

Wiping the Slate Clean - Part I

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

By Steve Dempsey

This scenario is in two parts, the first of which is a mundane looting of an abandoned manse. The second part, available next month, will present a more unusual idea directly relating to Robin's column. This adventure may be run in parallel with others. You could introduce the Amaranths gradually into your own game and subtly build up the interest. Or not, as you wish.

1. Background

In Aeons gone by Archmage Pandido created the vat creature Amaranth and fell in love with her. She was a fey creature, willowy and beautiful. She might have laughed at his clumsy flirting and teased the old mage but Amaranth was afraid of Pandido. His power over life and death seemed unnatural to her.

Amaranth spurned Pandido's advances and instead took up with a craftsman called Ydelon from the little village under the hill where the wizard had his manse. Amaranth preferred Ydelon's way. He would search around for the right stone and bring forth from it a work of art. His fashion was to encourage creation whereas Pandido sought to impose his will on all around him. As Pandido was distracted for a while by an amusing pervulsion, Amaranth and Ydelon were free to nurture their love.

But their joy was short lived. Finally noticing that Amaranth was missing, Pandido quickly found her with his magic, and sought to rain death down on Ydelon. Amaranth threw herself in the way of his coruscating darts of power as they surged towards the hapless sculptor and was utterly and irrevocably destroyed. In his horror and grief Pandido forgot his feud with Ydelon and dragged himself back to his manse to brood. Try as he might, he could not recreate Amaranth, nor could he shake off her memory. It hung around him like an odorous infection.

After much contemplation Pandido decided instead to magically expunge the memory of Amaranth, but his thirst for her was at the core of his being. To deny that was to deny himself, and he was too powerful to let go.

Again Pandido was left in deep despondency. Again he took to his books and devised a stratagem. No longer would he seek to affect himself. Instead, Pandido decided to kill the God of Memory, Klazan. Through long study, self-denial and mighty magics he managed to weaken and contain Klazan, but not kill him.

This was almost enough. Pandido forgot what he was doing, he forgot his name, his magic and his past but, somehow, a bright, willowy shadow still haunted him. In despair he fled his manse. A manse he no longer recognised as his own. Down the hill he ran, down to the village. The villagers cowered in their homes but Ydelon dared, in his anger, to venture forth. Pandido ran to him, tears across his face. Ydelon took up his chisel and slew the wizard. Local legend called the manse cursed and it fell into ruins.

Within the crumbling walls Klazan remains locked up forever, trapped inside a blue glass cylinder some 40' tall in the centre of Pandido's laboratory. Thus he has been contained for aeons. Memories are sustenance to Klazan but he has had nothing new on which to feed for all this time and, to avoid perishing, has been chewing over the same recollections of the sad tale of Amaranth and Ydelon.

Should Klazan expire here he would become a kind of ghostly memory, forced to reenact his last thoughts over and over. This he wishes to avoid. True death (which he now desires having spent far

too long immersed in thin melancholy and unrequited carnality) could come only come through a complex magical process. Klazan must imprint himself in the mind of beings that are capable of destroying their own memories, accomplished mages, and then force them to purge him from their minds.

Klazan is physically bound in his prison but he is still able to evoke memories in any who come near. While trapped in our world, he does still extend into the Overworld and it is from here that his invisible tendrils insinuate themselves into the minds of anyone who has ever had experience of him. Through these tendrils he can affect the memory of anyone, or anything, nearby. It is easy to imprint on the sensorium of uncomplicated creatures such as the deel-bugs, but it is a much more difficult process for humans. Also, the tendrils are very thin and, because Klazan's imprisonment has weakened his power, the tendrils tend to break off and drift around, producing strange sentiments of unexperienced *deja vu* in those on whom they alight.

2. The Amaranths

After much trial and error Klazan has managed to train some local insects, deel-bugs, to operate Pandido's vats using Pandido's last remaining matrix. Thus he has created copies of Amaranth, sending them forth to find a means of freeing him. He has done this many times with no success. In a desperate bid for freedom Klazan has run the vats to destruction, creating nine copies of Amaranth to work together to free him. Unfortunately too feeble to learn spells, even though Klazan has been able to teach them something of magic's ways as protection, they have been given the task of enticing mages to the manse in order to fulfil Klazan's plan.

After manipulating the Amaranths for many a month, Klazan has imprinted in their minds a deep desire to set in motion the events that will free him. He has also given them a subconscious link so that they are vaguely aware of what each other knows.

