answer in the context of the psychic girl, if it is accepted that the initiation serves to unlock a deeper well of potential than she actively possesses. One option would have her initial psychic awakening occur as the result of a botched initiation that produced an immature predator, or simply that, at her age the only natural predator she could imagine was a boy—that boys were the only bane of her young existence. Of course, her sponsor would have been in a position to take the boy she manifested under his wing, perplexed by his manifestation and curious to determine how he was supposed to fulfill the imperative of the initiation. Possibly he would simply see the boy as the embodiment of her true power, and choose to seize the opportunity it offered. Alternatively, the boy begins as the kind of predator she envisioned, but after being dragged off of her and raised apart from her he evolves into a more normal boy. Plausibly, his manifestation could be the result of a gestalt misconception, from hearing talk of boys eating girls, boys who tormented girls, boys who might have threatened to kill her, or even having witnessed a boy killing someone or something. Something to base the assumption that boys are deadly predators. Possibly, just that boys were allowed to hunt, that her concept of a predator was formed by observation associating them with that kind of activity. More simply, she had the misfortune to fall prey to some boy who considered girls his natural prey, and she knew it. Given what is possible for metamorphs, a predator in boyish guise could indeed present itself—and in fact, he could be the dragon himself.

A psychic girl

She was the daughter of a courtesan and a knight. Her mother was actually a priestess of Arden and her father a paladin of the church, or in common terms, a witch and a witch hunter. At the time of her conception, her parents had joined forces against a wizard, a man who had mastered conjury, magery and sorcery and was determined to establish a new order in which most people would be subordinate to those more evolved; psychics like himself. Circumstances had forced them to join forces with a man, a powerful Ardean psychic and former colleague of the Athean wizard, opposed to his radical agenda.

The two men had experienced similar revelations, though the lives they lived were very different.

The wizard’s mother had been abducted in a raid on her Athean village and sold into slavery. Born into slavery, the wizard was rescued and sponsored to the academy by one of its instructors. There, he augmented his official training in sorcery with an illicit study of conjury and magery using the academy’s restricted archives. The discipline of his studies granted him control of the wild and unpredictable psychic gifts he’s already possessed. It also suggested a path of continued exploration to prove his emerging theories about psychic ability.

The other man was a natural psychic, the son of a wealthy Ardean widow who unwittingly alienated him by marrying an impoverished noble who took control of the family fortune and sent him away to a military academy. He made the best of the opportunities that schooling gave him, even though it offered little to stimulate his psychic talents—in fact forcing him to conceal them to the best of his ability. Though never tested for magical aptitude, like any other prospective soldier his training included an analytical study of magic and its combat applications, presenting him the opportunity to observe the truth about magic.

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

The revelation of a common foundation for antagonistic schools of magic helped her parents overcome their natural enmity, and partially accounts for her untimely and inconvenient conception. Her father was not only a decade older than her mother, but he was a married man with several children. Because her mother was a courtesan, the girl was considered a legitimate, if embarrassing addition to her father’s line. As her mother’s eldest daughter, 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.

When she was seven, the Athean wizard once again threatened her family. In the course of the crisis, she endured a very personal confrontation with him as he was probing her psychic potential and she turned the powers he unleashed against him in desperation. Following the crisis, she became the protégé of the Ardean psychic. Outside his private tutelage, she continued to learn from her parents, including mastery of her mother’s gymnastic fighting techniques and her father’s arsenal of weapons. Her primary training as a psychic gave her certain advantages in learning what her parents could teach, but presented a serious obstacle to learning any kind of magic.

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

Related Notes

Following his break with the wizard, her mentor had sought to alert various authorities to the danger the wizard, and a number of other gifted entities he had encountered, posed to the world at large. From the goddess, he had received the assistance of one of her champions, the girl’s mother. From the church, he had received various degrees of support including the assignment of one of it’s paladins, the girl’s father. From the Throne of Arden, he received both a knighthood and a commission to form an elite corps to investigate and prosecute such threats. From the Academies, he received some of the finest graduates suited to his elite corps, plus certification and teaching credentials to establish a special branch academy for the training of psychics. The first class of psychics formed as the girl turned thirteen, made up primarily of others her own age since puberty was one of the more common catalysts for manifesting psychic ability. The girl’s parents assumed roles as instructors at the branch academy, as did most members of the corps. The girl, like the other cadets, was occasionally called on to help the soldiers complete a mission, and occasionally the cadets were the only ones suited to a mission. At one point, it seemed that the corps had succeeded in killing the Athean wizard during a mission, but among his remains, the girl found a ring—a ring of resurrection. To the wizard’s shock, the girl somehow, paradoxically, eluded the trap. In fact, he could feel her in the trap, knew the body he had stolen and altered for his use had been hers, yet she had been beside him, sorting herself out as he sorted himself out. He quickly adopted a new identity, that of a boy forced into the service of his former self. He was inducted into the branch academy, becoming more and more absorbed by the girl. When the boy within the girl revealed himself, answering questions by posing unanswerable questions, he realized she was the one who truly entrapped him. In spite of himself, he fell in love with her, and her heart was all to easy to win with the aid of her alter ego and his special insight into her trapped psyche. They had all to little time, however, before his own agents retaliated for his death. To avenge their master, they made an example of her, not simply slaughtering her, but attempting to inflict an eternal death as only they could. Once again, the seventeen year old girl somehow accomplished the seeming impossible. Somehow, she made her body assimilate the incompatible infections of a vampire and a were-tiger.

A child of paradox

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.

Creaton 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 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.

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

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

A normal girl dispossessed by the resurrection of a man, reborn as a boy

- The man was a mage hunter, slayer of rogue gods, immortals and mages

He could not bring himself to endure the ordeal necessary to properly restore the girl he displaced

He compromised by making her his son and heir

- As the boy approaches the age when the girl was displaced, he experiences symptoms of her reawakening

He dreams, remembering her life but experiencing difficulty remembering the dreams when awake

He experiences a shocking transformation into a girl upon reaching the age of her displacement

- The man is forced to explain cause of the boy’s dreams and transformation

He explains his inability to reincarnate the girl in her true form, his inability to endure the pregnancy that would have required

He attempts to convince his heir that the ordeal, the choice it imposed, was a unique and special opportunity few people were granted

- As the girl awakens, she confronts the boy she became, able to recognize him as part of herself but at the same time as a person in his own right

She confronts the full scope of her displacement from her old life, and the disorienting context of her, or rather his, life

She weighs the advantages of their combined training and experience against the difficulties implicit in their differences

A ghost of a demon desperate for a suitable host

The demon used the girl’s own potential to devour her and resurrect itself in her image, unwittingly granting the girl the power to resurrect herself

Alternatively, the demon’s attempt divided the girl and boy, trapping the demon between them

A child of forbidden love between a vampire father and were-tiger mother

- They never imagined a child could result from their secret affair

Her mother’s blood had a particularly revitalizing effect on her father, restoring much of his humanity and making him fertile

Her father’s genes carried the legacy of changes wrought on his flesh by vampirism, but not the full curse of vampirism itself

- They were surprised by her conception, half-were and half-vampire children had been born on occasion, but never one who was both

Were children were rare, but half-breeds were even rarer and most of their natural gifts lay dormant until provoked

Vampire children were virtually unheard of, the half-breeds being more common who found their gifts difficult to evoke prior to death

- They were forced to abandon the girl to an orphanage to prevent her destruction as well as their own

She grew up believing herself entirely human, if somewhat tougher, stronger and more agile, and possessing somewhat sharper instincts and intuition

She also had unusual powers of regeneration and psychic potential, for which reason she was initiated as a muse

- Her superiors suspected what she might be, given her taste for blood and red meat, but unable to know the truth they could not pin down her true nature

She responded well to her training and education, eager to make herself a useful companion to a lord, knight or mage

She had a healthy childhood, for being an orphan, growing into a bright, poised maiden

- Her curiosity about her origins worried her patrons and parents equally

She was disturbed over her own, darker, natural impulses and the nightmares they tormented her with

She began searching for answers, probing the mystery of herself, when she turned seventeen

- Her questions soon attracted the wrong kind of attention and a lethal response

She had been given hints and leads from a vampire who suspected her parentage and nature, and her very scent had aroused the interest of local weres

She answered an invitation to meet a man who might be able to identify her parents, unaware he intended to destroy her

- The man was her father’s sire, and while he examined her at a distance her mother’s sire intruded, equally curious about the girl he’d heard of

She was oblivious to the trap she was falling into as the rivals studied and seduced her

She fascinated both men, but only her death could reveal her true nature and prove their suspicions

- Her death was made to look like a rape turned murder, staged both to punish and provoke her parents

She was shocked by the consequences of her death and unexpected resurrection the morning after, and fled from the morgue

She was shocked again as death reclaimed her in the dark of night

- Her body was returned to the morgue, but her actions of the past day inspired two attempts to abduct her during the night

She revived next to confront the sires of her mother and father, rivals for the rule of Ruins’ Deep

She demanded answers, but the rivals were more concerned with unraveling the mystery of what she was

- Her ordeal begins to follow the pattern of the wager at this point

A male vampire and a female were-tiger indulge in a transcendental physical/spiritual union, unwittingly conceiving an unusual child

- The couple were damned by their peers for their forbidden love, unaware of the potential of their sexual and spiritual polarity

They faced certain destruction, hunted by their own kindred, and chose to meet their end together as lovers

They made love through the dawn, to be consumed together in the pyre of his death, unaware of what was created in their destruction

- The child was born fully formed and androgynous, heir to the full gestalt of her parents, including the ability to assume male or female form

She, since her natural form seemed more feminine in stature, appeared to be about seventeen years old

She had memories of her parents individual experiences and natures, but recognized herself as something distinct from either of them

- The manner of her birth presented a number of immediate problems

She was discovered in the morning, in the midst of her parents mortal remains, mistaken for a demon and condemned for their murder

She fled, stumbling upon her metamorphic abilities in response to her desperate desire to conceal her unique appearance

- The discovery of her powers generally follows the pattern of the girl in the wager

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 judgments

- 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

Morgan of Avon Lea

As the protagonist featured in numerous story proposals, Morgan became burdened with a multitude of backgrounds. The common themes have her associated with a mother, a grandmother, a number of half siblings or cousins, a lover who turned out to be a brother or alternate incarnation of herself, a number of candidates for a father but nothing to prove which one was, training as a gymnast, dancer or courtesan, illicit training as a cat-burglar, fencer and martial-artist—often obtained by posing as a boy while growing up. Some scenarios have her acquiring a father-figure/mentor, particularly when she appears as a ward of the goddess or orphan or when he is her mother’s patron. At one point, her mother was treated as a courtesan turned assassin or agent who strove to keep her daughter from being forced into the same roles. Such threads feature Morgan as the child of feuding houses—her father was an agent of his house who fell in love with her mother in spite of the fact that they were sworn enemies. By chance, the two had been peers initiated together at the academy. In situations where Morgan was divided into male and female incarnations, her mother had been born male, afflicted with a sex changing curse. Morgan’s division was the result of an attempt to break the curse that was employed when her mother was pregnant. Minor variations appear at this point. The curse featured in that approach evolved to suit the story while presenting the most internal logic.

One variant presents the curse as limited to one person, passed on at the moment of conception. The former victim permanently adopted the sex in which he, or she, conceived a child. If the child dies, the curse reverts to the previous victim. Thus, Morgan’s mother was not affected by the alternate cure she attempted, and Morgan was split in the womb. The daughter remained with her mother and the son was taken by his father. In this instance, the boy and girl grow up in rival houses, each as an only child of a parent striving to keep them from being recruited as agents of their house. Inevitably, the pair encounter each other and fall in love, merging in a moment of intimacy that reveals that Morgan was conceived as a girl and female by default. On assuming the full burden of the curse, Morgan is finally taken into her parent’s—and their patron’s—confidence, educated about the curse, told of her parent’s efforts to end the feud between their houses, and introduced to her cousin—another victim of the curse. A few generations ago, a victim of the curse conceived twins, passing the curse on to both children. Her cousin, a boy by default, is the one who helps Morgan cope with her singular duality and encourages her to go out to the party. The curse is what draws the interest of the demon to Morgan. Morgan comes to the attention of the rival immortals by selling her services as a guide to the Ruins of Aeslyn Tear.

Absorbing the influences of Avonlea and Morgan Wildmuir, Morgan of Avon Lea was required to endure the ordeal of the wager. In instances where weight was given to exploring the duality of gender, events had to evolve in a direction that reasonably provoked the wager. A chance encounter at a party was plausible, but something is necessary to encourage the immortals to condemn Morgan to certain death. Selling her services as a guide into their realm is one option, and having her intimately associated with someone the immortals would destroy her simply to wound is also viable. In either case, her dual infection was an assassination attempt gone awry as the result of the regenerative powers she gained upon assuming the full weight of the curse. The certainty of death and the beginning of her ordeal is itself worth some regard. Her survival recaptures the attention of the rival sires, prompting the evolution of the plot into a wager over the result of her turning. The immortals’ actions pull her into the ruins and onto a path leading to the entrapped demon. In assimilating the were curse, Morgan is led to believe that her tiger form replaced her male form, when in fact it simply displaced it, becoming an intermediary form. Her male form can only be accessed by moving deeper through her tiger form. In her encounter with the demon, Morgan is twinned, escaping destruction by reviving the magic that once split her sexes. A story utilizing all these options would be called Thrice Cursed.

The one weakness of most of the singular duality threads is the fact that the male incarnation is almost always secondary to the female. Most of the inspirations associated with Morgan were originally devised for a female character. In the rebirth and displacement threads, his life is likewise given only an abbreviated glimpse. He is given the most attention in circumstances where his upbringing was closely integrated with her own. Ironically, other male characters developed with strong conceptualizations and reasonably detailed notes. His thread is developed most coherently in cases where he faces transition from being male to being female, either as the first or second incarnation in a rebirth and displacement scenario. In the division of the family curse, the story benefits from having little temporal distortion and neither aspect has an obvious advantage over the other. It also presents a foundation for Morgan to evolve into something unique through the interaction of the curses. By necessity, however, the plot arc involved in Thrice Cursed must be longer and slower to enable the reader to remain sympathetic to the character. That is why the plot integrating the wager and the ring together makes such a strong alternative. It spans two generations, but retains all the same elements while introducing them to the reader in a more digestible progression. It also results in Morgan being one of three unique and identical entities.

It is not necessarily undesirable to have Morgan appear as one third of a trinity, particularly when each is predisposed to a different gender. The set up can be simplified by having Morgan find the ring in her youth, being its sole wielder, and having the ordeal of dual infection lower her defenses against possession. Given the events of her childhood, she might well know about the regenerative and polymorphic powers of the ring, and even employed them as necessary. There is sufficient cause to deter her from exploiting the polymorphic aspect without great need, and possessing the ring itself would have been sufficient cause for the Order of the Ruins to take an interest in her. Instead of striving to become a maiden of the goddess, she would be trained by members of the order. It certainly offers a more plausible foundation for her to be lured into crime, since part of her training would include the skills of a thief even if her mentors had not intended her to become one. It definitely suits itself to having a member of the order become her mother’s patron, associates the mother and daughter with the Sword & Sorcerer Inn at which both found employment as well as residence. Her grandmother remains the cause of Morgan’s courtesan training. Morgan’s association with the order is sufficient by itself to make her a target of opportunity, at least, as long as she was not recognized as a member. Killing her would simply be a way to send a warning to the order, a retaliation for the violation of the status quo.

The entire issue of Morgan’s reincarnation as a boy would be simplified thus: Morgan was imprinted with the capacity to change sex, but had always relied on the ring as the mechanism to trigger the changes. The demon would have expelled Morgan through parthenogenic rebirth simply to gain sole possession of her body. Morduin would have been able to force Morgan to assume male form as a deterrent to her reawakening, expecting that the boy would never discover and exploit the potential it had engraved in her. This would eliminate the need for a host mother or surrogate father, since Morduin would simply abandon the baby at an orphanage—forced to allow the child to live since killing it might cause his soul to reattach to its original body. However, at age seven, when the boy was tested for magical ability, the polymorphic ability was triggered. There was no full awakening, and his upbringing as a boy compelled him to reassert his manhood as soon as he realized what he had become. The experience deterred him from having anything to do with magic, though it did prompt a knight of the Order of the Ruins to take him on as a squire. Then, as the boy approached the age at which Morgan had been displaced, he began having dreams, memories of her life filtering through his subconscious prior to her reawakening. Her full awakening was proceeded by spontaneous transformations into her form. While he was adapting to being female, she was finally resurrected.

As is obvious in the abstract of Thrice Cursed, Morgan has evolved into an overly complex character. Many of the same possibilities can be explored starting from a more modest foundation. A way to mute her back story a little requires limiting her to being the child of feuding houses, uncertain of her paternity, with her mother’s patron for a father figure and mentor, training as a courtesan due to her grandmother’s influence prompting the rebellious exploits and misadventures that establish her familiarity with the ruins and association with the underworld, with those last two combining in her exploiting her talents as a guide to the ruins to pursue a life of adventure. The party that hires her would include the paladin on a mission to probe the ruins. That, in turn, prompts the rival immortals to attempt to assassinate her, provoking the paladin into inadvertently sacrificing himself to save her. Most of Hunger and Thirst can proceed from there.

Former Establishment: Morgan was descended from a long line of courtesans, although her mother had tried to rebel against that calling. She set out to become a priestess only to end up in a whirlwind romance with a soldier. Worse, the man she fell helplessly in love—and conceived a child—with was already married. To legitimize her daughter, she was forced to resume the mantle of a courtesan. Morgan ended up being her mother’s eldest, her father’s youngest—but the only child of both. Her father, a former mercenary turned officer in the Avon Guard, settled with his wife and her sons, opening the Orchard Inn in Avon Lea. Morgan received training as a courtesan courtesy of and at the insistence of her grandmother, but having inherited her parents’ lust for adventure she aspired to become a maiden of the goddess. As a result, she obtained the skills of a warrior in addition to the wiles of a woman. As the result of her childhood adventures and misadventures, she acquired an unusual knowledge of the ruins of Aeslyn Tear—the underworld known more commonly as Ruins’ Deep, as well as skills more suited to a thief. Among those who lured her into crime, her unique mix of abilities suggested that she would make an exceptional spy or assassin. Only with great difficulty did Morgan elude the designs of her mentor in crime and the desires of her underworld patron. Somewhat more difficult to escape, her father had arranged a marriage for her with the son of his best friend and former rival.

Former Synopsis: She had trained to become a maiden of the goddess. She had become the protégé of the paladin of the goddess, fixating on him as a father figure and object of desire. On a night of the autumn festival, she was dragged to a party by her friends, and he arrived later, stalking a pair of rival immortals that had decided to crash the party. She spotted him, and being somewhat inebriated, threw herself at him—unwittingly bringing them both to the attention to the predators in their midst. Tempted in spite of himself, he responded enough to convince the rivals that she was his lover. In the ensuing confrontation, she leapt to the paladin’s aid. Already aware of how deadly the paladin was, the immortals concluded that the most effective way to hurt and incapacitate the paladin was to destroy his lover before his eyes. For all her talent and skill, she was not ready to fight such foes, and she fell quickly and helplessly into their hands. As one, they bit her, and threw her back to the paladin. Alone, neither bite would have been a threat, but because of the antagonistic nature of vampires and weres, they became a lethal combination. The paladin had only one hope of saving her life, and only at the cost of his own. Taking the ring that granted him immortality so long as he possessed it, he placed it on her finger. In passing on the ring, he was ripped from his own body as the ring lay claim to his soul, transferring his psyche into her body which she would now be forced to share with him or surrender to full possession. Worse, the ring sufficed only to allow her to survive the bites. It could not truly cure her of their effects.

Source Notes: Morgan Wildmuir

Timeline mortal life 12 21 1900, 12:00 am born 12 21 1921, 12:00 am died

Prologue • Morgan was unconventional even from the outset. The following is a brief breakdown of the events which led to her death, rebirth and awakening...

1900 • early childhood

Born (at home during fierce snowstorm, in the countryside of upstate New York.) last of thirteen to an unconventional doctor, on the height of the winter solstice. Morgan was raised in an environment of deep thought, and intellectual challenge. Competing with her siblings made her exceptionally bright for a girl of her time. For balance, she was encouraged to pursue physical activities, such as acrobatics and dance (which she also excelled at, seeing it as more competition.)

1907 • childhood

Morgan's father begins training her to deal with her amoral nature, bringing her into closer contact with the learned and intellectual world of a doctor. In many ways, it became clear to her father that Morgan was not a 'normal' child. She was innately intelligent, notoriously amoral, and nearly insatiably hungry for the experiences of life. Due to her immaculate amorality, he rigorously trained her to recognize her lack of moral judgment in advance, and figure out a suitable way to guard against amoral blunders. From this seed evolved her impeccability, her personal code of honor. Her voracious curiosity and appetite for knowledge also took root early in her youth. She would devour any book, regardless of complexity.

1914 • early adolescence

WWI begins, throwing life into turmoil. She buried herself in texts and literature on every subject, anything she can get access to, in reaction. Eventually she consumed her father's entire medical library. This was how she supplemented her respectable education over the next few years or more.

1917 • adolescence

Father followed her older brothers to serve their country, in the absence of her father, she was left to her own devices in dealing with morality and propriety. Her search for answers soon led her to encounter works of philosophers and occultists. Disturbed by the discrepancy she was finding between what people believed and what they accepted as real or sane, she began to question the very idea of 'reality' in favor of seeing the true possibilities of existence. As her first term at college wore on, she discovered for herself the vast and rapidly growing chasm separating her from the common man or woman. Indeed, recognized how without her careful self control, she was virtually insane in their eyes. This forced her to withdraw from campus society. Left to her own devices to nurture and feed her intellectual growth (and to follow her visionary growth free of the immaculate misconceptions of religion and science,) she eventually began to fall in with radical thinkers, and mysterious 'philosophers' she met through correspondence and synchronicity.

1918 • adolescence

Turns her attention to the works of G. Geirdjeiff, Aliester Crowley, and even the budding theories of Einstein, and begins to take them apart. Withdraws from finishing school. Begins researching her own ideas. Approaching nineteen, and the appropriate age to consider marriage, her family relationships, especially with her mother, began to get strained. The reasons should be fairly obvious. Things became strained with her father for rather specific reasons (having something to do with his strong moral sense.) Her thoughts became focused on the mysteries of existence, causing numerous debates regarding this or that system of belief.

1919 • late adolescence early adulthood

Having became focused on the mysteries of existence, it was only a matter of time, given the likes with which she associated, before she formally defined her views. Moving out after a family conflict, gave her the freedom she needed to begin writing. This soon led to her first publication, under a pseudonym. Writing and publishing her book was both the final straw in her family break up and the seal on her doom. This in turn led both to her disinheritance, and the beginning of an odd and unconventional relationship with the strangest of people... a pale, handsome, and mysteriously intelligent man who defied rational thought.

1920 ‑ 1921 • early adulthood unto death

As they became more intimate, her death became more and more inevitable. The book itself acquired a small cult following over the next decade, which dwindled, as the book faded into obscurity. The strange being, whom she came to know only as "Pale" from her own descriptive comment the night they met, became a regular companion after having read her book. She always tried to find out how he had found out that it had been her who had written the book, but never learned more about that than she ever did about Pale himself. Their conversations were characterized by their spontaneous occurrence, their lucid depths of meaning, and the almost frantic fervor that always possessed them, causing them to debate through the night often well into the morning.

But never did Pale remain with her until dawn. He would suddenly get up and bid her farewell at precisely a half hour 'til sunrise, and depart without further word of meeting again or of explanation. An irregular number of days would go by, and just when she thought he had abandoned her, he would surprise her with an appearance in the most unlikely of places and circumstances. Eventually, she reached the point where she hardly took notice of Pale's comings and goings, and even failed to notice as he became her sole close companion. The days of his absence would pass, her time and attention absorbed elsewhere, but when her thoughts turned back to Pale, he would suddenly be around. Even to the end, she never quite put her finger on what was so unique about his kisses, and only Pale knows what happened between them on those most intimate of evenings. This relation ship lasted for the remainder of her life, which ended on her twenty‑first birthday.

immortal life 12 22 1921, 12:00 am reborn present

On her 21st birthday, "Pale" offered a very special "gift." Her death, and rebirth began a decade of turmoil as she was educated in the ways of a vampire, in the most unprecedented of all manners. During that time, her writing faded into obscurity. To this day, she still writes, but no two works are connected to the others in name or even in writing style.

1921 • Following her death, she was 'educated' haphazardly through a series of pranks and orchestrated catastrophes by her sire, Pale, who would remain maddeningly, tantalizingly near, but was never within her reach. Following her Embrace, their relationship changed so radically, she felt she had been abandoned by him. She was put into situations where she had to figure out the 'rules' and abilities for herself or else be caught in the backlash. The more competent she became, the less she would see or hear of Pale, who would drive off any other kindred she might have encountered. This made her something of a loner. It made her dangerous, driven to win all battles with the first, as it were. She still maintained her survival technique of controlling her self and moral appearances so that she can remain free. Otherwise, her sanity become more and more nothing but a semblance.

1928 • She traveled abroad for a couple of years, and developed the habit of attracting a few mortals in each generation who she becomes intimately involved with, sharing her philosophy, shelter and support with them, in return for companionship. And for learning to control her thirst. The best control, she learned, is through temperance. The intimate drink, become her preference, and she determined to never deliberately kill an innocent in drinking. To support this, she formed the habit of 'seeking the blood of the evil doer' whenever the possibility exists that she lacks the will or control to not kill her host.

1930 • Putting as much distance as possible between her mortal life and herself as possible, she settled in the Pacific Northwest, taking her brood with her. She selected a large house in the foothills an hours drive outside of Seattle. This pattern became a habit for her as time would go on. During this time, "Pale" made his biggest appearance of her immortal life, declaring that her 'education' was at a practical end, and taking her to the Prince of Seattle for her presentation into vampire society. Following this, she chose to follow "Pale's" last words of advice, and kept to the edge of vampire society, only staying close enough to observe the rules of the masquerade. Thus she remained a loner among vampires.

1939 ‑ 1945 • WWII, she remained in the US throughout the war, living in the country, an hour's travel from a city. She developed the additional habit of seducing hosts for small intimate drinks, disguised as sexual acts, thus always maintaining high blood levels, not risking the hunger. She heals the wounds and commands them to forget what has happened. (As much to confuse what actually happened as anything else she might have the power to do.)

1949 ‑ 1965 • She lived peacefully and uneventfully in the Rocky Mountains for the longest stretch, during which she wrote five unrelated books on the Dream and its aspects. One of which was actually in the guise of a children's story, which became very successful and well loved (though it is doubtful that many understood what was actually being said in the book.) Her first group of Intimates who lived with her in that house throughout the fifties left to pursue their fortunes and were succeeded by Carol Alt‑Bryon, Richard Cail and Erin O'Casey during the sixties. This group moved with her to California at the end of '65, where a new mortal began to fall in very close to the group. She was welcomed by Morgan, but not taken into full confidence for a sort of probationary period.

1968 • During this time, she was living near L.A. and prowling through the hippie and runaway crowds that flocked to it and places nearby, such as Venice Beach. Accidentally drinking from a host who had recently dropped a hit of LSD, she lost control of herself, draining him completely. The drug hit her, and threw her into a nightmare of perceptions, of being taken apart and put back together, of hovering precariously on the edge of a boundless abyss. Her thoughts stilled by their own turmoil, she saw the world, without distortion of interpretations, made surreal as dreams. In this searing burst of clarity, the teeth of her driving urge to realize the truth of the Dream locked on her heart‑essence.

1969 • The year following her visionary rekindling, she skirted the edge of her own doom. In a tragic chain of events. One of Morgan's Intimates, the new probationary, turned against the group. Enraged by her moralistic denouncements, Morgan challenged her to weigh their love for one another against the truth of her nature, challenged the value of morals. Horrified, the girl fled from her with her son swearing to see her destroyed. Before Morgan caught her, she had already attempted to enlist aid, unwittingly from a mixed kindred mortal crowd. Morgan accidentally kills the girl, unknowingly in front of her son, during their confrontation. With the aid of her Intimates she found all who had taken the girl's outburst seriously, and systematically destroyed their credibility and sanity, mortal and kin alike. Whatever it took to cover up her dark new secret.

1970 • She established her next group of living mates, as her sixties group go their separate ways. By now, her living pattern became set, with her moving every eight to ten years, buying a house in the country, and renting to her companion trio of that decade...

1991 • Heeding an elusive inner calling, she moved to the northern peninsula of Golden Gate Bay, an half‑hour to an hour drive from San Francisco and the East Bay. There, with her relocated disciples she acquired a large house out of public view. She soon came into contact with a group of loosely associated kindred and glimpses of the world they (and those far older than they) exist in. In a night of catastrophe, her fate became inextricably drawn to theirs. Her Intimates, slain by a band of irate Lupines and herself, driven out of her haven by fire. It is with this loss, that she returned to the club Purgatory. It is with this loss that she received an invitation to Court with the other Kindred. This sets in motion a convoluted sequence of events and the upheaval of the Camerilla and the Sabbat... not to mention Morgan's own life.

