reboot

to pin down the true evolution of the story, the options and inspirations cultivated up to this point need to be sorted into order.

random input

constants

supported threads include the demon within, the investigation, the girl within, the accidental assassin, the slain lover, the outcast, predators and prey, blooding the dragon within, and the eve of paradox. they define most of the action of the plot and are fairly well integrated.

it is not essential for the boy and girl to be born and established in the same frame, assuming that their interaction is focused on the period of the boy’s transition.

sequentially, the timeline begins with the conception and birth of the boy. unless enough material warrants it, the boy’s story—though first chronologically—can be addressed as an arc in the girl’s story. even with my life to draw on for the boy’s story, most of the series was envisioned from the girl’s perspective.

born two decades later, she plays a paradoxical role in completing the boy’s work. the girl arrives in the past through a rift in time. her life is interrupted at the time of the massacre, at seven, in the aftermath of a lover’s death, at seventeen, and once again during the massacre, at twenty-seven. the first and last provide the best point of temporal displacement, while the middle serves to involve her in the splinter realms.

from the point where they meet, events bring them together past obstacles to becoming friends and lovers. once past that point, however, the boy is tortured by their relationship, his love undermined by envy and regret—a growing sense of self-betrayal. this provokes his transition into a girl.

episodically, the story begins with an event that confronts the girl with a reason to begin probing her past. the idea that comes immediately to mind would be the rediscovery of her mother’s ring, which establishes her claim to the estate and title of avonlea.

the question of establishing the demon and or the girl as the mind and soul of creation—in the inner realm—can be simplified in point paradox.

variables

uncertain threads include the tiger skin, the vampire patron, the were-tiger’s bite, the vampire’s gift and hunger and thirst. although these threads have roots in the opening book, they are best suited to their own books.

the part of the tiger skin thread suited to the first book is where 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.

where does the demon within originate?

during the massacre, the girl took possession of the demon possessing her mother, embracing it to free her mother’s soul. but, that only explains how the demon became her demon within. from inception, the demon within is an echo of the demon without, the dragon’s first angel, 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 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.

how does the demon within gain possession of the girl’s mother?

assuming the demon within was in the girl’s ring, which presumably remains in her possession as the seal of her title, it might be better to question when she is possessed. it is safe to assume the demon within remains trapped in the ring the girl found in the underworld, after emerging from the rift, until the time of the massacre. so, the first thing to look at is how the demon is released from the ring. a tie already exists between the massacre and the theft of the ring. the wizard who tampered with the ring was an ally of the adversary of the order’s founder—often referred to as the exile. ten years later, he could easily have risked his soul to possess the power of a demon and if he succeeded, be the one the exile sent to wipe out the gathering at the estate. on confronting the mother, and seeing the ring, he might see that it was damaged, sense that it was still primed with its warped demon. it would be easy—amusing, in fact—to break the seal he had to bypass a decade earlier when he warped the demon within. the rough cut of the nightmare, in which the girl relived the massacre, remains accurate on that point and the details of that event become a little clearer.

when does she go through the rift?

assuming the boy is born first, and the girl loops back over his life, the obvious point of displacement is when she is seven, the night of the massacre. that need not unhinge plots based upon her inheritance, since questions about her identity and origin could remain a mystery for a decade. the legacy does not impact her until she comes of age, so it is practical for her legacy to be discovered around that time. it allows her to grow up as an average girl. although her displacement at seven makes probing her past a problem, it does not stop her from probing what she believes to be her past.

all other reasons aside, the impetus for her displacement at seventeen was the phoenix thread featuring her discovery that her mother does not seem to exist. originally, the phoenix thread was a resurrection paradox where a girl becomes her own mother to recover from the death of her original incarnation. in the evolved scheme, she could confront that shock once the ring is identified and her claim declared impossible. further investigation reveals that the members of the order and the academy who found her, after tracking her emergence from the rift, always suspected she originated from a splinter realm.