Klazan does not concern himself with any particular rationalization as to why Amaranth should want to free him, better to leave that up to the Amaranths. The Amaranths have had many adventures before they encounter the mages and these experiences have left them all slightly different. Each Amaranth now has a different reason for wanting to visit the ruined Manse. Choose from this list or make some up yourself:

- Amaranth is keen to loot the manse but is not powerful enough to overcome the magical defenses. She heard of it in a prophetic dream.
- Amaranth is unaware of her origins and thinks that the manse might hold some information to help her. She needs the Mages' help to gain entry but once in they are free to take whatever they find.
- Amaranth is keen to become an apprentice to the Mage, having long revered him from afar. If she gives him the location of the manse, which she chanced upon in some ancient, now lost tome, perhaps he will take her under his wing.
- Amaranth will try to steal something from the Mage and trade the knowledge of the Manse for his mercy.
- Amaranth is in the employ of Iocounu but is keen to leave for a more reliable master. Perhaps the mage will take her under his wing in exchange for an important piece of information.
- Amaranth has long sought someone powerful enough to gain entry to the manse and thinks that the Mage is just such a character. She lived in the nearby village but her neighbors were all bumpkins and buffoons and so not able to help her.

Generally any Amaranth can offer the location of the Manse and some information about traps and such, She can offer herself, for she cares not and has but one goal in mind. She can tell of the exotic artifacts, the ponderous tomes, the lively constructs, the money, the vat matrices, all the wonders contained therein.

3. The Proposition

An Amaranth has been watching each of the Mages for some time and has been collecting information about them. At present she¹ knows enough about each mage that she can target their weaknesses.

Look at each Mage's Resistances and choose an approach that gives them the least resistance.

Remember that Amaranth has been watching them for a while and is an excellent judge of human character. Amaranth has no actual magical powers, but if she can she will try to persuade people not to use magic to influence her. In fact she would rather die and can use this as a dissuasion.

Try the subtle approaches first and if these fail to bite have Amaranth make an outright proposition. She will trade the location of the Manse for a share of the treasures therein.

4. The Journey

Mages of the caliber of the player characters will probably have some form of magical transport available. If not, place the Manse in a location that is favorable to your game so that the journey is not overlong nor uninteresting. Use the time spent travelling to develop the relationship between the PCs and Amaranth. She is no dullard and is capable of playing them off against each other.

It is obvious that probably only a few or even a single Amaranth will travel with the PCs. This is not a problem. The others can be allowed to turn up *deus ex machina*, at propitious times later in the game. Alternatively, they can be kept for encounters after this scenario has finished. If the PCs mistreated any of the Amaranths any survivors will be aware of this and could plan some kind of revenge with the help of the PCs' nemeses.

5. The Village

In any case, the Manse is situated on a cliff overlooking a fast flowing river as it cuts through a gorge (somewhere in the Scaum Valley would be appropriate). The cliff turns away from the river to overlook a wide plain. The strata of the Aeons are plainly visible in the cliff and it is clear to any student of geology that some great upheaval has fashioned this overhang. There is a river at the bottom of the cliff and situated on this, about a mile from the river, is the village, now called Ydelon after its most famous son. The climate here is temperate, bordering on the hot. There are regular showers each day and the vegetation is wild and abundant.

A steep path winds its way up the cliff face from the village to the Manse. It has only been used by Amaranth in recent years and so is quite overgrown. The village itself is in a small clearing surrounded on one side by the stream, on two by the forest and on a third by a large spoil heap. The heap is the compacted collection of items that have been discarded over the Aeons from the Manse. As each Amaranth tried, and failed, to free Klazan the items belonging to the failed Mages were thrown over the cliff by Amaranth in a bid to tidy up before the next arrivals. The Ydelonians collect these items and trade them or use them until they break. They discard them, with the bodies of any dead mages, into the spoil heap. Thus the heap contains any broken magical accouterment that you care to name plus a whole heap of human bones.

¹ That is each of the Amaranths. I will use the singular henceforth, the repetition has become tiring.