Morgan Wildmuir • Storyline

Personal log of the Devil's Masquerade. Morgan's first appearance was some where in chapter II, between act VII and act VIII...

interlude I

act VII.I • Following a busy month of relocating to the north Bay Area from Washington, Morgan finally got a chance to smoke down the area. Dropped off by an Intimate in the East Bay, she cruised around for a bit until her path stumbled across Purgatory. To her surprise, she finds herself among kindred for the first time on her own. Among them Renae, her virtual twin! She joins them for their evening's hunt. They stumble across a Nosferatu in a derelict train on the Emeryville tracks, who becomes enraged and mauls Renae. Finding herself in a totally alien situation, she also finds herself at a loss how to act. Following that incident, they swing over to Berkeley. There, along with Scarlett and Vladimir, she witnesses the rising of an (Malkavian?) elder of unnatural beauty and affinity for fire. Finally she reunites with her Intimates at home for their last Embrace...

chapter III • fire on the mountain

act VIII • Oblivious to the fates of her new acquaintances in the East Bay, Morgan awakes. Rising from her basement crypt, she rises to an uneasy sense of violation. Mounting the stair, she hears the piercing song of her Intruder haunting the rooms above. There, all is in dark and the smell of blood and fear assail her. Passing into a room, an object flies at her from the dark; the severed head of one of her Intimates. She brushes closed the sightless eyes, and kisses him a passionate farewell; her grief transformed to icy rage. Setting down the cold clay, she slips through the dark to find her assailants. Stopping at the gun locker to arm herself, she is ambushed through the wall, in the style of Rutger Hauer from "Bladerunner." Faster and stronger, her werewolf assailant tells her that this was a warning, stay out of the outback! Mending her broken hand, she has little time to collect her vital items before the pack of wolves set her house to the torch. With nowhere else to turn, she goes to Purgatory (where she is reunited with Vladimir, and meets Rossete, Sharla (Lucien's Ward & Mim's "cousin"), Raymond (wounded from an ambush by a rogue vampire) and Annabelle, who arrives to invite them to Prince Modius Dark's party) to seek sanctuary.

Until the Party on All Hallows Eve, Renae puts her up at her place. They get to know each other a little better, and Morgan begins to confide her interests with Renae and Sharla. (at this time, Renae alludes a bit to her camping trip with her Shaman, and Scarlet. Strange inferences to a ritual transporting them through the Astral aether to an arcane library where they discovered strange insights.)

chapter IV • the shell game

act IX • all hallows eve (10/31/91) At the party, she meets the rest of Dark's Carnival, listens to the various stories and pronouncements, assents to the attentions of Annabelle hoping for friendship or intimacy, and begins to wonder what is really moving beneath the surface of the evening. She shares a few theories with Vlad who also smells hidden politics. She talks several times with Modius, receiving a compliment for her seeming integrity. She also learns the name of the waking elder from her first night out. At the end of the evening, she hears the announcement of Ilsa's invitation to San Francisco on the following eve.

act XI • the vampire club (11/1/91) In search of Ilsa, they visit the Vampire Club, where Sir, an intoxicated Elder directs them to ask at the Cave. On the way, they encounter Rage, a skinhead Anarch, who invites all to attend an Anarch meeting at midnight.

act XII • the cave At the Cave, they are kept waiting in the main room for far too long, to distract herself, Morgan plays little mind games with the patrons and her companions. Finally they are all admitted to the back room to witness the staking of an elder for the purposes of a wager. Sensing a sleight of hand, as it were, they join the wager on the side of the impaled kin. Sure enough, he slips the apparently airtight prison and wins. Then Simon gets around to helping the group find out where to go and tells them: A meeting at the Aquarium at three.

act XIII • fire over water Dropping by the Anarch meeting reunites them with some old faces (such as Nick, Dion, and ‑ unexpectedly ‑ Joker) and some new (like Michael & Guhnter). Everything was nice and peaceful (well, sort of) until Rawhide & Bloodybones (Ilsa's Enforcers) show up to bully, threaten, and finally burn the place down. A riot erupts, causing Rawhide's men to start the fire prematurely, forcing Morgan and the others to bolt through the portholes into the bay bellow.

act XIV • the hungry ones Those bellow the Pier find themselves sitting ducks for the sharp‑toothed gunmen waiting in their boat. Although Scarlet (who escaped via the roof) makes a valiant (if showy) attempt to save them with her handy rocket‑launcher, the mental disciplines of Michael prove more successful. He leads them all away and helps them replace ruined wardrobes. Somewhere in all this, they touch base with Ray and Rose and hear of their strange, supernatural assailant.

act XV • politics While gathering in the parking lot, the Purgatory Kindred are met by a band of bikers led by Brecheau (a Sabbat elder), who invites all to join the Sabbat ‑ Scarlet goes along, innocently thinking she can always leave later¼ Continuing into the Aquarium, they are searched by Shamus (a Toreador Archon) and then led to Ilsa ‑ except that she isn't the real Ilsa (as Vladimir reveals). Jasmine (a Ventrue Archon) had been masquerading as Ilsa to find out what they knew. Why? Mr.Jade (yep, even he is an Archon ‑ for the Tremere) appears to inform them that Ilsa has disappeared, and that they are suspect! They are ushered in to meet the Primogen who (after much debate)decree that the young licks must prove their innocence in finding the missing prince ‑ a blood hunt being the price of failure. Karma (an Asimite in Baron Vulsung's service) and Sharky (the Malkavian Archon) are to join them in their investigation. Before they leave, Ulriké (the Malkavian Primogen) gives Morgan a very strange pet, while crooning about the Baron's suffering.

The Purgatory Kin are put up for the oncoming day by the Osiris Society, a Tremere Chantry led by Little Nell (the only Primogen to outright defend them at the meeting).

act XVIII • the monarch's haven (11/2/91) Morgan wakes up to find herself in a library, supervised by an enigmatic Tremere. She thumbs through a book on lupines, before being joined with her friends. She gets the impression that each one had come to in compromising ways as well. After distressing wakeup calls at the Chantry and an even more disturbing dinner with the Baron (where they are joined by Mim, Sharky, & Karma) the Purgatory Kin are led to Ilsa's private apartments at the top of the SF Pyramid building to begin their investigation. The scene is very thin, and the clues are rare and exotic indeed.

act XIX • things fall together The Purgatory Kindred finish their investigation of Ilsa's lair, having discovered the following: a) it took place during the day, b) two kidnapers ‑ one invisible THING (like the one Ray & Rose encountered), the other a former retainer believed dead (named Roarke), c) a number of items of unusual nature (like maps & papers drawing vague conclusions about Satanists, Anarchs, and the Sabbat ‑ a necklace that gives visions of an elder cainite [weak & in pain] ‑ a chess board set up for a peculiar endgame, etc¼) and d) Sharky is a real asshole. This last is probably why they do not warn him when Nick arrives with steak in hand while leaving.

act XXII • (things fall apart) Nick leaps into the Malkavian Archon, followed by Morgan and Vlad, while the rest stand around playing dumb. Feigning assistance, while providing only hindrance, Morgan trips Sharky up while Vlad and Nick take him apart. Renae attempts to return to Ilsa's suite costing them all valuable time, while Vlad stows away Sharky's incapacitated body. Taking Nick up on an offer of asylum, joining with other members of the Purgatory Kindred, they take off. Morgan jumps out on the way to snatch a pedestrian clipped by Renae in her car ahead, and flustered by the unfamiliarity of the situation, drains him to death. Stunned by the ramifications of her act, she realizes that she knew nothing of this person. Taking his I.D. she vows to find out who he was, somehow, from those who did know him. Then she disposes of the body. While she finishes her business, the rest of the group become stuck in between a rock and a hard place, and panic, making things even worse.

act XXIII • (sabotage) Joining up with the others, fleeing from their disaster scene, they attempt to pool their information, then seek to return to the Chantry of the Osiris Society only to find that it has been obliterated, and dawn is only moments away. Before fleeing for shelter, Morgan spots another 'witness' on a roof above, the King of the Blind. Barely making it to a Marriott and getting a safe room, before they all collapse, and fade into Dreams...

...a chess board of many colored pieces ‑ red, white and black. We are all here, I see so much activity...but, what is this? Is this... am I at a wedding? And I, such an elegant dress, so delicate, so pure and white.. wait, its a coronation. They are tossing petals... cherry blossoms. They are my people. I see that now. But... they are all throwing their flowers at ME! My mistress, with her hair so pale, so long and elegant... hair? She HAS hair! ( Ulriké!) Walking towards me holding forth a pillow ‑ upon it a crown!

(11/3/91) Morgan awakes, followed by the others, and they finish pooling their notes. Part of the group goes off to collect a few other members of the group who had had other arrangements for their slumber. Morgan, Renae, Alfonso, Scarlet (!) who was delivered to their door by the King of the Blind, and Karma continue to compare notes. Now, the truth comes out about Pandora. Morgan reveals that she had been summoned down to the bay area by Pandora in the first place. They decide to set out for the site marked in Ilsa's maps and reconnoiter. There they trip over the rag reporter, who latches onto them, and repeatedly draws the group to the threshold of breaking the Masquerade. Morgan and Renae decide to pull out, when something darts out at them from the woods. Instinctively, Morgan strikes it down, nearly killing it. Renae attempts to revive it, and Morgan is charged by the demonic beast that had been pursuing the deer she'd kicked. Gravely wounded, she hides, and waits for help.

The finale involved the culmination of this cult ritual, and the death of the prince, Ilsa. Morgan was battered within an inch of her unnatural life, saving the clanless assassin in the process. After the agonizing conclusion, and assisted rejuvination, all gather to receive the absolution of the primogen, and learn of Morgan's appointment as the Rule. The chaos has only just begun.

Among notable persons, Marcus Sing Khan - the CIA agent made vampire and recondemned to mortality by Nyarlothoteph (?)

1

It is strange to look back upon my origins. So much is locked away in those lost moments. Surely much, if not all of what I am, stems from all of the things I've experienced in my time. I am sure that there is great significance and relevance to all of the specific circumstances and events as well, but I do not want to read anything into them. If there is anything to such assumptions, then the significance surely must be reflected in what I am now, and would be terribly difficult to discuss. I can't quite imagine how I could possible separate what I am from those specific circumstances of my birth and growth. I was born at home, during a terrible peak in the worst storm in decades. Being the last of thirteen children born to my mother, this was not much of a problem. And with my father, the local doctor, there, whatever problems that might have developed could have been reasonably dealt with. What is there to say about having been born during a terrible storm at midnight on the winter's solstice at the birth of the century? I have often amused myself with dramatic interpretations about my birth, but to this day, I don't know if any of it means anything. Would I have faced the same fate ultimately, if I had not had such an alluringly distinct point of origin?...

...Of course, I had an involved and interesting life. Many things simultaneously shaped and prodded me onward through my childhood. Waterbreak was a uncomfortably small, Victorian community to grow up in. My father was the only doctor in residence, which accorded a certain amount of prestige and onus upon our family. We were all treated so deferentially, and yet were always expected to be almost better than human. The townspeople's desire to see their doctor as infallible caused them to develop steep expectations of him, and by reflection, us. Being the youngest in this brood of exceptionally driven children was an astounding experience! In order to compete, I was practically provoked into becoming the prodigal child in our family. I think that it was a great disappointment to my siblings and the town notaries, that I was a girl‑child. But that disappointment would seem like nothing if they had ever come to know me as I really was...

...As I gradually grew older, smarter and more expressive, it became more and more apparent, to my father especially, that I lacked even the slightest gleam of moral sense and propriety. My father called me an amoral wretch, and tortured himself endlessly over the many conflicts and disasters which, in his mind, would someday fall down upon me because of it. I was an unabashed and sensual child. I had no remorse. And I was too smart for my own good. It was all of this, among other things, which inspired my peculiar perspectives on life. Views which were not particularly popular for the times in which I lived. I remember the innumerable attempts by my mother to tutor me in morality (arguing on moral grounds), and I never had the slightest idea what she was talking about. I eventually came to the opinion that my mother was not right in the head. From that point on, we had only a distant relationship with one another...

...Their concern was not unjustified. After all, mankind has a history of persecuting those who do not conform to the designated mold. Only a thin veneer separated the proper Victorian civility of the people of Waterbreak, from the ignorant fear and contempt which drives people to burn some unfortunate for the uncertain and unsupportable crimes of witchcraft or the like. Fortunately, my father was able to appeal to me intellectually to recognize this. Pointing out my moral lack, and my potential fate should I attract the attention of the Moral Majority. He very artfully educated me in social psychology, for lack of better words. By making me recognize the dangers, and making me aware of the problem, I was able to develop a technique to protect myself from the attention of the small minded and the morally sacrosanct alike. I have only survived as long as I have because I was intelligent enough to stay ahead of social repression...

...It is sort of ironic, that my parents' attempts to 'correct' me always made things worse or more exaggerated. Their attempt to distract my intellectual intensity through participation in acrobatic and dance activities, made me even more independent and self‑reliant. It gave me the motivation to better myself as much as possible. It also awoke a certain visceral and carnal awareness of myself. I had up to that point only had an innocent, inquisitive drive, not yet grasping the possibilities of expressing myself through actions. I had peculiarities, to be sure. I often failed to observe certain proprietary rules of conduct, etc, in that I remained oblivious to the moral prerogatives they served. I saw no reason why I needed to wear clothing in the insufferable heat of summer, or risk their dangerous (or merely annoying) entanglements while swimming or within the comfort of home. Neither did I see any reason why I needed to be helpless in anyone else's power. Early on, I gained even my eldest of brothers' respect, regarding the ferocity and capability with which I would defend myself from torment and abuse. Having been exposed to the possibilities of physically expressing myself, it was an obvious step for me to take. As tomboys go, I was ahead of my time in Waterbreak...

...Was I ever a normal child? I remember being very quiet and watching things a lot. I wasn't particularly eccentric for most of the time that I can remember. Family life was very structured, and even at a young age, my siblings and I all had certain obligations and chores, but that was the only way such a large family could maintain itself cohesively. I was intelligent because there was so much intellectual stimulation for me at home. I was daring because I never learned to fear anything. I was wild because, no matter what I ever learned, I was never able to express the things I always wanted to say. I never had an avenue through which to channel all that pent up energy. Things always seemed so obvious, it never failed to surprise me when I discovered that people didn't see or understand things. When I was a child, I could Dream anything and make it happen. When I finally came to understand the Dream as an adult, I cried for months about losing the ability or faith in my ability to Dream the world the way I wanted...

...No one ever understands the Dream. When I talk about existence, they can follow the workings of it as a concept while I am talking about it, but they never realize the truth behind the paradoxes. No one ever remembers their amortal existence, where they came from. All they ever know is what they are. What they interpret. They almost never believe in their pre‑existence. And because of this, they will not allow themselves to understand the Dream. But that is not surprising, they do not listen to their insight, or see what they know...

...Losing my acceptance of the dream, was really what ended my childhood. I was in school, and I had in the past used the Dream to surprise close friends, which led to stories being told. One day I was cornered by a mob of hypocritical and or skeptical older children who felt that it was their duty to teach me a lesson for tricking the younger kids. They told me that the things I had shown the others were not possible. They had to be tricks. Lies. I became so mad, and scared because they were so hostile about it. I told them I wasn't lying. I tried to show them, but they refused to see what I was doing when I did it. And when they began to push me and throw things at me I couldn't stop them. They chased me until it started to storm out, and they had to get out of the rain. I didn't stop running until I was lost deep in the forest outside of town. I remember that it took another day before my father found me, and from that day on, I wouldn't dare Dream. Because it had failed me so badly, I had lost all faith in it. But I never stopped understanding it. I would merely pretend to ignore it the way everyone else did around me...

..I was learning to dance and tumble around the time I stopped Dreaming. If I had known before what I came to know soon after, I might not have been intimidated out of my touch with the Dream. It pains me that I lost all of that simply because I did not realize that I could act physically in my defense, or for my own good. This of all things showed me what an insidiously incapacitating thing ignorance is. I honestly began to pity those who were ignorant, for what their ignorance cost them. I realized that they were not mean or evil, they simply didn't know that they could be or do anything better...

...It took a lot of time and effort on my father's part, before I came to truly grasp what a dangerous, vicious circle enslaved humanity as a race. People had made themselves subject to the limits of what could be known rationally, which was rarely very much. General ignorance among people became the root to so many social evils. The society was only as good as the individuals from which it was comprised, and those individuals in turn, could only become as good as the education that society gave them. The artists and philosophers of a society inspired it to achieve greatness, but the means to reach the masses of growing populations inevitably wore thin. The masses became gradually more ignorant over time, until they reached a point at which it would begin to persecute those individuals who stood out amongst them, the artists, the thinkers, the ground breakers. Those people who were the only thing in the society which could save or redeem it. Understanding this convinced me that morals, and similar blind constraints, were the opiate of the ignorant...

...Another thing that closed the door on my innocence, was awakening to the harsh realities of social conformity. Discovering that I was at the mercy of any ignorant and self‑righteous busy‑body's judgment and even persecution, almost undid me. As it was, I lost all semblance of blissful security. Suddenly my youthful idealism turned into an unending conflict between my right to exist, be who I am, and grow, and endless, mindless pressure to conform, to submit to the asphyxiating strangle‑hold that society and reality demanded...

...I'd always loved to read. To me, a book was the richest feast, and I'd devour them accordingly. But when the war started, reading became more than an interest. It became a refuge. I began to voraciously consume whatever I could lay eyes on. Texts, histories, even my Father's medical library eventually fell to my compulsion. This did tremendous things for my education at the time, but later was part of the reason I did not finish my higher education. When my Father and brothers went off to fight in the war, I was on my own. It was the next year that really drove home the differences between myself and my peers. Any of my friends or teachers would think I was insane if not for my careful impeccability. My need for self expression eventually drove me into the company of free‑thinkers, radicals and philosophers through correspondences or chance meetings. Somewhere in all of that, I heard of Gurdjieff, and his philosophies. That's when I finally gave up on school, so I could work on my own ideas. Of course, this did not go over well with my family. In their eyes this was where my 'rebellious' streak began to take hold. It hurt to be slowly rejected by my own blood. But it was my own sensual amorality that struck the fatal blow to my family relations...

...That was the first major turning point in my life. The second would come after my writing success began to draw special attention...Morgan I: Beyond the Pale

Born under heavily auspicious omen, and driven to fulfill unnamed yet exceptional expectations imposed on her by her social environment, Morgan was torn through the inertia of doubt and self estrangement inherent to all children native to Earth and especially western thought. For her, the only way to begin to pursue her destiny, was to go beyond the veil of death. To yield to the undead embrace of vampirism. Having acquired the benefit of a strangely frail and vulnerable immortality, she has finally begun to see the dream beyond the veneer of reality. See the truth behind the pale illusions of the world. But, will she ever begin to break free of the cloying grip of fear of the unknown, the shadow of doubt, the chains of all earthly confinement?

Morgan Erin Wildmuir

acquaintances to form her own brood, as her role of enforcer will require...

There is still the son of her former friend and intimate, slain before his eyes by herself, who still seeks her death...

There is still the young mortal ward whom she would do anything to protect...

She is only recently scarred by the murder and mutilation of her intimate mortal companions at the hands of territorial lupines...

Among her wary allies is the orphaned assassin whom she risked her own existence to rescue from a fiery death, the somber White Russian, Vladimir, the dazed and confused debutante, Sharla, and possibly the former vampire and current CIA operative, Marcus Singh‑Khan, and others...

...this book occurs after the her coronation...

"To master the possibilities of a mortal being, it is necessary to attain immortality. To master the possibilities of being an immortal, it is necessary to grow beyond the pale bonds of a reality we impose upon ourselves..."

OUTLINE

1 I ‑ OPENING

The Rule of the Phoenix...

(A visit, a device for the initial exposition, by way of Pale...)

contemplating the consequences of her actions in recent events

the death of a stranger

the heritage of a vampire

Pale, in the shadows

MORGAN ERIN WILDMUIR •

PALE •

2

how it came to this

3

coronation, a question of choice and an evaluation of one's self

rationale for choice

power and powerlessness

4

comings and goings, the wake of a shift in the balance of power...

I am going to need all the friends I can get

you know, as well as I what is really going on here

while they think they are going to take advantage of me, I am going to take advantage of this

5

confronting the demands of her appointed position as the Rule

to be, or not to be a puppet

6

fighting the system

weaving a web

7 II ‑ MOTION

building from scratch...

my training has already begun. The hard parts are still ahead.

I need to establish some power of my own

8

Hi, long time no hear. The time has come. I offer you the choice.

9

I can't believe I wrote all of these books...

Damn you, Pale! What are you trying to do?

echoes of a man

10

I'm a writer, this is something that I feel I need to do...

11 III ‑ PRESSURE

The power behind the throne...

12

Back off. The last thing I need right now is you playing with my mind!

I wasn't expecting all of you to show up...

13

What do you mean? They are my Brood... who else am I supposed to trust?

14

Oh, hello, well sure, I can take care of him for a few weeks...

now what am I going to do?

15 IV ‑ COMPLICATIONS

Hi, Mew. / Hello, Brian, luv...

16

Fine, I'm taking care of it. Come on, troops...

Damn it, I can fight my own battles, Pale.

you want to oppose me, fine. You know the Rule as well as I.

17

They'll try and kill you, Mew...

look, just promise me, no matter what, you'll watch over Brian, all right?

18

Crap, I thought no one knew about that...

it looks like they are going to use him.

Are they insane? That could hurt us all!

19

Why are you doing this, Pale?

20

Shit! They've gone after Brian...

No! Please not Pale, I still needed him

21 V ‑ CRISIS

What is...happening...to...ME?

It's happening to all of us.

Mew, its turned into a war now.

22

I don't care, Brian. I am not going to 'take' you...

23

It's confirmed, Mew, they let him burn. Pale is gone...

They want a war? I'll give them the bloodiest damn war they ever imagined!

Mew, what's happening to you? When did you become so savage?

24

You've got to come out of it, the rest of us can't take it any longer...

Not yet. It's almost over.

25

We're warning you, you are getting out of control...

What did you expect? You should have known something like this would happen. Remember what happened to the last Rule?

26

If you don't quench the thirst, you will not ever wake up again...

maybe I'll finally get to Dream again, then

That's what happened to the others, please.

27

Why did we come here? / I know who shall slake my thirst...

Why did you come back? You do not get a second warning.

Neither do you...

28 VI ‑ CLIMAX

I'm sorry, you started this all, now I have no choice but to finish it...

where did you get this powerful?

You gave it to me.

29

It is over. The rule is secure. Are you satisfied...?

NO MORE HUNGER...

What am I now? how do I ever pay for all of the blood, all of the destruction

I must not forget what I was. I must remember the dream.

30 VII ‑ RESOLVE

Beyond the Pale...

you've devoted your life to destroying me, why did you pass up your opportunity?

31

Finally, I cross the threshold... but death waits only in transition. Should I know you...?

Prince of the Scarlet City, alone responsible for maintaining the tenuous balance of secrecy, behind which stalk the children of the night, and authority through which the young and headstrong are tempered by the will of the old and dangerous with a minimum of conflict. She is the sole flame of violence which is sanctioned to burn among the immortals. She is responsible to all, and above all in the rule of the phoenix. She is free to command the creation and destruction of her kind, and is charged with resolving conflicts between the Bloodlines and its adversaries. To aid her in this towering responsibility, she is permitted to create a brood of her own, and grant other bloodlines new additions to gain their favor. She is also responsible for calling for the destruction of a wayward vampire, when it is justified. These responsibilities are understood and unspoken, without question. Any who wish to contest the authority of the Prince do so at their own peril. A suit can only be ended by the unanimous agreement of all participants in the dispute. Often this means a full truce or a total annihilation of one side of the participants. Unfortunately, this position has often been reduced to an empty title, with the real power held in the hands of the older and more powerful blood, who use the Prince as their puppet. Morgan strongly suspects this is the intention of those who so titled her. She was an outsider, and hardly the oldest or strongest of bloodlines which could have been chosen in this city. In fact she was merely the eldest of those who had only recently come to this city...

It is a common tradition among status conscious immortals to associate individuals according to the vampire from which their bloodline descended. One of their common misconceptions is that there are few enough bloodlines in existence that they can be known and interpreted foolishly like astrological signs.

First Chord

The job description

Building from scratch

A brood and an Organization

The power behind the throne

Second Chord

Intimate reunions

Intimate enemies

Cherishing the fragile

Third Chord

Madness in the blood

Fathers and Daughters

Inheritance of the Blood

Fourth Chord

Beyond the Pale

Open Development

Option One

The best way to incorporate the threads of the singular duality, the demon within, the death of a lover and the wager starting with the boy creating a crucible of rebirth with exceptional wards of protection, involves having the crucible broken to cause the temporal displacement of the girl, having the boy and girl become lovers, and have the demon within possess the boy, provoking the death of a lover. The girl faces trial and execution, fakes her death to escape, flees to Arden to search the ruins for clues about the origin of the demon and becomes the object of the wager, where her dual infection is translated through the ember within her to become hybridized, while triggering the manifestation of the dual nature she is heir to because of her embryonic exposure. Thus, there is a transition from male to female, artist to muse. Ironically, the boy is infected and "slain" by the girl's venom during her attempt to defend herself from the demon's assault, thus rising from the grave to become her nemesis. The crucible of rebirth is a device of parthenogenic reincarnation, and permits a second incarnation of an individual to be born and grow up while the original is still alive to act as a receptacle for the original's psyche upon death--which for the receptacle amounts to suddenly awakening to the memories of the original's life.

the singular duality

a transition from male to female, artist to muse

the demon within

the death of a lover

the wager

the crucible of rebirth

a device of parthenogenic reincarnation

a second incarnation of the original

a receptacle for the original's psyche upon death

an awakening to the memories of the original's life

exceptional wards of protection

broken

the temporal displacement

a stolen crucible lost at sea

a dark and stormy night

a girl washed up on a beach

the lovers

a boy to the rescue

a girl with no past

the demon within

the demon's assault

her attempt to defend herself

the death of a lover

infected and slain by her venom

rising from the grave to become her nemesis

the trial and execution

faking her death

escaping to Arden

to search the ruins for clues about the origin of the demon

the object of the wager

dual infection translated through the ember within her to become hybridized

manifestation of the dual nature she is heir to because of her embryonic exposure

Source Notes

Introducing Elements

The underlying premise of the revised conceptual paradox is that Morgan, the muse, and Logan, the artist (in consideration of other notes, it was not stated that the boy conceived in the original version of the experiment was named after the artist) are incarnations of the same soul. Because of the broad pool of source material contributing to the project, the story ends up being spread over three generations and creates too many parallel situations. The most effective way to resolve this is to tighten everything down to the point where the parallels are overlapped and merge them into one chain of events. Part of that process is already begun in referring to Logan and Morgan as the artist and the art (muse). A slight shift in the timing of certain events is created, so that Morgan and Logan are both seventeen and (possibly) facing trials to conclude their initiations when the bridging occurs.

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, the pregnancy is 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.

Principle Development

Logan's experiment to embody the soul of creation involved the design and creation of an embryo that could be implanted in a host mother. Unfortunately, two things went amiss. Logan had reached for the soul of creation and grasped nothing, and in holding nothing grasped his own soul, from which he had abstracted his ideal self, his inspiration, his muse. Logan had also intended to use his fiancée as the host mother, and she did not react well when she explored his lab, perused his work and discovered his intentions. The embryo was ready, held in stasis in a special crucible. For fear he would complete his plan the next time they were intimate, she stole the crucible, went outside and threw it into the ocean. The crucible remained intact, riding the tides and currents, until a storm that evening, when the crucible was dashed apart. In that moment, the embryo came to life, full of the promise of what it would grow to become. Because the artist had believed his experiment tapped into the essence of creation itself, he had placed a ward upon his creation, compelling the embryo to call upon the potential of the entity it embodied to protect itself from harm. To that end, the hostile environment the embryo entered triggered that ward, and the embryo called upon the potential of its embodiment for salvation. In short, the embryo needed a womb. It was within the potential of that embryo to become a woman that could provide that womb. It looked within that possible woman for the potential to move from the place she would be to the place she was needed right then--for the potential to encompass a paradox. In that moment, a path was created upon which a girl would become her own mother.

At the point where Morgan was pulled from the future, the girl was involved in an attempt to probe her past. As a child, she was scarred by a trauma that had been buried for most of a decade. When her nights became haunted by nightmares of her childhood abduction, and her days tormented by frightening blackouts and traumatic flashbacks, she set out to discover what really happened to her, to unlock her psychic potential. Ironically, it was the abilities she gained from her ordeal that offered her a means to discover the truth. Unfortunately, her attempt to keep her investigation a secret forced her to proceed without proper guidance. Her research revealed how to proceed, using a special form of astral protection, but her inexperience forced her to proceed randomly, focusing in on the time she wanted to view by trial and error. She jumped backward in greater increments, first a few days, then a few weeks, a month, several months, a year, two more years, five years, a decade… and at that point she had overshot her target date by eight years, coming instead to the time of her conception. Overwhelmed by the imperative of Logan's ward, potential that Morgan had barely tapped suddenly kicked in and moved her bodily into that moment in her past, her flesh manifesting around the naked embryo and offering it a surrogate womb.

