AVATAR · THRESHOLD · REVISION

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ASH

Ash, the Lord Eryn Sean, was a member of the Dusk House and an heir to the dragon legacy. The Dragon prepared for a campaign or project on Aeirn by establishing his avatar in the House of Dusk. Exploiting the dragon legacy and a pact with the dragon house, he would approach a dragon lord in his dragon aspect and request the inception of an heir. Once his heir was conceived, the Dragon would accelerate the tempo of Aeirn, restoring normal time at the point when his avatar was coming of age. As they came of age, Ash faced the manifestation of his dragon heritage, during which he would gain the power to initiate his beloved, Cinder. A dragon initiation would cut her off from her phoenix heritage, but the temptation was irresistible. The lovers were debating her decision when she was ambushed by assassins. Ash sacrificed his native form in his haste to reach Cinder. When Ash blooded Cinder, he inherited her form and the capacity to incarnate others in her form as well.

* Ash was established to allow the Dragon to observe the Avatar Project experiment and assess the state of the realm.
* The Dragon had encouraged the prohibition of arcane arts responsible for the demon migration problem. He was responsible for recruiting Tempest, rescuing the boy from slavery and delivering him to the Aeryn Tear Academy and then recognizing him as the Dragon Paladin.
* The Dragon did not take possession of Ash until after his avatar's ordeal with Cinder.

CINDER

Cinder, the Lady Avon Lea, was the daughter of Forge and Fire. A member of the House of Dawn, Cinder was an heir to the phoenix legacy and the first mortal incarnation of the goddess. Concerned that her daughter might be perceived as her heir, Fire made Cinder a ward of the goddess to be raised at the Sanctuary of Dawn. Ironically, this precaution convinced the architects of the purge that Cinder was Fire's heir. As an heir that had come of age, she was targeted for elimination. In order to preserve her mortal incarnation, Phoenix possessed Cinder to defend her. Cinder surrendered her body to Phoenix as the result of her dragon initiation by Ash. Ash sacrificed his native form in his haste to reach Cinder. The only way Ash could ensure her survival was to initiate her. Her dragon initiation was contemplated as a deliberate method to gain her as a mate but was carried out in a desperate attempt to save her from her captors.

* Cinder's return home, and initial confrontation with Ash, could be derived from the presentation and reception sequence currently featuring a confrontation between Ember and Cinder.
* In effect, Cinder arrives right in the wake of Ash, interrupting the reception.
* They both arrived dressed in clothes scavenged from the camp of her former abductors.
* The related scene featuring a reunion of Cinder and Ash can be displaced to a later point in the story.
* Cinder and Ash confront Ember unexpectedly, after she survived an assassination attempt and became acquainted with the Aegis Delegation.

EMBER

Ember, the Lady Avon Lea reborn, was the embodiment of Cinder's phoenix heritage and a new incarnation of both Cinder and Phoenix. The creation of Ember was attributed to a conflict between the dragon and phoenix legacies. When Ash blooded Cinder, he inherited her form. Cinder surrendered her body to Phoenix as the result of her dragon initiation by Ash. At that point, Phoenix became Ember. Ash prevented Cinder from blooding any of her former captors, prompting her to pursue Ember, devouring her to complete Cinder's initiation. Ember's phoenix nature asserted itself at the same time, causing her to resurrect—proving she was not the heir of her mother and qualifying her to become the Paladin of the Phoenix. While all souls had dragon and phoenix potential, a mind could embrace only one or the other. Thus, an individual initiated as a dragon and a phoenix was generally twinned.

Ember's interface augmentation manifested as a result of Phoenix's involvement in the project. It manifested as a product of taking possession of Cinder. Cinder had embodied the ideal Phoenix identified with, so the perfection of her form by the spirit of Phoenix was virtually unnoticeable. Cinder and Ash both inherited the refined form and the interface.

FEUDING HOUSES · ASH & CINDER

The goddess Dawn and the god Dusk had founded the bloodlines and legacies of the House of Dawn and the House of Dusk. 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 Duke 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.

Born into rival houses, Ash and Cinder were recruited into and trained at the academy. They initiated together under the same mentor. Vale's unique condition made it possible for Ash, the Lord Eyrn Sean of the House of Dusk to be initiated under the male aspect of Vale, while Cinder, the Lady Avon Lea of the House of Dawn was initiated under the female aspect. During the course of their initiation, the two fell in love, only to confront the ancient feud between their houses. Cinder and Ash were raised to believe that they were enemies fighting against each other for the restoration of their native houses. Her 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, they learned the truth about each other's lineage. By that time, the two of them had already become an accomplished team, an artist and a muse paired by the academy by virtue of their extraordinary compatibility.

In addition, they were 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. Over the course of their ten-year initiation, the couple was forced to engage their mentor’s adversary or his agents several times. A man who had mastered conjury, magery and sorcery, he was determined to establish a new order in which most people would be subordinate to those more evolved; psychics like himself. In their most climactic battle, Ash and Cinder were forced to pool their resources as an artist and a muse to an exceptional degree to survive an engagement with their mentor’s nemesis. The intimacy engendered by the conflict burned away the remaining obstacles between them, causing Cinder to finally admit and surrender to her attraction to Ash. In that one moment of weakness, she sealed her fate. The only way they could be together was for him to initiate her as a dragon.

A MENTOR AND HIS ADVERSARY

Vale and Rain were roommates at the Aeryn Tear Academy. Each in his own way 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. Initially they were driven by shared revelations, 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 two men had experienced very different lives.