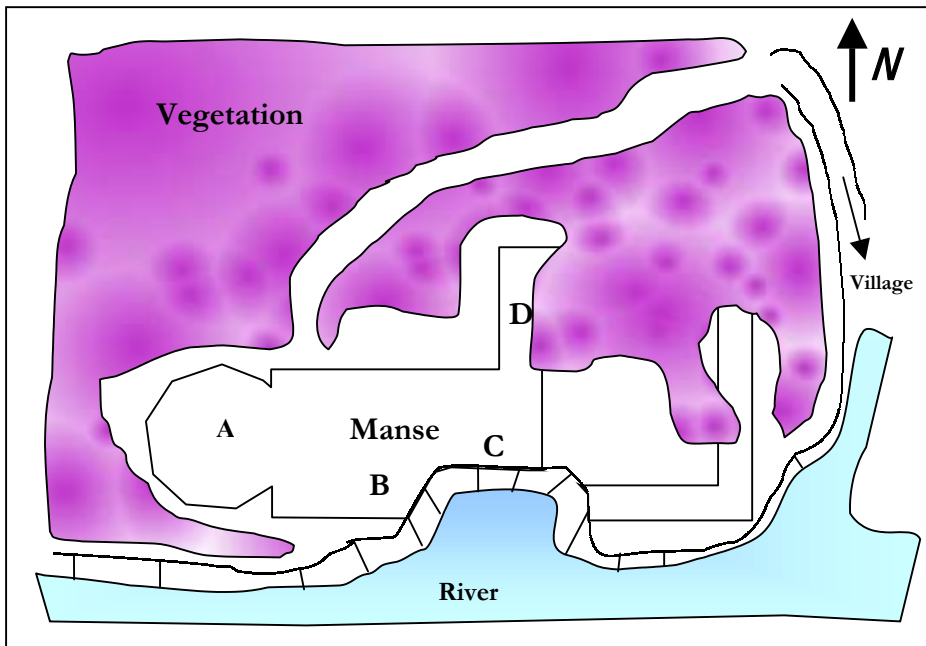
The villagers live in ramshackle huts and wear a mish-mash of fine garb and rags. Everything in the village is obtained through trade with the villagers' only skills being haggling and the knowledge and use of magic items. This knowledge is passed down families from parent to offspring. A strict social order determines who has the pick of the items and depends on whose hut they fall nearest to. There are currently eight families in the village, with approximately ten souls residing in each hut.

It is safe to bet that each villager possesses at least one functioning magical item, and to assume that the players might try to take these. If they do, the villagers will rise as one in a thunderous magical onslaught and kill, if they can, all the PCs. They are loath to make such a show of strength because it depletes their dwindling stock and might also damage any new items that they will inherit when the PCs fail, as all have done before them.

The villagers are aware that Amaranth is the source of their bounty and treat her like royalty. They are also quite happy to feed and entertain PCs and take a keen interest in any magical adjuncts PCs possess. The PCs might also notice some horse trading going on in the background as deals are done for when the putative bounty falls from the sky.

6. The Manse

What remains of the once proud building which was Pandido's Manse stands on a cliff overlooking the river. Alas, time has writ its passage large on this edifice and much of it has crumbled away under the influence of weather, flora and fauna. Part of the cliff fell into the river long ago taking Pandido's bed chamber and wine cellars with it, the portico in a harlequin of yellow and green marble was destroyed when a passing land whale used it as a scratching post. Whip-vines have invaded and torn down the tonal cloister (fashioned from musical stones that sang in low harmonies as one promenaded) which now plays a horrid cacophony of discordant notes anytime the wind blows or something disturbs the whip vines.



The entrance way, fashioned from a single emerald, remains, being the portion of the Great Hall that was not destroyed by the land whale, as does most of the laboratory under the Great Hall and the vestiges on one corner of the cloisters, surmounted by the cracked ruin of the observatory. Since the nine Amaranths were living here until relatively recently nothing much that is dangerous has had a chance to move in, and besides, some of the magical defenses still work.

At the moment, the whip-vines are solely contained in the northern part of the crumbling cloister. Amaranth has been keeping them away from the path by spreading it with noxious chemicals that she found in the laboratory but they are likely to try to attack anyone passing that way.

A. This is the entrance to the Manse and is formed from a single emerald. The door, also part of the emerald, has long since been ripped from its hinges and leaves the way open from the west to stroll right in through the twisty narrow passageway to the Great Hall beyond. Lurking in the multiple facets of the large gemstone is the main protection for the Manse, Pandido's sandestin Korbik. Korbik has been stuck forever but is still bound by the promises he made to Pandido to defend his manse against intruders. Amaranth is not affected by the sandestin as she, and anyone who resembles her, was specifically excluded from the sandestin's remit. Anyone else entering this way will wander through the emerald and notice their greenish reflection and other more misty phantasms, then their normal reflection as they are spirited into the emerald and trapped. If Korbik is persuaded to release anyone, the other misty phantasms will also be released: a selection of creatures that have wandered into the gem over the Aeons. Most will be ghosts by now, having long since died, and will evaporate as they are released².

