

Memory Quest

A race for truth

a roleplaying game for 3-4 players

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using “whisper” (as a thing players do) and “morning” (as “reset” or “new beginning”)

An amnesiac agent trapped in a strange place on a secret mission hears whispering voices. Can the agent recover a lost identity and complete the mission before the Nemesis arrives? If so, then what? And what’s the whispers’ role in it all?

Game Length

This game can be played in a single session. The results at the end of the session may wrap things up or fill you with an urgent need to play more. Playing more should result in a maximum of 3 sessions for one Agent Player.

Agent and Whispers

Everyone should read the Agent Instructions, and no one should read the Whispers Instructions. Pick one player to be the Agent Player. Everyone else will be Whispers Players, and they can now read the Whispers Instructions.

If you have played the game before, you must be a Whispers Player.

Agent Instructions

If you're the Agent Player, do not read the Whispers Instructions.

The Situation

It was 2011 in America. You had a life of some sort, and you definitely had training for this mission. You can't remember how you got here, or even where "here" is for sure. Did your enemies injure your brain? Did your agency erase your memories so you couldn't talk under torture, but now they've failed to return? There are a few things that you're sure of. You're sure that you're on the clock, that your Nemesis is after you. You're sure that if it catches up to you before your mission is complete, it will take you -- kill you, or maybe worse. You're sure that this place has some clues to your past, but you have no idea where to look for them. And you're sure of your mission. You know what you need to accomplish, and you know what four steps are required for that. The mission is top secret, and no one can be trusted with your true objective or these steps.

What you're not sure of is the whispers. You hear them constantly, coming from no particular direction. Are they allies? Enemies? Gods? Hallucinations? It takes a great effort of will to focus on them, and during that effort, your Nemesis draws closer.

How much can you learn about your situation, from the whispers and the obstacles that confront you, without letting your Nemesis sabotage your mission?

If you complete your mission, your Nemesis will be defeated, but what will be next for you?

Agent Instructions

If you're the Agent Player, do not read the Whispers Instructions.

Instructions

On another piece of paper, write out (a) where you are, (b) the objective of your mission, and (c) the four steps you must complete in order to be able to achieve your mission.

You will describe your adventure to the other players as if they observe all, but know nothing beyond what they can see, hear, etc. You may not narrate what you are thinking. You may not reveal your mission or steps to people you encounter, either (top secret!). No speaking your thoughts into the air, either; your Nemesis may always be listening.

When the other players interrupt your narration to present you with an obstacle, narrate how you overcome it, and the other players will narrate what that costs you. Often, you will be injured, and there's nothing you can do about that. What you can do is decide whether or not to interact with the objects, places and people that the obstacles thrust into your path. Some might be dangerous, while others might help you on your mission.

How to narrate what you do:

Every time you start speaking (e.g. after finishing with an obstacle or hearing a whisper), begin your narration with one of the phrases listed below. The Whisper Players need to know which type of activity you are engaged in at all times, so you also need to use a phrase if you switching to a new activity in the middle of a narration.

Whenever you speak a phrase, mark off a box with the letter corresponding to that phrase.

In addition, whenever you complete a step for your mission, mark a box with a star.

The four activities and phrases are:

O - On with the mission!

S - Sidetracking,

B - Backtracking,

W - What did you say?

Activities: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Damage: ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

When the last activity box is filled, your Nemesis arrives, and will get at least one chance to hurt you as you pursue your final activity.

When the last damage circle is filled, you die.

Whispers Instructions

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The Situation

You are brilliant government scientists, and your experiment has succeeded. Mostly. You were able to insert your government's most skilled agent into the mind of a psychotic terrorist in order to break down the terrorist's barriers to interrogation. Unfortunately, the terrorist's mind has reacted to the agent like a virus, erasing his memories and working to kill him. You wanted to pull the agent out, but your data suggests that he'll return as a drooling vegetable without a very specific extraction procedure, covering reminders and transition.

Reminders:

You've moved your operation to the agent's home, surrounded by everything he owns. Your procedure is to prime the agent for extraction by slipping reminders of the real world into his experience inside the terrorist's mind. Each time the agent connects with such a reminder (i.e., takes it with him on his mission), he gets one step closer to being able to return. Four reminders should do the trick.

The science of implanting reminders is inexact at best, working through the medium of the terrorist's brain. One in three attempts gets through as intended; one in three manifests randomly; and one in three is co-opted by the terrorist's attempt to purge the agent.

Even the most successful implantation is dangerous. The agent's mind will only react to content that obstructs his mission; nothing else registers. Further, the agent's own paradigm of risky missions translates every obstacle into a danger. The harm these dangers can inflict is small -- unless co-opted by the terrorist.

Transition:

The final ingredient is the transition. The mission is the strongest remaining element of the agent's mind, and only by completing that mission will the agent become ready for extraction.