Morgan regained consciousness stretched naked on a secluded beach. The cliffs upon which the Academy was built towered above her. Her memory of recent events was scrambled by her temporal displacement. It was not uncommon for her to slip out in the early hours of the morning for a swim, and it was possible she might have had some kind of accident, to explain her blackout and difficulty remembering things. She was searching for where she might have left her clothes when she was discovered by Logan, who was scouring the beaches for the crucible his betrothed had disposed of. He was immediately struck by the girl's appearance, having envisioned it to perfection in the process of designing the embryo. He had been hesitant to impose a specific gender upon the soul of creation, so the embryo had been designed with the capacity to express either sex. Any questions about whether she really was who he thought she was were banished when he saw her picking up the shattered pieces of the crucible from the sand. Clearly the ward had done its job, far in excess of what Logan would have imagined. He instantly came to her aid, offering her his cloak and guiding her back to the Academy. On the way, he probed her gently, shocked by her comments and responses. She identified herself as Morgan of Avon Lea, a psychic Initiate of the Academy--which implied she was a member of his own clan and a peer in many of his own classes.

When Logan took a shortcut to the dorms, Morgan stopped in shock at the sight of the empty lot, asking aloud what had happened to the gymnasium. Logan cautiously prompted her for more information, including her mother's name. Morgan revealed that she had adopted her mother's name after her death, that officially she was named Allannah Morgan. When asked for her father's name, she responded with his name. In a way, that was perfectly logical, though it implied a chain of events that seemed mind boggling. Unfortunately, she realized he had not identified himself, and asked for his name. The fact that she did not recognize him, in spite of the fact that she would have to be used to an older version of him, unsettled him. At the same time, he could not refuse to answer. He confessed that he was Logan of Avon Lea. At that point the pair were forced to face the conclusion that she was somehow in the wrong time. Morgan realized the danger she represented, quickly deciding it would be too risky to present herself at the Academy and even more dangerous to interact with her father. Unfortunately, she could not resist the desire to spend time with him, since he had died before she was born. In horror, she realized that meant he would be dying sometime in the next few months.

Logan heard her argument for leaving before she altered her past, and confronted her with a few disturbing observations. First, he knew no women by the name of Morgan except for her. Second, her failure to recognize him implied that he would not be around long enough for her to develop any memories of him. Third, if he was correct in his suspicions, Morgan was pregnant. Fourth, she had no legal identity in this time, but if she were to marry someone, him for example, she would be established in history. Morgan retorted that his suggestions were ridiculous. First, there was no way she could be her own mother, because not only was that genetically impossible, she was a virgin. Second, if she somehow was--if somehow she was impregnated during the short time absent from her memories, then she already knew when and where she would die! He returned that she could not have physically entered her own past unless her presence was already accounted for in it. When she demanded an explanation, he confided a shocking truth. If she was pregnant, he could tell her approximately how and why, and in both cases, it was the result of a "genetics" experiment he was conducting. He asked her if she personally saw proof of her mother's demise, touched her cold, dead body. He stresses that she might believe she knew when, where and how both of them would die, but unless it was a fact she had confirmed herself, it was foolish to assume their fates were sealed. It was imperative for them to establish the facts of the situation as quickly as possible and take the appropriate actions.

Morgan allowed Logan to take her home, ironically to the same suite of apartments she had lived in at the Academy. He pointed out that normally it took up to a month to determine if a woman was pregnant, but if his experiment was responsible, he would be able to tell after a quick examination. She agreed, and he quickly confirmed the presence of the embryo and the protective wards. Without going into full detail, he revealed that he had been trying to design--for all intents and purposes--a perfect human being. To protect his work, he added a failsafe to his creation, a magical ward that would enlist the potential of the soul he was embodying to protect the physical manifestation from mishap. That was how Morgan could be her own mother. When his betrothed cast the crucible into the sea, the ward activated and deduced that the embryo needed a mother in order to survive. Since it was within the potential of the embryo to become a mother, and apparently within the potential of that woman to step through time, the ward selected Morgan to serve as her own surrogate mother.

Because the whole situation was his fault, Logan repeated his offer of marriage. Morgan was simply stunned, but his logic was impossible to argue with. It hardly mattered that he would officially become her father, when he was in fact her creator. He was also the only person who she could share this secret with. The following days were spent devising a cover for her, beginning with her being found "shipwrecked" and suffering from amnesia on the beach that first morning. Following a final confrontation between Logan and his betrothed, in which the other woman spitefully threw Logan at Morgan, while warning her that he would exploit her, it was less difficult to present an abbreviated courtship to Logan's to the school at large.

The real courtship was an uneasy one, complicated by extraordinary chemistry between them. Because Morgan remained prey to her nightmares and flashbacks, moments of true intimacy occurred. Morgan began to remember what she was doing when she was ripped from her own time. At the end of that first week, the arrangements were all made and the two visited a temple where they were married in a simple ceremony. That night, they finally explored each other, each with a sense of wonder inspired by their beliefs about what the other really was. Unfortunately, the demon of Morgan's childhood was finally offered the chance it has been waiting for. As their intimacy deepened, a rapport formed between the lovers, which left Logan completely open to possession. Unfortunately, the demon's sudden assault, from the depths of Morgan's mind, provoked a strengthening of their rapport, as they instinctively joined forces to fight back. The more desperate the struggle became, the more their minds overlapped, until they formed a gestalt--a unity of mind the demon could use to dislodge them from Logan's brain and take sole possession of his body. With one last incapacitating blow, the demon took flight, leaving the confused and disoriented bride to suffer arrest on charges of murder. By the time a witness reported the observing the departure of Logan on a ship bound for the North, Morgan had sorted herself out.

Eclipsed Development

There is a full tapestry of plots and circumstances upon which the pilot story/series is drawn. For convenience, it is best to summarize the various "chapters" in Morgan's life. The pilot story itself focuses either on the events leading to her infection by a vamp and a were, or events and circumstances resulting from it. While the series plot focuses on the escalation of the northern conflict and a demon hunt, powerful influences existed that establish Morgan's past and future. Her past concerns itself with the matter of her conception, birth, and childhood prior to the massacre, her childhood post trauma developing her foundation skills and abilities, and the events concluding her initiation and provoking her investigation of the ruins. There was always an imperative to have Morgan born divided into male and female incarnations, which called for unusual circumstances of conception and birth. The first solution to this problem also justified the 'child of paradox' theme of the character, and produced a number of close variants. The concept emphasized an experiment conducted by an exceptional student of the art. The complete tale of Morgan/Logan's origin is a complicated story by itself. Thus, the story of her origins can be revealed at a later date in a series focusing on the ordeals endured by her mother/father. Her future, following the conclusion of her quest, concerns itself with her death and rebirth--a paradox that loops her in time to act as her own surrogate mother and opens the door to a larger universe. That is the subject of a third series in which Morgan is reborn and raised in a technologically advanced interstellar civilization, returns to the world of her birth, slips into the past to capture the ember Morgan is reduced to in the final act of the first series, and serve as both a surrogate mother to herself, and an emissary bridging two cultures.

Conception Nineteen

At the conclusion of two years of advanced training an exceptional student of the art conceived of a radical experiment. Seeking to prove the main tenet of the Nova Arcanum by conceiving a human incarnation of the soul of creation, the nineteen year old artist inadvertently turned his life upside down. The process he devised required the artist to embody a personification of the soul of creation and sire it parthenogenically, but a slight miscalculation transformed the artist and resulted in the conception of two children. One became the son of the host mother--the artist's fiancée and unwitting participant in the experiment--the other became the daughter of the artist by way of a spontaneous "correction" that caused the artist to become female and impregnate herself. It was the attempt to harness the full potential of the "soul of creation" that prompted the split conception and transformation of the artist. Instead of grasping the soul of creation the ritual embodied the artist's ideal self and seized his/her own soul. Following the mishap, she consulted her mentor. Finding no way to undo what the artist had done, her mentor fabricated a new past and identity for her, including marriage records to reestablish her as a member of her real family. While the cover for this transition was established, the artist concluded her studies allowing the spell woven by her mentor to weave her presence into the memories of her peers and instructors. Word of the artist's death, in his original identity, prompted his closest friend to seduce her in the guise of consoling her--a night that sealed the end of her former life and the beginning of her new one.

In order for the situation outlined as the conception of Morgan and Logan to occur as stated, Logan's mother would have to have been an accomplice to the experiment. The experiment required the artist to assume the form that personified the "soul of creation" and that would have prevented him from using his fiancée in the experiment without her knowledge, or would at least have prevented her from believing her son was Morgan's half brother. Thus, she would instead be the artist's confidant and ally through the whole ordeal of legitimizing and bearing the children. It is plausible that the artist's best friend was also an accomplice, and his seduction of the artist a complication of the plan to have the friend marry the artist's fiancée while the artist posed as her former self's widow.

Birth Twenty

The artist returned home as the widowed bride of her former self, but only the child she bore compelled her family to welcome her. As a daughter-in-law, she discovered a different side of her family. Her presence caused mixed reactions from all of them, beginning with strong animosity toward her, over the disruption of a marriage pact between the artist's family and that of the artist's fiancée. In addition, the mother blamed the artist for the death of her son, and the artist could not dispute her belief. Even more disturbing was the reactions of the artist's father and brothers, all of whom attempted to seduce her, and the latter of whom pressured her to remarry with one of them. The sister, whom the artist long believed to have hated him, surprised her the most by becoming her one, strong ally and confidant. Next to her, the last person the artist expected to side with her was the woman she should have married, who bore her son. After all, she was the rival who came out of nowhere to steal her fiancé, as far as everyone else was concerned. Instead, she opened up to the artist to express her concern when their children, Logan and Morgan, were engaged at birth to fulfill the pact. By her understanding, the two were half brother and sister. When pressed, the woman confided the story she was told by the artist's mentor, the explanation of his desertion, marriage to another woman, and death, as well as explaining her own haste to marry and legitimize her son's birth. She married the artist's best friend and rival--the same man who succeeded in seducing the artist during the early months of her pregnancy.

Seven Twenty-Seven

The pact resulted in the three parents living together to raise the betrothed children. It was difficult for the artist to be so close to the only people she had ever been intimate with, and be excluded from their intimacy. Ultimately, her familiarity with both of them betrayed her. Under the couple's close scrutiny, her secret finally came out and she revealed the "true nature" of the children. More than one interpretation was given for the result of the artist's experiment. Care was taken to keep the debate discrete, but rumors eventually spread beyond the friends and allies of the artist. The rumors of the children's nature drew the attention of a demon, who named them as the sacrifice to bind it to the service of a powerful demonologist. Taken at the age of seven in a bloody raid, the pair were offered to the demon. After torturous examination, he deemed their parent more suitable to its needs, preserving the traumatized children long enough to serve as bait for the artist. The artist attempted to rescue the children and fell into the demon's trap. Taking possession of the artist, the demon attempted to eliminate the children. Instead, the demon was slain and became trapped in the interstices of their minds as the final trauma awakened their psi potential in time for them to defend themselves. The combined trauma and psychic awakening caused both of them to be diverted into an obscure path of initiation emphasizing the martial arts as a means to discipline the naked powers of their minds. Through their training they grew ever closer, to the delight of their families counting on their union.

Seventeen

Following the death of the artist, Logan's parents continued to raise Morgan. In many ways, Morgan and Logan were siblings, particularly in the sense of sibling rivalry. While fiercely protective of each other, they competed just as fiercely, driving each other on. Inevitably, their intimacy deepened into love and they became lovers. At the conclusion of their initiation, when they indulged in the ultimate intimacy they were capable of--sex in full telepathic rapport--the demon within them was able to break free of the prison of their minds and seize control of one of their bodies. Instinctively driven to protect his lover, the boy became trapped within the girl's mind as the demon stole his body. Worse, because they were joined in rapport, their personalities and experiences remained deeply merged, the two able to confront each other only through a focused effort. Her initial pursuit of the demon was an almost fatal disaster, misinterpreted as a heated lover's quarrel. Following her "abandonment" by "Logan", Morgan became obsessed with the memories unlocked during the tragic union, setting out to explore the ruins where her soul was nearly sacrificed a decade ago. Her hope, at that point, was to learn something about the demon that had stolen Logan's body, in the hopes of discovering some way to return him to his proper place. Instead, her intrusion into Ruins' Deep brought her into the heart of a struggle between vampires and were-tigers who wagered the outcome of their conflict upon the power of their venom to conquer the vaunted immunity of a psychic--specifically, Morgan, whom both desired.

In past attempts to explore the Childhood Demons thread, the climax followed the marriage of Morgan and Logan. It is suitable for the marriage to occur at the conclusion of their initiations, to allow their friends to share the celebration, with the couple settling in the region to pursue advanced training and start a family away from the interference of their family heads. Because of their intimate upbringing, the night of their union invited a more intimate coupling than either had ever dared, opening the door for the demon that possessed the slain artist to emerge and take possession of one of their bodies. The demon's escape was punctuated by bloodshed, as the demon and the bride struggle to kill one another. Morgan ends up under suspicion for the murder of her husband, defending herself with a slightly altered version of the facts of the demon's attack, and escaping execution only because a witness turns up to testify that "Logan" had taken passage to the North. This allows Morgan to arrive in Avon, making a slight side trip on her way to the North in pursuit of Logan.

Seventeen - Ruins' Deep

Even though there have been a number of inspirations for the initiation of Morgan by a vampire and a were, the specifics of her struggle to resist their infections and their attempts to integrate her into their respective clans were always sparse at best.

Late Morning, Day One : Port of Avon, A Public Bath

A girl disembarked from a ship and made her way to a public bath. While resting in a pool of hot water, she slipped once more into traumatized sleep. Nightmares had plagued Morgan since the night her childhood demon escaped. Some were the disturbing images of an alien entity taking control of Logan's body, turning an act of love into an act of devastating brutality. Some were similar and horrifying memories of the same entity taking possession of her mother and trying to kill her, only to be torn to pieces by an invisible force lashing out of Morgan and Logan. Some were of the excruciating physical and mental mutilation they had endured as the demon probed the pair of them, testing their suitability as offerings. Buried in those images of trauma was the memory of something inside her mind snapping and then unfolding, to heal her flesh, to heal and protect her mind, and ultimately to slay the person she loved most in the world. Through all this trauma, she clung to the dreams searching for clues, signs, anything that would lead her to the identity of her nemesis or the place where he had been summoned or bound. They were the only leads she had in the pursuit of Logan's salvation. The only hope they had of becoming separated, or reunited as husband and wife.

To her utter mortification, a strange man was forced to rescue her from drowning as she unconsciously wrestled with her personal demons. Awakening in his firm embrace, the pair of them utterly nude, Morgan was reminded of the depths of her loss. Pushing him away, she retreated from the bath to reflect on the most recent reminder of her purpose in returning to Avon. He pursued her, determined to make sure she was all right and demanding an explanation. Morgan was forced to restrain her phantom lover as they both recognized the man's obvious arousal in the bath, and easily deduced the nature of his interest. In spite of her rebuttals, the man stubbornly attached himself to her as her protector.

Early Afternoon, Day One : The Duke's Keep, Redleaf Manor

Morgan arrived in Avon, having adopted the mantle of an adventurer and responding to an outstanding challenge to scout the ruins of Aeslyn Tear. Following protocol, she sought an audience with the Duke of Avon to gain a commission to explore the ruins. As it was a public audience, the petition caused a sensation, which resulted in an immediate summons before her grandmother and surrogate mother--her future mother-in-law.

Morgan took advantage of the summons to ditch her admirer. To satisfy their families, Morgan asserted that her mission was geared toward reconciling the "breach" with her fiancé, Logan, to fulfill their engagement. Morgan realized it was impossible to remain in her adopted home. Like a few other places, she could never be certain the memories it evoked were her own. Or that she was herself. On occasion, events or circumstances prompted Logan to take full possession of Morgan. On those occasions, a question would rear its ugly head, threatening the unity that had evolved between the them. The question that plagued Morgan was whether or not she was really haunted by Logan. When the demon intruded upon them, their minds had been interwoven, melded into a gestalt. It was possible that his psyche left such an impression upon her mind she merely believed he had been thrust out of his body and into hers, that the Logan in her mind was just an echo of the real Logan. Even "Logan" was not certain, making her mission to find the demon and exorcise it from Logan's body even more imperative. Only then would she find out if he truly was with her this whole time. In either case, the demon had to be banished in order for Logan to resume his life. It was best to assume he was trapped in the shadow of the demon, to resist the allure of the phantom lover who currently resided within her, embracing her with her own power, penetrating her more deeply than any lover. It was better for him, to resist the desire to seize her body for his own, to embrace life in the only form she could offer him. Otherwise, he might do more than haunt her. He might possess her as fully as any demon would.

Dusk, Day One : The Sword and Sorcerer Inn

A were-tiger meets with his subordinates, pointing out how Morgan's intentions to delve into the ruins ran in direct conflict with the desires of vampires and weres to protect the existence--and gain control--of Ruins' Deep. Their adversaries would move immediately to intercept her, when they received word of her formal commission. Morgan was far from the first to stumble into this conflict. Since she was a child, the Duke of Avon had been committed to the excavation of the ruins, only to face constant frustrations as accidents and sabotage drove away all who were employed to unearth the lost city. There were a rare few who had delved into the ruins successfully, making their fortunes and reputations on their unique accomplishments, a group to which Morgan and Logan gained entrance at the tender age of seven.

That evening, after settling in at an exclusive inn, Morgan was toasted by other survivors of past expeditions into the ruins. Morgan noticed her admirer was present again, watching her thoughtfully from across the room. She was distracted from him when she was approached unexpectedly by a former "patron" who questions her intentions. This man, Lloyd, for whom she and Logan were once duped into becoming cat burglars as children, had remained an enigmatic influence in her life--ironically, being one of the few connections she had left to her mother. Hearing of her intention to return to the scene of her mother's death, and her need to find clues to identify the demon responsible for her death, and the "abduction" of Logan, he offered obscure warnings and advice.

Not that he was alone in testing her determination to revisit the depths she miraculously navigated as a child. Among the other survivors of the ruins, a group that unofficially took Morgan and Logan under their wings, she confronted questions about her betrothal to Logan, and his strange disappearance. To Morgan's annoyance, even they attempted to warn her off with word of increasing unrest and mysterious fatalities linked to the ruins.

Evening, Day One : Common Room

A vampire studied Morgan intently from the shadows. He fought to conceal his disgust at finding a pack of weres sniffing at her already. Like him they were conscious of the threat she represented, but unlike her, they were not worthy to be in his presence. It was a shame circumstances forced him to be circumspect, leaving the initial contact with her to surrogates.

Over the course of the evening, Morgan was approached by random adventurers intent on determining the sincerity of her intent to probe the ruins. She was surprised when several men and women asked to accompany her on her mission for a share of the potential profits. Her new companions probed for details about her past, the rumors about her abduction and escape from the ruins, revealing them as the reason they chose to throw in with her on this excursion. Of particular note, her admirer, having been joined by a pair of very powerful looking men, continued to quietly observe Morgan through the course of the night, listening to her private discussion, her response to those who sought to challenge or discourage her, and her statements to those who enquired about joining her. Later that evening, when some arrogant sod attempted to molest Morgan, they casually stepped into the ensuing brawl at her side. After the ruckus, the three drank with Morgan, praising her courage and determination to venture into certain death. When Morgan attempted to extricate herself, her admirer stopped her, forcing her to hear him out. Having listened to the reports and rumors circulating in he wake of her commission to probe the ruins, they had concluded--like the others before them--that she offered the best chance for a successful expedition and offered to enlist their services. Morgan had already taken on a decent number of men, and a few competent women, but having seen them fight, she decided they would be excellent additions to the party. She gave them the names of the other party members, as well as letters of commission they could use to provision themselves. The next day they were to assemble to discuss the details of the mission.

Unfortunately, some of the adventurers had joined the party specifically to ensure the mission's failure. The were-tiger met with a group of his subordinates and assigned them the task of eliminating Lloyd before Morgan spoke to him again.

Night, Day One : A Room, An Apartment, A Mansion

Oblivious to the threat of sabotage, Morgan found herself unable to sleep or lose herself in the embrace of her phantom lover. Prompted by an uneasy premonition, Morgan hunted Lloyd down at once, determined to have a better explanation of his cryptic advice, and inadvertently helped save his life. His anger at her intrusion dissipated instantly when the assassins burst in on them. The cloaked assailants proved to be immune to mortal wounds, prompting Morgan to flee with Lloyd to an obscure mansion.

Once they were secure, Lloyd began to confide, among other things, that the Duke was not the only one interested in exploiting the ruins. Lloyd had a vested interest in keeping such expeditions from succeeding. While he sympathized with her purpose, he had his own interests to protect. In short, she needed his blessings if she wanted to succeed in her mission, and regrettably, his blessings did not come without a price. Morgan had no choice but to proceed. Without mincing words, she was led to another room and introduced to a man of startling youth and beauty. From him, she learned the first part of the price she must pay. Morgan was instructed to steal maps and documents from the residence of a powerful merchant in the Port. That man had been involved in planning, maybe even executing, the abduction of Morgan and Logan a decade ago. She was instructed to strike in broad daylight, and to resist the temptation to confront this man on peril of her life. She was assured that the information she needed to accomplish her mission--with the crime lord's blessing--would be contained in what she stole.

To her dismay, Lloyd informed her, as they leave, that the man she had just met had taken an uncommon interest in her, warning her that he was a very dangerous man to become intimately involved with. Morgan thought she had picked that up clearly herself. She had noticed the enthralling quality the man possessed, and did not doubt that was as lethal as he was seductive. Confident in the immunities granted to her by her psychic gifts, she assured Lloyd that she had no interest in betraying her fiancé.

Dawn—Dusk, Day Two : Streets of Avon, Markets, Port Avon, Another Mansion

A vampire stalked Morgan undetected. He had waited for her to expose herself, but clearly she required more delicate handling. The arrangements were already made to introduce him to her party, however. All that remained were the sacrifices necessary to permit him to walk among mortals in the sun.

Making it to bed a couple hours before dawn, Morgan slept through the morning. After a quick brunch, she met up with the people she recruited. The party consisted of her admirer from the bath and his two companions, a sorcerer accompanied by a pair she had not met before--a conjurer and a female cleric, an elf she knew personally and a drow. The tension in the group was obvious, but they all swore their personal differences would be resolved before the start of the mission. Not entirely convinced, she left all of the arrangements for provisioning the party under the supervision of the one individual she was previously acquainted with. Morgan disappeared for a while to scope out the second story job she had been given. A quick survey of the target residence convinced her she could not follow the advice her new patron gave her. The closest she could manage was to strike at dusk, when the evening light provided her some cover.

Unfortunately, her reconnaissance had not gone unnoticed. Nor had her tail. That evening, when she broke into the mansion, she was surprised by the ease of the caper. Nothing went wrong until she made her escape. With frightening efficiency, Morgan was stalked into a corner and confronted by a dozen mysterious figures. After swiftly disarming and overpowering her, they confer to identify her, the objects she had stolen and her publicly stated mission. For daring to probe into the mysteries of the ruins, they promised her a prolonged and gruesome death. Ironically, some of the least trusted members of the party arrived and quickly proved their worth rescuing her from her assailants. Morgan later cursed herself for falling into that trap, knowing she should have expected to find a cult of some sort associated with her offering to a demon. Particularly since she had been clearly informed about the resident's involvement in the affair. On the other hand, the demon's secrets would be easier to discover if they were held by human hands or minds. No doubt, the rogue demon that stole Logan's body was not the only demon these cultists consorted with. She could expect to face others of its ilk in the depths. Grateful of the backup, despite concern about the risks--and uncertainty about some of her new compatriots--she remained committed.

Morning, Day Three : The Sanctuary, Temple of Arden

Morgan delivered the maps and documents to Lloyd's agent at the Temple of Arden the next morning, after sleeping in once again. Morgan was surprised to see him in such a sacred place, but he revealed that it was the only place where he was ever relieved of the burdens he bore, confiding that it was an excellent place to watch the sun rise. After reviewing the paperwork, he slipped everything into a satchel and praised Morgan on the success of her caper. Morgan reminded him of their agreement, wanting to know if she had Lloyd's blessings--after seeing him pack up the maps she allegedly needed. He reminded her that there was a price involved; that she must take him along as her guide and obey his instructions during the excursion. He assured her he was not attempting to assume the leadership of the party, but only controlling the paths they could take. With him in possession of the maps, she could hardly protest. She was just grateful that the price turned out to be something so innocuous.

Unfortunately, she was not done with ill omens. Before she could depart from the temple she was summoned before the goddess Arden, the patron of her people. Such an audience was a rare honor, and one Morgan had only once before. Morgan and Logan had been so traumatized by their ordeal and the awakening of their psychic abilities, Arden had been required to tend to them. In the present, Arden expressed her dismay at Morgan's intention to return to the ruins. She instantly detected the presence of Logan in Morgan, however, and demanded an explanation. Morgan briefly explained what happened to them. Revealing her intentions to track down a rogue demon, and recover Logan's body, she received the goddess' blessings. Even so, Arden warned her that she was in great danger on this mission, that the consequences of this adventure could be a life altering as her two encounters with the demon that plagued her. Advised to be wary of the men she enlisted, Morgan could only sigh. That much had already been obvious to her.

Dawn, Day Four : The North Road, Gale of Tears Manor

With the hope that the last obstacle had presented itself, Morgan embarked upon her mission at the first opportunity. At dawn the next day, the entire party was assembled and the last of their preparations checked. Introductions were made all around, to accommodate their new guide, and not surprisingly tensions remained strained between the men of the group--and in a different way between the men and the women as well. Amazingly, they all managed to differ to her despite their posturing and animosity. Not for the first time, Morgan sensed that some of the men might have more than a passing interest in her.

On the way to the ruins, the party had an unpleasant encounter with a band of brigands. Caught off guard while establishing camp the first evening, the brigands were able to fall on the party while it was split up, and threaten them with superior numbers. After informing them of the party's lack of funds, hoping to discourage them, the brigands reveal that they were being paid enough just to ensure the party's demise, rambling on to propose the seizure of the party's equipment and women as a bonus for their trouble. Slaughter ensued, with the brigands numbers being reduced to nine before they retreated in rout. In the mayhem, the party's guide succeeds in confirming his reputation as an assassin, and the drow shows a similar proficiency.

Apart from that excitement, the first leg of the expedition was calm enough, as they entered the ruins on the third morning and proceeded directly to the manor through which Morgan once exited the ruins' depths. Before evening, the party managed to complete a full reconnaissance of the manor, acquiring a few small treasures and artifacts and confronting a pack of lycanthropes--as identified rather venomously by some of the men. Those men became upset when Morgan stopped to parlay with them, rejecting their suggestion to wipe out the nest. When the guide and cleric scolded her for risking infection, Morgan confided the secret of her immunity. Through the night, they were tested by the denizens of the deep that emerged to haunt the ruins by the light of the moon.

Day Five—Seven : Foundations, Catacombs, Ruins' Deep

The next day, they descended into the foundations of the manor, discovering the bones of the keep that once stood in its place. They stumbled across and eliminated a nest of vampires before venturing down into the catacombs linking the surface to the buried city.

On their third day in Ruins' Deep, their guide mysteriously vanished on them. A quick search of the area turned up no pitfalls that might have claimed him. Angry that he would abandon them, Morgan retraced her path from memory, seeking out the place where she was to have been sacrificed. The closer she got, the sharper her memory of the traumatic events became, until she found the site of the ritual. Her companions had taken note of the broken and shattered wards as they crossed their thresholds, and retreated to a safer location, forcing Morgan to be separated from the party. At ground zero, Morgan relived the final moments of the ordeal she shared with Logan and realized that the fury of their struggles against demonic possession, when their powers first awakened and were untamed, had been responsible for shattering the mystical prison. The horrible suspicion crystallized, a host of demons had been entombed in the city during the war of the gods, and she had unwittingly set them loose upon the world.

Morgan returned to inform the party that the danger was long past, any demons freed here escaped a decade ago. Not surprisingly, the group had kept busy while she was away. A wealth of sacred and holy relics of the age of the gods was added to the other artifacts gathered along the way, and the party moved that it was time to depart. Morgan vetoed the suggestion, insisting she must study the area she once disturbed and find out what demons were unleashed in order to be able to hunt them down. The guide showed up unexpectedly, angry at Morgan for continuing on her own against their agreement. She did not spare him her anger at wordlessly abandoning them. When he explained that he had no choice in the matter, wasting no time to lead a dragon away from the party before it could slaughter them, Morgan was not impressed. While dragons had not faded into myth, they were certainly extinct! Morgan relieved him of the maps, leaving him under guard with the party as she returned to conclude her investigation.

