

Wiping the Slate Clean - Part II

an adventure for the *Dying Earth* RPG, suitable for Turjan-level characters

By Steve Dempsey

In which the player characters purge themselves of an unpleasant memory.

This part of the adventure is very unstructured and is an opportunity to use Robin's "[Yes, but ...](#)" from this and last month's columns. The adventure takes place in the PCs' collective memory so it is essentially up to the players to construct the backdrop to the adventure. The film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* has sequences that illustrate this kind of thing, and it's well worth seeing too!

1. In which the sanity of the scenarist is doubted.

This is the final part of Klazan's plan to destroy himself by being wiped from the memory of the last beings that remember him, the PCs and Amaranth.

When we last left the brave characters, they had just freed the monstrous god of memory, Klazan, from his prison in the laboratory of the dead Archmage Pandido. Once Klazan is freed, by whatever method, something strange happens. Everyone gets an intense feeling of *déjà vu* as the whole room in which they are standing appears to shimmer.

Although the PCs still seem to be in Pandido's laboratory, there are in fact in the Memory Maze. This is not anywhere as such. It is a form of collective memory shared between the PCs and can exist only because of Klazan's powers as the God of Memory. It is made up of the pooled memories and experiences of the PCs. This part of the adventure will depend very much on the players driving things forward but it will be up to you as the GM to provide interesting challenges based on the direction that the PCs take.

If it sounds scary letting the players come up with the adventure, don't worry too much. As a GM, you've been doing this kind of thing all along, you just haven't thought of it as being like that. In your other games, you might have planned the initial structure for your adventure but once you let the players loose in it, it really becomes their reality. They are the ones who really decide which way things are going to go. In this part of the adventure you'll just be the same as before, only more so. Read Robin's articles which will help greatly with this style of play.

2. In which the nature of the Memory Maze is exposed.

The Memory Maze is created by the PCs own memories of places and people so it is colored very much by their perceptions. If a PC was born in Kaiin but hadn't visited it since they were a child, their version of it will be very loud and scary. The buildings and people will all be monstrously tall, a cacophonous din will drown out all but shouted talk and it will be impossible to navigate the tortuous streets without somebody dragging them around by the hand.

Places will also be tainted by the PC's feelings at the time. So in the above example, most things will appear frightening and moving away from the guiding hand would require a **Wherewithal** check. If the PCs visit a place where one of them was celebrating the find of a rather splendid manuscript,

everything will be brightly colored and friendly at first, turning darker and more ponderous as the PC celebrated too much and finally becoming a place of anger and despair as they discovered that the manuscript had been stolen whilst they engaged in drunken revelry.

So, the PCs can go anywhere that they remember, either through having been there or having read or heard about the place. The amount of detail in a scene depends very much on how direct an experience it was for the PC. A place they lived in will be vivid, noisy and colorful. Somewhere they once read about will contain the things that were described but won't have any extra details. Backgrounds will be hazy, faces indistinct and objects insubstantial. A place on mentioned in passing by a stranger in a tavern will be almost completely misty and indistinct, the only color, provided by the impression that the PC had of the place when they first heard about it.

In practice this means that as the PCs visit each new place, you must ascertain how much familiarity they have with their location and under what circumstances.

For example, the PCs decide to visit Taun Sfer, happy childhood home of one and where yet another passed three dismal months trying to recapture an escaped vat creature. Taun Sfer is well known to two PCs and so should be rather detailed in its Memory Maze representation. However its aspect should be a mixture of enormous happy places (the childhood memories) and dark fruitless allies and foreboding hostilities (the unhappy pursuit). The people encountered should also be either gigantic and enthralling family members of the one PC or secretive and hostile encounters of the other.

In this scenario it is important that you describe the perceptions of the PCs because these will be what drives the adventure forwards. Don't be afraid to embroider! Vancian fiction is full of fanciful vistas and you should not shy from them.

3. In which the nature of the quest is elucidated.

Although they don't know it, the PCs' mission is to fulfill Klazan's desire to die. As Klazan's body is now dead, all that is left is what the PCs remember of him and his basic self-preservation prevents this from being an easy thing to destroy. His representation in the PCs' memories will attempt to hide away from them in neglected places in their memories: a stolen glance at a fetching courtesan, a non-nondescript meal in a third rate inn or an embarrassing punishment endured as a child. Klazan's memory presence, henceforth just called Klazan, will disguise itself in some way in these scenes and could appear as anything: the reflection of the courtesan in a mirror, the third flask of flat beer or the very cane that beat the child. Although the disguise will be good, in some way it should be noticeable to the PC in whose recollections the PCs are searching. Perhaps the reflection is more colorful than the rest of the scene, the beer bubbles slightly too noisy or the cane even more penetrating of the PC's undergarments. Match Klazan's **Concealment** skill against the **Perception** of anyone looking for him.