Understanding the agent:

The mission is the life-raft that keeps the agent functioning. It's the safe zone he constructs for himself within the terrorist's mind, a kind of wish-fulfillment dream. The mission drives him, and piggybacking onto it is your best chance to slip him reminders. If you can figure out what he's trying to do, you can choose reminders which he would logically take for the good of his mission. If he's bent on assassination, you'll have better luck with a gun than with a screwdriver!

You've got a monitor hooked up to the terrorist's brain, tuned in to the frequency of the agent's consciousness. You can see and hear everything he's imagining. By analyzing what you see, as a team, you can hope to deduce the agent's mission and get him the reminders he needs. Choose wisely and hope for some luck, for too many failed implants will hasten the agent's demise.

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What if we fail to deliver reminders?

Each time the agent succeeds in a mission without getting his reminders, he loses himself deeper inside the terrorist's mind. All the reminders he'd found cease to function as connections, and now he needs a higher total (by one) for extraction from his new mission.

So, the second four-step mission requires 5 reminders for extraction, the third four-step mission requires 6 reminders, etc.

What if the agent fails at the mission?

If the agent dies in his fantasy mission, he dies for real, the end. Fortunately, when death is on the line (or at any time you choose), you can always dismantle the terrorist's attack with a powerful electric shock.

Unfortunately, this destroys some of the agent's recent memories as well. The agent "wakes up" on the same mission, but now needing only 3 steps to complete it. All the reminders they found cease to function as connections; they need 4 new ones. You now know more about their mission, but your time to use that knowledge is limited, as their injuries have only healed by half and the terrorist is closer to finding them.

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Creating the Nemesis

When the terrorist's mind tries to eradicate the agent, this manifests in the agent's fantasy as his Nemesis. Choose a way to identify the forces of the Nemesis when they appear. Men in black, ninjas, a certain color or odor or symbol, nightmarish nonsense, gnashing teeth -- whatever you think is a distinctive manifestation of some psycho's brain in attack mode! Collaborate on this in secret before starting play.

Starting and re-starting play

All Whisper Players say this in unison: "You wake up in the morning. Where are you?" This begins every mission.

At the beginning of the game, it's the Agent Player's cue to begin narrating.

After a completed mission with insufficient reminders for extraction, it's an end to the session. The Agent Player must author a new mission for next time. Tell them this.

After a rescue from death, it's a mysterious reset. Tell the Agent Player to (1) consider the first of their four steps to be already done, but the others not done, (2) erase half their damage, and (3) erase half their activity check boxes, crossing out the letters in the ones left filled.

Victory

If the Agent Player has collected the required reminders, and performed the required steps, and the Nemesis hasn't caught up:

Once they finish narrating the completion of their mission, all Whisper Players say, in unison "You're awake!" Then, they roleplay the doctors telling the agent about what happened.

Whispers Instructions

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How to discuss the agent's activities

Whisper to each other! If the Agent Player catches a few words, fine, but make sure they can't hear full phrases!

How to respond to the agent's activities

For "On with the mission!" no response is needed.

For "What did you say?", the Whisper Player being addressed by the Agent Player repeats out loud the last sentence they whispered. (In the case of a really long sentence, the last two clauses will do.)

For "Backtracking," "Sidetracking," and "What did you say?", narrate how the edges of the agent's environment begin to fray, and manifestations of the Nemesis slowly approach. Once the Agent Player switches activities, secretly flip a coin to see whether they took a point of damage (tails) or not (heads) before getting distance from the Nemesis. If damage was dealt, narrate how, and tell the Agent Player how many points (1).

How to play obstacles

Whisper Players agree as a group on what reminder they'd like to introduce. Then agree on what obstacle to use to interrupt the agent. Once agreed, one Whisper Player interrupts the Agent Player by introducing the obstacle in a way that cannot be ignored. Ask the Agent Player, "How do you overcome this?" As they narrate, secretly roll 1d6:

- 1 terrorist co-opts implant, obstacle does 1 damage
- 2 terrorist co-opts implant, obstacle does no damage
- 3 reminder lost, obstacle does 1 damage
- 4 reminder lost, obstacle does no damage
- 5 reminder arrives, obstacle does 1 damage
- 6 reminder arrives, obstacle does no damage

Wait until the Agent Player finishes their response (if they ask, tell them they don't need to check off an activity box for that). Then add to their narration, saying, "During that," and then explaining:

- a) if they were damaged, tell them how, and how many points (1)
- b) if they encountered a co-opted implant or a reminder, tell them how, and ask "Do you interact with it?"

If the Agent Player interacts with a reminder (which does not cost an activity box), tell them how it gives them a flash of memory and makes their environment seem briefly insubstantial. Describe how this memory seems core to their real self that they've forgotten, and how they now have some sense of being closer to recovery.

If the Agent Player interacts with a co-opted implant (which does not cost an activity box), tell them how it morphs into a manifestation of their Nemesis and harms them. Secretly flip to see whether it does 1 (heads) or 2 (tails) points of damage, and convey the result.