Evening, Day Seven : Demon Crypts

A desperate search eventually turned up a single demon, still bound by protective wards. This demon was the only clue Morgan had about the demons that escaped, and the rogue who stole Logan's flesh. The demon tempted her with a number of appeals, before Morgan recognized and employed one of the artifacts she found to trap and bind the demon to her service.

Morgan was not surprised to emerge from the demon crypts (where none of her party dared to accompany her) only to discover that part of the group had abandoned the rest with the bulk of the treasure. The surprise was that the real traitor was not the one she had been expecting. With her remaining allies, Morgan set out to return to the surface. On the way, a disturbance led them to discover that the party traitors had taken a wrong turn, stumbling across and releasing another demon. In spite of their betrayal, Morgan could not leave them to their fate. She handed over the map she had confiscated to her admirer, the most trusted of the remaining group, instructing him to lead the others out to safety, then went to the aid of the traitors.

Night, Day Seven

Not surprisingly, when Morgan engaged the demon, the traitors used the distraction to flee. After a difficult battle, where she was unexpectedly joined by the guide and her admirer, Morgan managed to slay the demon. The two men confronted each other, in a tense discussion concerning Morgan's quest and the consequences of this disturbance, while Morgan started to track down the deserters. Morgan was quickly joined by the two men, who insisted on escorting her and explaining why they had accompanied her into Ruins' Deep.

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.

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.

Open Project Development

Prior

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 a 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.

Imperatives

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 that 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.

Principle Development

All notes are subject to revision. Notes in black are from the initial fusion of ideas to support the development of the series. Notes in red are comments on revision and override the fusion notes as specified. Taken together, these notes are the pool from which the story is drawn.

Logan's experiment to embody the soul of creation involved the design and creation of an embryo that could be implanted in a host mother. Unfortunately, two things went amiss. Logan had reached for the soul of creation and grasped nothing, and in holding nothing grasped his own soul, from which he had abstracted his ideal self, his inspiration, his muse. Logan had also intended to use his fiancée as the host mother, and she did not react well when she explored his lab, perused his work and discovered his intentions. The embryo was ready, held in stasis in a special crucible. For fear he would complete his plan the next time they were intimate, she stole the crucible, went outside and threw it into the ocean. The crucible remained intact, riding the tides and currents, until a storm that evening, when the crucible was dashed apart. In that moment, the embryo came to life, full of the promise of what it would grow to become. Because the artist had believed his experiment tapped into the essence of creation itself, he had placed a ward upon his creation, compelling the embryo to call upon the potential of the entity it embodied to protect itself from harm. To that end, the hostile environment the embryo entered triggered that ward, and the embryo called upon the potential of its embodiment for salvation. In short, the embryo needed a womb. It was within the potential of that embryo to become a woman that could provide that womb. It looked within that possible woman for the potential to move from the place she would be to the place she was needed right then--for the potential to encompass a paradox. In that moment, a path was created upon which a girl would become her own mother.

At the point where Morgan was pulled from the future, the girl was involved in an attempt to probe her past. As a child, she was scarred by a trauma that had been buried for most of a decade. When her nights became haunted by nightmares of her childhood abduction, and her days tormented by frightening blackouts and traumatic flashbacks, she set out to discover what really happened to her, to unlock her psychic potential. Ironically, it was the abilities she gained from her ordeal that offered her a means to discover the truth. Unfortunately, her attempt to keep her investigation a secret forced her to proceed without proper guidance. Her research revealed how to proceed, using a special form of astral projection, but her inexperience forced her to proceed randomly, focusing in on the time she wanted to view by trial and error. She jumped backward in greater increments, first a few days, then a few weeks, a month, several months, a year, two more years, five years, a decade… and at that point she had overshot her target date by eight years, coming instead to the time of her conception. Overwhelmed by the imperative of Logan's ward, potential that Morgan had barely tapped suddenly kicked in and moved her bodily into that moment in her past, her flesh manifesting around the naked embryo and offering it a surrogate womb.

In the first pass, it was assumed that Morgan suffered only a mild disorientation, and quickly discovered her temporal displacement and pregnancy. That puts the burden of coping with the paradox on her mind from the outset, which was not how the concept was originally envisioned. Because the necessary circumstances establish themselves in a natural way, it makes more sense if she is rendered amnesiac by her transit into her own past. Her memory loss is not absolute, but clearly the result of something installed within her mind that actively obscures her memories. Her name comes back to her with a little effort, and her skills and abilities assert themselves as circumstances present themselves. But specific details of her past elude her. In that way, her nightmares and flashbacks serve a greater purpose in guiding her, they are the only keys to her past. While certain elements of the embryo's design remain the same, their application ensures that Logan can not instantly recognize Morgan as the product of his experiment. She bore a distinct resemblance to an idealized version of Logan, with traits possibly inherited from his betrothed. To ensure a suitable embodiment of the soul of creation, the embryo was designed to possess developmental polymorphism. Logan and his betrothed provided the basic genetic templates for the experiment, since they would be posing as the child's parents. The child would also be able to assimilate and adapt other genetic profiles in order to refine his or her embodiment. Which happens later in the pregnancy, providing Morgan a number of refinements. Between Morgan's appearance, the timing and nature of her arrival, and her lack of a past suggest to Logan that she might have been created by the ward. Of course his assumption is that the Morgan was the direct result, that the ward forced the embryo to develop into a full fledged adult in order to survive in the world. From the odd bits of memory and training she does exhibit, it is not difficult to imagine that he and his betrothed served as templates for Morgan's accelerated development.

Morgan regained consciousness stretched naked on a secluded beach. The cliffs upon which the Academy was built towered above her. Her memory of recent events was scrambled by her temporal displacement. It was not uncommon for her to slip out in the early hours of the morning for a swim, and it was possible she might have had some kind of accident, to explain her blackout and difficulty remembering things. She was searching for where she might have left her clothes when she was discovered by Logan, who was scouring the beaches for the crucible his betrothed had disposed of. He was immediately struck by the girl's appearance, having envisioned it to perfection in the process of designing the embryo. He had been hesitant to impose a specific gender upon the soul of creation, so the embryo had been designed with the capacity to express either sex. Any questions about whether she really was who he thought she was were banished when he saw her picking up the shattered pieces of the crucible from the sand. Clearly the ward had done its job, far in excess of what Logan would have imagined. He instantly came to her aid, offering her his cloak and guiding her back to the Academy. On the way, he probed her gently, shocked by her comments and responses. She identified herself as Morgan of Avon Lea, a psychic Initiate of the Academy--which implied she was a member of his own clan and a peer in many of his own classes.

When Logan took a shortcut to the dorms, Morgan stopped in shock at the sight of the empty lot, asking aloud what had happened to the gymnasium. Logan cautiously prompted her for more information, including her mother's name. Morgan revealed that she had adopted her mother's name after her death, that officially she was named Allannah Morgan. When asked for her father's name, she responded with his name. In a way, that was perfectly logical, though it implied a chain of events that seemed mind boggling. Unfortunately, she realized he had not identified himself, and asked for his name. The fact that she did not recognize him, in spite of the fact that she would have to be used to an older version of him, unsettled him. At the same time, he could not refuse to answer. He confessed that he was Logan of Avon Lea. At that point the pair were forced to face the conclusion that she was somehow in the wrong time. Morgan realized the danger she represented, quickly deciding it would be too risky to present herself at the Academy and even more dangerous to interact with her father. Unfortunately, she could not resist the desire to spend time with him, since he had died before she was born. In horror, she realized that meant he would be dying sometime in the next few months.

Logan heard her argument for leaving before she altered her past, and confronted her with a few disturbing observations. First, he knew no women by the name of Morgan except for her. Second, her failure to recognize him implied that he would not be around long enough for her to develop any memories of him. Third, if he was correct in his suspicions, Morgan was pregnant. Fourth, she had no legal identity in this time, but if she were to marry someone, him for example, she would be established in history. Morgan retorted that his suggestions were ridiculous. First, there was no way she could be her own mother, because not only was that genetically impossible, she was a virgin. Second, if she somehow was--if somehow she was impregnated during the short time absent from her memories, then she already knew when and where she would die! He returned that she could not have physically entered her own past unless her presence was already accounted for in it. When she demanded an explanation, he confided a shocking truth. If she was pregnant, he could tell her approximately how and why, and in both cases, it was the result of a "genetics" experiment he was conducting. He asked her if she personally saw proof of her mother's demise, touched her cold, dead body. He stresses that she might believe she knew when, where and how both of them would die, but unless it was a fact she had confirmed herself, it was foolish to assume their fates were sealed. It was imperative for them to establish the facts of the situation as quickly as possible and take the appropriate actions.

Morgan allowed Logan to take her home, ironically to the same suite of apartments she had lived in at the Academy. He pointed out that normally it took up to a month to determine if a woman was pregnant, but if his experiment was responsible, he would be able to tell after a quick examination. She agreed, and he quickly confirmed the presence of the embryo and the protective wards. Without going into full detail, he revealed that he had been trying to design--for all intents and purposes--a perfect human being. To protect his work, he added a failsafe to his creation, a magical ward that would enlist the potential of the soul he was embodying to protect the physical manifestation from mishap. That was how Morgan could be her own mother. When his betrothed cast the crucible into the sea, the ward activated and deduced that the embryo needed a mother in order to survive. Since it was within the potential of the embryo to become a mother, and apparently within the potential of that woman to step through time, the ward selected Morgan to serve as her own surrogate mother.

Because the whole situation was his fault, Logan repeated his offer of marriage. Morgan was simply stunned, but his logic was impossible to argue with. It hardly mattered that he would officially become her father, when he was in fact her creator. He was also the only person who she could share this secret with. The following days were spent devising a cover for her, beginning with her being found "shipwrecked" and suffering from amnesia on the beach that first morning. Following a final confrontation between Logan and his betrothed, in which the other woman spitefully threw Logan at Morgan, while warning her that he would exploit her, it was less difficult to present an abbreviated courtship to Logan's to the school at large.

The real courtship was an uneasy one, complicated by extraordinary chemistry between them. Because Morgan remained prey to her nightmares and flashbacks, moments of true intimacy occurred. Morgan began to remember what she was doing when she was ripped from her own time. At the end of that first week, the arrangements were all made and the two visited a temple where they were married in a simple ceremony. That night, they finally explored each other, each with a sense of wonder inspired by their beliefs about what the other really was. Unfortunately, the demon of Morgan's childhood was finally offered the chance it has been waiting for. As their intimacy deepened, a rapport formed between the lovers, which left Logan completely open to possession. Unfortunately, the demon's sudden assault, from the depths of Morgan's mind, provoked a strengthening of their rapport, as they instinctively joined forces to fight back. The more desperate the struggle became, the more their minds overlapped, until they formed a gestalt--a unity of mind the demon could use to dislodge them from Logan's brain and take sole possession of his body. With one last incapacitating blow, the demon took flight, leaving the confused and disoriented bride to suffer arrest on charges of murder. By the time a witness reported the observing the departure of Logan on a ship bound for the North, Morgan had sorted herself out.

In past attempts to explore the Childhood Demons thread, the climax followed the marriage of Morgan and Logan. It is suitable for the marriage to occur at (or after) the conclusion of their initiations, to allow their friends to share the celebration, with the couple settling in the region to pursue advanced training and start a family away from the interference of their family heads. Because of their intimate upbringing, the night of their union invited a more intimate coupling than either had ever dared, opening the door for the demon that possessed the slain artist to emerge and take possession of one of their bodies. The demon's escape was punctuated by bloodshed, as the demon and the bride struggle to kill one another. Morgan ends up under suspicion for the murder of her husband, defending herself with a slightly altered version of the facts of the demon's attack, and escaping execution only because a witness turns up to testify that "Logan" had taken passage to the North. This allows Morgan to arrive in Avon, making a slight side trip on her way to the North in pursuit of Logan.

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

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

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

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

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

Morgan Na Avon Lea

Morgan returned from the Academy at Aeryn Tear determined to face the demons of her childhood. An only child, Morgan was orphaned when she was seven years old. The lone witness, and obviously the sole survivor of the massacre that claimed the lives of her parents, she alone knew what the expedition into the ruins of Aeslyn Tear had unearthed. It had taken ten years of training to master the naked psychic potential unleashed within her that tragic night and fully comprehend the horror her parents unwittingly helped loose upon the world. Armed with the psychic and physical disciplines necessary for her to become a paladin of the goddess, Morgan hoped to discover who her parents had been, find out why they had died and lay their ghosts to rest.

[Revisional Pass]

Morgan, an only child, was orphaned when she was seven years old. The trauma of witnessing the massacre that claimed the lives of her parents shattered her young psyche, unleashing her full, naked psychic potential. Unable to deal with her in this condition, her surviving family abandoned her on the steps of the temple of the goddess Arden. Morgan recovered quickly in the goddess's care, healing from the trauma and adapting to the strange powers it awakened. She was sent to the Aeryn Tear Academy for training in the physical and psychic disciplines necessary for her to become a paladin of the goddess. When she returned ten years later, she ached to confront the ruins of her childhood and find out who her parents had been and why they had died.

The temple of the goddess crested the ridge dividing the Port of Avon and the City of Avon with a commanding view of the Aeslyn Tear Ruins and the former Seat of Avon. The largest port, and third largest city in Arden, Avon was unique for not having a reigning lord. House Avon had traditionally been the servants of the goddess and the defenders of the throne, so the Seat of Arden lay within the Avon Domain. When House Avon fell, and no legitimate heir could be found, the crown prince was appointed regent and ever since the domain had been under the indirect rule of the throne. The port and city were both home to vampire communities, each under the thumb of vampire princes, while the villages and countryside were both haven and hunting grounds for shape-shifter clans headed and protected by the tiger clan--tigers being the fiercest natural predators of the north.

Morgan had a certain fame for being the sole survivor of the Avon massacres. Among the people she sought out, there were a number of individuals notably opposed to the excavation of Aeslyn Tear. Because people were willing to talk to her, Morgan was able to begin unraveling a web of intrigue that tied into a series of very recent deaths. Her suspicions were aroused when she noticed that these same people were being murdered shortly after she talked to them or before she ever reached them. None she talked to would explain their reasons for discouraging the excavation project, but deeper probing revealed that they were all representatives of the vampire and were communities. From her own nightmares, she was able to discover the link between the current slayings and the massacre she had witnessed. Her parents had been killed by vampires.

The Myth of the Goddess

The Rise of the Phoenix presents a significant break point that can be exploited by A Child of Paradox, as well as encompassing story elements relevant to both stories. In A Child of Paradox, the heroine delves into the mystery of her own origin only to realize that she plays the central role in her own paradoxical conception and birth. To wit, she comes of age as the orphaned daughter of an avatar of the goddess. She was seven years old when she survived her abduction and offering to a demon only to witness the apparent death of her mother. At seventeen, before assuming the mantle of a paladin herself, she returns to the site of her mother's death only to be inexplicably transported into the past where she discovers no trace of her mother's existence--until she is mistaken for her own mother by a group that is stunned to find her alive. To her horror, the only people who can confirm her mother even lived had all witnessed her death several months earlier. Concluding that a near brush with death caused the confusion and disorientation she obviously suffers, they attempt to restore her memory--arousing doubts about everything in her mind, as the general details of her mother's life strongly parallel her experiences, as if the life she remembers is a dream's distortion of these events. Gradually, she adjusts to her adopted life, entering the service of the goddess and bearing an incarnation of the goddess as her daughter. All the while, she is haunted by the goddess' nemesis, until at age twenty-seven she is forced to escape his torment through the gate, orphaning her daughter, but taking possession of her body on her return to the side of her death ten years later.

Only when she returns home to consult her goddess is she able to begin sorting out her confusion. To her shock, the goddess reveals that the person described in her friends' tales had in fact been her--that life an attempt to escape from the grip of her nemesis. The story of the god and the goddess unfolds. The goddess reveals that she attempted to exploit the power of rebirth to create an offshoot of her nemesis, and seized possession of it in the hopes of breaking free from his enslavement. Unfortunately, he had displaced her by simply terminating the root incarnation and migrating into the offshoot. The startling thing, however, was the fact that Morgan (being consistent with the heroine of The Rise of the Phoenix) had somehow taken possession of that incarnation in her migration from the future.

Obviously this approach produces a number of complications entering the Rise of the Phoenix story arc. However, there are variations on the Child of Paradox origin story that are made viable and are compatible with the Rise of the Phoenix storyline. In short, the story of a boy turned girl, a child turned paradoxical parent, and the goddess breaking free of her nemesis. Through temporal manipulation, the goddess engineered her escape from her nemesis.

The first incarnation of the goddess was conceived and born male as an offshoot of her nemesis. This boy's transformation into a girl was part the result of the passage of the goddess into her first incarnation at the crux of the paradox, and part the result of becoming self possessed coming into her power. At the age of seven, when the boy first turned female, he did not understand what had happened and willed himself to revert to "normal" unwittingly sealing away the power he possessed--becoming effectively latent and thus a superb candidate for magical initiation. His initiation gradually eroded the self imposed seal, until the power manifested itself again at age sixteen. Of course the manifestation of the power also triggered the transformation to female again. Through sheer will, he could restrain his power and revert to male form, but over the course of a year he came to understand the power and transformation was the expression of his, or rather her, true self. In hopes of learning more, she allowed the power to guide her further, but she never expected the power to drag her twenty years into the past. Once it did, however, she was in a position to confront the goddess' nemesis. As intended, the god took a profound interest in the mysterious boy-girl, especially once the goddess proclaimed she was her paladin and personal avatar.

Morgan still did not know why, however, and began to pursue answers more aggressively. Like most people, Morgan was unaware that Avon held a highly coveted and disputed territory in the underworld. The killings Morgan was investigating were the result of a territorial dispute between the tiger clans and the prince of the city. The slain were a mix of shape-shifter casualties, mauled vampire retainers and the remains of an occasional interrupted meal--prey that no predator lived long enough to properly dispose of. The turf war between the were-tigers and the vampires was fought covertly, a deadly chess game of ambushes and assassinations in an ever mounting feud. Normal routines and habits became disrupted, producing a trail of bodies. Morgan's big break was discovering that they were fighting for control over Ruin's Deep.

Aeslyn Tear, the city once smothered by the wrath of the gods was far more extensive and surprisingly intact than anyone suspected, a sprawling underground metropolis dwarfing the port and city and underlying the surrounding countryside. Morgan had hardly begun her hunt when the prince of the city called a truce with the alpha male, to point out that their war endangered them all, and proposed a wager to settle their claim to the ruins. Initially, the object of the wager was simply to eliminate Morgan, but she proved to be something of a prize herself. As Morgan would make either a fine consort, the truce almost disintegrated over their attempts to conquer her. The increased stakes prompted a change in the wager, 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.

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 before 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.

At first it seemed that the prince was the victor, when Morgan died and rose as a vampire. 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. A were would turn overnight and swiftly gain vitality. Then as the hunger seized her, she transformed into a tiger, proving that she had been turned simultaneously into a blood-drinker and a man-eater. In a way, the dual transformation proved Morgan's salvation, her tiger form making it far easier to slake her blood thirst at the same time she fed her hunger for fresh meat by leading her instinctively to animal prey.

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. 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. These benefits did not console Morgan for the loss of her humanity, however. As she became aware of the seductiveness of human prey, she decided to end her unnatural existence before she damned herself by succumbing to them. 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.

Morgan regained her humanity through what she believed to be the intervention of her goddess when she attempted to commit suicide.

[Original Pass]

Morgan was an orphan chosen to become the paladin of the goddess. Nothing was known of her past or origins prior to her mysterious arrival at the temple of the goddess when she was seven years old. Morgan herself could offer little enlightenment. A victim of her own psychic ability, the young girl's mind had been overwhelmed by an endless flood of sensation from the moment of her birth--any natural adjustment or conditioning she had to cope with her sensitivity was blown away by a traumatic ordeal immediately prior to her abandonment at the temple. Morgan was enrolled at the academy to gain control of her psychic gifts and receive the training she would need to become a paladin. At the age of seventeen she completed her initiation and received her first mission from the temple.

It seemed a simple trial, to investigate a series of local slayings and hunt down the men or monsters responsible. The mission was literally in her own back yard, her summer home and stomping grounds while on recess from the academy. The temple of the goddess crested the ridge dividing the Port of Avon and the City of Avon with a commanding view of the Aeslyn Tear Ruins and the former Seat of Avon. The largest port, and third largest city in Arden, it was unique for not having a reigning lord. House Avon had traditionally been the servants of the goddess and the defenders of the throne, so the Seat of Arden lay within the Avon Domain. When House Avon fell, and no legitimate heir could be found, the crown prince was appointed regent and ever since the domain had been under the indirect rule of the throne.

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In spite of her familiarity with the region, Morgan's mission quickly put her on unstable ground. Like most people, Morgan was unaware that Avon was also a highly coveted and disputed territory in the underworld. The port and city were both home to vampire communities, each under the thumb of vampire princes, while the villages and countryside were both haven and hunting grounds for shape-shifter clans headed and protected by the tiger clan--tigers being the fiercest natural predators of the north. The killings Morgan was investigating were the result of a territorial dispute between the tiger clans and the prince of the city over the Aeslyn Tear Ruins. The buried, ancient city once smothered by the wrath of the gods was far more extensive and surprisingly intact than anyone suspected, a sprawling underground metropolis dwarfing the port and city and underlying the surrounding countryside.

The turf war between the were-tigers and the vampires was fought covertly, a deadly chess game of ambushes and assassinations in an ever mounting feud. Normal routines and habits became disrupted, producing a trail of bodies. The slain Morgan examined were a mix of shape-shifter casualties, mauled vampire retainers and the remains of an occasional interrupted meal--prey that no predator lived long enough to properly dispose of. Morgan had hardly begun her hunt when the prince of the city called a truce with the alpha male, to point out that their war endangered them all, and proposed a wager to settle their claim to the ruins. Initially, the object of the wager was simply to eliminate Morgan, but she proved to be something of a prize herself. As Morgan would make either a fine consort, the truce almost disintegrated over their attempts to conquer her. The increased stakes prompted a change in the wager, 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.

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 before 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. 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 first it seemed that the prince was the victor, when Morgan died and rose as a vampire. A were would turn overnight and swiftly gain vitality. Then as the hunger seized her, she transformed into a tiger, proving that she had been turned simultaneously into a blood-drinker and a man-eater. In a way, the dual transformation proved Morgan's salvation, her tiger form making it far easier to slake her blood thirst at the same time she fed her hunger for fresh meat by leading her instinctively to animal prey.

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. 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. These benefits did not console Morgan for the loss of her humanity, however. As she became aware of the seductiveness of human prey, she decided to end her unnatural existence before she damned herself by succumbing to them. 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.

Morgan regained her humanity through what she believed to be the intervention of her goddess when she attempted to commit suicide. It took a decade, during which Morgan bore a daughter of the goddess, for the two sires to realize that the were and vampire aspects of Morgan had simply become dormant in response to her resurrection. Morgan's dual turning foiled the terms of the wager, so once more the deal was revised. The contest now became a matter of conquering Morgan herself--a distinct challenge since she had rebuffed both her sires and made her escape. To become the master of Ruin's Deep, they had to woo this twice cursed immortal girl and make her a willing consort. Each pursued the matter with a ruthless grace, an ongoing hunt to run her down and cut her off from any means of support apart from themselves. For ninety years they conducted this merciless and nurturing pursuit, teaching and guiding her while razing or rending every nest or companion she tried to make. Those same years saw the rise of the Athelon Empire under the rule of a conqueror conspicuous for his seeming immortality.

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Open Notes: Clipboard

There are several ideas for the origin of her psychic ability. In one approach, she taps into her psychic potential resisting demonic possession. In a more dramatic approach she gains that ability, in particular telepathy, telekinesis and regeneration, as the result of being consumed, body and soul, by the demon and reclaiming that body from the demon when it reconstitutes it for its own use or replicating the process to resurrect herself. This is an approach that does not require the cultivation of a male aspect of Morgan, divided or reincarnated, to achieve the body/identity theft developed in those variants. It gives Morgan the motive of trying to reclaim her life from an usurper, keeps her true to her inspirations and remains within the scope of her natural life.

The models for Morgan both evolved from or evolved into individuals with humble beginnings. Caitlyn evolved into Avonlea, who despite being born a were-tiger, was still a modest character. The first version of Morgan Wildmuir was the child of altered humans and possessed extraordinary powers over space, time and the mind, but was reinvented as a normal girl who evolved into those powers as the result of being turned into a vampire. Lauren Sinclair was another variation of the same character in whom the human qualities of Caitlyn and Morgan merged, and toward whom Avonlea was evolving.

Thus, Morgan was merely the daughter of a courtesan and a bard. Both of her parents had possessed the talent and potential for advanced magic, but neither had a sponsor to the Academy for formal training. In spite of this, they each managed to exceed the limits of common magic and became successful enough to sponsor their daughter to the Academy. Unfortunately, by testing the highest among the girls in her group, she came to the attention of an agent of the Cult of Morduin who identified her as a suitable sacrifice to free the demon from its prison. She was abducted and taken into the ruins where she was devoured body and soul by the demon.

In the process of being consumed and used to fuel the demon's resurrection, her mind was forced open and the powers demonstrated by the demon during her dissection and the reconstitution of her body for its use were seared into her psyche. She gained the powers of telepathy and telekinesis the demon used to dismember her and the power of regeneration the demon used to resurrect itself in her image, replicating the process to resurrect herself. In the time it took her to collect herself after the demon expended her in its own resurrection and resurrect herself, the demon was able to return in her place and take over her life with the help of its servants.

Morgan was forced to survive in the depths of the ruins for several weeks before finding her way back to the surface. The power that had been awakened in her the night of her sacrifice remained wildly active, and drew the attention of a demon hunter who took her under his wing once he determined she was human. Morgan was not able to offer more than her name, the traumatic ordeal had severely disrupted her memory. Like many seasoned magic users, Logan had developed and trained psychic abilities of his own. He probed her wounded mind and concluded that a demon was responsible for the traumatic, psychic rape.

Initially, he had no intention of keeping her or making her his protégé. He attempted to heal her, but damage was far greater than he could repair, so he delivered her to the temple of the goddess. After the goddess did her best to heal Morgan, she returned the girl to Logan and named him her guardian and instructed him to train her as his successor. Once he discovered, through his own investigation, that an impostor--without the demon who raped Morgan--had claimed her identity and taken over her life, he understood that Morgan needed to master his trade if she wanted to reclaim her life.

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The melding of male and female human potential was originally explored as the basis of Morgan's psychic ability, but efforts to realize that idea frequently became hung up on the division of the character into male and female incarnations. Some methods of resolving the dual sex impulse begin with the character born male or female and reborn as the opposite sex through possession, transformation and parthenogenic displacement. The ring of regeneration is one of the catalysts used to accomplish this, as is the demonic possession scenario. As noted elsewhere, the ring and the demon can be combined into a singular element making it the device for possession, transformation and division.

An alternative to division is possession, transformation and reincarnation by a human agent associated with the ring. The initial impulse involved Morgan finding the ring, being turned male and being possessed by Logan who reincarnates her as a boy to free both of them from the ring. Logan raises the boy, making him his protégé, but when he reaches the age when her life was interrupted, she awakens and reasserts herself. It takes Morgan a while to come to terms with being a girl and a boy, but the experiences of both lives quickly pool together in a new perspective and psychic awakening. Morgan applies her new talents to hunting demons, but in one traumatic encounter where she nearly succumbs to demonic possession, Morgan is split into her male and female aspects.

Morduin and Logan had killed each other several hundred years earlier. While Logan had been trapped in the ring upon his death, which remained in the pool where Logan and Morduin's battle came to its fatal conclusion, Morduin had simply been disembodied and taken possession of a fish, and moved up the food chain making each successive predator its new host until it was confronted by Morgan and Logan a few months earlier. By that point, the demon had taken possession of a young dragon, wandering and preying upon human settlements for more than a hundred years as his host grew and matured. In an effort to appease the rogue dragon, many communities had taken to sacrificing virgins to him. This suited Morduin fine until Morgan took the place of one of those sacrifices to bait Logan's trap.

The demon was forced out of the dragon upon crossing the wards Logan had placed around the killing field, but fortunately the dragon's shock and rage caused Morgan to be battered about and lose her personal protections. Morduin had moved instantly to possess her, but her mind proved almost impossible to grasp, as if she possessed two minds working in perfect rapport. The demon pressed its assault, penetrating deeper and deeper into her mind seeking her soul at the core. Faced with this horrible penetration, Morgan called upon untapped depths of her psychic potential and split herself into separate aspects to escape. Morduin was torn in half as the conjoined minds suddenly jumped in different directions.