Near the end of their primary initiation, Rain turned their lives upside down by creating a ring of renewal and transforming Vale into a girl. Rain eventually abandoned her, chosing to join his father in conquering the North. Following their split, the psychic gained control of the sex changing power he inherited from the ring and became a mentor to Ash and Cinder. During their training and travel, Vale became concerned about the state of the world and concerned about the fate of psychics caught in the tides of conflict. He approached various authorities with a plan to prepare for the inevitable war. 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.

ARDEAN PSYCHIC

A natural psychic, he was 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 at the age of seven to be trained in the arts of sword and sorcery. For ten years he alternated between initiate studies at the academy in the autumn and winter and training while traveling with his mentor in the summer. He made the best of the opportunities initiation offered him.

His psychic sensitivity gave him certain advantages in mastering the conventional skills of a warrior, but presented a serious obstacle to learning any kind of magic. Like any other prospective soldier his initiation included the analytical study of magic and its combat applications. During this time he began to observe the truth about magic. While lessons in conjury, magery and sorcery were all very inspiring and enlightening, he seemed to have no proficiency for any of them.

It somehow escaped him that the problem was not that it was difficult for him to learn, if anything it might have been too easy. What he perceived as the workings of magic seemed frighteningly powerful and intricate, impossibly difficult from his perspective as a psychic sensitive. He simply could not allow himself to entrust the process to his unconscious mind as the magic required. Intimidated by magic, he also found himself somewhat intimidated by those who were proficient at using it.

Only the fact that his psychic perceptions gave him an edge in protecting himself from—and dispelling—hostile magic allowed him to be confident in himself as an artist. Having traced the origins of magic to the interference of the old gods, he became more adventurous. He took advantage of every opportunity to seek 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.

His roommate at the academy was, Rain, the child of an Athean slave who had escaped from slavery, was recruited by academy scouts and brought to Avon for initiation. As an initiate, he dreamed of returning to his homeland to help his father bring an end to the slave trade in the north. To this end, he was devoted to the eradication of the arcane arts and the conjurors who supported slavery. His training was devoted to combating necromancy and demonology and destroying demons and the undead.

The Athean Wizard bound an angel to create an Angelic Ring. Following an ordeal to master the ring, his roommate found the ring and identified it as belonging to a girl he had fallen in love with. During the ordeal he was subjected to, the ring was stolen and fell into the hands of a wizard paid to create a demon. In the process of recovering the ring, the ring was shattered in his—or at the time, her—grasp. The demon was absorbed into the young initiate along with the powers endowed by the ring. Her transformation changed her relationship with the Athean Wizard, who rejected her in order to pursue his personal mission to end slavery in, and unify, the northern dominions. Abandoned, she attempted to become a maiden of the goddess and ended up becoming a muse. In the process, she evolved into a polysex and manifested her psychic potential. The demon continued to incubate within the psychic. Vale eventually gained the patronage of the Lady Avon, becoming the mentor of Ember. Concerned about the impact of the Athean Wizard's campaign, she began to recruit and train individuals with psychic potential, founding an academy of psychic arts to rival the academy of magic arts. Technically, Ember was the first student of that academy.

In his final year of initiation, Rain became trapped in female form as a result of capturing a demon in a warded ring. When she confronted her mentor with her transformation, he explained to her that she had inadvertently created a ring of renewal. A ring of renewal was a powerful and useful artifact, cursed by its demonic origins. It captured the soul of its wielder and altered his, or her, very nature to force that person to explore both sides of human existence in order to unlock that soul's full potential.

To reclaim her official identity, Rain turned to her friend and roommate, Vale. Knowing Vale as well as she did, it was easy to seduce her roommate, and because Vale turned out to be an attentive and talented lover, Rain was able to lose herself in the moment long enough to dispose of her virginity and satisfy the ring's requirements. Unfortunately, two things happened. Vale fell in love with the girl who made him a man and he discovered the ring of regeneration that turned him into a girl.

When Vale stumbled across the ring and tried it on, becoming female, Rain was forced to explain to his panicked roommate what "she" would have to do in order to regain her manhood. Vale was shocked to be turned into a girl, and even more shocked when his roommate explained the powers and influence of the ring, revealing in the process that he was the girl Vale loved and Vale would never be a man again unless she lost her virginity. Reminding Vale that he had been through the same ordeal, Rain offered to return the favor.

Unfortunately, Vale was discovered in the dorm before they were comfortable enough with each other to have sex, and she was escorted off campus. Posing as a girl, she sought shelter from her mother. Calling herself Vale she asked for "bridal training" and subjected herself to a crash course in being a courtesan. In the days that followed, while Vale tried to rendezvous with Rain, her mother worked overtime to make a lady out of the "hopeless tomboy". Both of them were impressed with how well she cleaned up.

Meadow's efforts to help her accept and embrace herself had an unexpected effect on Vale. Disturbingly comfortable in her new body, Vale began to wonder if she would have been happier as a girl. Vale had always been an androgynous and sensitive person, mistaken often for a girl as a child, and capable of passing for one if he tried. Many times in his life he had been told, in a playful way, that he should have been born a girl. On becoming a girl, Vale had been both frightened and eager to explore her new condition.

Her options as a girl with no history or credentials were very slim. While she was exploring them, she caught the eye of a powerful noble who made arrangements, through Vale's grandmother, to acquire her as his mistress. Oblivious to this, Vale confronted a difficult decision. In the moments they had spent together, as Rain eased Vale into bed, soothing, calming and arousing her, the feelings Vale had for Shannon were deepened and enriched by the discovery that she was Rain.

The initially frightening notion of remaining a girl, in order to be with the person she loved, grew more attractive the longer she was subject to her mother's guidance. Vale confided in Logan, her mentor at the academy, before leaving and he conspired with her to pose as her father and cover for the boy's absence. The qualities Vale had fallen in love with the girl for were the qualities she had as a person, qualities Vale always admired in Rain. On the other hand, because of his ambition, the boy had no interest in being the girl Vale had fallen in love with.