when do the boy and the girl become involved with each other?

the relationship between the boy and girl presents a few challenges. the boy’s evolution into a girl is soul searching and self defining—and the girl embodies the result; this makes the girl a challenge to his development. he needs time to develop his self-image before confronting her. this can be resolved by setting their first encounter at the end of spring in their fourteenth year.

assuming that the boy and girl do not encounter each other until then, the boy has had time to perfect his self image, even if circumstances discourage him from fully adopting it; his official identity dependent on the sex and coloring of his birth. in face and form, however, he is the male version of her. as a male, he strives to live up to the masculine ideal of his female predisposition, so the girl ends up finding him irresistible.

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. at this point, they enter the same academy, they begin to share friends, become acquaintances and begin to interact. it becomes common knowledge that he had a crush on her, and that she has an unreasonable aversion to his interest.

the tipping point in their relationship comes when they visit a retreat near the girl’s home during a winter break. 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.

as a natural consequence of their relationship, the boy is one of the girl’s suitors. though driven by mutual attraction, each is reluctant to commit fully to the relationship, especially when confronted with their engagement. the threat of marriage is also what provokes the tomboy’s manifestation.

what prompts the girl to confront her childhood demons?

the girl’s underworld ordeal already features the discovery of a ring, which appears in other contributions as the seal of authority over the estate. tied in with the original notion of an estate won in a hand of cards, the scene presents itself. the ring was in her possession when she emerged from the rift. 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. 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.

what part does the ring play?

assuming the boy is responsible for his own transformation, and the demon of the realm moved directly through the outer host, the scope of the ring’s influence is diminished. however, it does have significance as both the symbol of the girl’s claim to her estate and title and a device to be used in a plot against the focus. as the symbol and seal of the girl’s claim, the ring must be recovered when it is stolen; and while lost, it still falls into enemy hands. the demon must wait for the bindings on the ring to fail in order to carry out its mission.

in keeping with the idea that the royal and noble bloodlines are descended from the goddess and those considered touched by the goddess, the origin of the ring does not need to change much. it was created by a paladin of the goddess, to contain a demon—originally, the dragon’s first angel. the dragon’s angel fell seeking a soul of its own, driven by its inspiration to hunt members of the phoenix bloodline and the touched. 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.

although no one could have anticipated the paradoxical path the dragon’s warped demon actually takes in the story, what appears to happen fits well within the scope of the conspiracy. after recovering the ring, she is arrested for a murder, declared possessed by a demon and exiled to the pale, where a confrontation with the dragon was probable. the conspirators would assume that the girl was possessed by the demon in the ring, and thus compelled to seek the dragon out. so, they would move into position to take advantage of the opportunity their confrontation would create.

where does the girl’s investigation lead her?

assuming the girl passed through the rift at seven, the main problem with probing her past is the fact that it occurred in the future. as a result, led by her memories of events that have not happened yet, her investigation leads her to places no one had any reason to go. one way to deal with the problem of her family history can be solved by the fact that she emerged from the rift. 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 of avonlea 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 slaughtered by demons.

so, 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. the main thread the girl pursues 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 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.

how are the trials set at the girl’s estate?

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.

this adjustment also prevents the trials from being delayed and displaced from the first book.

who is the slain lover?

assuming the second suitor remains the target of the underworld’s assassin, he must also be the slain lover. on the other hand, the thread has evolved to make him the tomboy’s slain lover. in that evolution, the second suitor is the outer host, committed to escaping the demon’s possession. thus, 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.

how the slain lover and accidental assassin threads play out is evolving in a slightly different manner, in relation to the trials thread. the hit was intended to prevent an intrusion into the underworld, but the thread evolved to incorporate a deal the girl proposed, to minimize the threat. unfortunately, when the trials are held at the estate, their intrusion into the underworld simply provides a reason for a retaliatory hit. the adjustment helps to accommodate elements of threads that have already been roughed out.

how do the demon within and slain lover threads combine?