Unaware that the demon was divided and trapped between them, the two Morgans, identical minds in bodies of the opposite sex, are seduced by their own curiosity. In their intimacy, the pair strive to rediscover the unity of their polymorphic existence; their physical, mental and spiritual intercourse allows the demon to reconstitute itself and attempt once more to take possession of Morgan. Striking while Morgan was of one mind, the demon was able to wrest possession of the male body and launch a physical assault on Morgan. A question Morgan had been unable to resolve was finally answered, as her male and female instincts combined to preserve and defend her female embodiment, sacrificing her male half in order to slay the demon.

Unfortunately, she did not realize that giving the demon sole possession of a living body allowed it to fully assimilate the flesh and become immortal. Believing the demon slain, Morgan moved on, coming to terms with the fact that she chose to be a girl when put to the test. Her nemesis pulled himself together and set out to even the score, his obsession with her growing. Morduin went directly to Avon to renew his claim to Ruin's Deep. Upon delving into the underworld, he discovered that the denizens of the deep were still fighting for dominion of the ruins. It did not take him long to find and confront the two prime contenders and declare his intentions to reclaim his domain.

Harkin and Roark were surprised by Morduin's appearance, since he had reportedly been slain in battle with their old nemesis Logan centuries ago. Morduin convinced them that he was resurrected and that their nemesis, Logan, had also returned to life, all courtesy of the interference of Morgan of Avon Lea. Warned that Logan and Morgan were headed to Avon, Harkin and Roark were compelled to declare a truce until they had dealt with their mutual enemy. As Logan's protégé, Morgan was targeted for the initial attack, a revenge blow against Logan, who had slain Harkin's mate and Roark's companion and protégé. Morgan was initially abducted through the simple expedient of chasing Morduin down after a surprise encounter.

Morgan was kept alive as bait to lure Logan into their clutches, but Morgan would not permit it. She donned the ring of regeneration, and instructed him telepathically to recover the ring after her death and use it--and the body he stole from her originally--to resurrect her. Thus, when Logan failed to appear her captors prepared to execute her. While waiting for Logan to rescue Morgan, they had discussed her, and how best to use her death to hurt Logan--since they had intended to kill her anyway--and came up with the basics of the wager. The best way to hurt Logan was to make Morgan one of their own, and of course they had argued over which of them would claim her.

Morduin suggested the dual infection, betting on Morgan being able to survive the internal conflict until one infection overwhelmed the other--and if she died, that served their purposes as well.

Among the impulses that have asserted themselves is the division of the character into male and female incarnations. Any attempt to realize that impulse is a challenge. The simplest solution is a character that is both male and female, or neither but given a means to assume either form. The most functional solution calls for division and representation as a normal boy and a normal girl. In a linear approach, more than one method of developmental division presents itself. The one with the lowest impact starts with a child born sexless and thus able to retrieve the Ring of Morduin only to become divided by it into male and female incarnations. After such an event, the boy and girl would be separated to encourage them to develop into separate entities. In spite of their separation, the two would be drawn to each other and in consummating their union allow the demon split between them to reconstitute itself and vie for possession of one of their bodies. At that point, the girl inherits the gestalt and comes into full possession of her potential and manifests psychic and metamorphic abilities. Thus, up to this point, the boy and girl were entirely normal. Having become an unusual girl, Morgan pursues the demon and becomes involved in the war over Ruin's Deep. Her dual infection stimulates the growth of her powers, while branding her with the qualities and characteristics of her sires.

Morgan was a normal girl, apart from having been a courtesan's daughter. Of course, she did not know her mother was not a normal courtesan. Nor did she know that her father had not been a normal bard. Her parents, born into rival houses, were recruited and trained as spies and assassins by agents of the Cult of Morduin. The cult had arisen among the general populace and branched out during the purge prompted by the persecution of conjurors following the rise of sorcery. A cell of the cult dedicated to the resurrection of Morduin based itself in Avon, with agents placed in the service of House Avon.

The god Arduin and the goddess Arden 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. 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.

Morgan's parents were led to believe that they were fighting for the restoration of their native houses, both driven underground by the purge that followed the unification of Ar Doen. In truth, they had been chosen to breed a vessel to resurrect the demon Morduin who sired the demon and angel who became the god Arduin and the goddess Arden. While appearing human, the god and goddess passed on a genetic legacy originating in part from Morduin. If the right elements combined in Morgan, her body would be an acceptable vessel for the demon. In specific, she was supposed to manifest the elemental sex.

Morgan was identified as a girl when she was born, but in fact she was a nymph. Neither male nor female, but equivalent to both, Morgan was precisely what the cult was hoping for. Fortunately, they were prevented from discovering that right away. Morgan's parents had learned the truth about each other and while they remained in love the baby threatened to expose them to their families. To protect themselves, and Morgan, from the wrath of their families, the couple ran away when they discovered the pregnancy and appealed to the goddess for intervention. As soon as she was born, Morgan became a ward of the goddess and an inmate of the temple orphanage. Her parents used the discovery of each other's true identities to explain their absence and the end of their intimate relationship. This sufficed to satisfy their families, but the agents of the cult remained suspicious, eventually tracking down and identifying Morgan. Once they found her, they abducted her and presented her to Morduin. The demon had been trapped in a soul cell, enslaved to enchant a ring granting demonic powers to its human wielders. The ring had been in the possession of a man who used those powers to hunt rogue demons and undead. A founding member of the cult had witnessed the man's fall, as the demon in the ring began to take possession of the demon hunter and wreak havoc. In desperation, the man had descended into Aeslyn Tear and sought out a circle of warding that would bind the demon and bar any human from entering and recovering the ring.

Morgan's ordeal started with the trauma of her abduction and descent into the ruins. There, she was examined and prepared for the demon's possession, suffering additional physical and mental abuse. When she was on the verge of breaking, she was taken to the warded circle no male or female could enter, and no demon or angel could exit, and instructed to enter and retrieve the ring. When she obtained the ring, she paused to examine it, slipping it on over her finger and blacking out. The witnesses saw her turned into a boy and the soul of the demon hunter took possession of her altered body. His shock at being resurrected was enough distraction for the demon to act. Morgan had experienced an endless moment of shock and horror as her psyche was sucked into the ring and confronted by the demon. To her young mind, she was trapped in the worst nightmare of her life, and she struggled with all her might to wake up. This instinct was sufficient to prompt her to join the struggle for dominion over her body. The demon was forced to divide its attention to fighting Morgan and Logan. Somehow Morgan managed to thrust her way back into her body braving the horrible intimacy of two other minds naked and entwined with her own. She focused all of her effort on trying to remove the ring, but the convulsions of her body caused her to thread the finger of her opposite hand through the adult sized ring counter to the first finger.

The ring, responding to the imperative to turn its wielder female and male at the same time, tapped into the regenerative powers it possessed to split her into male and female versions of her original, androgynous self. In the process, the man in the ring found himself gravitating to the male embodiment, Morgan found herself gravitating to the female embodiment--since she had a female self image--and the demon became warped, then split between them as the ring shattered, destroyed by the battle of wills.

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.

There are several ideas for the origin of her psychic ability. In one approach, she taps into her psychic potential resisting demonic possession. In a more dramatic approach she gains that ability, in particular telepathy, telekinesis and regeneration, as the result of being consumed, body and soul, by the demon and reclaiming or replicating that body from the demon when it reconstitutes it for its own use. In other approaches to this story, the dual infection itself prompts the awakening of her psychic ability. A combined approach might feature her devouring as the initial catalyst for developing psychic abilities, which become or are rendered dormant in the wake of her resurrection only to be reawakened when her life is threatened or her need is great. So, in the course of growing up, her powers were never formally identified or trained.

With the details of her childhood trauma blocked out, the origin of the powers she manifests from time to time would be a mystery to her, a mystery she has to explore to control that power and understand herself. Each time the power manifested, Morgan experienced blackouts followed by terrifying nightmares. A reason for that could be that her power is still controlled by the demon within her, a demon she suppressed laying claim to her resurrected body that was able to rise up within her only during moments of stress or excitement. Though trapped within Morgan, the demon would still act to preserve its host, waiting for the chance to possess or expel her. Even the blackouts and amnesia can be attributed to Morduin, as attempts to keep Morgan ignorant of its existence and prevent her from having the demon expelled. The alternative, in which Morgan resurrected herself in repetition of the demon's resurrection in her guise, Morgan's involvement in the war of the ruins could occur through a case of mistaken identity. Or, more simply, those blackouts, occurring with increasing frequency, were the result of the demon taking possession of her and using her to gain control over the ruins by starting the war by pitting weres against vampires. Exploiting the power of Morgan's soul and the skills of her body, Morduin would assassinate individuals on one side setting up individuals on the other side to take the blame. It only took an occasional hit to keep escalating the feud. Unfortunately, Morduin did not count on Roark and Logan, a vampire and a were with a history of friendship and rivalry coming into power and working together to end the war. Suspicious of the assassinations that started and fueled the conflict, they set a trap for the presumed assassin and Morduin was barely able to escape. The encounter put Roark and Logan on Morgan's tail, and there was little the demon could do to warn or protect Morgan since she remained the dominant entity. Roark and Logan quickly identified Morgan working at the Sword & Sorcerer, but when the confronted her they detected no sign of recognition, animosity or apprehension from her at all. There was no question that she was the assassin, but the did not betray herself in the slightest. Conversely, Morgan was someone each of them had gotten to know, so when they unmasked the assassin their shock was enough to allow Morduin to escape, and when they confronted Morgan she seemed as innocent and ignorant as ever. Roark and Logan eliminated the possibility that she had a twin or look alike and probed Morgan herself, eliciting her story of childhood abduction, her adoption by the order of the ruins, the details of her formal and informal training, and the blackouts and nightmares she suffered from as a result of what happened to her as a girl. It was clear to them that she had the training to be an assassin, but the blackouts suggested that she was someone's cat's paw. The only hope they had of unmasking their true enemy was to hold on to Morgan, to break down her conditioning and confront her with how she was being used and hope she could lead them to or draw out her master. Telling Morgan that there was an assassin responsible for the mysterious deaths that had been occurring in the port and city and they had reason to believe she might be targeted for assassination. They presented a strong case, revealing that everyone who had been slain had been involved or held interests or investments in the exploration of the ruins. People were being killed because of something they might have seen or discovered in the ruins. Morgan had been the youngest person to enter the ruins and return alive, and her claim to remember virtually nothing of her ordeal implied she might be hiding valuable knowledge about the ruins or her experiences there. Morgan initially refused their offer of protection, but Roark and Logan were not the only ones to be dreaming up conspiracy theories, and Morgan was targeted by agents of the underworld for capture and interrogation. Following an intense couple of confrontations, Morgan returned to Roark and Logan, accepting their protection but demanding more of an explanation about what was going on. In response, Morgan was introduced to the underworld and told of the war that had been instigated by assassins, and their theory that there was something of great value to someone hidden in the ruins and this someone was willing to slaughter the entire population of Ruin's Deep in order to obtain it. They told her that it was imperative for Morgan to overcome her mental blocks in order for them to find out what that something was. For the first few days, they simply took Morgan to a number of different places, above and below, where they asked all sorts of odd questions. Had she been there before? Did she remember anything about anyone or anything in particular associated with each location? It alarmed her because she had dreams, nightmares set in those places, many of which she had never visited before in person. When she confided this, they asked her if there were other places she visited in her dreams that stood out in her mind. Roark and Logan were able to most of the places she described to them within the ruins. To her horror, she was informed later that the places she had been taken by Logan and Roark were places where the assassin struck. The other places she identified marked a path into the depths of the ruins, a path leading to her worst nightmare. Her memory returned when they reached Morduin's crypt. As Logan and Roark studied the wards and inscriptions and related their meaning to Morgan, she relived her abduction and sacrifice--her helplessness as the demon devoured her soul and body after raping her mind, her fury as the demon used her to resurrect itself in her image, her triumph as she overwhelmed the demon and seized control of her body. The horror of her merciless assault upon the men who abducted and tortured her also returned. The march of death as she made her way back to the surface only added to the terrible burden of guilt that caused her to reject the memory of what she had done. But then, after she retraced her steps, the memory of all the assassinations she had performed at the goading of that taunting inner voice came back too. The part of herself that had been aroused by her pain and suffering, that she had feared and rejected had been used by the demon, exploited to serve its will. She realized that Logan and Roark had known she was the assassin, that their offer of protection and plea for her help had been a ruse to make her put herself in their power. She confronted them with this realization, when they confronted her about the visit to the crypt. They admitted their suspicions, explaining that they had spared her upon discovering she was being used, hoping she could help them identify their true enemy. Morgan told them about her childhood ordeal, the demon within was their enemy, using her, using them and their kind to gain possession of the ruins. Sensing no escape, the demon finally declared itself, stating that only death could force the demon out of Morgan. The same desire and affection for Morgan that had caused the rivals to hesitate when they unmasked Morduin, should have prevented them from sacrificing her to slay the demon.

Among the impulses that have asserted themselves is the division of the character into male and female incarnations. While the melding of male and female human potential can account for the realization of extraordinary abilities, efforts to establish that situation become hung up on the division of the character into male and female incarnations. Any attempt to realize that impulse is a challenge.

The simplest solution is a character that is both male and female, or neither but given a means to assume either form. In a linear approach, more than one method of developmental division presents itself. The one with the lowest impact starts with a child born sexless and thus able to retrieve the Ring of Morduin only to become divided by it into male and female incarnations.

Morgan's parents were brought together to breed a suitable vessel for the demon Morduin. Her mother and father were direct descendants of the goddess of Arden and the god of Arduin, intended to serve as the champions of their fallen houses and the mortal instruments of the goddess and the god. They met each other at the Academy when they were seven, fell in love during their training together and after the conclusion of their training, when they were seventeen and faced with responsibilities that forbade their relationship, they conceived Morgan. Here, their union could result in their ascension, requiring a host mother to bear Morgan and dragging Morgan herself back in time to fulfill that role. In such a case, the temporal displacement would occur during the reunion of the male and female incarnations of Morgan and the liberation of the demon Morduin. During the reunion, the demon would take possession of the male half while the female half was impregnated with the ember of herself on the couple's arrival in the past. Morgan was initially a nymph, neither male nor female but having the potential to become either or equivalent to both, but was mistakenly identified as female. Upon proper examination, this "mutation" would be mistaken for an effect of Morgan's conversion into a were-vampire. It identified the child to the agents of the Cult of Morduin as the awaited vessel. Morduin had been trapped in a soul ring which came into the possession of the demon hunter Killian. The powers of the ring kept Killian young and vital for centuries, but eventually he succumbed to the demon's possession. Thus, the demon founded his own cult and planned for the day of his full resurrection. With Morgan in his grasp, the demon was impatient to take possession of her body. By attempting to take possession of Morgan, the demon unwittingly gave Killian an opening to reclaim possession of his body. Killian had waited for this chance, and used it to rip the ring from his finger, severing all connections with the demon and forcing it back into its prison. Unfortunately, he waved the ring in front of Morgan's face before casting it away, and the child instinctively snatched at it, threading a finger from each hand through the ring from both sides, triggering her division into male and female incarnations. As the source of the transforming power, the demon was subsumed and divided as well, absorbed in the creation of the split twinned Morgan. In the looped variant, Morgan would recognize and identify the possessed Killian as her mentor and thus fall under his influence. Her possessed counterpart would also confront Killian, deducing from the presence of the ring who he is dealing with. He would encourage Killian-Morduin to humor his other half, always withholding the truth to protect the events of the past. In addition, Logan and Roark would make the same identification and target Morgan as a way to provoke the presumed demon hunter. Freed from the demon's possession, Killian would take the twinned Morgan under his wing, initially as their guardian and later as their mentor.

After such an event, the boy and girl would be separated to encourage them to develop into separate entities. In spite of their separation, the two would be drawn to each other and in consummating their union allow the demon split between them to reconstitute itself and vie for possession of one of their bodies. At that point, the girl inherits the gestalt and comes into full possession of her potential and manifests psychic and metamorphic abilities. Thus, up to this point, the boy and girl are entirely normal. Having become an unusual girl, Morgan pursues the demon and becomes involved in the war over Ruin's Deep. Her dual infection stimulates the growth of her powers, while branding her with the qualities and characteristics of her sires.

A more functional solution calls for division and representation as a normal boy and a normal girl. An evolved approach to dividing Morgan in a linear plot employing the ring of regeneration and the demon within concepts. Morgan finds the ring when she is seven years old. The ring turns her male and the soul trapped within the ring takes possession of her body. Logan attempts to free her twelve years later by using the ring's powers to reincarnate her as his son. But the powers of the ring are not mere enchantments, they are the powers of a demon trapped within the ring. Or, more accurately, the powers the demon could manifest by harnessing the raw power of a soul. By freeing Morgan's soul, Logan provoked the demon into taking possession of him. Possessing Logan was not enough to free the demon entirely from the ring, but it did put the demon into a position to attempt to conquer Morgan. When the boy was seven the demon returned to take him under his wing, posing as his father, Logan. Instead, Morduin retreated to Ruin's Deep and attempted to possess him, giving Logan the opening he had been waiting for. But, instead of forcing the demon back into the ring, Logan drove it out into Morgan. But the demon did not merely wish to possess Morgan. It wanted to resurrect itself, consuming Morgan body and soul to accomplish that task.

In the process of trying to harness Morgan's soul, Morduin opened his mind, rousing the memory of his prior existence as a girl in the process. To truly resurrect itself, the demon needed to manifest and exploit several aspects of Morgan's psychic potential, including Morgan's masculine and feminine potential. The process of consuming Morgan began with forcing the manifestation of telepathic, telekinetic, metamorphic and regenerative abilities that Morduin seized to assess, analyze, dissect and digest her. Exposed and enslaved to the process of her own destruction, Morgan's psyche could not help absorbing all of the details. Morduin never anticipated the consequences of bending the singular duality of Morgan to its will, or that exploiting the boy-girl in its own resurrection would result in a division of the two embodiments of Morgan that would tear Morduin itself in half. It was partially an unconscious resistance on Morgan's part, but it sufficed to resurrect separate embodiments of the girl and boy Morgan had been. Logan was a helpless witness to the whole process. Once he determined that they were still human, albeit powerful psychics, he took both of them under his wing. While having a hard time comprehending or articulating the fact, the boy and girl understood that they were the same person, and Logan never suggested otherwise.

The trauma of the ordeal caused both of them to blank out most of what happened to them and disjointed their memories of childhood. Their common identity and constant awareness of each other made it difficult for anyone who became familiar with them to see them as separate entities. The intimacy of their existence was unnerving and inevitable. Like any child growing up, they were curious about their bodies and the differences between them. It was confusing and frustrating for them to be identical in every regard but sex, and puberty was especially hard on them. It widened the rift between them while creating a powerful, magnetic attraction neither could resist. Until the thing that divided them became the thing that allowed them to unite in the most incredible way, causing them to become connected to each other more than to their individual selves. Complimenting and completing each other, they were inseparable. But their intimacy would become their undoing. The deeper their intimacy became, the easier it became for the demon split between them to reconstitute itself. Unconsciously driven toward fusion, they reached the point, when they were seventeen, where they engaged in total intercourse, physical, mental and spiritual. As the lovers' rapport evolved into a true gestalt, Morduin awoke, exploiting their ultimate embrace to make a bid for its freedom.

Morduin focused on possessing the boy, the stronger of the two bodies, unseating the gestalt mind and forcing Morgan to concentrate everything in the girl to protect her from Morduin's physical assault. Once Morduin had sole possession of the boy, Morduin broke the circuit of intercourse and escaped. The trauma of losing her other half prevented Morgan from pursuing at once. In spite of the gestalt, it was as if the male half of her had died--he was simply absorbed into her, a ghost trapped in the corner of her mind. That blow was followed by the loss of her mentor's support. With no assurance of ever reclaiming what she had lost, Morgan set out after Morduin. Freed at last, Morduin went straight to Aeslyn Tear, determined to raise the army of demons trapped in the ruins and complete the mission they had embarked on during the war of the gods. He quickly ran into an obstacle, the war over Ruin's Deep. While the vampires and weres at war over dominion over the ruins, both sides were hostile to any efforts to free even a single demon of the depths. Knowing he could not make allies on either side, Morduin's options were limited to encouraging their mutual destruction or forming an alliance against a common enemy like Logan, and somehow parlaying that into a way to seize control of the ruins.

With the division of Morgan, freeing Morduin from the ring, Logan lost all the powers the ring once gave him. He was left with the training and experience of several hundred years from his first incarnation and the training he gained as an initiate during his second childhood. That was more than sufficient to enable him to train Morgan as his successor. As a boy and a girl, Morgan answered to the same name but Logan distinguished them from each other with the nicknames Dusk and Dawn or by simply calling them "Boy" and "Girl" when it was necessary. Dusk and Dawn had been trained to take advantage of their singular duality, working together to fight demons and undead under Logan's direction. Logan did not believe the girl was capable of carrying on alone and announced his retirement, urging Morgan to find herself a husband and try to have a normal life. He argued that her training made her dependant on Dusk and no other partner, not even a man as skilled a Logan himself, could work with her as effectively as she had worked with Dusk. Morgan refused to accept that she was helpless without her other half, insulted by her mentor's belief that she would just get herself killed if she continued to hunt demons. Part of her longed to have a normal life, to be reunited with her original family or have a family of her own--to just be a normal girl--but she would never have traded Dusk for any of that. She could never live a normal life while that demon wore her other face. After their falling out, Logan realized it was a mistake to try and prevent Morgan from going after Morduin. Conscious of the debt he owed Morgan, he followed, determined to see that his fears for her did not come true. Thus, Morgan and Logan both played right into Morduin's hands. Morgan was led easily into a trap, captured to bait Logan. All Morduin had needed to do was catch her eye and lead her to his contentious allies. Harkin and Roark both became entranced by Morgan, contemplating her conversion into a consort. Of course Morduin had demanded certain considerations for leading her to them, an unstated claim to her he was able to assert once his rivals were nudged into staking their claims to the ruins on a wager over her.

In both scenarios there is the option of using a temporal loop or displacement to bring the male and female incarnations together, at one of three specific ages. A similar paradox is featured in variations where a single, female incarnation of Morgan is looped in order to serve as her own mother. A common element of all such stories is that she is displaced and impregnated when she becomes the focus of the wager, and the infection of the ember is what allows her to survive the ordeal. Also common, the male incarnation has typically been possessed by the demon or the hunter by this point, so there is only a brief encounter between the two incarnations of the character. Because the ember is not the only sound basis for Morgan to survive the wager, the entire loop can be dismissed. The same results can be derived in a linear fashion with the use of the ring or the demon. The main purpose of the temporal displacement is to have Morgan stand in as her own mother, ostensibly because the manner of her conception or the circumstances her parents were in left the embryo in need of a womb.

The moment of Morgan's conception serves as an arrival point in the past as does the moment of submission to possession or the moment when her parents first formed a gestalt rapport. Confrontation with a demon, an angel or an advance version of herself serves as a departure point in the future. The ordeals Morgan faces on her return to Avon are diverting enough to conceal the fact of her temporal displacement, but the path her childhood and adolescence followed provide for most of it. Born and raised in the depths of Avon Lea, the city buried under Avon Tear, until she fled to the surface to escape from demonic possession and became a ward of the goddess, Morgan was sent to Aeryn Tear for training as a psychic initiate. Upon completion of her initiation, she returned to the temple of the goddess in Avon where she was confronted by the future aspect of herself, an avatar of the goddess, who sent her to the moment of her conception to free her parents from a gestalt fusion--making certain adjustments to Morgan's mind to adapt her to the time she would arrive in. But, while it is possible to envision, such an extraordinary origin reduces the significance of everything else that follows. Instead of an evolving character, Morgan would be challenged to simply live up to her origins.

A human with the form of an angel. The division of Morgan can be achieved through the interference of the ring of regeneration. One of the ideas was for Morgan to be born initially as a nymph, neither male or female, because her mother and father were descendants of the goddess and the god respectively.

In Hunger & In Thirst

Proposed

Certain ideas refuse to be divorced from the character of Morgan. First among them a scenario that causes Morgan to be divided into male and female incarnations. To satisfy the imperative that he or she starts out as a normal person, the impulse was satisfied by having a staged division and incorporating the ideas of Morgan acting as her own surrogate mother, acting as a conduit for her childhood demon to possess the male Morgan during a psycho-sexual fusion with the female Morgan, being infected by were and vampire venom while carrying her ember and of course dealing with the paradox of her birth.

The original device was an embryo created by Dusk Morgan, and stripped of the previous context, it remains a plausible device. The crucible plot is founded on an experiment in parthenogenesis, a kind of soul jar, and a means some artists had employed to prolong their existence. In simple terms, the artist created a clone-embryo that was linked to the artist and kept in stasis in a magical crucible. Basically an advanced soul jar. In the event of the artist's death, that crucible would be the key to his or her rebirth.

In a story where Dawn Morgan is displaced in time to serve as a surrogate mother to herself the impetus starts with Dusk Morgan. While a fatal dual infection works as a catalyst for his psychic awakening, permitting Dusk to escape death through the creation of Dawn, it is somewhat difficult to establish him as the object of the wager. That plot evolved entirely around Dawn. In fact, starting with Dusk removes the necessity for many of the designs built up around Dawn, including the demonic possession thread. However, by using Dusk to establish Dawn, Dawn becomes the key to preventing a cataclysmic future.

A good way to develop the transition from Dusk to Dawn, without compromising the wager, would be to have Dusk fall victim to assassination by a lethal injection of vampire and were venom. Presumably, by combining their venom before injection the effects would be unquestionably lethal, while combining their venom in the bloodstream presented a properly trained or prepared victim time to neutralize one or the other. Ironically, the mixed venom does cause a hybrid turning, but only on a cellular level while it is breaking down the body. The victim is hit hard and fast, voiding of the stomach and bowels causing an unappeasable hunger and thirst. The victim can only keep down water after the first hour. By the end of the first day, his internal organs start breaking down and the victim starts bleeding to death as the poison eviscerates him. Perversely, the victim typically survives for as much as a day after evisceration, as the rest of his body is sustained by a cycle of regeneration for as long as he is exposed to sufficient levels of light, during which time his mind is stimulated to an extraordinary level of psychic activity.

It was in this stage that Dusk had a vision of the future dominated by cataclysm. Realizing his death was inevitable, his only option to survive and prevent the horrors he had seen from coming to pass was to somehow resurrect himself. He knew a spell for reincarnation, technically parthenogenic rebirth, but that required a host mother and almost two decades to mature, by which time the tides of the future would be too strong to shift. On the other hand, he had access to more potential, more power, in that moment than he ever dreamed of. Enough to alter the ember he was creating, at the same time creating a new set of future possibilities, from which one would produce a version of himself that could be brought back to serve as host mother to the ember and champion in his effort to avert the cataclysm. Unfortunately, no one knew of his illness, bringing her back in a position to host the ember he created would kill him, and she would arrive in the midst of a blood bath disoriented by her displacement and his dismemberment.

Dismemberment was the final stage of the victim's demise, as if the spirit literally clawed its way out of the flesh to end its suffering. This freed the ember from within Dusk and spilled it and the bloody mess his insides had been reduced to into the bath where he sought comfort from the aches preceding his disintegration. Then Dawn appeared in the bath, encompassing the sinking ember. She struggled to the surface, recoiling in horror from the scene that met her eyes, and flung herself over the edge of the bath to escape. In her haste, she slipped on the tiles and knocked herself out on the edge of the tub. By this time, Dusk's friends were concerned by his two day absence and entered his apartment to investigate. They discovered Dawn's naked, blood coated body, and Dusk's remains and called for the guard. Dawn was arrested, but did not recover from the shock, disorientation and confusion for a few days, by which time she was facing trial. In her mind, she--like Dusk--had recently returned to the Academy for her final year of initiation. However, she was told that there was no record of her ever attending the Academy.

The more she learned during her trial, the more confused she got. Her insistence that her name was Morgan--the same as her victim, as she was accused of assassinating him--was taken as impudence, and earned her the contempt of the court. She tried to explain that it was short for Morganna, and that she was named for her mother. She appealed to people she remembered as her instructors, but none of them admitted to knowing her. She did, however, attract the attention of her principle instructor, her patron at the school, her mentor in psychic arts. He visited her, commenting on her resemblance to the victim, and the potential he had possessed. He tested her psychic abilities and disciplines and confirmed that she was the product of his instruction, but again, he had never seen her before her namesake's death. He also questioned her about the responses she had given during her initial examination, claiming things like a date eighteen years hence, and a birth date almost precisely nine months hence. He commented on the manner of Dusk's death and finally on the fact that Dawn was pregnant.

By deduction, her mentor works out what must have happened when Dusk was assassinated to create and displace Dawn--presumably so she could avenge his death. However, he is also aware of the fact that her presence in the world had altered the future, creating an alternative to the devastation he had foreseen. To test this theory, and to devise a way for Morgan to escape her execution, he slips her a poison. If she is the product of Dusk's actions, she would be a hybrid were-vampire, so the poison would simply induce a death like state and convince her captors that she committed suicide. They would bury her in a pauper's grave, from which she would be able to escape when the poison wore off and she reanimated. Sunlight and a proper meal would be sufficient to restore her to normal vitality. In addition, he gave her an amulet that held a sample of Dusk's corrupted flesh and blood that could be used to track down the source of the vampire and were venom used in the poison, and possibly lead her to the assassin. Since the alternative was being decapitated, Morgan was willing to risk the poison.

