

Persistence of Memory

Adam Lee

From set *Gatecrash*

Sarusin sat in a dimly lit room far beneath the cobbled streets of Ravnica. He knew by the air that he was underground—the smell and sounds were different underground. Where he was exactly he had no idea, which was strange, as Sarusin knew the tunnels under the Seventh District quite well. He should; he grew up in them.

Now he looked about, but nothing seemed familiar. He was somewhere else, although he could not remember how he got there. Just as he moved to get up out of the chair, a soft voice poured out of the darkness at the edge of the candlelight.

“Don’t get up.” Something about the voice made Sarusin stay in his seat. Something soothing, yet deadly.



Balustrade Spy | Art by Jaime Jones

“You have been chosen for a very important assignment.” A pale man emerged from the darkness. Danger oozed from the man—his bone-white skin shone in stark contrast with his black eyes, black hair, and black leather. Sarusin was a fairly seasoned Dimir agent but he could not control himself and instinctually recoiled. A vampire. “I am here to give you the tools to carry out that assignment, so consider me your... teacher.” The vampire bowed before Sarusin with his arms outstretched, but he never took his cold, dead eyes off the agent.

“Where am I?” Sarusin felt his voice emerge as if muttered from another mouth.

“You are in a place unknown to anyone. Even I did not know about this place until you told me.” The vampire reached back into the blackness and pulled out a leather carrying case before setting it on the table under the candlelight.

Sarusin’s head hurt and his limbs felt a little numb. “What do you mean? I’ve never been here in my life.”

From the leather case the vampire pulled a vial of glowing liquid. As Sarusin looked closer, he noticed it was not the liquid glowing, but rather something within it—something that looked like a patterned strip of paper. The vampire unstopped the vial and with a pair of delicate, silver tweezers, he plucked the glowing strip of intricately patterned paper from the liquid and held it before Sarusin.

“This strip contains all your memories of this place, how I extracted them from you, how we arrived here, and how we met. I am here to teach you the method of memory excision.”

The vampire introduced himself as Mirko Vosk. Sarusin realized he would not leave the place with any knowledge of the vampire. He knew that any information about Mirko would be extremely valuable and briefly thought about secretly writing down that information when he could, but he quickly pushed such dangerous thoughts from his mind. Underneath the civilized demeanor, Mirko was like a hungry snake coiling around a helpless mouse, and Sarusin found his nervous fingers unconsciously twisting a leather tassel on his tunic into tight knots.

“Memories are not as fragile as one might think,” Mirko began. “They are a disease. A pleasurable memory, one of a desire fulfilled or an ambition realized, can become an obsession. A dark memory, one engraved in fear and pain, can stalk one to the grave.” Mirko held up the strand of glowing memory.

“No memory is innocent. Right now, your mind is trying to reconnect the pathways that I have severed. If I have not been diligent in my work you will begin to reconnect and reform memories from residual associations, random thoughts. Soon you would have vague impressions about our meeting and our journey here and my work will have failed. In the case of our work, the mind of your target is your most powerful enemy and curiosity is its weapon of choice.”

Sarusin heard more of psychic skimmers and excisors—mages who specialized in memory assassination and knowledge brokering—the deeper into the rabbit hole of the Dimir network he moved. The other guilds of Ravnica would pay handsomely to gain an advantage over their rivals—especially the Izzet League, who were always restlessly seeking new information.

“How do I learn?”



Mental Vapors | Art by Mark Winters

Mirko opened up the case again and produced another glowing flask. “Here are all the memories you will need.” Mirko removed the sealed cap and drew out the long strand of glowing memory. “These memories were removed rather... hastily... so they might be a bit disorienting.”

“Wait,” Sarusin said abruptly. “You mean those are...”

“Yes. They are the memories of your predecessor. A powerful excisor who became careless. Which reminds me...” With superhuman speed, Mirko had Sarusin in a vise-like grip, his face a mask of murderous undead. “Do not become careless.”

Mirko shoved the trembling man back into his seat, the human-like guise returning like a veil. “Are you ready?”

“How are you going to—”

Sarusin had no time to finish. Mirko pushed the memories into his mind like driving an icicle into his head. As images and knowledge flooded into his awareness like a torrent of debris down a flooded sluiceway, he was somehow aware of his physical body writhing in its chair, his head bursting as Mirko’s cold, dead hand pinned him to his chair.



Mind Grind | Art by Daarken

Sarusin saw—learned—years of training, secret assignments, victims, and techniques, all in a matter of moments. He experienced these flashes as if they were his own memories, but there were some experiences where he felt a mind that was not his own: a mind obsessed with power and control. An ambitious mind far beyond what Sarusin had ever dared to glimpse. Sarusin struggled to keep this mind separate from his own, but he began to lose track of which were his memories and which were the memories of the other. He struggled under the weight of the information, the images, the “other” reality, memories filled with avarice that clawed and chewed at the bars of their new prison.



Last Thoughts | Art by Peter Mohrbacher

The victim lay slumped in a chair as the Dimir mage pulled the last few inches of the memory strand from the victim's head. He teased the memory from its domain much like an expert gardener would extract the roots of a prized plant from its earthly home.

He sealed the spell and went to the mirror. For a brief flicker, someone else gazed back at him. A stranger. The thoughts didn't line up with the face that he saw.

He gripped the side of the washbasin. The "other" was slipping in again.

He fiddled with a leather tassel on his tunic, as some part of him tried to cling to something familiar, but the memories began to trickle in. He could feel the dam weakening under the pressure of a new identity forming in his mind. A more powerful identity.

This new body would do nicely.