assuming the second suitor is the living, outer realm host, the demon without becomes aware of the girl and the tomboy through him. probing the girl, the demon without contacts the demon within. due to her instinctive possession of the demon within, her possession was entirely unconscious. probing the tomboy, the demon without confirms her as the earlier incarnation. striking through the host, the outer demon possesses the tomboy, slays the host’s mortal shell, and flees from the scene of his apparent murder.

the demon tracks down and confronts the girl, torturing her, forcing her yield to the possession of the demon within before leaving her to the authorities. the girl is unable to resist arrest, unable to deny that she carried a demon within. meanwhile, on the threshold, the tomboy confronts the outer host and learns that she has become the inner host of the demon encompassing the entire realm. this is essentially the opportunity he had been waiting for, a chance escape his possession. to take it, he had to abandon her and all the possibilities of her realm.

all other circumstances aside, the situation supports the girl taking possession of the tomboy’s body as an escape from the jaws of a dragon. When the girl takes possession of the tomboy’s body, she does so as a goddess—not a demon. she is essentially challenging the outer demon’s claim—at the same time the tomboy is fighting the demon’s possession. in the fight for possession of the tomboy’s body, the tomboy senses, through the demon, who it is fighting with, and why. her love for the girl prompts the tomboy to take possession of the demon without, to surrender possession of her body to the girl in order to save her life. in time, the girl tries to repay the tomboy by reincarnating her, but until then the tomboy is trapped between the threshold and the girl, haunting her mind. the demon without is fully assimilated with the tomboy’s reincarnation as the girl—a child goddess.

why does she confront the dragon in the pale?

it is more accurate to say, the dragon confronts the girl in the pale. although it has not been addressed, specifically, placing the dragon in the role of the focus imposes on him a responsibility for lost souls. new hosts tend to emerge on the threshold, while the victims of the rift and the purge can be found both there and in any of the shattered realms. the pale is one of shattered realms long lost to demons and other nightmares—a perfect hunting ground for a dragon. assuming the dragon would notice signs of life in the soul of creation, he would look for the incarnation and focus on the girl even if he never identified the boy. he might reasonably take up a role in her life—or rather, the role he has long had could start earlier in her life. beyond that, the dragon would follow her into the pale, but even if he was not already watching, his attention would focus on her almost immediately once she arrived in the pale. a basis for that has also already been threaded. on the pale, demons would be quick to mark her as a human typical of the phoenix bloodline or as a demon of the dominant inspiration.

when is the eve of paradox?

the proposed placement of the eve of paradox at the time of the massacre contradicts the evolved eve of paradox thread featured as the climax of the demon within thread. keeping it in that position is possible, but it relied on a different set of circumstances. the dragon has replaced the goddess as the focus and the host has replaced the ring as the conduit for the demon to possess the girl. on the other hand, a different demon presented itself—the dragon’s first angel.

the best idea at this point is to use the demon of the ring to resolve a problem with the massacre. assuming the tomboy takes possession of the demon without, and the eve of paradox occurs ten years earlier—when the displaced girl is seventeen—the mother has to be possessed by a different demon. what better demon than the one trapped in the ring, the one the conspirators intended to exploit as a weapon against the dragon?

the ring can remain a trap created by a paladin of the goddess, passed down through the phoenix bloodlines until it was lost during the fall of the phoenix house. the girl finds the ring, keeps it hidden until it fits, claims the title and estate, and lends the ring to the tomboy posing as her. the ring is stolen from the tomboy, sold to a wizard, tampered with and then recovered by the girl. ten years later, the ring is damaged, the demon is set loose, gains—with the advantage of paradox—possession of the mother and—at the disadvantage of paradox—is possessed by the girl. technically, the demon possesses her; it simply is not able to dominate the girl. the girl instinctively suppresses the tainted demon, rather than assimilate it.