B. This is the Great Hall wherein Pandido entertained his guests, such as they were, and displayed his most gaudy treasures. The portico on the north wall was destroyed and has collapsed most of this room. The falling pillars have created a lean-to against the south wall that is dank and dark. Nothing much lurks in this place of long and threatening shadows. Part of the mural on the south wall still survives beneath a covering of moss and fungus. If cleared away it is possible to see some of Pandido's more splendid achievements: his triumph in a battle of spells over Degorny the Scintillate, his wresting of the Emerald of Jhazar from the forehead of the Zombi-God Pung and his creation of many fine vat creatures, including Amaranth. Upon careful examination, one may discern some mathematical formula inscribed on a number of tablets in the background. These will allow a mage to instill two free points of Perception in any creature that they fashion in their vats. At the end of this lean-to is a large hole where the side of the cliff has collapsed.

C. This area is rather unstable and more than one person walking round here is likely to cause further collapse. The path to the cloisters is blocked by the hole but Amaranth has fashioned a rope bridge across. The dome of the observatory overlooks this area and it is home to a breeding pair of pelgranes with a nest of eggs. One of the pair will stay on the nest to incubate the eggs but the other is always on the look out for a tasty meal and will swoop down on anyone in this area.

D. In the north-west corner of the cloister, in close proximity to the vine-whips, there are stairs leading down to the laboratory. Anyone walking along the cloister will set off the horrid cacophony from the broken tonal paving stones. Using acrobatics it is possible to jump from one piece of rubble to the next and so avoid creating the unpleasant noise. The stairs lead down into the dimly lit laboratory, a large dome shaped room with a 40' tall glass tube in the middle that appears to support the ceiling.

This area has served as bedroom for the Amaranths for many years and so much of the magical adjuncts have been cleared away and many of the precious tomes have been ripped up to make stuffing for pillows and quilts. Beyond the glass tube are the vats: an impressive array of tanks, tubes, retorts and all manner of alchemical apparatus, now blackened and twisted through overuse. A faint rustling noise can be heard to come from around the room, this emanates from a swarm of Deel-bugs who wander around harmlessly over everything unless attacked. In spite of the work of time, many diligent house maids and an army of sentient bugs, some treasure has avoided destruction: a prismatic pearlescent IOUN stone has been used to prop open the door, a Pen of Chabal (Turjan's Tome p47) is to be found under a workbench and if it can be unshredded, a scroll containing 3 useful spells has been stuffed into a small green leather pouf.

² Should a fight of some sort be a suitable distraction at this point, you may choose any nasty creatures to engage the PCs.

7. Liberating Klazan

Anyone who approaches the tube cannot help but notice the horrific and imposing sight of the massive god crammed into the azure tube³. Now that the mages are here, Klazan can bring his plan to fruition. Using the few mind tendrils that he has he will create the illusion that he is actually the arch-nemesis of one of the mages, preparing to cast some massively destructive spell at the poor PC. He will choose a PC who has spell that is powerful enough to destroy the glass tube in which he is contained. As soon as this happens the illusion falls, the glass tube shatters and the liberated Klazan will flop to the floor and expire in a stinking, writhing heap. Wherewithal rolls all round with a levy of one, and a further one for a failure the first time. Those who don't succeed will suffer nightmares for a further week (see footnote).

And the upshot of all this? Wait for next month's exciting installment of *Wiping the Slate Clean!*

Characters

The Amaranths, vat-grown playthings of a long dead mage.

Persuade (Charming) 6 Rebuff (Purehearted) 10 Attack (Speed) 4 Defend (Dodge) 12 Magic (Insightful) 10 Athletics 8 Concealment 8 Living Rough 8 Perception 10 Seduction 10 Stealth 10 Tracking 8 Wherewithal 2 Avarice 4 Indolence 4 Pettifogery 4 Rakishness 4 Health 10

Amaranth is tall and willowy with a girlish bob of black hair. Her features are attractive but quite sharp. Her eyes are gray. She wears outmoded fashion from Aeons ago, a green military jacket with lapels and medals that jangle, purple trousers and riding boots of fine leather. She carries a shoulder bag in which she keeps all her worldly goods, a few terces, a shell she found, a small Bakelite statue of a bearlike creature that she found on the banks of the Scaum, a thin sheet of metallic material under which she sleeps and some leaves of the bodo-bush. One of these will feed a person for a day but stains the mouth bright red.