If the PCs spot Klazan and break whatever representation he is taking on, then Klazan loses one point of **Health**. Each time this happens the *deja vu* feeling that happened before should be re-experienced and the scene should shift to a different memory.

4. In which the characters receive some guidance.

Whilst Klazan is hoping that the PCs will finish him off of their own accord, he is not leaving everything entirely to chance. He has sent along a guide to help push them in the right direction. Through his long association with Amaranth, he has managed with his last real breath to create a facsimile of her in the PCs' memories that has some independence from their memories of her, enabling her to help things along. She will not tell the PCs directly what is going on for to do so would push Klazan deeper into the PCs' memories and make him even harder to find and destroy.

As she is only a phantasm of their collective memories, Amaranth doesn't actually know any more than the PCs do, but she is aware of inconsistencies and will attempt to point out any to the PCs. This way she hopes to prompt them into action against Klazan.

5. In which the end of Klazan is foretold, and perhaps even brought about.

Eventually, the PCs will reduce Klazan to 0 **Health**. When this happens, the PCs will be returned to Pandido's manse wherein they will discover a fetid mass that was once Klazan but is now unrecognizable to them. Amaranth will also be here and will explain to the PCs that her time is finished and that they must kill her before she can undo the good work that they have done. They will have no recollection of what this work actually was. If they press her to reveal what they have done, or use magical means to accomplish this, they will once again be plunged back into the Memory Maze. In fact, if at anytime they ever seek to recover their missing memories, they will return to the Memory Maze and have to hunt down Klazan once more.

6. "Thus and so", an aid to the harassed GM.

Here is an example of play to illustrate the process that I have been describing.

There are three player characters: Borkquorce, Drowel and Erelkode. They have dispatched Klazan's earthly body and now are looking around for treasure to loot. Amaranth is sitting nearby with a strange expression on her face. It seems to be part melancholy, perhaps at the passing of her creator, and part amusement, at the PCs failure to find anything of interest amongst the ruins of the laboratory.

Drowel notices Amaranth's semi-smirk and requires her to furnish him with a suitable reason for her lack of proper decorum. She acquiesces not without good grace and points out that he has missed something. Following her line of sight he notices a mirror in which the reflection of the laboratory is different. It is as if no violence had ever been wreaked upon it by the PCs! Drowel feigns a passing interest and hastens to purloin the magical mirror before his fellow mages notice.

The mirror however, being Klazan's memory presence, has other ideas and attempts to move away. Or at least that part that is Klazan does. And so the image of the pristine laboratory shifts out of the mirror and across the room, seemingly somehow suspended in mid air. Attempts to prevent it escaping with paralyzing magics fail and the mages are obliged to try more forceful methods, causing it to shatter.

Suddenly the scene shifts through a strange sensation of déjà vu to an old memory of another PC, Erelkode say. The GM describes to Erelkode that they appear to be in an underskullery of his childhood home and prompts the player to describe the scene. The GM has in mind that the Erelkode's father created his mother in his vats but that Erelkode would rather not remember this and so by using

the “[Yes, but ...](#)” technique steers Erelkode's recollections round to something rather dark and threatening. The walls of the manse seem to close in on the PCs, pictures leer at them and beautiful creatures run madly through the halls and misshapen lumps of beings proffer strange counsel.

Let Erelkode's player describe the setting whilst using the power of the “but” to steer the game round to the atmosphere that you want. Remember, this is a Turjan level game so aim for Horror, Opportunity for Bloodshed and Ruined Wonders. I shouldn't wonder if, in under such circumstances, Klazan doesn't end up being part of Erelkode's mother, or a favorite pet. Something that he once cherished and that he will have to see rent apart by his accomplices. It doesn't much matter what the outcome is, as long as it is something that has the right feel about it.

Characters

Klazan's Memory Presence

Health X¹ Concealment 10

As mentioned above, this figment of memory can take on any form it chooses. Any other attributes will be those of the form of which it takes. As regards **Health**, the number above is the value for the Memory Presence itself. If is in the form of a creature, for example, the PCs will have to destroy the **Health** of that creature before the Memory Presence loses a point.

¹Choose this to suit your game and have it equal 0 when you think the players have had enough.