In the hope of holding on to the person she loved, in spite of the cost, Vale was willing to become a woman permanently for him. When she finally arranged to sleep with Rain, with a little help from her mother, she tested him with a barrage of nervous questions trying to gauge his feelings. Rain understood her feelings, similar feelings had caused him to sleep with Vale as Shannon, but sensing what Vale was contemplating, he felt compelled to reject her, going as far as breaking her heart.

Rain could not allow his friend to sacrifice everything just to be with him. To discourage her interest he even refused to help her through the ordeal of the ring. He placed the ring in her hand and told her to pick someone else, warning her he would not see her again unless she was a man. Vale was crushed by Rain's rejection. She knew she would never be able to bring herself to sleep with some random boy to complete the ordeal, so she fled from the academy and resolved to start a new life as a girl.

Devastated, Vale turned to her mother for solace, revealing the whole story to the shocked woman. After recovering and demanding an explanation for Vale's transformation, Meadow took her son-turned-daughter in hand and offered her unconditional love and support. She advised Vale to confront Rain with the ungarnished truth. So, heart in hand, she returned to Rain and explained everything, her decision to remain female for her own reasons, but this time Rain confessed that he simply did not have strong enough feelings in return.

He was a man on a mission, and he could not allow himself to be side tracked by love, or even a devoted lover. Shattered, Vale resolved to return to her old life, determined to forget the whole ordeal. He agreed to share one night with her, but the next morning they were stunned to discover that the ring had gone missing. Some pickpocket had lifted it off Vale while she was running back and forth in angst and anguish. She confronted Rain with this news, and he resolved to help her track down the ring.

Vale was able to remember when and where a stranger had stumbled into her, so they returned to that area and sought out witnesses who recognized her assailant and could direct her in pursuit. It took a while to track the thief down and find out where he had fenced the ring. After some encouragement, the fence informed them that he had immediately contacted a collector of rare artifacts when he acquired the ring, and sold it for an awesome sum the previous day.

The wizard who bought the ring had been searching for a bound demon to fulfill a contract. He had been hired to imbue a demon with a new nature and had everything ready to perform the task when he returned home with the artifact. The deed was completed that night and the men who hired him were contacted to come and retrieve the demon. The exchange was arranged for late the next day. At the time that Vale and Rain were learning what had happened to the ring, the wizard was preparing to receive his guests.

Vale and Rain got the address of the collector, resolved to get access to the ring long enough for Vale to return to normal, but they were rebuffed at the door. Desperate, Vale broke in to get to the ring, but just as she found it and went to put it on, she was caught. The collector revealed that he was a very powerful wizard, and he unleashed a lethal attack without hesitation. To their mutual shock, the fury of spell was drawn to the ring, which shattered in Vale's hand, unleashing a flood of power into her.

The men who had contracted the wizard's services arrived during the commotion, and made careful note of the girl who had unwittingly volunteered to serve as the host for the altered demon. Unknown to her, the soul trapped in the ring, and the demon that was bound to it, transferred automatically into her, as the destruction of the ring transferred the bindings from the shattered metal to her living flesh. While the wizard stood in shock, Vale raced away, escaping into the night.

Because the ring had been shattered before being donned, the demon had not been given the chance to possess her directly. Instead it was trapped in her subconscious mind, watching and waiting for the chance to act.

Following the mishap, she consulted her mentor. Finding no way to undo what the ring 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, Vale concluded her studies allowing the spell woven by her mentor to weave her presence into the memories of her peers and instructors.

:. As the demon matured, it began to take possession of its host, manifesting itself in the elemental sex when the Ardean Psychic was unconscious. Over time, it became able to assert itself during moments of distraction, causing blackouts and seizures in its host. While it waited for the opportunity to act, it plotted and recruited reinforcements. It devised a plan to achieve its initial objective by exploiting the relationship between Ember and the goddess. .:

ATHEAN WIZARD

Rain was the child of an Athean slave who had escaped from slavery. Like his father before him, he was recruited by academy scouts and brought to the academy for initiation. His grandmother had been abducted in a raid on her Athean village and sold into slavery. Born into slavery, his father was rescued and sponsored to the academy by one of its instructors. He was a natural master of sword and sorcery. On leaving the academy, his father went to Athen where he became a hero, a champion of the people and a paladin of the god. In the course of weeding out corrupt powers, his father was helping to build create the northern empire, Athelon. As an initiate, he dreamed of returning to his homeland to help his father bring an end to the slave trade in the north. To this end, he was devoted to the eradication of the arcane arts and the conjurors who supported slavery. His training was devoted to combating necromancy and demonology and destroying demons and the undead. 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.

In his final year of initiation, Rain became trapped in female form as a result of capturing a demon in a warded ring. When she confronted her mentor with her transformation, he explained to her that she had inadvertently created a ring of renewal. A ring of renewal was a powerful and useful artifact, cursed by its demonic origins. It captured the soul of its wielder and altered his, or her, very nature to force that person to explore both sides of human existence in order to unlock that soul's full potential. To reclaim her official identity, Rain turned to her friend and roommate, Vale. Knowing Vale as well as she did, it was easy to seduce her roommate, and because Vale turned out to be an attentive and talented lover, Rain was able to lose herself in the moment long enough to dispose of her virginity and satisfy the ring's requirements. Unfortunately, two things happened. Vale fell in love with the girl who made him a man and he discovered the ring of regeneration that turned him into a girl.