Amaranth is generally quite kind, playful even, but if provoked is capable of spiteful retaliation. Her main desire, unknown to herself, is to free Klazan from his imprisonment. She is fairly distrustful of magic, and certainly has no love for those who use it to impose their will on nature or others. But she recognizes that it is essential if she is to achieve her goal.

Klazan, a god.

Klazan is essentially a cross between a spider and a giant slug, so not the most attractive of deities, but he travels the routes of the overworld leaving a slimy trail and spinning together memories which float up from lower regions. These he eats and remembers.

Deel-bugs, small swarming insects.

These creatures do Klazan's bidding. They run his vats for him creating copy after copy of Amaranth and feeding her memories, by literally being swallowed by her. To anyone but Amaranth they all appear identical, but she has known enough of them to recognize subtle differences and indeed to read them as a language. The Deel-bugs are about 1/2" in length and half that across with any number of legs between about 6 and 20, although these are difficult to count due to an abundant covering of hair. They are all dark blue. They taste of salty apples when swallowed and impart their memory. With a tendency to wander around aimlessly it is unclear how they eat or reproduce, but if attacked they will swarm and

³ Unless your mages mettle is supremely stern, impose a wherewithal check with a levy of 1. Failure leads to nightmares for a week and to pools on half refreshing through sleep.

there will appear to be many more in the swarm than seen originally, so perhaps they reproduce by swarming. Individually they are not much of a threat but as a swarm they have the following stats.

Attack 15 Defend 2 Athletics 6 Heath 10 area effect spell bypass defense and destroy 1-3 HT for each spell (depending on success level). Each round beyond the first, health starts to regenerate at a rate of 1, but never beyond 15. If roused, the swarm moves quite quickly and will attempt to knock down and consume anyone in its path, including Amaranth.

Ydelonians, would-be cargo cultists.

The people who live in the valley of the manse worship Amaranth as the Goddess of Bounty, a sort of cargo cult. Each time she comes she brings more mages to die. When they die, she throws their things and herself over the cliff. If the mages don't die soon, the Ydelonians start to become impatient. Eventually they will overcome their fear of the manse and investigate. It's just possible that they might come across the slumbering forms of the mages and strip them of their belongings.

If the mages emerge triumphant, the enraged Ydelonians will attack them for taking what they truly believe is theirs.

Persuade (Glib) 5 Rebuff (Wary) 8 Attack (Ferocity) 12 Defend (Surefootedness) 4 Magic (Insightful) 1 Appraisal 6 Living Rough 5 Pedantry 12 Perception 6 Health 5

Whip-vines, hungry flora.

Whip-vines are dangerous mobile vegetation that seem to thrive in the weak sun of the Dying Earth. They don't appear to put down roots but instead prefer to feed in any rotting organic material that they find, preferably animal in origin. A single vine is usually between 8' and 15' long and 1/2" thick with small fronds that allow it to creep about, albeit fairly slowly. However the vine is capable of rearing half its height into the air so as to cross obstacles and fall on prey. When it attacks the fronds bore into the target inflicting serious lacerations. Usually the vine is mottled purple in color and so blends well with much of the other flora near the manse. When in season it takes on a yellowy tinge as it builds up spores inside its stem. It injects these into its prey and some weeks later a mass of new vines burst forth from the unhappy victim. The only cure for this infestation is magic, although it is said that deodand bile will purge the spores from your system if applied in the early stages. If slowly roasted, the spores release a sweat smelly cloud of insect repellent gas and so are prized in certain swampy areas.

Attack (Speed) 12 Defend (Dodge) 6 Athletics 6 Concealment 6 Perception 3 Stealth 6 Health 8

Korbik, a sandestin.

Korbik usually manifests as a small shaggy dog-like creature with green fur and a stripy yellow tail. As a sandestin he is effectively indestructible but does have a weakness for small lizards and the usual volpsiok pollen. It is possible to persuade him to release his prisoners, and his rebuff suffers a levy of one if Amaranth does the persuading.

Persuade 0.5~ Rebuff ~0.5

Pelgranes, hungry swoopers.

The usual giant flying predators, rendered even more vicious by the presence of a clutch of eggs. Any one of the four eggs would be worth several hundred terces to a menagerist.

Persuade (Intimidating) 0.5~ Rebuff (Lawerly) ~ Attack (Finesse) 2~ Defend (Misdirection) 0.5~ Appraisal 4 Athletics ~ Etiquette 2 Gambling 4 Pedantry 2 Perception 2 Wherewithal 2 Health ~