A variant employing the ring of regeneration--in truth an elven ring--is also plausible. The ring of regeneration plot works on a related concept, but excludes the demon thread. In essence, the ring of regeneration is an elven artifact possessing a number of special powers. The true name of the ring was the ring of the body and soul. It could regenerate or rejuvenate the body, turn the body male or female, reincarnate a soul in a new body parthenogenically, store a soul in the event of the body's destruction, or transfer a soul from one body to another.

The simplest version of the elven ring variant would be for Morgan to become locked by it in female form, trying to conclude the ordeal of mastering that form in time to return to the Academy following the Autumn Festival. The ring would come to him through his roommate, who used it to become a boy and escape from slavery. He, or she, would have already completed the ordeals of the ring--as a girl, with the unwitting help of Morgan--and gained the powers it bestowed. Morgan only needed to complete the female ordeal to master the ring and gain the same powers. In female form, however, Morgan caught the eye of Logan and Roark and resurrected their personal rivalry to complicate their feud over the ruins. The demon plot could be worked into his life story, with Morgan exploiting his current form to probe for answers. It is, however, quite a bit of strain to introduce sexual dichotomy into Morgan's character.

One of the ideas for establishing Morgan involved a fey, or androgyne, first incarnation, and a split second incarnation. As in other developments, Morgan was descended from a goddess on her mother's side and a god on her father's side--the twins, Arden and Arduin. Arden and Arduin assume the translation-fusion origin to become unique among gods for actually being female and male--the first "human" gods. Genetically, however, they were angelic-demonic fusions that imitated humans, and their sex chromosomes were adaptive. When paired together or with a human chromosomes, Arden's sex chromosomes acted as female chromosomes while Arduin's sex chromosomes acted as male chromosomes, thus Arden produced sons and daughters with human mates, while Arduin only produced sons. When a daughter of Arden mated with a son of Arduin, the offspring was either male or androgyne, depending on whether a human or exotic female chromosome was paired with the exotic male chromosome. Morgan was conceived with an exotic male and exotic female pairing, and born fey.

Morgan was chosen as a sacrifice because she was human and fey, thus a vessel a demon could use to escape from a demon warded circle and be entirely comfortable living in. Unfortunately for the demon, Morgan had explored her sexual potential using the ring of regeneration, and accidentally triggered a split rebirth as a boy and a girl--as father and mother respectively. She had been lured into the demon's trap by the abduction of her daughter, and was prepared to sacrifice herself to ensure the demon did not harm her girl once she submitted to it. Of course, the demon did try to kill the girl, triggering the suicidal trap Morgan had prepared to slay the demon. Unfortunately, this caused the demon to be torn asunder as her psyche split between the minds of her offspring, trapped in the minds of the junior Morgans. Mostly, this follows the same pattern as the phoenix split conception, but using the ring as the cause of the parthenogenic split. The younger Morgans meet, dub each other Dusk and Dawn, become lovers and the demon steals the body of Dusk.

Dawn slays him in self defense, but is forced to escape from prison to avoid being executed. Dawn sets out to gather evidence of her childhood ordeal in hopes of proving her innocence. This leads her into the middle of a war over Ruin's Deep where she becomes the object of Logan and Roark's wager. The added complications for her would be the reconstitution of Morgan's mind in Dusk and Dawn's fusion, or more accurately, the problem Morgan faces is the assimilation of Dusk and Dawn. Matters are simplified in respect to the timing of significant events. Morgan grew up posing as a boy and a girl, acquired the ring at the age of nineteen, conceived Dusk and Dawn, who were both born when she turned twenty. Dawn was abducted at age seven, when Morgan was twenty seven. Morgan wakes up from her death at age twenty seven in the bodies of Dusk and Dawn (as the demon is busy warping them into fey twins determined to claim the host it sought ten years earlier?). Regardless of whether she is fey or female on resurrection, Morgan would have the wager and pursuit of the demon to contend with.

There is one issue with having Morgan born fey and resurrected in the fusion of her split incarnations. She would have lived twenty seven years as a fey, and seventeen years each split into male and female incarnations. There alternatives to explore where she is born fully fledged at seventeen as the result of a conceptual fusion and follows the general path to her demise, but that throws the idea of a normal origin even further out the window than being born fey. Ultimately, the staged split conception offers the only plausible scheme.

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Of course, Morgan did not know how to use the ring when he found it, and was not prepared for what was required to master the ring. By luck, the first time he donned the ring, it was oriented to the male aspect and so he was locked in his native form until he mastered it. Once he did, however, the ring unlocked and he happened to be wearing it oriented to the female aspect. Under the alias Anne, Morgan was forced to master her new form to unlock it. As Anne, Morgan was identified as the object of the were-vampire wager. She also unwittingly triggered the power of rebirth, impregnating herself prior to her infection. The ring was the source of the power of regeneration that was the key to the wager. In theory, the only way for Anne to survive was for her body to neutralize one infection while assimilating the other to stop the combined lethal effect.

Considered

The core premise of this story is the manifestation of an individual's full potential. Alternatives to this story explored this premise by having an individual develop that potential divided into male and female incarnations, however, that approach can not be developed in a practical way in this story. Instead, the latent potential in Morgan is accessed through psychic abilities awakened by the trauma of demonic possession, and fully manifested as the result of being turned by a were-tiger and a vampire. 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.

Their agent in the Port of Avon proposed the truce and wager to exploit Morgan's training to determine who would have dominion over Ruin's Deep. Morgan, returning from the Academy determined to end her nightmares and lay her demons to rest, played right into their hands. 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. To lure her into their trap, the rival immortals approached her with potential leads she could pursue above ground. Posing as mercenary adventurers, they confided a few details they had picked up "in the employ of their current patron"--the story of a young girl's abduction arranged by their patron and carried out by mercenaries in his employ. Morgan was eager to accept their help in confronting the man who might have the very answers she was looking for.

They helped her get a position in their patron's house guard. In the process, Morgan discovered the man was some kind of high level crime lord. Apparently, her misspent youth was going to be an advantage for once. While she waited for the opportunity to steal maps and documents she could use to find her way to the part of the ruins she had been taken to, she worked as a member of his household alongside Logan and Roark, both of whom were determined to seduce her. Morgan accepted that as one of the hazards of being a muse. Ideally, a muse was partnered with an artist, fulfilling a role that was part familiar, part courtesan, and part performer but ultimately that of body guard. She could also fill that role for men in important positions, a last line of defense against assassination by physical or magical means. Of course, a properly trained muse also made an exceptional assassin. She half expected her two amorous allies had enlisted her to serve that purpose, since they had betrayed the man they served the moment they confided in her. She was very curious about their true motives and loyalties.

This is essentially the opening point in the story. As the Autumn Festival approached, Morgan was settled into her role as the household threat detector. She performed that role in the guise of her patron's recently discovered niece, which allowed her free run of the house and ambiguous responsibilities. As part of her cover, she admitted to training as a courtesan but of course she had not established herself yet. Technically, both statements were true, as her mother was a courtesan and she had trained Morgan on the side. Since her father was an anonymous adventurer, it was plausible she really was her patron's niece--though the thought turned Morgan's stomach. She had gathered enough intelligence over the summer to confirm that he had orchestrated her abduction and delivered her to a cult intent on sacrificing her to a demon. She still needed to locate the maps of the ruins and any information about the demon cult he possessed, before she felt ready to delve into the ruins. Unfortunately, she would be kept busy through the festival since her patron was hosting parties almost every night of the week.

Much of the time, Morgan was on her own in her master's mansion. Logan and Roark, to her knowledge, performed their duties for Lloyd in the Domain and City of Avon respectively, returning to the mansion to lounge about for a night or three before taking off again. It was rare for her to see them together, but she was always relieved to see either of them when they appeared. They continued to try and court her, and in spite of herself, they were starting to grow on her. It disturbed her, however, to think their interest in her could become the wedge that drove her only allies in Lloyd's household apart. No doubt they would both show up for the celebrations, and she did not look forward to seeing how they responded to each other's interest in her. However, the party would give her the opportunity to raid Lloyd's vault for the items she and her allies were searching for. She was counting on them to give her back up in case things went wrong, and reminded them when they arrived that their mission took precedence over any personal business they had with each other.

Unfortunately, a three way romance had been part of the cover they had created for their little conspiracy, founded in their recommendations for her employment. In an increasingly crowded house, they were required to go to greater lengths to secure the privacy they needed to plan and coordinate their actions. Similar problems in the past had contributed significantly to Morgan's seduction, where they were forced to respond to the invasion of their privacy by resorting to intimate activities. Nothing too serious had happened yet, but enough to make her think seriously about taking either of them to bed. In all honesty, if it did not promise to cause a rift in their group, she would have been more than willing to go all the way with either of her would-be lovers. They were each as desirable a specimen of manhood as she could ever hope to find. Unfortunately, the confrontation she had been dreading came up as soon as she returned from a successful raid on Lloyd's vault. Roark and Logan were waiting for her in her room, and proposed an unusual solution to their rivalry.

Morgan could hardly believe they were willing to share her, but each insisted he would rather see the other sleep with her than wonder when or if he had. While their declarations seemed rehearsed, their feelings for her and about each other were unmistakably genuine. Even though it had turned into a night for reckless adventure, Morgan found herself unable to say no, and unwilling to say yes. Working together wore down her resistance. 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 want to hunt down and defeat her childhood demon? Could she do it on her own? Did she want them to help? Morgan had to say yes. Even with the formidable abilities she possessed, she lacked the skills and knowledge to confront a demon on her own. If it meant they would help, Morgan would eagerly grant them one night of intimacy. Morgan never suspected what it would truly mean to give in to their advances; she had no clue what they intended to do.

In the heat of passion, they bit 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.

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There had been plenty of men determined to bed her, but there were only two men--brothers or cousins, she was not sure which--who intrigued her. The problem was, they seemed to be fierce rivals in competition with each other long before they started competing for her attentions. Up to this point, she had used their rivalry as her excuse for not favoring either of them.

What Morgan did not know about her two paramours was that they were 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. As they courted her, they learned about her life and training--a tale edited to conceal her adopted gender. Once she revealed she was an initiate, the two were reminded of a story where an initiate's unique abilities were exploited to settle a dispute between a were and a vampire in the past century. [An initiate possessed the talent and training necessary to resist vampire or were venom. But, in a joint infection the initiate would be forced to divide his resources fighting both infections--and ultimately die--or concentrate his resources on neutralizing one infection and succumbing to the other.] To settle their conflict over Ruin's Deep, they could infect the object of their other conflict and see which of their bites Morgan succumbed to--winner take all. Of course, Morgan tried to fight off both infections, stalling the progress of either while she attempted to escape from her sires and reach the temple of the goddess in the hope of receiving a proper cure.

Along the way, she realized that fighting the infections directly would quickly exhaust her and their combined, unopposed effect would kill her soon after. Her chances of surviving were greater if she regulated the infections, allowing them to run their course but devoting her resources to controlling 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. Morgan had no idea how absorbed in this effort she became, losing more than a day weaving the spell that would oversee her controlled corruption. By the time she emerged from the ruins and set off for the Sanctuary, she was already feeling the emergence of hunger and thirst as the price of her gradual transformation began to assert itself. Gripped by the need to hunt, she deviated from her determined path, but by evening she succeeded in running her prey to ground and fed both hunger and thirst. Renewed, her thoughts turned once more to the prospect of a cure after which she could return home, return to being male, and return to the Academy for the final year of her--or at that point, his--initiation.

Morgan's hunt had taken 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 she had changed in her sleep--into an undead tiger. 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 left, warning Morgan of impending dawn, but the tiger simply retreated, waiting to see what Morgan would do with her new immortality.

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.

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Morgan was a normal girl, the daughter of a courtesan and a bard. At least, those were her parents' legitimate professions. Both of her parents had been raised and trained as assassins. Her mother was a daughter of the House of Arden and her father was a son of the rival House of Arduin. In spite of being natural enemies, they fell in love and when they had a child they tried to retire and start a new life together. Their families and patrons were outraged, each sending assassins out to recover their asset and eliminate his or her mate.

Once the ruling houses of Ardanna, the House of Arden and the House of Arduin had fallen from power as the result of an ancient feud between them and those who exploited it to seize power for themselves. Other factors contributed to the fall of the two houses, including the bastardization of both bloodlines. The traits that once distinguished the direct descendants of Arden and Arduin became the common characteristics of Ardannans, but this later allowed the bloodlines to survive the purges following the fall of their houses.

The main thread of the story deals with events and circumstances which unlock the potential of the main character, Morgan. This thread draws on an extensive pool of developmental notes detailing a multitude of scenarios. To preserve and promote the plot of **In Hunger or In Thirst**, the following devices come into play: An enchanted ring with the power to change a person's sex. A conflict between a were-tiger and a vampire over possession of Ruin's Deep and Morgan, in her native form. A wager to win both. A different solution to a fatal proposition. An end and a beginning.

It was supposed to be the end of an ordeal. Three months earlier, on the night of his seventeenth birthday, Mare offered to make Morgan a man. To their shock, that intimacy broke a spell he had lived under for fifteen years and turned Morgan into a girl. Memories long forgotten until that moment confirmed that he had been restored to his native form. After sorting everything out, Morgan was left with two options, which both required the same sacrifices. The magic ring that transformed him as a child could be used again, if he fully mastered the ring. That meant completing two ordeals, the first of which he fulfilled growing up to be a man. If he wanted to be a man again, he would have to become a woman first.

Morgan had to complete her ordeal before the last day of the Autumn Festival, when her ship to the Academy was due to set sail. Determined to be on it, she devoted her entire summer to discovering what it was to be a woman. After all, if she failed, she would have the rest of her life to come to terms with what she was. As the first day of the festival arrived, desperation forced her to consider a radical solution. Instead of struggling to become a woman, all she really needed to do was just *be* a woman for one night and *do* what any normal woman would do during the annual fertility rites.

The ring was one of nine created by Arden and given to her demi-human offspring to aid them in human intercourse. Because the direct descendants of gods were androgynes, the primary function of the rings was to turn an individual male or female, depending on how they were worn. Both sides of the ring had to be mastered to unlock the other powers of the rings, and the first time either form was manifested the individual was locked in that form for as long as it took to make full use of it. Once mastered, that form was only expressed when the ring was worn in the proper fashion, and when the ring was not worn at all, the individual's native form would reassert itself. While the rings enabled the nine "daughters" of Arden to found the original ruling houses of Arden, and the legacy of Arden's Blood, all were eventually lured away by other demi-gods to establish the elven nations. Among their own kind, the nine had little use for the rings. Some were passed on to their Ardannan heirs, some were given to elven offspring who expressed a desire to walk among humans in their adventurous youth. For one such, the adventure came to a tragic end but a human adventurer followed in her wake and acquired the ring when he came across her corpse.

Mead was a true son of Arden, that is, the bastard son of a muse whose prospects were limited to the wandering life of a mercenary and adventurer. Fortunately, he had a talent for the sword and sorcery in spite of the fact that he was never formally initiated. He began his career as a squire to Arduin, a knight in the service of the goddess--and possibly his father. He made the most of the opportunities presented to him and when he came of age, he decided to seek his fortune through adventure. Instead, he came across a magic ring that turned his entire life on it's ear. Two startling things happened when he tried the ring on; the ring automatically adjusted itself to fit him, and he turned into a woman. He quickly discovered the change was effectively permanent, and struggled to adapt to his new form and circumstances. He also discovered the danger of being a woman out in the world alone. A close brush with rape forced Mead to come to grips with what *she* had become. Calling in a favor from a close, childhood friend Mead was able to get an escort back to her home, searching along the way for someone who could explain what happened to her or how to fix it. Unfortunately, drink and curiosity overcame them one night early in their journey, and by the time Mead reached Avon, there was no doubt she was pregnant.

If Mead had not been wearing the ring when she had sex, she would have changed back before she became pregnant. Unfortunately, her pregnancy made her transformation truly permanent. Her condition forced Mead to approach her mother for help. While settling in to her mother's household, Mead removed the ring and put it away for safe keeping. Mead's mother saw her through the birth of her daughter, Morgan, and convinced Mead that the ordeal had improved her prospects. Her experiences as a man would make Mead unusually successful as a muse. By the time Mead had recovered from Morgan's birth, she had progressed enough under her mother's training to begin her new profession. When Morgan was two years old, she found the ring and, fascinated to see it shrink to fit her, slipped it on her finger. Her transformation was upsetting for the whole household. Mead was tempted to try the ring on again, quickly discovering that it would turn her back into a man if worn the proper way. Because Mead lost his virginity as a boy, long before finding the ring, he had effectively mastered the forms it endowed. Unfortunately, it would not undo the transformation of Morgan. Fortunately, Morgan was so young she adapted quickly to becoming a he, and in a short time dismissed the fact that he was born a girl from his mind.

The real problem presented by Morgan's transformation was the one that confronted every male with the mark of Arden's Blood. His prospects were rather limited. In the hope of giving Morgan a better start, Mead reverted to his native form and reintroduced himself to Morgan as his uncle and mentor, since Morgan already recognized Harkin as his father. [Harkin, by the way, unimaginatively coined Mead's alias, "Meadow".] By working with Morgan from a very young age, Mead guaranteed the boy would be chosen as an initiate when he turned nine. Ironically, the ordeal Mead had been through also made him a candidate for advanced training, permitting him to continue as Morgan's mentor at the Academy. In the summer, Morgan would return to Avon where Mead would resume his role as Morgan's mother. He was something of a prodigy at the Academy, with the promise of a bright future once he completed his training. But his prospects for the future took a sudden and unexpected turn at the age of seventeen.

The summer before his final year at the Academy, Morgan returned home to a city in turmoil over a string of mysterious slayings. He was quickly distracted from the rumors surrounding the unexplained deaths when he was taken to bed by his grandmother's protégé, a girl, with whom he had become more and more enamored of over the summers of his initiation. Thus, it was particularly shocking and mortifying when the act the finally made him a man also, inexplicably, turned Morgan into a girl. In a desperate attempt to hide what had happened, Morgan fled from the arms of his lover into the night. Mane, possessing a bit more sense, paused long enough to throw something on allowing Mead to intercept her as she attempted to pursue Morgan. After listening to the girl's confused explanation, Mead realized what must have happened and set out, in the guise of Morgan's mentor, to find his daughter. He caught up to her, stalking through the city in a daze of shock, and quickly took her aside. As he expected, Morgan responded at once to the presence of her trusted mentor, and rattled off her traumatic experience. Mead listened calmly, until Morgan asked him how such a thing could happen and how she could be changed back. At that point, Mead interrupted to inform her she had.

Mead set Morgan down and told her about finding the ring, showing it to her and putting it on at the proper point in his story. As Morgan dealt with the shock of discovering her mother and mentor were the same person, Mead explained how she had been unable to undo her transformation, and how she made her way home, including how Morgan came to be conceived. Mead stressed that she never knew what broke the spell, only that after Morgan enchanted herself with the rediscovered ring, Mead discovered she could use it to change back. Since the ring did not restore Morgan, Mead was forced to raise her as a boy--never knowing what might cause him to revert to his natural form. Now that Morgan had turned back into a girl, Mead suspected what cured both of them, and what might prevent Morgan from simply going back to being a boy. His theory was partly supported by the fact that the ring had no effect on Morgan, regardless of how she wore it. Mead informed his daughter that she might not be capable of reclaiming her adopted form until she fully explored her native form. If she ever wanted to be a man again, she had to first become a woman.

Morgan's ordeal began at midsummer and was supposed to end on the autumn equinox, during which time she was advised and instructed by Mane and her grand-mother, who managed to convince Morgan that understanding what it was like to be a woman would ultimately make her a better man. It was an enlightening and occasionally frightening ordeal, particularly since Mane insisted on Morgan experiencing every aspect of maidenhood. With her return to the Academy looming, the night Morgan had been putting off all summer finally came. The night of the autumn festival, Morgan faced her final ordeal, sex. There had been plenty of men determined to bed her, but there were only two men--brothers or cousins, she was not sure which--who intrigued her. The problem was, they seemed to be fierce rivals in competition with each other long before they started competing for her attentions. Up to this point, she had used their rivalry as her excuse for not favoring either of them.

What Morgan did not know about her two paramours was that they were 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. As they courted her, they learned about her life and training--a tale edited to conceal her adopted gender. Once she revealed she was an initiate, the two were reminded of a story where an initiate's unique abilities were exploited to settle a dispute between a were and a vampire in the past century. [An initiate possessed the talent and training necessary to resist vampire or were venom. But, in a joint infection the initiate would be forced to divide his resources fighting both infections--and ultimately die--or concentrate his resources on neutralizing one infection and succumbing to the other.] To settle their conflict over Ruin's Deep, they could infect the object of their other conflict and see which of their bites Morgan succumbed to--winner take all. Of course, Morgan tried to fight off both infections, stalling the progress of either while she attempted to escape from her sires and reach the temple of the goddess in the hope of receiving a proper cure.

Along the way, she realized that fighting the infections directly would quickly exhaust her and their combined, unopposed effect would kill her soon after. Her chances of surviving were greater if she regulated the infections, allowing them to run their course but devoting her resources to controlling 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. Morgan had no idea how absorbed in this effort she became, losing more than a day weaving the spell that would oversee her controlled corruption. By the time she emerged from the ruins and set off for the Sanctuary, she was already feeling the emergence of hunger and thirst as the price of her gradual transformation began to assert itself. Gripped by the need to hunt, she deviated from her determined path, but by evening she succeeded in running her prey to ground and fed both hunger and thirst. Renewed, her thoughts turned once more to the prospect of a cure after which she could return home, return to being male, and return to the Academy for the final year of her--or at that point, his--initiation.

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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.

While her mind was opened and introduced to infinite possibilities, the excess raw energy was eagerly consumed by Morgan's other new nature, as the consumption of her flesh placed immediate demands on a were-tiger's metamorphic regeneration. This started a cycle of flesh consumed and reconstituted while Morgan stood riveted in the pool, until the fusion of were and vampire she had started was perfected into an ember of flesh, an embryo reduced from the mortal Morgan had been. The seed of the new, immortal Morgan that could not survive for long outside a womb. The consequences of that need, apprehended by a mind in a state of naked enlightenment and empowerment, resulted in the apprehension of a future that could be created and guaranteed by the abduction of that future incarnation to serve as a host mother to herself, Morgan reborn. Beyond that point, the story deals with Morgan (Morganna)'s temporal displacement, under the guidance and supervision of Logan and Roark. Logan was the only witness to Morgan's immolation and rebirth.

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Morgan starts out as a the son of a courtesan and an adventurer turned guard-captain. He was scouted and became an artist-initiate at the age of nine.

Initiates are chosen at the age of nine and undergo nine years of training.

Morgan was not normally a beautiful, seventeen year old girl. It took the discovery and use of a magical family heirloom for the words "beautiful" and "girl" to become appropriate descriptions. However, the normally handsome lad had been convinced by his sister that experiencing life as a woman would ultimately make him a better man. Unfortunately, his sister also believed such an experiment required Morgan to bed a man for the whole ordeal to succeed.

"It won't kill you to be a *normal* girl for *one night!*"

Technically, that was true. Morgan could live in the moment for one night, let go of himself and lose herself in the festivities of Autumn Night. That did not change the fact that being a *girl* on this one particular night *was* going to kill her.

An experiment to become a better man by becoming a woman for three months. Ironically, when Morgan engaged in this ordeal, she was picked out as the object of a wager to end a war between vampires and weres. In spite of the dangerous climate he engaged in an unusual experiment at the urging of his elder sister, after discovering the secret of his mother's success as a muse--a magic ring that changed a person's sex, depending on how it was put on. His mother, and her muse ancestors, used the ring to gain insight and understanding about men. His sister claimed it could have the same benefits for Morgan, and convinced him he could be a better man if he knew what it was like to be a woman.

Morgan was conceived and born divided into male and female incarnations. At the age of seven, Morgan was offered as a sacrifice to a demon, but the demon became trapped within Morgan as the result of her dual existence. The demon managed to escape, taking control of the male incarnation when the two separate incarnations became lovers, prompting Morgan's search of the ruins of Aeslyn Tear. Morgan became involved in the were-vampire war over Ruin's Deep, and the focus of a wager proposed to conclude it.

The first of three options to establish Morgan's origins, and the simplest, starts with a phoenix familiar. In some legends, phoenixes have the ability to shape-shift and are capable of parthenogenic rebirth. Thus, the phoenix familiar of an artist-adept took on human form on some mission for its master, during which he was seduced by a courtesan (see notes: Arden's Blood). The nature of that intimacy provoked the parthenogenic inception of the male incarnation and triggered the transformation of the phoenix to female form and the reflexive inception of the female incarnation, as neither form was a suitable vessel for the full potential of a phoenix. The split incarnation tied up virtually all the powers of the phoenix, reducing all three to near human limits. Ironically, the two children both end up with the name Morgan. The boy was named for his father, and the phoenix passed on the name she had used to her daughter, having adopted a different alias to establish herself as a courtesan once she realized she was trapped in her human guise. Both children had the power of regeneration, and some psychic potential, but neither would be able to learn magic, because their dual existence consumed the necessary potential. The girl's abduction as an offering to a demon brought her mother to the rescue, and the demon ended up possessing the mother, who sacrificed herself to protect her offspring. The demon became trapped in the gulf between the minds of the split Morgan, until they encountered each other and become lovers.

The second of three options to establish Morgan's origins starts with a demon exploiting a liaison with an angel to become human. This approach delves into the nature of demons and angels, the manner in which new angels or demons are created. In short, the demon propositions an angel but instead of attempting to conceive a new elemental, it uses the opportunity to change both their natures. The transformation blends the couple's angelic and demonic natures while dividing them according to human nature into a woman and a man. Of course, the conception of a new elemental, a potential demon or angel, played a catalytic role in the transformation, defining the human characteristics of the couple and exploiting the physical mechanisms of conception when the spiritual means were denied. Or more simply, the demon became a man, the angel became a woman, both of them conforming to the human embodiments of the elemental they would have conceived. Both of them were used by that third soul as a vehicle to incarnation, resulting in the split conception of Morgan. The boy and girl would begin their lives as brother and sister, but at the age of seven (exploring an alternate origin arc) their lives would be disrupted by their father's return and his attempt to reclaim his true demonic nature from their mother. He abducts the twins to force their mother to submit to his will, but upon regaining that true nature the demon turns its attention to the children. That curiosity, combined with the ruthless probing the demon indulged in to satisfy it, forced them to pool their inner resourced to protect themselves and destroy their tormentor and imprisoning it in the depths of their conjoined psyche. This resulted in the severing of a primitive rapport the twins had shared, causing each of them to believe the other had died. This belief was underscored by the physical devastation caused by their struggle, leaving them separated in the bowels of the ruins, forcing them to make their way back to the surface alone where each of them was taken into the custody of strangers. Thus they remained separated until they were seventeen, at which time they became lovers.

In this variation, the pair are the offspring of gods, but they are human by virtue of the fact that the angel and demon became human themselves during the twins' conception. This version supports most of the requirements of the main impulse. The trauma the pair endures, and the means employed to help them recover, result in both of them obscuring their origins and embracing new lives and new identities--aided by the subtle manipulations of their mother, and the unconscious provocations of their father.

Split Incarnation Thread

An option that divides Morgan into male and female incarnations involves an attempt by a demon and an angel to escape from their prisons in Ruin's Deep. Metaphorically speaking, they were twin brother and sister, as Arden was the demon's sire and the angel's mare. While Arden remained neutral during the war of the gods, her son and daughter fought on opposite sides. As fierce as the conflict was, the siblings fought each other more fiercely, until the demon was able to defeat his sister and trap her within an angel warded ring. Later in the war, the demon participated in the invasion of Aeslyn Tear, where he stumbled into a demon warded circle and became trapped when the city was buried. He debated for a while before appealing to his captive sister, making a pact to withdraw from the conflict and set her free if she agreed to do the same. As an angel, she should have been able to walk out of his prison once she was set free of hers. Unfortunately, there were angels and demons on both sides of the conflict, and traps had been set to snare both divinities. Stepping out of his prison, she tripped an angel warded circle.

It took the siblings a little while to get over their disappointment and frustration, but their pact had been the first step toward resolving their differences. The fact that their prisons overlapped encouraged them to continue in that vein, while affording them each a private retreat for those times when they fought. Their pact to help each other escape compelled them to work on the problem together, and they eventually realized that Aeslyn Tear had been sacrificed by the sister's side to level a blow to the brother's side. The patron gods had quit the city, instructing their human charges to set the wards that would cause any god who entered it to become trapped. Once the invaders had taken the bait, the city was buried by its former masters. It took a while for them to grasp the obvious, that they could simply walk out of the ruins if they were human. It took even longer for them to devise a way for them to become human by combining and re-dividing their essence. They debated longest over the sacrifices they each had to make to fulfill their pact with each other.