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 DRAGON PALADIN

No attempt to bring law and order to the north could have succeeded without the possession of extraordinary power. While it was true that the fall of the gods had seen thoroughly to the elimination of the arcane art of sorcery, the ancients had dabbled in arts more dangerous and obscure than that. The arcane arts of conjury, demonology and necromancy mastered by the ancients, had survived in disparate forms such as witchcraft and wizardry throughout the north. It had been only a matter of time before true conjurors, demonologists, and necromancers reappeared. They were predominantly northern born people of the winter domains who clung to a magical tradition that predated the age of empires. As sorcery spread people assumed that conjury would die out. Ironically, the two arts proved to be compatible. Those who were able to mastery both arts had risen to new heights as wizards, and these wizards tended to support and defend the arcane arts. Fortunately, wizards tended to be jealous of their power, so it wizardry was not as common as sorcery or conjury. Wizards were not noticeably worse than conjurors, but they did dabble in darker areas than Sorcerers. Pure sorcerers tended to be radically opposed to wizardry and conjury—particularly the higher arts of demonology and necromancy.

Throughout history, slavers had raided the ports of the winter domains, stealing women and children to sell in the slave markets of the eastern empire, but the raids had been increasing over the past few years. It had been discovered that the slavers were using agents within the northern domains. While the traditional enemies of the winter domains, the autumn domains, were not directly responsible, many of the individuals who were responsible were intimately associated with them. Smaller kingdoms and republics faced conquest and annexation now that there were no remaining frontiers left to colonize. Around the world, conjurers, disciples of the second age of magic, be they witches, warlocks, demonologists or necromancers, were being surpassed by the advance of swords and sorcerers. Power gained through the abuse of blood, bodies and souls had been condemned, but this only forced the wielders of such power to band together and fight back. Driven from their old haunts, they strived to seize power in other lands, crippling them in the process and inviting their foes to annex those lands, continuing their scourge.

The Autumn Kingdoms were plagued by constant aggression from the neighboring Winter and Summer Kingdoms, who raided the western domains to sustain the perpetual internecine wars amongst themselves. The Paladin of the Dragon, Tempest, having unified the winter domains, had officially declared his intentions to conquer the autumn domains. The winter and autumn domains formed the largest percentage of the north’s population, and were roughly equal in size to each other, in essence the two major powers of the north. Combined, they would make an empire the world would take note of. In truth, his real intentions were to draw out the dangerous enemies within the winter domains, slavers and masters of rogue arts. The rebellious forces in the north, aroused and led by masters of the ancient arts, were rumored to be moving on Arden, the seat of the autumn domains. They were skilled conjurors and they had successfully resurrected the arts of demonology and necromancy that had become proscribed by modern artists. A war of disastrous proportions was shaping up, and each day the news got worse. In the course of the king’s previous conquests, powerful demonologists and necromancers had banded together to raise the legions of slaughtered warriors as an army of their own. The ongoing campaign against slavery and forbidden arts provoked an armed uprising. As a persecuted faction in the winter domains, they now sought to conquer the autumn domains and after crippling the armies of the autumn and winter kingdoms, destroy the dragon king.

Threshold : Avatar

Series Arc

The Angel Within

The Demon Within

The Goddess Within

Revision Note: In an attempt to distinguish this project from others developed utilizing a common pool of notes, a few things need to be established going in. The two main characters are known by a few different names and titles. On the Threshold, they are the Dragon and the Phoenix, and those are their primary titles. In general, their personal names are Ash and Ember and their titles are Dusk and Dawn.

Notes

Ember's childhood ordeal reverts to becoming trapped in the ruins as a girl. • Combine notes for the two sequences involving her flight from the dragon and demons in the ruins. • A separation of Ash and Talon required the revision of Talon's thread. • Combine threads of Ardean Psychic/Athean Wizard with Ring Ordeal, Ember's Mentor/Touch, Talon. • Using Ash to sire Dusk set the founding of the Athelon Empire free, allowing it to occur two or three generations earlier and eliminated the dragon initiation element from that thread. The rivalry between the House of Dusk and the House of Dawn is internal to Arden.

One aspect of the story to develop further is the consequences of death for a player. Ash is slain by Ember while he is possessed by the demon, Umber. • Another aspect of the story to develop is the creation of the demon Umber. In moving the ambush on the beach, a hole was created that requires some sort of attack on Ember. • The creation of Umber was featured as the corruption of an angel. In background notes, Ember found and used a ring of regeneration while she was trapped in the ruins. This ring allowed her to assume the identity of Brand and pose as a boy. • In drafted material, there are references to her being exposed, and in other notes the idea of the ring being shattered and its powers passing on came up. • The concept of using Ember to get to Phoenix already exists, as does the concept of creating a demon by exploiting the body, soul and guardian angel of a girl. • The issue of Ember's phoenix potential also stands in need of establishment.

Additions

By having the slain lover thread end in possible execution, forcing Ember to escape from prison, it becomes essential for the thread to begin after the establishment of the expedition. Thus, Ember learned about the Threshold, was captured and sacrificed to turn her guardian angel into the demon Umber, betrayed her discovery of the Threshold to Ash, was summoned before the goddess and given her task to prove herself as a paladin of the goddess, mounted an expedition into the ruins while gathering intelligence and investigating the slayings that were tied to the ruins, and finally, provided a conduit for the demon within her to take possession of Ash and attempt to kill her.