the adjustment makes the dragon’s demon the girl’s inner demon, unconsciously mastered due to her assimilation of the tomboy possessing the demon without. smoothing out this thread frays others, however. a confrontation with a dragon is central to the predator and prey thread, ultimately prompting the girl’s possession of the tomboy’s body. for the most part, it has always been envisioned as a confrontation with *the* dragon—the focus. the moment when the dragon enters her mind to initiate the blooding would be an appropriate time for the inner demon to strike at the dragon. however, the real cause of the eve of paradox is the moment when the tomboy possesses the demon without. that is technically what displaces the focus and disrupts reality.

focus - the boy

a transgendered boy with severe abandonment issues and an indomitable spirit, his parents divorced when he was three. he was put up for adoption when he was four, and spent a year in foster care before finally being placed with his new family. the lack of a stable home and favorable male role model could have contributed to his failure to identify with men or other boys, but unfavorable reactions to his feminine behavior and self-identification contributed immensely to his fear of abandonment. he had literally been told that no one would want a boy who acted like a girl. so, he hid what he truly thought and felt, pretending to be a boy for everyone around him while searching endlessly for a way to become a girl to stop living a lie.

his ordeal begins when circumstances force him to realize that he’s neither the boy he appears to be, nor the girl he is inclined to be. conforming to the expectations people have of him, based on what he is, forces him to live a lie and fuels his drive to explore and express himself honestly and openly.

the opportunity to do something about his situation comes when the boy is confronted by an adept, over a bit of mischief. when asked his identity, and compelled to speak true, the boy can only admit to not being who he appears to be. intrigued by their debate, the adept presents him to the academy for initiation.

his initiation at the academy enables him to determine who he is and what he could be—as well as what the cost to himself and others would be. the boy perfected his self image over time. in private, or in secret, he conformed to his instincts. in public, he adopted only the characteristics his circumstances allowed. most of the changes in his appearance were concealed by growth and puberty; but, changing sex could not go unnoticed and would not go unremarked or unchallenged.

when confronted with the girl, the boy is confronted with a problem; the person he should have been was someone else. there could be no greater obstacle to his—or rather, her—self assertion. as the embodiment of his ideal, however, he could not help falling in love with her—or hating her. as a boy, he wanted nothing more than to be with her. deep down, as a girl, he wanted nothing more than to be her.

focus - the girl

the demon within thread begins with the massacre, featuring both the apparent death of her mother and the confrontation with the demon—which is visited in the first arc of the girl’s story.

the girl emerged from the rift in roughly the same place where she was confronted on the estate. pursued into the depths, she slipped away from the responding rift knights. emerging from the underworld in the city, the girl fell in with street orphans where she established her ties to the underworld.

the girl was eventually tracked down and recruited by the order of the rift, who sponsored her to the academy. she was initiated with the hope of becoming a rift knight.

when other initiates returned to their homes, the girl spent her seasonal breaks from the academy at the orphanage, often revisiting her street orphan associates.

when the girl was first identified, a regent was appointed to manage her estate and title—though the girl did not learn of it until her identity was made publically known as a consequence of openly wearing the ring.

the natural starting point of the story, or series, would be the girl’s return from the academy in the spring. the girl is caught between two young men, the one she is betrothed to and the one petitioning for the trials to be held in the underworld. the first suitor is present when the girl is confronted with the plans for their engagement and the nightmares awaiting her for that first visit home in a decade.

marriage and the assumption of her title and duties conflict with her personal ambitions. her intentions were to begin service as a companion in the order, with hopes of becoming a knight. unfortunately, a suppressed childhood trauma threatened her plans. if she could not remove that flaw in her psyche, she would not pass trials and could no longer escape the trap.

at the end of their initiation, both suitors are present when the exploration of a ruin at the academy reveals the girl is haunted by her traumatic ordeal. his discovery of her previous trip though the underworld encourages the interest of the second suitor.

the girl returns home for the summer determined to confront the demons of her past. she investigates the events surrounding the massacre and becomes involved in a conflict in the underworld. since her investigation is precipitated by her need to pass trials to avoid being forced into an arranged marriage, only part of the accidental assassin thread fits.

