he learns of her existence when he is mistaken for her while he is out as girl. their first confrontation leaves the girl mystified and curious. the boy escapes from their first encounter disturbed to discover that his desire to be with her contradicts his desire to be her.

on one hand, the knowledge is discouraging, but it arouses his interest as well as his doubts. the girl is disturbed by the intensity of his interest, choosing to remain aloof.

they encounter each other daily at the academy. they begin to share friends, become acquaintances and begin to interact. it becomes common knowledge that he has a crush on her, and that she has an unreasonable aversion to his interest.

as a male, he strives to live up to the masculine ideal of his female predisposition, so the girl ends up finding him irresistible.

the ring had been in her possession since her trip through the underworld when she was seven. in her mind, it is her mother’s ring, even if she had no idea how it ended up where she found it. she kept it hidden, worn on a chain around her neck. she did not wear it openly on her hand until her fingers grew to a snug fit.

the discovery of the ring allows the girl to establish herself as the heir to an estate and title no one in the current realm could claim—officially.

the revelation of her claim is what leads to her engagement to the previous host. the tipping point in her relationship with the boy comes when they visit a retreat near the girl’s home during the winter break.

a summons from the estate’s regent, to be informed of the engagement, prompts a visit to the estate that rouses the nightmares that inspire her investigation.

memories of her last visit to the retreat, ending with her return home the night of the massacre, provoke nightmares and traumatic flashbacks. one of the attacks hits the girl in the baths, and the boy saves her from drowning when she blacks out.

though driven by mutual attraction, each is reluctant to commit fully to the relationship, even when confronted with the girl’s engagement.

the first problem with investigating her family history is the fact that she had passed through a rift. the members of the order and the academy who found her, after tracking her emergence from the rift, were forced to guess where she might have fallen in.

the state her mind was in when she was found made it impossible to determine precisely what point of reality she came from. the ring provided the best clue to her identity. her memory—and the history—of the estate provided a place of origin.

at the end of the last century, the estate fell into a rift tide where the inhabitants were most likely slaughtered by demons.

when the girl starts probing her past, she is actually probing into the past of a woman who could have been her mother, a princess in exile. as a result, the girl stumbles into the intrigue and politics of the scourge.

her investigation touches on the history of the northern conflicts arising from the rise of the dragon empire, the fall of the phoenix house and the occupation of the autumn kingdoms, leading her into the exiles’ plot.

as her investigation proceeds, the girl focuses on a controversial campaign to probe the ruins of the underworld. the stated purpose was to follow up on a lost archeological expedition that had uncovered evidence of possible truth to ancient legends from the first age of magic. lord avonlea, responsible for mounting the original expedition, defied the opposition and was preparing to mount a new expedition when the rift tide struck the estate.

the girl responds to the tomboy’s explanation of her transformation by confiding her own experience with metamorphic magic, transforming herself into a tiger. at one point, the girl was confronted with a gang of outlaws and, while turning into a tiger to defend herself, was soul-struck by one of her attackers. though distracted and disabled, as intended, by the psychic-magic power surge, the girl managed to keep from losing control of her transformation—which would have turned the attack into a fatal strike. as a consequence, however, the art of her transformation had been burned into her psyche, the transformation now swift and second-nature.

the investigation leads the girl to the lord’s surviving allies or their descendants. a string of suspicious deaths frustrates her pursuit of the opposition, until she discovers the slain all have ties to the underworld.

the girl calls on her own ties to the underworld to probe further, while the tomboy covers for her.

his determination to prove himself against lesser demons motivates him to probe the underworld and fuels his interest in the girl, who has survived both.

his interest in the girl leads to his involvement with the tomboy, who poses as the girl while she pursues her investigation of her mother’s death.

the hit was intended to prevent an intrusion into the underworld, but the girl managed to convince him to support a different site for trials.

prompted by memories of events that have not happened yet, her investigation leads her to places no one had any reason to go.

the estate was rumored to be haunted, possessed and infested by the damned. reclaiming it from them is a suitable task for their trials. assuming she was supposed to be discouraging her second suitor from advocating trials in the underworld, the girl presents the estate as an alternative site for trials. as a child, she had stumbled upon a route to the underworld through the ruins under the estate.

delving into the underworld through the estate under the cover of trials solves problems for the girl and her unwanted suitor. it helps her to secure her claim on her title, but more importantly, it allows the girl to advance her investigation, serving as a compromise between what her second suitor wants from her, and what representatives of the underworld have demanded to help her in her investigation—preventing an official expedition into the underworld. the girl explains to her second suitor that she can get him where he wants to go in secret if trials are held at the estate.

the trials are held at the estate,

their intrusion into the underworld during trials simply provides a reason for a retaliatory hit.

the ring has significance as both the symbol of the girl’s claim to her estate and title and as a device to be used in a plot against the focus. as the symbol and seal of the girl’s claim, the stolen ring had to be recovered.

while lost, the ring falls into enemy hands. the wizard left the bindings intact so that the demon could be contained until a suitable host was selected. the girl managed to escape before the wizard could unleash the demon upon her. even so, the bindings were weakened when the ring was tampered with, so the demon would not have to wait long before the bindings on the ring to failed, allowing it to carry out its mission.

what appears to happen fits well within the scope of the conspiracy. after recovering the ring, she was arrested for a murder, declared possessed by a demon and exiled to the pale, where a confrontation with the dragon was inevitable. the conspirators assume that the girl was possessed by the demon in the ring, and thus compelled to seek the dragon out. so, the adversaries move into position to take advantage of the opportunity their confrontation would create.

the wizard who tampered with the ring was an ally of the adversary of the order’s founder—often referred to as the exile. he risked his soul to possess the power of a demon and succeeded. the exile sent him with a group of demons to wipe out the gathering at the estate. on confronting the mother, and seeing the ring, he sensed that it was still primed with its warped demon. it was easy—amusing, in fact—to break the seal he had to bypass when he warped the demon within.

the girl took possession of the demon possessing her mother, embracing it to free her mother’s soul.

the dragon’s first angel was created in the image of the angel the dragon loved in the outer realm. in spite of being a true manifestation of her spirit, his angel was not a manifestation of her soul. if anything, she was an embodiment of his intent to embody the soul his beloved. so, the dragon’s angel is a spiritual representation of the naked goddess, responsible for founding the phoenix bloodline and worshipped by many as the goddess.

among the critics, opponents and adversaries of the dragon, the goddess is regarded as the dragon’s folly. the dragon’s fallen first angel was considered a manifestation of his insane belief in the naked goddess, used to spread that insanity among mortals.

the royal and noble bloodlines are descended from the goddess and those considered touched by the goddess.

the goddess fell when she possessed a human, a touched girl who physically embodied the characteristics of the goddess, she had prepared to bear an incarnation of the naked goddess. unfortunately, the touched girl was suspected to be the living incarnation of the goddess and target for assassination. the dragon’s angel went too far in her attempts to save the slain surrogate’s life and ended up possessing her, body and soul.

the ring was created by a paladin of the goddess, to contain the dragon’s fallen angel. as a demon, it could only be redeemed by a soul it could identify as the source of its inspiration. it hunted members of the phoenix bloodline and the touched, by preference. having the guise of the goddess, and an appetite for the souls of those most devoted to the goddess, she was a threat that had to be contained.