Ember had an angelic ring of regeneration. She used it to pose as Brand, and became involved in the underworld as a cat burglar. When she was swimming in the Avon River, Ember was sucked into an underground channel and emerged in a cavern. She followed the underground channel into the ruins and eventually made her way out of the ruins. Within the ruins she was tormented by ghosts and demons, and watched in horror as the men who came to her rescue were slaughtered in an inexplicable bloodbath. Among the things she encountered was a magic ring of regeneration. In addition to healing, it had the power to change her sex, which enabled her to pose as a boy. This she used, in particular, to take advantage of advanced combat training that was available exclusively to boys. A strong believer in hidden assets, she kept the ring a secret, adopting an alias as a boy. During her summers, while she endured training as a maiden, Ember would slip away and explore the city in the guise of a boy. In this guise, she became involved in the corruption of a group of street orphans she befriended. Exploited by Thorn, she became a cat burglar, employing talents and skills developed in her regular training.

One night, she—or rather, he—was caught in the act and had to fight to escape. In the process, he caught a blow on his hand that shattered the ring. The close call, combined with being trapped in male form, prompted him to confide in his mother who arranged for him to attend the academy as Brand. Unknown to Brand, he had absorbed the angel and the powers of the ring. He quickly discovered that the power of regeneration was still working, but had no idea how to use the sex changing power without being able to reverse the ring. The solution came unexpectedly one day while Brand was swimming with Thorn and Cloud. It took a year for Ember to learn to control the power that altered her sex, during which time she was forced to pose as both Ember and Brand. The problem was solved when her instructors realized that she had merged with the angel once trapped in the ring. The angel was freed, but because of its association with her, it remained attached to her as her guardian angel.

Since she was already acquainted with posing as either a boy or a girl, this practice was continued so that she could train with other boys in the arts of combat and the sphere of athletics, though she also trained in the same disciplines with other girls and was trained in the arts of court and academics only as a girl. Sage, the Magus, tutored her personally in the psychic and magic arts alongside Ash. Ash was the only initiate who trained with both Ember and Brand. Ash often joked about Ember and Brand being the same person, since they were never seen together.

Ember was captured and subjected to the ritual necessary to create the demon. During the ritual, her guardian angel was drawn out and corrupted. Because Ember and the angel were both incarnations of the same soul, however, the sacrifice caused the demon to fall into her shadow awaiting the chance to seize another soul and complete its metamorphosis. Ash came to the rescue during the ritual, and in the confusion it was impossible for him to notice everything that was happening to Ember as he fought his way to her. Ember, fighting desperately to escape, had turned inward in search of anything that could help her. She touched her phoenix potential just as she was slain, and interpreted her resurrection as a panic driven teleport. She fled at once and ran into Ash as he arrived, and together they escaped. The members of the cabal are the only ones who realize that she resurrected, and when she was arrested and sentenced to death, the body she left behind was used to cover her escape when the cabal use thorn to spring her.

Ember was wounded during her escape from the cabal. When the wounds did not heal quickly on their own, she realized that the ritual she had escaped from had been designed to strip her of her guardian angel. Ash realized that this meant the demon he had been warned about had been created. When he consulted the goddess, she informed him that the angel's corruption had essentially wiped it from her memory. However, since it had been bound into a ring, there had to be wards or seals that would identify what the angel had been, wherever it had been entrapped. To undo the demon, it was essential to recover its true name, which meant Ember had to return to where she found the ring in the depths of the ruins. This became the task Ember had to perform to become the paladin of the goddess.

Ash escaped from possession into ghost mode. It took him a while to establish contact with Ember, finally succeeding through possession. Ghost mode was a way for players to recover and resurrect their avatars. Through a combination of mundane and divine intervention, it was possible to be resurrected, reincarnated or reborn in one fashion or another. Ember was grateful to learn that Ash was not completely lost to her, but it did not help her situation to be haunted. Sentenced to death, Ember was in no position to help Ash recover his body until Thorn showed up to break her out and stage her death.

In establishing the dragon hunt, Ash attempted to repossess his body. He failed, but he was able to regain access to his dragon potential and emerged from the clash as a dragon spirit. In effect, he started the cycle of awakening that allowed a child of the dragon legacy to inherit his full powers as a dragon. Unfortunately, when the demon used Ember as a shield, it changed the nature of the ordeal into one a dragon used to assume a human identity. No longer able to recover his own avatar, he was forced to exploit Ember to create a new one he would be forced to share with her until one of them sired a new incarnation for the other.

Stasis is a branch of metamorphic and regenerative ability. Where polymorphs have greater powers of regeneration, the undead have greater powers of stasis. Technically, vampires and weres are both undead, in the sense that they are spirits tied to the material plane. Their bodies are entirely subject to spiritual manipulation. Their general powers are similar, metamorphic regeneration. Vampires exist closer to the static end of the spectrum, while weres are found on the more dynamic end.

Adjustments

The ranks and titles of initiates attending the academy were not disclosed. Initiates were expected to succeed or fail on their own merit, not on the basis of who they knew or were related to.

Ember ended up becoming involved in the middle of a process a dragon could use to become human. Ash exploited the process of becoming a dragon to escape from the shadow of the demon that possessed him. The dragon legacy was originally a player advantage and ended up being passed on to indigenous characters, like the phoenix legacy.

Blocking

Revision Note: Previously, the notion of having the goddess embodied as a result of a member of the dragon house "conceiving" of the absolute or the "soul of creation" was explored using Ash. In addition, there was a direct correlation between the Houses of Dusk and Dawn and the Dragon and Phoenix Houses. Combined with the notion of the goddess possessing an incarnation of Ember and conceiving of herself, unaware of an illicit affair between Cinder and a dragon, in this case, Ash, a division of the Phoenix through the translation of Cinder and Ash could occur. Or, taking things one step forward:

Ash, the Lord Eyrn Syn of the House of Dusk initiated under the male aspect of Vale, thus sharing his mentor with Ember, the Lady Avon Lea of the House of Dawn. During the course of their initiation, the two fell in love, only to confront the ancient feud between their houses. The only way they could be together was for him to initiate her as a dragon. Doing so would cut her mother off from her own heritage, but the temptation was irresistible. As they came of age, Ash faced the manifestation of his dragon heritage, during which he would gain the power to initiate her.