the evolution of the demon within, accidental assassin and slain lover threads establish a framework in which the girl must consciously master the demon within; as a child, she mastered it unconsciously and then repressed it.

targeted for assassination, the second suitor still fits into the slain lover strand of the accidental assassin thread, and his death still precipitates the girl’s condemnation.

as in the slain lover thread, the second suitor’s death is investigated, the girl is arrested and tested for demonic possession. unfortunately, in assimilating the demon, the girl inherited the souls it possessed. possession of those souls marked her as a demon. the girl was condemned and exiled to the pale, an echo of reality.

in the pale, alone among demons, following the predator and prey thread, the girl is haunted, hounded and hunted, driven into a deadly dance with a dragon. here, the seventeen-year-old girl dies, devoured by the dragon roused from her mind, and takes possession of the tomboy’s body.

the second suitor turns up alive and the goddess convinces the authorities to rehabilitate the girl. the girl returns from the pale in time for trials, visiting the family of her first suitor to inform them of the boy’s possession—a partial explanation for his disappearance.

among her further adventures, other prominent threads include:

conscription by the order

exploration of the rift

capture by a space fleet stranded upon the threshold

service in a war within the rift

confronting and being courted by a dragon

negotiation of an alliance of rift-bound communities

nomination as an avatar of the goddess

reincarnating the tomboy and surviving pregnancy

confrontation with agents of the adversary

involvement in a conflict in the underworld

infection by a vampire and a were

involvement in the eve of paradox plot

losing her daughter in a raid on her home

focus - the demon within

fallen angels – the angel the dragon loved in the outer realm serves as the prototype of the dragon’s first angel. when it was confronted with a mortal embodiment of its inspiration, it experienced a conflict of identity; identifying with that mortal so strongly that it could not abide that mortal's death. not when that mortal's death amounted to the destruction of an embodiment of its inspiration.

focus - the demon without

fallen angels – the demon of the realm's creation, specifically its origins as an angel of the outer realm, amounted to an inspiration captured by the universal mind. she was drawn to a man who was blooded as a dragon. they fought together in the cataclysm, until the dragon was slain. his death was unbearable, and when she could not save his life, she would not let go of his soul. when she fell and possessed his soul, her own soul snapped out of the unity and into the depths of the dragon’s mind. there, it remained alone as other souls joined the dragon in the depths of the fallen angel’s mind, living in an echo of the inner realm the first soul brought into focus.

focus - the host

the second suitor has been identified in many roles, but the one that is of particular significance is that of the demon’s living host in the outer realm. second to that, he is also the boy’s academy rival.

the host is a direct route for the demon to possessed the tomboy—it goes after her through him, drawn by his interest in the girl. the demon probes the girl to confirm what it had sensed in her through him. not only did she possess its spirit, she was the reincarnation of the soul that embraced it.

the demon remains in full possession of the host’s original body when it turns inward to take possession of the host's body in the inner world. it puts the host's body in the outer realm into a self-induced coma—keeping the consciousness of the host trapped in limbo, at the edge of the abyss. to regain control of his original body, the host first had to overcome the demon's possession.

the death of the host’s inner-realm body does not free the host out from the demon’s possession. when a demon takes a new host, it has the option to release the soul of its previous host—it would not require a new host if the soul of the previous host had been suitable for its needs. however, a demon still gains power from the souls it has possessed, so it is more likely to retain possession and leave the body of its former host an empty husk.

once the demon had possession of the tomboy's body, she became its host in the inner realm, and confronted the demon's host from the outer realm at the edge of the abyss in limbo.

focus - the focus

the dragon featured in some notes as the demon’s focus, in place of the goddess, was a soul immersed in the dragon archetype before the human incarnation in which he was initiated. when he was slain in the fall, the angel could not bear the thought of his destruction and unintentionally possessed him, falling and becoming the demon. in the depths of the demon’s psyche, the dragon encountered the unborn soul isolated by the angel’s fall. he took it upon himself to coax her awake, attempting to engineer her birth within the inner realm. his cultivation of the phoenix bloodline resulted in the rise of the touched, who worshipped the naked goddess.