The only thing they overlooked was the full consequences of merging, which was normally a reproductive process--the means to conceive a new angel or demon. Their assumption was that the division of their combined essence into human qualities would abort the conceptual process. Instead, their child was divided as well--like them into otherwise identical male and female incarnations. Their spiritual union concluded in a physical union that ensured both incarnations of their child would be born. Of course, they did not realize what they had done until after escaping from their prisons and the depths of the ruins. The truth was discovered when they visited Arden. After studying the children, it was determined they should be separated at birth and allowed to develop independently as humans. Because they would ultimately be bound to each other and strongly attracted to each other, they could not be raised as siblings. The angel, who had become their mother, kept the daughter and the demon turned father took the son. The two were kept separated until the start of their initiations at age seven.

Individually, all four were entirely human. Together the parents could reclaim their divinity, but no one was sure what the children would be capable of together. Both children were given the name Morgan, the only aspect of shared identity they were granted, and that simply because their parents tended to think of them as the same being, and if they were raised apart having the same name had the effect of distancing them in the eyes of others. Of course, the parents had not counted on the children being initiated together at the Academy. They could not have predicted the girl would be abducted and offered as a sacrifice to a demon, or that the threat would cause her to call upon her other half for help. Across the distance, his mind merged with hers to fight off the demon's possession, but it was the separation of their minds when he was snapped out of his fitful trance that caused the demon to be torn asunder, divided between their psyches. It would take the demon ten years to reconstitute itself, during which time Morgan of Arduin and Morgan of Avon trained together in a special class for psychic children.

Sharing the same name and such physical similarity, the children dubbed each other Dusk and Dawn. Their resemblance was dismissed as the result of generations of effort to breed girls with specific characteristics to serve as courtesans. Because of their compatibility, their master concluded they were soul mates, and they received special training to pool their resources. This training served to help the demon within them to recover, but even as their initiation neared its end, and the demon became whole, it remained trapped in depths between their divided minds. In order for it to assert itself, they had to become a singular being, a gestalt of the individuals they had become. That was an intimacy greater than they had working in rapport or while making love. However, when they graduated and indulged in total intercourse, the demon was finally free to act. In a short, desperate struggle, it attempted to take possession only to discover it could only claim one of their bodies--and doing so caused the gestalt to shift entirely into the other. It claimed the male form instinctively, as the stronger vessel.

To ensure its escape, the demon attempted to kill the female--but she had been trained too well. Before Morgan could sort out what was happening, she had defended herself with lethal force. As she stared in horror at the body of her lover, her other half, she realized what had happened and knew she could not prove the truth. She also realized that her lover had become a part of her as the result of the tragedy, so completely woven into her psyche she did not know where Dawn ended and Dusk began. Looking down at his dead body felt like looking at her own corpse, and the thought of being executed for murdering herself made her panic. There was only one person she could think of to go to for help. Morgan's mentor and master listened to her story, but could not prevent her arrest when the body was discovered and the guard came for her. Her trial did not go well, unable to state her defense, she was utterly naked before the prosecution. Condemned to death, Morgan's only hope was to escape and gather proof of her childhood ordeal, and present the defense she should have from the start.

Fortunately, Morgan had gained more from her merge than anyone could have suspected. The power that once took the combined effort of Dusk and Dawn to summon came easily to her, allowing her to simply walk out of prison. She 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 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 while she was waiting for the order to consider her request 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 no common adventurer. With some effort, they drew her out, suggesting that they could provide her with valuable resources and assistance if her mission was worthwhile.

Paraphrasing as much as she could, Morgan explained her childhood ordeal, and its unexpected consequences. To her horror, they revealed that killing a demon's host did not slay a demon. The host had to be destroyed properly, or the demon would reanimate it and continue on its way. If Morgan 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. 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 quickly regarded her as a desirable consort, and she immediately became 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. Once the wager was agreed upon, the two set out to lure her into their trap. 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 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.

The third of three options to establish Morgan's origins involves obscuring her origins to conceal the fact that the events of her childhood occur in the future or to conceal the circumstances that brought her into the past. The mechanism of this approach is an ambitious experiment gone awry. This was the option explored as the basis of this book, however, the circumstances developed untenably. What remains applicable is the attempt by a prodigal artist-initiate to prove the existence of the soul of creation by creating a human embodiment from it. The flaw in the experiment is derived from the consequences of grasping for something that is not there, one ends up holding one's self. Thus, the artist inadvertently creates an ideal embodiment of himself. The experiment is further complicated when the embryo he created is threatened with destruction, activating a powerful protective ward designed to prevent a cataclysmic backlash for creation by forcing the soul-to-be-embodied to draw upon its untapped potential to protect itself. The artist intended to have his fiancée act as a host mother for his brainchild, but her discovery of the notes resulted in a tantrum in which she threw the embryo's crucible into the ocean. The crucible was shattered on the rocks during a storm exposing the embryo to the elements. The protective ward was triggered and the potential of the embryonic being explored for the means to protect itself. The specifics have been explained elsewhere, the results of which bring Morgan back in time to serve as her own surrogate mother.

Reincarnation Thread

An option that bridges time and gender involves the dual infection of Morgan as a boy, his reduction to an ember and psychic awakening. The psychic awakening serves as the central catalyst, opening his mind to the potential within him, the possibilities of the future and the power to influence both. His glimpse of the dark trend of the future provides him with the motivation to survive, and his search for a means to survive results in the alteration of the ember and temporal displacement of his future, female incarnation to serve as a host mother to herself. Emphasizing the singular significance of the boy's ordeal, in particular recognizing it as the origin of the girl's psychic abilities, displaces the demonic possession thread. Instead of having a demon trapped within her, fighting to take possession, Morganna (Anna, in her training as a muse, and Morgan in her other exploits) struggles with Morgan's reawakening, as places and things in her own life trigger blackouts where she relives the final days of his life. He haunts her waking life, and she haunts his memories--each of them a ghost telling the other's story.

At first, she welcomes the visions, believing they are about her father who died before she was born. They start with his return to his mother's home for the Autumn Festival, triggered by her return under the same circumstances. The final vision captures her, instead of ending she discovers that she has solidified in the vision, trapped either in her mind or in the past.

The wager becomes focused on Morgan through a simple chain of associations. The rivals both frequented the home of his mother, a successful courtesan. Through her they both knew of Morgan's initiation. When the feud over Ruin's Deep threatened to bring too much attention to them, the rivals needed neutral ground to discuss the problem, which Moira was able to provide. Moira believed them to be adventurers, favored sons of Arden, and introduced her son to them, they took him out every night of the Autumn Festival at her urging. The idea came naturally to them, to wager possession of the ruins on the outcome of his infection. As an initiate he could resist infection from either of them, but if he was infected by both it would take all of his resistance to survive and neutralize one, meaning he would succumb to the other. They infected him the third night of the festival, when he passed out from smoke and drink, they took turns watching him for the next few days "helping" him through the ordeal--since he did not remember clearly who or what bit him.

Presuming he was the victim of a vampire bite, he took the precaution of resisting potential infection, but noticed changes occurring in spite of his efforts, and concluded that it must have been a were. He spent the night trying to fight off the bite of a were, only to realize that he was still experiencing changes, suggesting he was the victim of something else. Uncertain what to do, he stopped resisting to explore what was effecting him and discovered he was the victim of conflicting infections. Unfortunately, while vampires and weres were immune to each others' venom, their combined effects on a mortal were lethal. Knowing he could not fight off the bites of a vampire and a were simultaneously, he worked a spell to exploit the effects of both bites to prolong the ordeal while enlisting the help of his new patrons to find a cure. If Logan and Roark had sought a cure, Morgan's gamble might have paid off. Instead, he had simply prolonged his death. When the third night came and his patrons did not return, Morgan was delirious with fever, aching in every fiber of his being.

Morgan exhausted himself, dragging himself to the pool in the courtyard in a vain hope of relief in the cold water. The spell he had woven tapped into the regenerative properties of both infections to combat the ravaging effect of being turned in conflicting ways. Parts of him were becoming vampiric, while others were becoming metamorphic, and it was tearing him apart. As morning came, the poison had run its course. His mortal flesh had been conquered by two different natures at war with each other and light was the key their power. Light was a catalyst for change in a were, and a catalyst for refinement in a vampire, so when the light of the sun fell upon Morgan, he was caught in a crucible of change and refinement. The were side of him was caught up in metamorphic healing as the vampire side ignited and began to consume him. It was a lightning cycle of death and resurrection in which Morgan was literally roasted alive, cooked down to an ember. At some point in the raging crucible, the two powers became one, refined and changed into a fusion of vampire and were-tiger.

Morgan's mind was held in the grip of revelation, seeing the future and the possibility of rebirth even as he was reduced to an embryo. Of course, Morganna was watching this startling ordeal, riveted by her vision, and never noticed when she crossed the line between present-past and past-present. One moment she was a ghost inside a memory, watching as the last ember floated in the pool, the next moment she was rearing up out of the water in shock.

Test Draft (1st person opening)

When you are psychic, you get used to having visions. In order to keep your grasp on the real world, you simply learned how to hold them off when you felt them coming on, or how to snap yourself out of them quickly if they came on too strong. But the vision I fell into when I returned home for the Autumn Festival caught me completely off guard. It started so innocently, just a subtle undertone as I greeted my grandmother, ran up to my room to leave my traveling kit and prepared for a bath. The feeling grew stronger as I became distracted, thinking about the week of festivities ahead. There was an odd sense of familiarity to it all, as if I had gone through the exact same motions before. Of course, it was pretty much what happened every year when I came home for the festival, so I shrugged it off. I was not really paying attention as I undressed, but I should have sensed something was wrong immediately. I should have noticed something peculiar about what my senses were reporting as I hung up my clothes and stepped into the stall. After relieving myself, I stepped out of the stall and confronted myself in the dressing room's full length mirror.

Only, it was not me. It was more like a male version of me.

I blinked and gasped in surprise, but even before I could take a second look, the spell was broken. I stood there for a moment, frozen in place, panting at the top of my lungs and staring at my shocked reflection. I am awfully pale to start out with, so you can imagine I was literally as white as a sheet. On top of that I felt cold, as if I had passed through a ghost, and every hair on my body was standing on end. I have rarely seen anyone look so scared in my life. If anyone had touched me right then, I would have cut them down with my very best scream, and then promptly beat them to death. Of course, the last time I saw a was surprised by a naked man during my bath, that had been the appropriate response. As soon as I consciously realized that the threat had been entirely in my head, I expelled my breath in a burst of nervous laughter, relieved that no one had seen me like that.

But, the truth is, I *was* scared. I had recognized the boy in the mirror. He was the boy from my dreams. Up until that moment, I had believed he was *just* a dream. Something my mind had invented to deal with the stray impressions I picked up over a lifetime of casual contact with the minds of passing men. I usually did not remember much from the dreams when I woke up. Only, it was not just a recurring dream. I mean, I had always felt a sense of continuity while I was dreaming, as if I lived an alternate life in them, which made it all the more frustrating when that feeling was the only thing I carried with me into the waking world. I mean, what was the point of having such a rich dream life, especially one that could help me understand men better, if I could barely remember it?

So, I had gotten into the habit of dismissing it.

But I could not dismiss this. No, at that moment I was giving the matter my full attention. I was struck with a sudden, frightening notion. What if those dreams had not been the product of my warped, subconscious imagination? What if they were the product of a psychic collision with the ghost of someone close enough to me I might mistake him as a part of my self? I knew instantly who that boy had to be, in spite of the fact that he was a man I had never met.

He was my father.

No one ever talked about him, and the only thing I knew for certain was that he disappeared eighteen years ago. He had been an ill-favored son of Arden, fresh out of the Academy and my guess is that he set out on the road to adventure as soon the Autumn Festival ended. That was part of what the festival was about, after all. It was the time when the talents and skills of individuals were tested and recruited for all purposes. He probably did not know he had fathered a child. I had often fantasized about him returning home and finding out that he had a daughter, and of course falling in love with me on the spot. I dreamed up a thousand things for us to do together while we were getting to know each other. Not once did I imagine that he might be dead.

I should have. I had lived for two years deep in the shadow of war. I knew that adventurers were often mercenaries and mercenaries often died. I had killed some of them myself--and believe me, they deserved to be torn to pieces. But, after that night, the only thing keeping me from being an orphan was believing that my father was still alive somewhere. Which I can admit now was rather childish. Why should fate be kinder to my father than it was to my mother, or to me? Once I admitted that, all those dreams that I had shrugged off seemed like calls from beyond the grave, his efforts to reach out to me, say all the things I had longed to hear from him. If so, my determination to shield my mind from the cries of the dead caused me to block him out.

What a horrible and depressing thought.

I could hardly get over it. I washed and then sat in the bath and brooded for an hour. I only got sidetracked once, wondering why I did not snap out of the vision in the stall. I mean, when was the last time I experimented with peeing *standing up?* And how distracted does a girl have to be to miss holding something like *that* in her hand? For that matter, if I was going through all the same motions as I did in the vision… well, I checked and there was no mess in the stall. So, *did* I manage to pee standing up? I swear, it's these little mysteries that really make my head hurt. To stave off a migraine, I returned to the bigger question. Eventually I reached the conclusion that *maybe* I had been wrong to ignore my visions. Perhaps I could learn something from them. Perhaps they were the only chance I had to get to know my father.

I had no idea what I was getting myself into.

Finally, after seventeen years, a breakthrough. Fortunately all my other attempts to get through to Morganna were not a waste, since they evoked her dreams of my life. The dreams alone would never have been enough, and I had already learned that communicating with her directly was too much. One way or the other, her mind would block everything out. It was all going to come down to the visions. They would show her who I was, what happened to me and hopefully make her understand how I used her and why. Of course, she was not the only one forced to face the consequences of my actions. I discovered the cost of exploiting her to escape from my own death at the same time she was confronting my reflection in the mirror. What she was looking at was a memory, a moment from my life. In exchange for glimpsing that moment, her mind vacated her body for a moment and I found myself in it, living, breathing, for the first time an almost twenty years.

And I really needed to take a piss.

I won't bore you with the gruesome details, just take my word, my first experience in female form was mortifying. Fortunately, there a lot of things a body knows how to do on it's own as long as you just don't interfere with it too much. If you ever happen to find yourself in the same position I was in, my advice is to just sit down and pretend you're taking a dump, and try not to think about what's going on until the music stops.

On a similar note, try to avoid looking into the full length mirror when you come out of the stall. The word is "mesmerizing" and fortunately I snapped out of it when she snapped out of her vision.

The point is, that little experience made me realize that Morganna was not the only one facing a trial in the coming days. I was going to find out what it was like to be a girl, whether I wanted to or not, and I was going to have to cover for her every time her mind stepped out. I should have realized what could happen if I used her to cheat death. I was not looking forward to her reaction when she finally learned the truth. Even before I discovered this latest twist, I wished I could warn her. Of course, if I was going to take over her body while she was locked in visions, I realized I would be able to give her warnings. I could leave her notes to explain what was not explained in the visions.

Comments

The nature of the story allows the main characters to narrate each other's stories. The one problem with that approach lies in the assumption that he is reborn as her, that his personality was submerged as a past life and does not resurface until her mind is probed to determine her relationship to him. If so, he is not capable of assuming control during her visions, but, there is nothing to say that her visions are not instantaneous recollections, or exclusively dreams. The device of having her future self confront her, but having these meetings dismissed as dreams or visions, works to provide an occasional goad, while adding diversity to the episodes she endures. As usual, there are more options, more approaches to telling the story, than the story requires. The one to apply should be the one with the most consistency.

A complex character evolves out of the simplest of circumstances. Providing that for this story depends on the exclusion of all unnecessary threads, painful as that may be. To that end, it is necessary to accept the best solution that presented itself. Morgan, an initiate-artist, was drawn into a vampire-were war over Ruin's Deep. His training, combined with his personal characteristics, resulted in him being chosen as the object of a wager. The rival vampire and were-tiger infected him simultaneously. His training was sufficient for him to resist one of their infections, and the one he succumbed to would indicate the victor. Morgan's response was beyond prediction, however, as he tried to use his abilities to exploit both infections to prolong the ordeal while he escaped and sought a cure from the goddess. Unfortunately, what he actually did was integrate the infections, turning him in a fusion of vampire and were. Instead of gaining the time to reach the sanctuary of the goddess, he was overcome by the hunger and thirst of his hybrid nature, and deviated from his path to hunt. This allowed his sires to catch up to him and confront what he had become. After experiencing the power of his hunger and thirst, he realized there was only one way to ensure he never preyed on human beings. He refused to return with either of his sires and waited for the sun to rise.

When he exposed himself to the dawn, however, he discovered the truth about the effect of light on vampires and weres. It was a catalyst, unlocking the raw potential of his psyche even as it consumed and refined him. In the space of a few breaths, he was reduced to an ember--the refinement that normally took a vampire centuries accelerated and perfected by the metamorphic regeneration of a were. While his body was refined to an embryo, his full psychic potential was awakened. Instinct and intuition expanded to conceive of a way to ensure his survival, calling upon the future to provide for the needs of the embryo in that instant, changing the embryo itself to ensure that a future Morgan, capable of bearing a child, would come into existence and then dragged her into her own past to serve as the embryo's host mother. Everything up to this point is simply a preface, the foundation of Morgan's story, in which she finds herself inexplicable tossed into the past, falls under the wing of the vampire and were [the latter of whom witnessed the "rebirth"] as they lead her through the discovery of her hybrid nature [incidentally introducing her to the memory of her previous incarnation with their attempt to verify her connection to him].

Everything required to account for the realization of her potential is provided in this approach. As much as possible, the transgender influence is diminished without stripping Morgan of the cultivation of her male potential. It does give her a male alter-ego, who provides her with a contemporary context and later motivation to assume a masculine form.

Note: It might be possible to devote attention to the transition itself, beginning in Morganna's generation, confronting her with her older self, introducing the rivals for her affections as they prepare her for her displacement by stimulating latent memories of Morgan's final ordeal. Upon displacement, the plot follows her into the custody of her sires, her realization of her displacement, her introduction to her true nature and indoctrination, and the discovery of her pregnancy. She faces the scrutiny of the goddess, who investigates her as the focus of a radical shift in the prospects of the future, where her presence offers the world a chance to survive the coming cataclysm. She also draws the attention of entities responsible for nudging the world toward the brink of destruction. At the heart of it all, she faces the simple fact that if she should die before giving birth, she will never have existed.

Morgan was in the midst of an astral probing of her past to discover the truth about a childhood trauma that haunts her nightmares when she was snatched physically through time. Shaken and disoriented by the temporal displacement, her initial assumption when she is washed up in a cove is that she was interrupted during her meditations by someone intending to kill her. Moving someone's body while they were projecting could do that, and dumping them in the ocean on a stormy night almost guaranteed it, especially when the victim was known to indulge in the occasional night time swim. Not knowing who among her peers and mentors would have attempted to kill her she sought the haven of her other, unofficial patrons. On her way she encountered a building in what was supposed to be a vacant lot, without realizing the significance she tells herself that she must have taken the wrong route home. She makes it to the safe house, finding it typically unoccupied, and collapses in exhaustion.

The next day, after bathing and dressing, she sets out to begin an investigation into her attempted murder. Not wanting to tip off her killer, she is forced to remain at a safe distance, from which she can only make out the fact that no one seems to have taken her absence amiss. There was no uproar at the manor where she had been raised and trained to be a courtesan, it seemed to be business as usual at all the Order's establishment--one of which she had been abducted from the night before--and even in the dens and warrens of the criminal trade there were no rumors about a hit or plot against her. In fact, there was no mention of her at all. At the same time, she never came close to encountering any of her peers or close acquaintances.

It was late in the day before she finally came across a familiar face. He was someone she knew only in passing, an acquaintance of one of her patrons, and he met her approach with his guard up. As usual, it was always necessary for her to go through one of these associates whenever she wished to locate Logan, the warmer of her two self-appointed foster fathers. [Perhaps because she was wearing Logan's clothes, the other man did not question her odd approach. Logan was known as something of a ladies man and she was a courtesan, and there was a hint of the breed in her--better disguised than in any other of their kind he had met.] Morgan was told when and where Logan would next be available, if she was patient while he conducted his business, she could see him then. Unfortunately, that was a few nights off, and Morgan was in dire straits. Still, if that was the earliest Logan intended to appear, there was little chance of tracking him down quicker.

As evening passed into night, Morgan set out to appeal to her other father figure, Roark. In theory, he was always easier to track down, unfortunately that was because he owned a brothel. More than once, Morgan had worried that his interest in her was concerned more with grooming her for an exalted position in his stable--which was not so far fetched considering the many times she had nearly been expelled from the manor. Not too surprisingly, the matron sent Morgan to the bath, instructing the girls to make her presentable, when Morgan asked for an audience with Roark. To her shame, however, Morgan fell asleep on a couch waiting for an audience with Roark. [Roark came in ready to 'interview' the beauty who had asked to see him, and found himself startled at her appearance. This was not a girl desperate to lease a bed in a brothel. She had the breeding for a courtesan to kings. She also had the taint of the inoculated, either she was a retainer to a vampire, or she had survived a vampire's attempt to turn her. If the latter, she would not have come to him except in the hopes of becoming the former.]

Morgan awoke the next morning to receive a fresh outfit and instructions to report that evening to a private residence, where she would be given a second chance to meet with Roark. Frustrated, she decided to risk upsetting Logan. She knew where he cached a portion of his wealth, and unless she wanted to keep stealing for food she needed the money now. Naturally, she was forced to go into the ruins to get that money, and Logan turned up just in time to catch her hand in the cache. Morgan was quick to take advantage of his appearance, surprising him right off by tackling him and hugging him, and then she launched into her story confusing him, but making him clearly aware that she believed she knew him. After hearing her tale, he decided to play along, drawing her out with leading questions. [He quickly established that she associated him with her mother, from whom she was estranged, she did not know what he was, but from observation he deduced her mother had been turned while Morgan was in her womb. It was one of the few ways an individual could gain immunity to were venom, and it left a taint of the breed.] Logan allowed her to keep the money and promised to help her discover who was out to kill her.

Of all the options explored to establish the main character, the simplest starts with a phoenix familiar. In some legends, phoenixes have the ability to shape-shift and are capable of parthenogenic rebirth. Thus, the phoenix familiar of the Magus adopted human form on some mission for its master, during which he was seduced by a courtesan who hoped he would give her a favored daughter. The nature of that intimacy triggered a parthenogenic inception, but a human male was not a suitable vessel for the full potential of a phoenix, so the phoenix reflexively turned female and conceived a daughter to compliment the son. The division ensured the children would be born human, while imposing human limits on the phoenix. Ironically, the two children were both given the name Morgan. The boy was named for his father, and the phoenix passed on the name she had used to her daughter, having adopted a different alias, Maureen, to establish herself as a courtesan once she realized she was trapped in her human guise. In spite of these minor problems, their lives proceeded pleasantly for seven years when the girl was abducted and offered as a sacrifice to a demon. The phoenix risked everything to come to her daughter's rescue. Seeing no other option, the phoenix tricked the demon into possessing her and then sacrificed herself to protect her offspring. The demon attempted to capture her soul and inadvertently became trapped in the split between the children's psyches, until they encountered each other and become lovers. Following the death of the phoenix, the girl became a ward of the goddess and both children developed the power of regeneration, and gained access to some of their psychic potential, losing the ability to learn magic in the process. Their psychic abilities qualified them to study as muse-initiates at the Academy, where they first met each other and adopted the nicknames "Dusk" and "Dawn" to eliminate confusion over their shared name.

In the wake of Maureen's death, the only individual to know the truth of Dusk and Dawn's origins was the phoenix's former master, Alvin, the Magus. She had informed her master of her predicament as soon as she had been able, and he had helped establish her in her new life. Not surprisingly, he took a paternal interest in her children. He established that the two were capable of miraculous things if they worked together--which he explained to them as the result of being soul mates. Of course he did not explain that he meant that in the same way two people sharing a dorm might be called room mates. Thus, Alvin inadvertently encouraged them to become lovers. It took a significant amount of time for them to progress to total intercourse, but their intimacy presented the demon inside them with the possibility of escape, and its struggles set off Dawn's nightmares. Inevitably, the demon escaped, stealing Dusk's body and leaving him trapped in Dawn, setting the events of this first book in motion. The nightmares gave Morgan a place to begin her mission to retrieve Dusk's body. However, her interest in the ruins brought her to the attention of those who sought dominion over them.

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 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 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. 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.

On the night she opened herself completely to her lover, the demon within her took possession of his body and tried to kill her, forcing her to slay her lover to survive. The natural consequences of that are her arrest, imprisonment, and trial. It slightly alters the dynamic of the whole plot, in which her objective is not an attempt to rescue her lover, but a desperate attempt to prove her innocence. Escaping from prison and imminent execution, Morgan approaches her mentors among the Order of the Ruins for help acquiring proof of demonic influence from within the ruins. However, the process of acquitting herself starts with acquiring evidence to support the story of her abduction and information leading to the part of the ruins where she was offered to the demon. This advice comes from her mentor in crime, who urges her to lose herself in the underworld if she does not want to be dragged to the chopping block. Unaware that the man who was responsible for arranging her childhood abduction was a vampire, in league with the necromancer and demonologist that offered her to the demon, she broke in to his mansion and stole the information she needed.

Morgan was on the run. She had been declared a demon, convicted of the murder of Dusk and Dawn, and condemned to death. She escaped on the eve of her execution and sailed to Avon where her only hope of proving her innocence was buried. For the first time, the mistakes of her childhood were going to help her, providing her with one crucial contact with the underworld. Unfortunately, there was much more to the underworld than organized crime, and her path led her right into the heart of a deadly feud.

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 musclature. 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 returned to Avon and petitioned the Duke for a commission to explore the ruins. Because she was one of the few people who had entered the ruins and returned, her commission was granted, in spite of the fact that she was only ten years older then the seven year old girl she had been then. Over the next few days, she assembled a party to accompany her on her expedition, unwittingly including a vampire and a were-tiger bent on ensuring her mission failed if she ventured into their domains within the ruins. As an added complication, the pair were ancient rivals locked in a struggle for dominion over the whole of Ruin's Deep. However, their initial probing had caused Morgan to confide her true intentions, to find information about a demon who had possessed her lover that would help her track it down and banish it. The one thing the rivals were united in was the effort to expunge the demons trapped in the city before it was buried so long ago, so they were willing to support her to that extent.

Forced to work together within the party, the rivals were also given a chance to negotiate an end to their conflict before it drew too much attention from the mortal authorities. A solution presented itself as they both developed an interest in Morgan, each toying with the idea of offering to convert her, granting her the power to take on a demon on her own--and binding her to his will. It did not take long for them to recognize the other's intent, and propose to settle their rivalry by making her the object of a wager. A rift within the party presented the opportunity the rivals were waiting for, when Morgan crossed the forbidden line to rescue the mutinous party members from their own folly. Morgan saved the lives of her party, but she ended up paying the price. Her fight with the demon the others set loose brought her into a populated area of the ruins, a discovery she could not be allowed to share with the world at large. The only way they would take her word to protect the secret community was if she became one of them.

What Morgan did not know about her two paramours was that they were 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. As they courted her, they learned about her life and training at the Academy. Once she revealed she was an initiate, the two were reminded of a story where an initiate's unique abilities were exploited to settle a dispute between a were and a vampire in the past century. [An initiate possessed the talent and training necessary to resist vampire or were venom. But, in a joint infection the initiate would be forced to divide his resources fighting both infections--and ultimately die--or concentrate his resources on neutralizing one infection and succumbing to the other.] 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. Of course, Morgan tried to fight off both infections, stalling the progress of either while she attempted to escape from her sires and reach the temple of the goddess in the hope of receiving a proper cure.

Along the way, she realized that fighting the infections directly would quickly exhaust her and their combined, unopposed effect would kill her soon after. Her chances of surviving were greater if she regulated the infections, allowing them to run their course but devoting her resources to controlling 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. Morgan had no idea how absorbed in this effort she became, losing more than a day weaving the spell that would oversee her controlled corruption. 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. Gripped by the need to hunt, she deviated from her determined path, but by evening she succeeded in running her prey to ground and fed both hunger and thirst. Renewed, her thoughts turned once more to the prospect of a cure after which she could return and probe the ruins in secret, resume her pursuit of the demon, and recover the body of her lover.

Morgan's hunt had taken 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 she had changed in her sleep--into an undead tiger. 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.

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.

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 a celebration was held. During the celebration, Morgan was seductively distracted and infected by the rivals. Her training as an initiate would have enabled her to resist either infection. Combined they were lethal, unless she focused exclusively on neutralizing the effects of one. Instead of fighting, she applied herself to exploiting the effects of both infections to prolong the ordeal while she attempted to escape and seek a cure. Unfortunately, her escape was not a success 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 complete the mission she had entered the ruins for, but she faced obstacles to her pursuit of the demon itself. 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. It was assumed that, even if she were to save her lover, their relationship was usurped by what Morgan had become. Morgan had never confided that she carried his soul within her, that he was as tainted by her experiences as she was. If it came to it, she would infect her lover with her hybrid venom, if it allowed them to be a couple again.