For her protection, Ember had been entrusted to the sanctuary of the goddess when she turned seven. Over the next ten years, Ember trained as an initiate and a maiden of the goddess, Phoenix. When she came of age, Ember was targeted for elimination in the ongoing Dawn Massacre, to provoke her mother into bearing a new heir. When assassins ambushed her on a beach, she was communing with the goddess. The assassins revealed that they were demonic by attempting to possess Ember, and Phoenix countered by taking possession of the girl's body in order to fight her assailants.

Phoenix tore through the attackers, but limited by Ember's body and the nature of her opponents, she was wounded. While she was distracted healing her wounds, a guard patrol arrived. Phoenix did not think to warn them of the nature of her assailants until the man attending to her revealed his possession by collaring her. The psychic restraint greatly diminished her power, trapping Phoenix inside Ember. The newly possessed guards took her into custody and started marching for the ruins. In order to complete their mission, they now had to find a way to overcome the goddess.

That evening, her captors began the process of trying to break Phoenix. Employing techniques demons used to drive angels and other demons from their mortal hosts, they raped and tortured Ember. The carnal nature of animals, sentient or not, were alien to elementals, making them more vulnerable to such tactics. Mortals could endure for worse, simply because they had not alternative, clinging to life with a hope and desperation no spirit could comprehend. Ironically, the goddess bore it without complaint desperate and determined to shield the girl in her care from the abuse.

The group paused along the way to dispatch a messenger for reinforcements and new instructions, before resuming their march to the ruins. As they arrived at the ruins, they stumbled across a dragon. Several of the possessed soldiers were slain and Ember herself gravely wounded, during their desperate run for cover within the ruins. Bound by two promises, Phoenix was released from her collar long enough to restore Ember's body to perfect condition. The wait, and her ability to regenerate, inspired them to take her torture to a higher level each night until the messenger returned and the march resumed.

A second dragon began to stalk them cautiously. The two dragons clashed, the first time it tried to charge the group. The larger, and obviously older, dragon cut the younger one off each time it went after one of the possessed guards. With the dragons distracting each other, the group was able to make decent progress. On their final approach to the ruins, however, the dragons made a concerted attack. The older dragon cut a swath through the demons, and the younger dragon focused on Ember. Phoenix leapt into the jaws of the older dragon to save a demon, having figured out why the younger dragon had singled her out.

The second dragon, Phoenix suspected, was Ember. When the first dragon got a bite of her, it had started a process of initiation designed to create a dragon. Dragons were born in the minds of men. Literally, there was something in the psyche of mortals that dragons could provoke into evolving into dragons. The process began with the projection of the dragon of the initiate's dreams. It ended when the dream devoured the dreamer. Phoenix, nailed by her captors, had become caught in the middle. The sole purpose of the dragon stalking her was to devour her alive, and there was nothing she could do about it.

Phoenix understood why she had resurrected Ember's body, and why she no longer shared it with her. Ember's mind had been drawn into the dragon she had projected. During the hunt, she had been evolving into the psychic entity a dragon truly was. As a result of being nailed and then resurrected in the flesh, she was no longer the spiritual entity she had been. As much as anyone could be on Aeirn, she was now alive. Before escaping from the ruins, she had been forced to defend that life. On returning to the sanctuary, she nearly lost it. An attempt to restore herself to normal almost destroyed her and severely damaged her mind.

Disturbed by her ordeal, Ember returned to her family's retreat where she was confronted by her dragon sire. The dragon that had initiated her had assumed her form and used its rapport with her to anticipate where she would go and beat her there. Assuming a new identity as Ash, the dragon confronted her with what she had become and dubbed her Cinder. Cinder had no idea what had happened to the goddess, and Ash had not known that she had been caught in the middle of Cinder's initiation. They had no idea that the goddess had resurrected in Ember's image or stumbled into inheriting her identity.

Cinder was fascinated by her new twin, and Ash quickly became enamored with Cinder as she introduced the dragon to being human and female. They gave into curiosity and temptation, and while sating their passions Cinder and Ash fell in love. As a result, Ash was prompted to make one significant alteration to her adopted form. Transforming into a male version of Cinder, Ash confronted her with the metamorphic nature of a true dragon. A dragon gained new forms through assimilation, and adapted them using aspects of old forms it had already assimilated.

When the Phoenix could not divorce herself from the body she had inherited, she became recognized as Ember, although Flare had sensed her daughter's death. Typically, an angel of the goddess posed Phoenix, so her absence went unrecognized, but the angel in question had turned out to have a sense of humor. Ember was anointed as a paladin of the goddess. It was in this guise that the Phoenix confronted the return of the Dragon. To establish the foundation for a new campaign to resolve the problem of demon migration onto the Threshold, the Dragon made a pact with a slave turned sword-sorcerer.

In exchange for granting the slave the power to purge the north of slavery, necromancy and demonology, the man would sire a new incarnation of the Dragon. The pact called for the slave's initiation as a dragon, Talon. In return, Talon was required to sire a human incarnation of the Dragon, Ash, who would come of age in twenty years. With the help of an Athean slave turned wizard, Talon set out to conquer the kingdoms of Athen. When the purge turned into a persecution of witches, who were more psychics than conjurors, the wizard abandoned Talon and proceeded to recruit wizards and witches to his own banner.