an angel of the outer realm

a man blooded as a dragon

the dragon was slain and the angel fell

the dragon becomes the demon’s focus—a god of the inner realm—and confronts the naked goddess

the dragon’s first angel was created in an attempt to clothe the naked goddess. instead, his angel was merely his soul clothed in the original angel’s spirit, so he turned away from her. the spurned angel, believing his reason for rejecting her was her lack of a soul of her own, became determined to find her own soul. this establishes a lesser angel of the phoenix born of the dragon’s psyche, which supports the eve of paradox thread.

focus - the naked goddess

in a majority of notes, the goddess was presented as the focus of the demon of the realm. in many cases, she was a human the angel identified with so deeply it could not abide her death. as the story evolved, the conflict between this version of the goddess and the inspiration for her role became clear. fortunately, the concept of the naked goddess, developed in some notes, is true to the original inspiration. the naked goddess is the unborn soul, and inspiration for, the angel—a phoenix—and the demon—a dark phoenix. the focus of the demon, the dragon, devoted himself to her incarnation. she is recognized by the dragon, a bare majority of the other inner gods, and most of the touched as the soul of creation or the naked goddess, in the inner realm.

incarnated as the boy, the naked goddess asserts herself gradually. in the event he was not her first incarnation, it is plausible that she might take a close embodiment of her ideal for granted, but as him she literally could not take her existence for granted. it would take a long time for the dragon to think of provoking her with a self-denying incarnation, but once it did he had the means to engineer it. as a consequence of the revelations and teachings of the third age of magic, a touched genius might also think of attempting to sire an incarnation of the soul of creation. both options have been explored.

focus - the eve of paradox

the girl displaces demon's focus as the soul of creation, shattering the consensus with cataclysmic consequences for the reality that was founded upon it.

the girl retains possession of the souls of the focus, the host and the rest of the eclipsed, so they remain gods of the inner realm.

loose threads

angels and demons – angels and demons are identities that are not entities in and of themselves; they are the idea of a person, not the actual person. the characters, personalities, alternate identities, aliases and personifications a psyche adopts that work in concert with the primary identity are angelic, while those in conflict with it are demonic. one aspect of the soul is universal or part of the unity definable as the absolute or personified as god. in that sense, an angel can manifest the spiritual qualities of any soul, and thus have an affinity for a particular soul. so, it is possible for an angel to be drawn to take possession of a soul with a physical manifestation or mental aspect of its spirit and—because that soul has a different identity, a psyche with a different physical or spiritual affinity—become a demon. a demon uses the soul of a former host to gain the leverage needed to conquer a new host—giving the psyche of its former host a potential foothold in the body of the new host.

possession – in some cases, an angel apprehends its own soul, its seat, becoming self-possessed, essentially becoming human. a demon never becomes self-possessed; rather, a demon seeks the embodiment of its soul, an incarnation that is capable of taking possession of it. an incarnation taking possession of a demon also takes possession of the souls the demon has already claimed; essentially becoming a god.

personal demons – whether spawned from the unity or an entity, a personal can remain dissociated from, and antagonistic toward, its seat—the mind that spawned it. a personal demon can be little more than a conflicted feeling or impulse, or as much as a competing persona—personalities or identities in conflict within the psyche.

the purge – in the history of aeirn, the inner gods became embroiled in a war over control over the inner realm. in simple terms, the notion emerged that power over the inner realm was distributed among the captive souls and diluted. to increase their own power, some of the gods began hunting the rest. among them were a few that were even more ambitious, seeking to conquer the demon of the realm. these particular antagonists saw the host and the focus as the main avenues of attack. the focus was where the demon’s spirit was rooted, and the host was where the demon’s conscious attention was engaged. all of the possessed had a direct connection to the demon through its presence in their own minds. using that connection put their sanity at risk, however, so most used it passively to tap into the demon’s consciousness.