Her sires feared she might do just that, and they intended to stake their claim to her first. So, once again, her only option was to escape. 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.

1: Morgan faces the scrutiny of the goddess, who investigates her as the focus of a radical shift in the prospects of the future, where her transformation creates a chance to save the world from the coming cataclysm. She also draws the attention of entities responsible for nudging the world toward the brink of destruction.

2: 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. 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.

3: 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.

At the age of nine, Morgan was abducted and offered as a sacrifice to a demon trapped in Ruin's Deep. Confronted with such a traumatic ordeal, her young mind searched for any possible means of escape and found one the demon could not prevent--escaping into the past. Emerging from the ruins twenty years earlier, she became an honorary member of the Order of Aeslyn Tear and a ward of the goddess. The demon's assault had deeply scarred her psyche, leaving her with a fragmented memory of her childhood and extraordinary psychic abilities. Those abilities earned her a spot at the Academy where she would be trained as a muse. There, she met a male version of herself--a boy with the same name and strikingly similar features--in training to become an artist. She dubbed him "Dusk" when he invented the alias "Dawn" for her. They were separated for their training in magic and psychic disciplines, but shared most of the same classes in academic and athletic disciplines.

Facets

It is a question of identity, dualities and singularity, and the probing of the mysteries of the psyche. It is a matter of one standing at the cusp of all and nothing, a mind encompassing space and time. It is the story of an individual crossing the boundaries of sex and spirituality. It is a paradox.

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.

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. 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. 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.

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.

Establishment

01. Morgan returns to her grandmother's home in Avon to confront her past. Visited by nightmares, Morgan reflects upon recent steps. Arriving at the temple, Morgan finds a summons to visit her grandmother, Muriel. Morgan is disturbed to learn of her inheritance and a betrothal, either of which could conflict with her calling. A night alone in her childhood home is relieved only by a visit from the goddess, instructing her to put her affairs in order. A visitor comes to the rescue. Unable to return to sleep, Morgan luxuriates in an early, casual morning, almost forgetting her appointments. Lack of sleep catches up to her in the bath, and her flight from nightmares causes a potentially fatal drowning accident. Morgan's betrothed arrives anxiously, letting himself in and tracking her down as unsettled feelings deepen into alarm. A strained breakfast party. Morgan suffers an escort from Blaine to her appointment with her parents' advocate, the executor of their estate. Morgan strains to convey her intentions to quickly dispose of claims and entanglements that would compromise her calling. Morgan takes note of the opportunity she has to confront her demons and lay her ghosts to rest.

Morgan returned from the Academy at Aeryn Tear determined to face the demons of her childhood. She was sent to the academy for training in the physical and psychic disciplines necessary for her to become a paladin of the goddess. The temple of the goddess crested the ridge dividing the Port of Avon and the City of Avon with a commanding view of the Aeslyn Tear Ruins and the former Seat of Avon.

The largest port, and third largest city in Arden, Avon was unique for not having a reigning lord. House Avon had traditionally been the servants of the goddess and the defenders of the throne, so the Seat of Arden lay within the Avon Domain. When House Avon fell, and no legitimate heir could be found, the crown prince was appointed regent and ever since the domain had been under the indirect rule of the throne.

An only child, Morgan was orphaned when she was seven years old. The trauma of witnessing the massacre that claimed the lives of her parents shattered her young psyche, unleashing her full, naked psychic potential. Unable to deal with her in this condition, her surviving family abandoned her on the steps of the temple of the goddess Arden. Morgan recovered quickly in the goddess's care, healing from the trauma and adapting to the strange powers it awakened.

02. Morgan is noticed by a demon from the ruins. Morgan tests her nerve while Blaine pleads his suit. Blaine dogs Morgan's heels as she visits the ruins to firm her resolve. Morgan considers Blains pleas, stunned to hear his story of their meeting and realizing she unwittingly encouraged his affection. Morgan attempts to restate her position, referring back to the start of intimacy in their relationship. A shocking episode is revisited. A fifteen-year-old Morgan loses her cool when her friends drag her down into the ruins. Morgan snaps when she encounters one of the demons of her childhood and takes flight, leading her friends deep into the maze. Morgan willingly indulges her friends' curiosity to escape from the horrors of her past. Morgan names her priorities, the couple makes an informal pact. Morgan was a lover out of friendship and for fun, not speaking of love because even love could not alter her calling. Morgan must decide her true feelings, as part of putting her affairs in order, but sorting out her past still came first. Morgan and Blaine reach an understanding oblivious to the presence of an unearthly observer

The sole survivor of the massacre that claimed the lives of her parents, she alone knew what the expedition into the ruins of Aeslyn Tear had unearthed. It had taken ten years of training to master the powers unleashed within her that tragic night and fully comprehend the horror her parents unwittingly helped loose upon the world. Armed with the mantle of a paladin of the goddess, Morgan hoped to discover who her parents had been, find out why they had died and lay their ghosts to rest.

03. Morgan interviews family and acquaintances of her parents. Her debut provides Morgan a good place to begin her inquiry. A coming out is scheduled for Morgan's seventeenth birthday on midsummer's eve. To her annoyance, preparations and matters of her estate keep Morgan busy until the week of midsummer. A private celebration on the eve of her birthday is thrown into chaos by a tavern brawl. Questions lead to confrontations, shedding light on the family legacy. The morning of her anniversary, Morgan is infuriated to learn her debut will include a wedding announcement. Morgan circumvents her grandmother despite being tied up all day in preparations, calling upon Blaine telepathically. After welcoming the guests, Morgan hunts down her grandmother finding her engaged in an argument with the goddess. Dancing, a glimpse of politics, intrigue and cues to tantalizing leads. True to his word, Blaine derails her grandmother's plot with the support of her father's father, Alfred. On the dance floor, Morgan gains enlightenment on many matters from a string of different partners. Most people are eager to feed her curiosity about her parents, mentioning various scandals, affairs and involved parties

04. Morgan seeks audience with associates of her parents and their liege. Under the guise of courtesy visits, Morgan follows up on leads gathered during her debut. Moira, a great aunt, reveals that Muriel was a bastard daughter of House Avon, born to a courtesan not a concubine. Morgan confides that Balfour--a magistrate and former lover of Muriel--died before she could respond to his invitation. Morgan is stunned to learn Alfred and Muriel are half-brother and -sister, explaining the scandal her parents endured. A second lead fizzles due to the sudden or recent demise of a contact, but Morgan perseveres. Kern, the family advocate, reveals the truth about Morgan's breeding and her grandmother's foiled plans for her mother. Alvin, Morgan's great-grandfather on both sides, is her nearest true half-elf relation--the controversial "lost heir". Alfred provided a list of her parents associates--the most promising lead ends at a funeral for the friend and adversary. Morgan is encouraged by word of an intrigue involving her parents around the time of their deaths. Funeral gossip gave Morgan something new to investigate, a controversy surrounding the excavation of the ruins . A number of wealthy or influential people opposed or objected to the excavation, representing much of the community. Many protests evolved into insults, resulting in duels championed by her father or debates hosted by her mother.

Morgan had a certain fame for being the sole survivor of the Avon massacres. Among the people she sought out, there were a number of individuals notably opposed to the excavation of Aeslyn Tear. Morgan needed to know if these objectors had reason to suspect the tragic outcome of the venture, and if they did know something, why had they failed to give sufficient warning. She had been probing this mystery over summers past but at last she was able to pursue answers more aggressively.

05. Morgan connects the deaths of her contacts. Morgan focuses her attention on the individuals noted for their objections to the excavation of the ruins. Pursuing the objectors in hopes of confronting them, Morgan is confronted again by the stranger, Eden. In spite of the position she finds herself in, Morgan presses the objectors in hopes of discovering their motives. Morgan receives no admissions and her attempt to provoke their confidence gets her ejected from the club. Blaine comments on the oddity of recent deaths, the most recent victim being an individual Morgan just confronted. It took a few days to uncover another nest of conspirators and confront them, again with little success. Blaine confronts Morgan about her activities, citing the danger represented by the latest reports of slayings. Recognizing the victim's name, Morgan reconsiders the daily gossip on random killings in the port, city and countryside. Suspicious, Morgan checks her list of contacts with the authorities and discovers many of them among the slain. Morgan suspects that conspiracy in the past could be linked to present conspiracy, and tests a disturbing hunch. A list outlining possible conspirators against the excavation encompasses the list of recent "random" fatalities. A chance encounter raises Morgan's hackles, presenting a possible, horrifying scenario for current events.

Because people were willing to talk to her, Morgan was able to begin unraveling a web of intrigue that tied into a series of very recent deaths. Her suspicions were aroused when she noticed that these same people were being murdered shortly after she talked to them or before she ever reached them.

06. Morgan gets caught in the middle of an assassination attempt. When another contact she visited turns up dead, Morgan races to confront the remaining few. As Morgan recalled, the excavators discovered evidence of others penetrating the ruins--and considers the implications. Arriving on the scene of another killing, Morgan is vividly reminded of what demons were capable of. Morgan reaches a conclusion about the course of the conspiracy and moves to intercede directly. Outraged to have her offer of protection exploited for a seduction, Morgan is poorly prepared to face his assassin. Confronted by Morgan's assumptions, Lloyd accepts her offer of protection, treating it as a pretense for a liaison. As Morgan takes advantage of his hospitality, he intrudes intend on taking advantage of her. The confrontation between Morgan and Lloyd is interrupted while the pair are in compromised positions. As the combat evolves, Morgan learns of the ongoing conflict between the weres and vampires.

None she talked to would explain their reasons for discouraging the excavation project, but deeper probing would reveal that they were all representatives of the vampire and were communities. All of the slain quickly proved to be shape-shifter casualties, mauled vampire retainers or the remains of an occasional interrupted meal--prey that no predator lived long enough to properly dispose of.

The killings Morgan was investigating were the result of a territorial dispute between the tiger clans and the prince of the city. Morgan had hardly begun her hunt when the prince of the city called a truce with the alpha male, to point out that the escalation of their war endangered them all, and proposed a wager to settle their claim to the ruins.

07. Morgan is stalked by the demon.

From her own nightmares, Morgan was able to discover the link between the current slayings and the massacre she had witnessed. Her parents had been confronted with mounting animosity by the weres and vampires in a direct progression to their deaths in the ruins. It did not take much of a leap for Morgan to realize that they were fighting for control over Ruin's Deep all along.

The port and city of Avon were known to harbor vampires, divided under the rule of two vampire princes, while the villages and countryside were both haven and hunting grounds for shape-shifter clans headed and protected by the tiger clan--tigers being the fiercest natural predators of the north.

Like most people, Morgan was unaware that Avon held a highly coveted and disputed territory in the underworld. The turf war between the were-tigers and the vampires was fought covertly, a deadly chess game of ambushes and assassinations in an ever mounting feud. Normal routines and habits became disrupted, producing a trail of bodies.

08. Morgan is given an audience with the vampire lords of the city and the port

As few mortals beyond Morgan could attest, Aeslyn Tear, the city once smothered by the wrath of the gods, was far more extensive and surprisingly intact than anyone suspected. It was a sprawling underground metropolis dwarfing the port and city and underlying the surrounding countryside.

09. Morgan is abducted by a were raiding party.

10. Morgan is oblivious to the demon's attempt to snatch her from her abductors.

11. Morgan is confronted by the alpha tiger.

Initially, the object of the wager was simply to eliminate Morgan, but she proved to be something of a prize herself. As Morgan would make a fine consort in the eyes of both leaders, the truce almost disintegrated over their attempts to conquer her.

12. Morgan escapes from the tiger clan, while they are distracted by the demon.

13. Morgan is summoned before her goddess

14. Morgan probes the ruins for proof of demonic involvement in the massacre

15. Morgan is noticed by vampires and stalked, inadvertently frustrating the demon

16. Morgan finds herself in the middle of a battle over Ruin's Deep

17. Morgan is captured and becomes the focus of a wager

The increased stakes prompted a change in the wager, 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.

18. Morgan is infected by the alpha tiger and the lord of the city

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 before 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.

19. Morgan is visited by the demon, tempted by it as she lies dying

20. Morgan dies yet is turned by both bites, a vampire-were tiger

At first it seemed that the prince was the victor, when Morgan died and rose as a vampire. 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. A were would turn overnight and swiftly gain vitality. Then as the hunger seized her, she transformed into a tiger, proving that she had been turned simultaneously into a blood-drinker and a man-eater.

In a way, the dual transformation proved Morgan's salvation, her tiger form making it far easier to slake her blood thirst at the same time she fed her hunger for fresh meat by leading her instinctively to animal prey.

21. Morgan remains the focus of the wager for Ruin's Deep--the sire to win her wins

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. 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. These benefits did not console Morgan for the loss of her humanity, however.

22. Morgan succumbs to her hunger, escaping to hunt

23. Morgan confronts what she has become and exposes herself to the dawn

As she became aware of the seductiveness of human prey, she decided to end her unnatural existence before she damned herself by succumbing to them. 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.

24. Morgan is shocked to regain her humanity

Morgan regained her humanity through what she believed to be the intervention of her goddess when she attempted to commit suicide.

25. Morgan is shocked to discover her hungers persist

26. Morgan is confronted by her unwanted suitors and the implications of what she is

27. Morgan discovers the consequence of indulging her hungers

28. Morgan is finally cornered by the demon

29. Morgan slays the demon, only to learn it was one of many loosed ten years ago

30. Morgan presents her proof to her goddess

31. Morgan is confronted by her sires who reveal the role Arden played in her fate

Var

Notes to Append: Seventeen - Ruins' Deep

<!> Points of interest [01/27/04]: The conception of Morgan and Logan. The union and separation of Morgan and Logan. The initiation of Morgan. <!>

Cast Notes

Morgan

Logan (phantom)

Duke of Avon

Court (Ensemble) Advisors (3), Ministers (9), Councilors (18), Bodyguards (3), Guards (60/20), Courtesans (3), Concubine

Arden

Priestesses (39) Matrons (3), Maidens (9), Maids (27)

Priests (27) Patrons (2), Monks (9), Clerics (16)

Logan's Family

Mother

Father

Amanda, Sister

Brothers (3)

Staff (7) Steward, Cook, Groom, Maids (3), Nurse

Hannah's Family

Father

Mother (deceased)

\* Husband (Logan's best friend)

\* Children (0/3)

Staff (3) Steward, Cook, Maid

Sword & Sorcerer Inn

Adventurers (18)

Staff (5)

Lloyd

Assassins (3) (were)

Cult assassins (9) (vamp)

An admirer, (were-tiger)

A swordsman, (were-tiger)

A swordsman, (were-tiger)

A guide/assassin, (vampire)

A sorcerer

A conjurer

A cleric

A thief (elf)

A scout/assassin (drow)

Brigands (21/9)

Seventeen - Childhood Demons

AN: Ruins' Deep would effectively be the second book in the second series. The first book, Seventeen - Childhood Demons, would be set at the Academy or immediately after returning from it. The elements of the first book have been explored elsewhere. The demon within. The coming of age and engagement. The breaking down and confronting the past. The end and the beginning, possession. The fruitless pursuit. Nightmares have plagued Morgan since the night her childhood demon escaped. Some were the disturbing images of an alien entity taking control of Logan's body, turning an act of love into an act of devastating brutality. Some were similar and horrifying memories of the same entity taking possession of her mother and trying to kill her, only to be torn to pieces by an invisible force lashing out of Morgan and Logan. Some were of the excruciating physical and mental mutilation they had endured as the demon probed the pair of them, testing their suitability as offerings. Buried in those images, as in the second sort, was the memory of something inside her mind snapping and then unfolding, to heal her flesh, to heal and protect her mind, and ultimately to slay the person she loved most in the world. Through all this trauma, she clung to the dreams searching for clues, signs, anything that would lead her to the identity of her nemesis or the place where he had been summoned or bound. They were the only leads she had in the pursuit of Logan's salvation. The only hope they had of becoming separated, or reunited as husband and wife. Notes and relevant material can be filed under Childhood Demons for simultaneous or preemptive development.

In past attempts to explore the Childhood Demons thread, the climax followed the marriage of Morgan and Logan. It is suitable for the marriage to occur at the conclusion of their initiations, to allow their friends to share the celebration, with the couple settling in the region to pursue advanced training and start a family away from the interference of their family heads. Because of their intimate upbringing, the night of their union invited a more intimate coupling than either had ever dared, opening the door for the demon that possessed the slain artist to emerge and take possession of one of their bodies. The demon's escape was punctuated by bloodshed, as the demon and the bride struggle to kill one another. Morgan ends up under suspicion for the murder of her husband, defending herself with a slightly altered version of the facts of the demon's attack, and escaping execution only because a witness turns up to testify that "Logan" had taken passage to the North. This allows Morgan to arrive in Avon, making a slight side trip on her way to the North in pursuit of Logan.

Of note, there are some approaches to Childhood Demons that subject the boy and girl to the same childhood trauma, but the majority featured the girl alone being subjected to the horror of losing her family, while the boy is affected indirectly by the chain of succession implicit in their split inception.

Morgan returns to her grandmother's home in Avon to confront her past.

Visited by nightmares, Morgan reflects upon recent steps.

Arriving at the temple, Morgan finds a summons to visit her grandmother, Muriel.

Morgan is disturbed to learn of her inheritance and a betrothal, either of which could conflict with her calling.

A night alone in her childhood home is relieved only by a visit from the goddess, instructing her to put her affairs in order.

A visitor comes to the rescue.

Unable to return to sleep, Morgan luxuriates in an early, casual morning, almost forgetting her appointments.

Lack of sleep catches up to her in the bath, and her flight from nightmares causes a potentially fatal drowning accident.

Morgan's betrothed arrives anxiously, letting himself in and tracking her down as unsettled feelings deepen into alarm.

A strained breakfast party.

Morgan suffers an escort from Blaine to her appointment with her parents' advocate, the executor of their estate.

Morgan strains to convey her intentions to quickly dispose of claims and entanglements that would compromise her calling.

Morgan takes note of the opportunity she has to confront her demons and lay her ghosts to rest.

Morgan returned from the Academy at Aeryn Tear determined to face the demons of her childhood.

She was sent to the academy for training in the physical and psychic disciplines necessary for her to become a paladin of the goddess.

The temple of the goddess crested the ridge dividing the Port of Avon and the City of Avon with a commanding view of the Aeslyn Tear Ruins and the former Seat of Avon.

The largest port, and third largest city in Arden, Avon was unique for not having a reigning lord.

House Avon had traditionally been the servants of the goddess and the defenders of the throne, so the Seat of Arden lay within the Avon Domain.

When House Avon fell, and no legitimate heir could be found, the crown prince was appointed regent and ever since the domain had been under the indirect rule of the throne.

An only child, Morgan was orphaned when she was seven years old.

The trauma of witnessing the massacre that claimed the lives of her parents shattered her young psyche, unleashing her full, naked psychic potential.

Unable to deal with her in this condition, her surviving family abandoned her on the steps of the temple of the goddess Arden.

Morgan recovered quickly in the goddess's care, healing from the trauma and adapting to the strange powers it awakened.

Morgan is noticed by a demon from the ruins.

Morgan tests her nerve while Blaine pleads his suit.

Blaine dogs Morgan's heels as she visits the ruins to firm her resolve.

Morgan considers Blains pleas, stunned to hear his story of their meeting and realizing she unwittingly encouraged his affection.

Morgan attempts to restate her position, referring back to the start of intimacy in their relationship.

A shocking episode is revisited.

A fifteen-year-old Morgan loses her cool when her friends drag her down into the ruins.

Morgan snaps when she encounters one of the demons of her childhood and takes flight, leading her friends deep into the maze.

Morgan willingly indulges her friends' curiosity to escape from the horrors of her past.

Morgan names her priorities, the couple makes an informal pact.

Morgan was a lover out of friendship and for fun, not speaking of love because even love could not alter her calling.

Morgan must decide her true feelings, as part of putting her affairs in order, but sorting out her past still came first.

Morgan and Blaine reach an understanding oblivious to the presence of an unearthly observer

The sole survivor of the massacre that claimed the lives of her parents, she alone knew what the expedition into the ruins of Aeslyn Tear had unearthed.

It had taken ten years of training to master the powers unleashed within her that tragic night and fully comprehend the horror her parents unwittingly helped loose upon the world.

Armed with the mantle of a paladin of the goddess, Morgan hoped to discover who her parents had been, find out why they had died and lay their ghosts to rest.

Morgan interviews family and acquaintances of her parents.

Her debut provides Morgan a good place to begin her inquiry.

A coming out is scheduled for Morgan's seventeenth birthday on midsummer's eve.

To her annoyance, preparations and matters of her estate keep Morgan busy until the week of midsummer.

A private celebration on the eve of her birthday is thrown into chaos by a tavern brawl.

Questions lead to confrontations, shedding light on the family legacy.

The morning of her anniversary, Morgan is infuriated to learn her debut will include a wedding announcement.

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After welcoming the guests, Morgan hunts down her grandmother finding her engaged in an argument with the goddess.

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True to his word, Blaine derails her grandmother's plot with the support of her father's father, Alfred.

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Most people are eager to feed her curiosity about her parents, mentioning various scandals, affairs and involved parties

Morgan seeks audience with associates of her parents and their liege.

Under the guise of courtesy visits, Morgan follows up on leads gathered during her debut.

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Morgan confides that Balfour--a magistrate and former lover of Muriel--died before she could respond to his invitation.

Morgan is stunned to learn Alfred and Muriel are half-brother and -sister, explaining the scandal her parents endured.

A second lead fizzles due to the sudden or recent demise of a contact, but Morgan perseveres.

Kern, the family advocate, reveals the truth about Morgan's breeding and her grandmother's foiled plans for her mother.

Alvin, Morgan's great-grandfather on both sides, is her nearest true half-elf relation--the controversial "lost heir".

Alfred provided a list of her parents associates--the most promising lead ends at a funeral for the friend and adversary.

Morgan is encouraged by word of an intrigue involving her parents around the time of their deaths.

Funeral gossip gave Morgan something new to investigate, a controversy surrounding the excavation of the ruins .

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Many protests evolved into insults, resulting in duels championed by her father or debates hosted by her mother.

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Among the people she sought out, there were a number of individuals notably opposed to the excavation of Aeslyn Tear.

Morgan needed to know if these objectors had reason to suspect the tragic outcome of the venture, and if they did know something, why had they failed to give sufficient warning.

She had been probing this mystery over summers past but at last she was able to pursue answers more aggressively.

Morgan connects the deaths of her contacts.

Morgan focuses her attention on the individuals noted for their objections to the excavation of the ruins.

Pursuing the objectors in hopes of confronting them, Morgan is confronted again by the stranger, Eden.

In spite of the position she finds herself in, Morgan presses the objectors in hopes of discovering their motives.

Morgan receives no admissions and her attempt to provoke their confidence gets her ejected from the club.

Blaine comments on the oddity of recent deaths, the most recent victim being an individual Morgan just confronted.

It took a few days to uncover another nest of conspirators and confront them, again with little success.

Blaine confronts Morgan about her activities, citing the danger represented by the latest reports of slayings.

Recognizing the victim's name, Morgan reconsiders the daily gossip on random killings in the port, city and countryside.

Suspicious, Morgan checks her list of contacts with the authorities and discovers many of them among the slain.

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A list outlining possible conspirators against the excavation encompasses the list of recent "random" fatalities.

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Retired Notes

Morgan was dragged from her cell expecting to face execution, after lingering in prison for a month after her conviction and sentencing. Her fears seemed to be confirmed when she was brought to a bath for purification. From there, her path deviated from her expectations by leading back to the court, still nude as the day she was arrested. To her shock, the assembled court was presented testimony from a witness detailing the departure of Arduin Morgan on ship to Athelon. The charges against her were summarily dropped, and Morgan was escorted from the keep and dismissed.

For a moment, Morgan boiled in outrage at being discharged onto a public street in the nude, then what she heard in the court registered, and any concern for her appearance was dismissed by the formulation of an immediate plan of action. Storming in to a public audience, she made a direct appeal to the Duke of Avon for a commission to lead an expedition into the ruins of Aeslyn Tear. Once the commotion caused by her intrusion settled, and the Duke's advisors informed him of who she was--notably one of the few people to ever return from the depths of the ruins alive--he reprimanded the guards for discharging her in such a condition, and instructed servants to take her aside and clothe her for a private audience.

In private chambers, after Morgan had dressed, he questioned her. Morgan reminded him of the crime she was detained for, specifically of her testimony that a demon from the ruins had taken possession of her husband, asserting that her only hope of recovering him was to search for the demon's origins in the ruins for any clues that would enable her to find and drive the demon from Arduin. She kept the fact that her testimony did not include the exact truth to herself, specifically how Arduin came to be possessed to begin with. Given their recent trials at the ruins, it was simpler to blame that than admit to her own suspicions. To her relief, she was granted the commission.

Establishment Threads

01

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None she talked to would explain their reasons for discouraging the excavation project, but deeper probing would reveal that they were all representatives of the vampire and were communities. All of the slain quickly proved to be shape-shifter casualties, mauled vampire retainers or the remains of an occasional interrupted meal--prey that no predator lived long enough to properly dispose of.

The killings Morgan was investigating were the result of a territorial dispute between the tiger clans and the prince of the city. Morgan had hardly begun her hunt when the prince of the city called a truce with the alpha male, to point out that the escalation of their war endangered them all, and proposed a wager to settle their claim to the ruins.

07

Morgan is stalked by the demon

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From her own nightmares, Morgan was able to discover the link between the current slayings and the massacre she had witnessed. Her parents had been confronted with mounting animosity by the weres and vampires in a direct progression to their deaths in the ruins. It did not take much of a leap for Morgan to realize that they were fighting for control over Ruin's Deep all along.

The port and city of Avon were known to harbor vampires, divided under the rule of two vampire princes, while the villages and countryside were both haven and hunting grounds for shape-shifter clans headed and protected by the tiger clan--tigers being the fiercest natural predators of the north.

Like most people, Morgan was unaware that Avon held a highly coveted and disputed territory in the underworld. The turf war between the were-tigers and the vampires was fought covertly, a deadly chess game of ambushes and assassinations in an ever mounting feud. Normal routines and habits became disrupted, producing a trail of bodies.

08

Morgan is given an audience with the vampire lords of the city and the port

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As few mortals beyond Morgan could attest, Aeslyn Tear, the city once smothered by the wrath of the gods, was far more extensive and surprisingly intact than anyone suspected. It was a sprawling underground metropolis dwarfing the port and city and underlying the surrounding countryside.

09

Morgan is abducted by a were raiding party

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Morgan is oblivious to the demon's attempt to snatch her from her abductors

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Morgan is confronted by the alpha tiger

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Initially, the object of the wager was simply to eliminate Morgan, but she proved to be something of a prize herself. As Morgan would make a fine consort in the eyes of both leaders, the truce almost disintegrated over their attempts to conquer her.

12

Morgan escapes from the tiger clan, while they are distracted by the demon

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Morgan is summoned before her goddess

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Morgan probes the ruins for proof of demonic involvement in the massacre

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Morgan is noticed by vampires and stalked, inadvertently frustrating the demon

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Morgan finds herself in the middle of a battle over Ruin's Deep

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17

Morgan is captured and becomes the focus of a wager

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The increased stakes prompted a change in the wager, 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.

18

Morgan is infected by the alpha tiger and the lord of the city

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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 before 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.

19

Morgan is visited by the demon, tempted by it as she lies dying

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Morgan dies yet is turned by both bites, a vampire-were tiger

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At first it seemed that the prince was the victor, when Morgan died and rose as a vampire. 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. A were would turn overnight and swiftly gain vitality. Then as the hunger seized her, she transformed into a tiger, proving that she had been turned simultaneously into a blood-drinker and a man-eater.

In a way, the dual transformation proved Morgan's salvation, her tiger form making it far easier to slake her blood thirst at the same time she fed her hunger for fresh meat by leading her instinctively to animal prey.

21

Morgan remains the focus of the wager for Ruin's Deep--the sire to win her wins

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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. 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. These benefits did not console Morgan for the loss of her humanity, however.

22

Morgan succumbs to her hunger, escaping to hunt

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Morgan confronts what she has become and exposes herself to the dawn

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As she became aware of the seductiveness of human prey, she decided to end her unnatural existence before she damned herself by succumbing to them. 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.

24

Morgan is shocked to regain her humanity

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Morgan regained her humanity through what she believed to be the intervention of her goddess when she attempted to commit suicide.

25

Morgan is shocked to discover her hungers persist

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Morgan is confronted by her unwanted suitors and the implications of what she is

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Morgan discovers the consequence of indulging her hungers

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Morgan is finally cornered by the demon

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Morgan slays the demon, only to learn it was one of many loosed ten years ago

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Morgan presents her proof to her goddess

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31

Morgan is confronted by her sires who reveal the role Arden played in her fate

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