Two years later, Talon fulfilled that pact and Ember had a chance encounter with Ash. In spite of his devotion to Cinder, he was fascinated with her mysterious twin and could not resist seducing her. In the heat of passion, the dragon became so absorbed he unwittingly conceived an heir of the phoenix in his image. That inception prompted a reflexive self-conception in Ember. Dusk and Dawn were separated at birth. The assumption was that the children would be true to the nature of their conception, so Ash took the boy into the dragon house and Ember raised the girl in the phoenix house.

An Ardean psychic drawn temporarily into an alliance with the Athean Wizard, rejected the wizard's methods and established a branch academy in Avon, recruiting Cinder, Ember and Ash to help him organize resistance to the forces Talon's conquest had routed and which now threatened Arden. Unfortunately, the conspiracy against the phoenix house was shattering the kingdom from within. The shift in the balance of power favored the dragon house and the kingdom of Arduin eclipsed the kingdom of Arden. Avon, formerly the capital of Arden, was only province remaining under phoenix rule.

The first time Dusk and Dawn met was during their initiation into the Academy. Ironically, Cinder and Ash's efforts to create harmony between their houses resulted in the betrothal of Dusk and Dawn. Perversely, they were forced to witness the massacre of Ember's household and Ember's possession. The demon, sensing a connection between Ember and the children, had its minions bring them along, adding abduction and torture to the ordeal the pair suffered. Unable to bear it, Dawn snapped and grasped her psychic potential, lashing out at Ember and ultimately destroying her mother along with the demon.

At the moment of her death, the demon within Ember was split between Dusk and Dawn as Ember's psyche passed on to them. The power she unleashed destroyed a section of the ruins, causing Dusk and Dawn to become separated. Dusk was able to find a way to the surface, but Dawn escaped by delving deeper, fleeing from a dragon's lair, following an underground river to the ocean. Following their escape from the ruins, they told the tale of Ember's death. Cinder adopted Dawn and continued to champion her engagement to Dusk. When Dusk and Dawn arrived at the academy, they met and befriended Ash.

Revision Note: One option explored was to begin with the union of Dusk and Dawn. Combined with other elements pushing the start of the story toward autumn, when Dusk and Dawn were seventeen, and with Ash in the role of Dusk, a new beginning emerged. The union of Dusk and Dawn would occur at Midsummer, while they were studying under the Magus. The demon was summoned and bound with a specific mission, to provide its masters with the core technology of the Threshold. One of its prime directives was obtaining the means to secure the Threshold. This prompted the demon to seek possession of the soul of creation.

From Ember, the demon was able to obtain the secret of the Dragon's security measures, and learned the identity of the Dragon, through whom it could gain access to the AI's created to secure the Cores of the Establishment. Dawn was arrested and charged with the murder of Dusk, preventing her from pursing the demon immediately. Dawn's execution was delayed by a rumor of Dusk's arrival in Avon. Conscious of the measures Ash had taken to deal with rogue demons, the demon went to Aeslyn Tear for reinforcements, freeing demons and setting off a war between the immortal clans of Ruins' Deep.

Dawn escaped from her prison and sailed for Avon. The two-week journey brought her to Avon Tear in time for the autumn festival and initiations. On arriving in Avon, Dawn quickly tracked Ash down. Ash was engaged in promoting the purge of arcane arts and trying to inspire Initiates to take up demon hunting. While confronting Dawn, Ash was summoned to a meeting on the Threshold. Intent on her mission, Dawn followed him onto the Threshold where her concept of reality was shattered. On returning to Aeirn, she learned of a summons to meet with her regent. The meeting was a trap to force her to attend an engagement party.

Unknown to her, while she was tied up at Redleaf Manor, the demon had approached Ash, posing as Dusk. Rather than risk compromising itself, the demon displaced the Dragon, as Ash, into the body of Dusk. The Dragon was caught completely off guard, and had no idea how he even survived the ordeal. Fortunately, the method used to establish Ash as his avatar made him a true reincarnation. His soul had already been anchored in Ash on Aeirn. It was this, primarily, that enabled him to survive on Aeirn when he was cut off from his body in the Aegis. His avatar had already assimilated him when the demon displaced him.

Dawn was stunned when Dusk actually showed up at the engagement party. At the first opportunity, Dawn tried to confront him. Dawn's challenges informed Ash that she, or rather she and Dusk, were also victims of the demon's body swapping. Unwilling to discuss the matter during the party, he cut her off. Claiming to have no idea what she was talking about he said he had no time to explain himself. Pointing out the dilemma she was in, he dodged her accusations by conspiring with her to postpone "their" wedding long enough to permit her initiation as the Phoenix Paladin.

Unable to sleep, Dawn confronted the demon in Ash's form the next morning, before discovering that Ash had been transferred into Dusk's form. Unwilling to risk tangling with Dawn again, the demon had arranged an ambush to either corrupt or dispose of her, using demons it had freed and provided hosts for. As Dusk, Ash arrived in time to help her defeat them. During her recovery, Ash discovered Dawn's awareness of the Threshold and the nature of her realm and disclosed his true identity to Dawn. They confronted her old obsession with him and he considered the prospect of assuming Dusk's identity and marrying her.

Ash confronted the goddess, a direct interface to the realm's AI, Phoenix. Phoenix confirmed that the demon had truly stripped Ash from his real body and abandoned him in the game. Phoenix explained her incarnation as Dusk and Dawn through her avatar, Ember, emphasizing the difference between herself, as an AI, and them, as people. Ash confides his theory that the demon that unwittingly created Ember was the demon he had been warned about by Asp. In order to neutralize that demon and thwart the plot, it was essential to discover the demon's true identity--a task Dawn had already embarked on.