the ambush – because the demon's host was more vulnerable than its focus, the adversaries concentrated on learning how to identify and ambush hosts, attempting to strike at the earliest opportunity by observing—through the demon—who it possessed and then capturing them in the nightmare limbo they were initially trapped in. once captive, their ruthless attempts to exploit the host either destroyed the host's mind or provoked the demon into destroying the host's assailants.

clay – clay was an incarnation of the intermediary host—born and raised on outer earth in modern times, he was possessed by the demon and found his way to the inner realm with the help of the goddess. she respected his desire to search for some way to recover his body and return to his former life. there was much for him to learn and to give him a solid foundation, he posed as a mortal to be initiated at the academy. while there, he became involved with the girl. his interest in the girl grew out of his rivalry with ash and efforts to exploit her experience with the ruins and the underworld to test himself against normal demons before facing the demon of the realm.

the god and goddess – the worship of the god and the goddess in the north predated the third age of magic. as the soul of creation, the goddess stood out from the other gods and goddesses of aeirn. what she referred to as the mind of creation became known as the god, or what the other gods referred to as the god aspect of the goddess—what she turned into if the demon of the realm was provoked. this distinction was lost on mortals, who believed that the god and the goddess were simply two different aspects of the soul of creation. throughout the history of aeirn, certain people possessed an affinity for the soul of creation that granted them miraculous abilities or stimulated the development of their own psychic potential.

the chosen and the touched – those who could perform miracles were called the chosen of the god or the goddess while those who manifested their own potential in response to the touch of the soul of creation were simply called the touched.

the bloodlines – through controlled breeding, the chosen and the touched determined the characteristics of different aspects of the god and the goddess and houses were established to preserve and promote those characteristics.

the bloodlines of the goddess – the goddess sensed that reality was becoming stable enough to be sustained by its inhabitants and no longer needed her to survive. her hope was that a mortal incarnation might be the key to freeing her soul from the demon, and she had spent thousands of years breeding a population capable of conceiving a child that would embody her in every way. ironically, the soul of the demon was predisposed to the same embodiment.

the paladin’s ring – a demon of the goddess was trapped and bound in a ring created by a paladin of the goddess, who used his soul as bait. the demon imprisoned in the ring became the source of its powers. the powers of regeneration, rejuvenation, resurrection, rebirth and reincarnation were natural endowments of demons and angels. the ring's ability to alter the sex of the wearer was a side effect of how the ring harnessed—and how humans accessed—those powers. the ring had a male side and a female side, and the changes were reversible only through the use of the ring or an equivalent power. when the paladin was slain, his psyche became trapped in the ring with the demon. those who gained possession of the ring were subjected to an ordeal that forced them to develop the potential to access the demon’s powers by changing their sex. those who passed that ordeal became virtually immortal; unfortunately, if something did manage to kill them, the ring would capture their souls.

the influence of the church – the majority of royal and noble houses of arden had defied the church’s interpretation of the revelation and remained devoted to the goddess avon, but the patriarchal minority that embraced the church—along with the revelation—seceded to form the kingdom of ardoen.

the conspiracy – the eve of paradox came about as a consequence of a complex conspiracy to assassinate the goddess. among the conspirators was a cabal of athalonian exiles who believed they were participating in a coup to deliver the kingdom of arden into their hands. agents of the church in the kingdom of ardoen believed they were the true authors of the plot. the destruction of the goddess would enable the agents of the church to stage coups in both kingdoms, an essential step in founding the ardoen empire. the church intended to betray the cabal, which ultimately sought to shatter the athelon empire, in retaliation for the scourge—both supported by the church—and reclaim their domains among the winter kingdoms. the church’s scheme was designed to pit two enemies of the church against each other, weakening both. in truth, they were all pawns in the exploitation of an ancient conflict among the gods for dominion over the inner realm.

a carefully laid trap—the architect of the wizard’s plot was a rogue member of the academy, an adversary who intended to achieve what the gods themselves had gone to war against each other over—conquering the demon of the realm. capturing a demon of the goddess was the penultimate step. the problem of finding a volunteer to host the exploited demon solved itself when the girl broke in to steal the ring back for the tomboy.

the eve of paradox—the true objective of the plot was to summon the demon of the realm using a demon of the goddess to threaten its grasp on her soul. once in possession of a body within the domain, the demon was expected to be vulnerable to attack by those who conspired to bring it into the inner realm to conquer it and claim its dominion.

the shattering blow—the goddess had been identified as the soul of creation. the attack upon her was intended to awaken the mind of creation, or rather, to manifest the creator. when the goddess probed her mind for psychic damage, she created an opening in her own mental defenses the fallen angel was able to infiltrate. the fallen angel could not hope to possess the goddess, but it was capable of devouring her mind from within, consuming the pieces until the soul within was naked. this was what would provoke the demon that had claimed her soul for its focus; the mind was what demon used to grasp a soul. without a mind, a soul slipped out of the demon’s grasp.

the choice—the goddess understood the implications of what was happening to her better than anyone. if she struggled, the demon of the realm would have time to sense the threat of her destruction and descend upon her to retaliate with a power unlike anything imaginable. the dream she and her kind had woven into reality would be shattered. nothing mortal would survive. the only way to prevent that was for her to embrace annihilation. the only consolation was knowing that her naked soul would survive, through a scheme she had set in motion ages ago to create a brand new incarnation of herself.

the mote—even as the girl took possession of the demon, the goddess embraced the fallen angel in a fatal fusion, one mind consuming itself in an instant, scattering its ashes within the mind of the girl. there was nothing the fallen angel could do as it and the goddess dissolved into a mist of incoherent information.

the rift—as the architects of the plot expected, the demon of the realm to have enough time to identify the source of the attack upon the goddess and attempt to seize the girl 's soul as it's grasp on the soul of its focus dissolved. they had intended to launch a direct assault on the demon the moment it took possession, but they had failed to anticipate that the destruction of the goddess would be a shattering blow to reality. everyone present at ground zero was cast into the rift, including the girl, the host and the conspirators positioned for the coup.

the study of the rift began with the manifestation of rifts in the past, as attempts to explain them and discover their cause. prior to the eve of paradox, most believed that the rifts were created by the use of magic, on the theory that it could tear the fabric of reality. some suspected that the rifts were the result of a traumatic blow to the foundation of reality—the soul of creation. a few believed it was evidence of someone mastering the demon of the realm and seizing power over reality. some individuals recognized the true significance of the eve of paradox, though most of them have different opinions about the consequences of preventing or permitting it.

in the eye of paradox—the demon ignored the host, realizing that he was actively protecting the girl from the ambush that followed in spite of the rift. once the ambush was thwarted, the demon and the host confronted one another. the demon interrogated the host, learning about the evolution of the inner realm. the demon sensed that the host was tempted to battle it to reclaim his former life and observed that the fate of the girl and the inner realm was in the host's hands. the demon explained that the rift could be healed if the host stabilized it. reality was created by the participation of the realm's inhabitants and would survive in spite of the loss of its foundation. until the rift healed, reality would be fragmented and prone to paradox. the host accepted the burden of stabilizing the rift and the demon relinquished its hold on the girl, casting her—and the conspirators—deeper into the rift.

out of paradox—the host was met at the threshold by the inner gods and told of the souls lost in the expanding rift. though it distracted him from saving the girl, he guided them through the process of stabilizing the rift and rescuing what souls they could.

a lingering threat—although the authors of this disaster failed to complete their coup, they survived being cast into the rift and remained lost in the deepest, most remote part of the rift until encountered by the self-proclaimed exile and recruited into his service.