Assuming the identity of Dusk, Ash delivered a summons from the goddess. At her audience with the goddess, Dawn was confirmed as the Phoenix Paladin. Her mission was also officially confirmed. As the Phoenix, Dawn approached the Duke of Avon to apply for a commission to lead an expedition into the ruins. Dusk, recently confirmed as a Knight of the Order of Aeslyn Tear, stood as her Second. While assembling a party, Dawn proceeded to gather intelligence from various sources to prepare and guide them on their mission. While pursuing various leads, she noted that her contacts were mysteriously dying off.

The killings that had begun a month earlier had initially gone unnoticed, and as the body count rose, they had not been connected to each other. The slayings appeared random, and because half of the bodies found were those of weres, the pattern of deaths was obscured. The victims of the slaughter were all tied to the underworld of Aeslyn Tear. Her mission caught the attention of vampires and weres, forcing them to temporarily suspend the feud the demon had initiated and focus on her. After Dawn foiled an attempt on his life, Lloyd, her childhood mentor in crime, provided her with the crucial lead.

Dawn raided the archives of a wizard who had played a role in her childhood abduction, recovering maps and documents that could lead her to the demon's crypt. Sharing the information with Lloyd earned his endorsement of her expedition. Unfortunately, he had not been the only one determined to sabotage it. A vampire and a were, rival leaders and rivals over Dawn, attempted one last time to discourage her. They confronted her at a party the night before her departure. Dusk was able to pry her away from them before she succumbed entirely to their seduction.

The first obstacle the party faced was a band of rogues set against them by mortal agents of the underworld. The party was able to drive the brigands off, reducing their numbers significantly, and leaving them vulnerable to demonic possession. The next obstacle was delving into the ruins itself. Dawn led them in through the mansion at the heart of the ruins, where she had been born and raised until she was seven. After clearing out a nest of vampires and standing demons off for a night, they descended into the ruins. At one point, Dawn was separated from the party and when they abandon her as lost, Dusk descends alone to find her.

Dawn fought a duel with demon, a rival of Phoenix Ember's, to win her freedom before Dusk could find her. Cut off from the rest of their party, they were surprised to emerge in the midst of the brigands' camp in the ruins and retreated back into the depths to avoid them. While they were searching for another way out, Dawn was bitten and mauled by a tiger. Retreating from the deadly predator, they were forced to delve deeper into the ruins where Dusk was confronted by a vampire. The vampire seduced Dusk, and sensing that Dawn had been infected by a were-tiger, locked her in with Dusk, to be his first meal when he turned.

When the fate of Dusk and Dawn leaked out to the other immortals, a wager was suggested. Dawn was as likely to devour Dusk as he was to feed on her. Depending on which of them survived when their crypt was opened, vampire or were, vampires or weres would claim dominion over the ruins. In the event that they killed each other off, the immortals would quit the ruins altogether, yielding to the demons' claim--championed by the demon, Raven, that Dawn had fought. In either case, Dusk and Dawn had to feed to complete their transformations, but no one considered the possibility of cross infection.

Dusk awoke blinded by thirst and attempted to feed, forcing Dawn to defend herself. As a result, while both of them were at the critical stage of turning, they inflicted each other with secondary infections. Their natural regeneration and latent sex-altering polymorphism, inherited from Ember, acted as a catalyst to turn them both into hybrid were-vampires. It took them a while to adapt to their new nature and abilities. Their psychic talents increased dramatically, diminishing their ability to wield magic, but they could change between being male or female, life-like or death-like, and human or tiger at will.

At the time their crypt was unsealed, the two were locked in their death-like state. Given their physical state, it was evident that they had cross-infected each other, and succumbed to the living death that was the fate of most victims of dual infection. There remained a possibility of one or both of them eventually coming out of it, as one infection overcame the other. Thus, the wager was modified. The demons, however, pointed out that they had effectively killed each other and declared themselves the victors. Dusk and Dawn were claimed as trophies and delivered to the demon Azael.

While in the demon's possession, Dusk and Dawn discovered the demon's plan. In order to fulfill it's task, the demon needed to gain access to the Core. Azael had learned that it was suicidal to attempt to conquer a Sentinel AI from the Threshold or below, but they were still vulnerable from above the Threshold since they were subordinate to their users. To that end, Azael intended to exploit its possession of Ash. It, or rather, he… had no intention of going alone. The demons Azael had recruited were tasked with possessing other players, to form the vanguard of Azael's army in Ash's native Realm.

The one thing the demon overlooked, having yet to assimilate all of the information that was at his disposal in Ash's place, was that Dusk and Dawn were avatars. It has assumed that since they did not have players, they were no threat, but as avatars--even as ghosts--they were able to cross over to the Threshold. In the game, they were ghosts, but in the Annex or anywhere on the Threshold, that distinction no longer applied. They were free to pursue a most desperate plan of action--plotting the assassination of Douglas. Without the Dragon's body, the demon would be contained within the Realm of Aeirn.

Dusk and Dawn set out to find and recruit an assassin operating in the Aegis. With help from Asp, and his contacts in the Assassin's Guild, they were able to make the arrangements. The irony was that the Dragon was technically paying for his own assassination. Dawn confronted him about his decision, but he assured her that he refused to be used to compromise the existence of the Aeirn or the Threshold, and based on what had happened to him and what she had confronted him with, he would not really be dead. Since the Threshold had always been the center of his life, it seemed fitting that he would live on in it.

When the assassin struck, the demon realized what had happened. As Dusk had predicted, Ash's avatar status prevented the demon from being destroyed by the loss of the Dragon's body. The one thing that had been overlooked was that the demon had been resurrected in Dusk and Dawn. Even more important, it was a corruption of the gestalt of Dusk and Dawn that had existed when it took possession of Dusk's body. The demon, once Azael, had become Cinder, a demonic echo of Ember. Having no soul of its own, the demon was a corruption of Ember's.