

Fantasy Craft™



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THE FORSAKEN



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INTRODUCTION

Laboratory of the Forsaken is a pulpy fantasy/horror adventure written in the vein of classic Hammer Films movies (the *Frankenstein* series in particular). It is heavy on plot, highly story-driven, and perfect for parties who enjoy detailed, atmospheric investigations that lead to dark discoveries and grisly, often gory encounters with abhorrent abominations. Fair warning! This adventure features disturbing themes and may not be appropriate for all groups.

FOR EXPERIENCED PLAYERS

This adventure is also far from a cake walk. A Menace of IV is assumed, which means that most if not all of the scenes are Dramatic. At this setting even the least imposing encounter can become a life-threatening challenge, and an unprepared party could easily be decimated. We strongly recommend you read the whole adventure and carefully decide what's best for you and your players before diving in. Unless you're certain that your group is ready for an expert-level confrontation, choose a lower Menace. You may also want to employ one or more of the suggestions in the Menace section, which can reduce the difficulty through various tweaks to the narrative and adversaries (see page 8).

SETTING THE STAGE

Laboratory of the Forsaken takes place in an isolated estate a few days' ride to the north of the capital city of Valespire, within the Realm (the micro-setting introduced in *Time of High Adventure*). In this outing, the party explores a mad scientist's manor house and the two dungeon levels located beneath it. The action begins with a brooding inquiry but rapidly escalates to horrific mayhem as the group descends into the manor house's lower levels. As with many such tales, this story begins with one man...

Dr. Magnus Croatalorn is a brilliant but eccentric alchemist and scholar. A heretical freethinker, he belongs to the Circle, a veiled association of arcanists who struggle against the divine dogma of the long established Church of the Road-Wardens. In particular, Magnus seeks to disprove the Church's doctrine of a "thousand thousand species, each created in the likeness of its own lords" by proving scientifically that all species are related to one another and are created by ancient alchemists and mages rather than gods. To do this he has worked to create his own forms of life.

Magnus' family was well-off gentry who lived on an estate a few days' ride north of Valespire. He always had a scholarly bent and the chance discovery of a tome of forbidden knowledge led him to question Church teachings at a very young age. He persuaded his father to send him to Valespire for higher education, where he trained in medicine, practiced covert

vivisections, developed a talent for alchemy, and eventually fell in with a cabal of Circle free thinkers. Traveling widely, he developed many and varied unlawful theories, studied the arcane arts, and became a full member of the outlawed organization.

Ten years ago a tragic illness — in truth, a mishap with a poison of Magnus' own making — resulted in the death of his elder brother Ethan, a stout devotee of the Church. This paved the way for Magnus to marry Ethan's widow, Lunalia, and in the process inherit the family estate of Croatalorn Manor. It was in this isolated sanctum, far from the sacred roads where the Church was strongest, that Magnus squandered his family's small fortune to establish a well-stocked laboratory. He expanded the old limestone caves and wine cellars below the manor into a labyrinthine dungeon where he conducted new experiments on the nature and origin of life.

Early in this research Magnus found it expedient to dispose of his old family retainers, replacing them with homunculi, flesh golems, and other artificial constructs of his own devising. Then another tragedy struck. Magnus' wife Lunalia discovered his heresy and committed suicide when he refused to recant and reject his dark path. Yet this was not the end of her sad tale. Magnus reanimated Lunalia as a golem under his control, stimulating what remained of her fresh brain to develop more than the meager intelligence normally found in such a creature. In time, Lunalia's departed spirit returned to haunt Magnus, but he was too absorbed with his obsessions to pay the ghost much attention.

Over the last few years, Magnus and his "Golem-Bride" hired hunters, adventurers, and brigands to secure samples of various animals, monsters, and nonhuman folk for his sinister research. His inquiries have largely taken two paths: first, deadly experiments into the differences and similarities between various species, including the destructive testing, vivisection, and hybridization of numerous creatures; and second, a mad quest to glean the secret of creating new life. Success with this latter goal has proven elusive.

Rather than developing "true" life forms, so far Magnus has only generated various oozes and jellies. He has, however, developed an "elixir of life," a primordial slime that, when exposed to the bodies and brains of other entities, promises to evolve them into something... else. He has yet to realize that the "perfect organism" these hapless victims are becoming is in reality a prototypical chaos beast.

Magnus' family rank and the isolation of his lair have mostly kept him safe from Church intervention. However, agents of the Church recently intercepted a letter he'd sent to other correspondents in the Circle, boasting of his achievements. A pair of Church Inquisitors visited Croatalorn Manor, and with the help of Lunalia's ghost they discovered his inner sanctum. They caught Magnus by surprise and administered the Church's ultimate sanction: The Forsakening. This irreversible slow-acting





poison paralyzes the body and slowly consumes the victim's memories.

Magnus summoned his golems, ordering them to attack and subdue the Inquisitors. This they did, and per their master's final orders they threatened to incorporate the intruders into Magnus' grand experiments unless the attackers complied with Magnus' demands. One of the Inquisitors felled Magnus with a dart laced with the Forsakening poison, but the Church warriors were soon overwhelmed by the golems and hauled off to speed the mad researcher's final work. Now one of the Inquisitors, Zebulon, is slated to be fed to Magnus' primordial slime in the hope of awakening it. Another, Elessandra, faces vicious torments in the experiment cells.

It's now several days later and Magnus' dungeon is entirely in the hands of his construct subordinates, led by a flesh-copy of his dead wife. The doctor's regular letters to his Circle compatriots have halted, and the Inquisitors have failed to report back to their Church superiors. Both factions are prepping new expeditions to the manor to discover what's happened to their allies, and onto this waiting stage step the adventurers...

ADVENTURER MOTIVATIONS

The adventurers can be drawn to Croatalorn Manor for a variety of reasons. The Game Master should pick whichever of the following alternatives best suits the party's composition and alignment.

AGENTS OF THE CHURCH

The Church dispatches a follow-up team to find out what happened to their Inquisitors, now that they have failed to report back. The party might include Road Wardens, Archivists, Inquisitors, or pious adventurers in good standing with the Church hierarchy.

Begin by reading or paraphrasing the following.

Lucien Bokk was a rich merchant based in Valespire, though Bokk's shipping interests were secondary to his real business — procuring exotic ingredients and live specimens for alchemists, mages, and doctors throughout the Realm. Whether you wanted a bear's paw, eye of newt, unicorn horn, fire beetle gland, or something even less common like a baby basilisk or a giant eagle's egg, Master Lucien Bokk was the man to see.

Of course, Master Bokk didn't gather these by himself. Through a number of middle men, the merchant employed several freelance hunters and rangers who specialized in tracking rare items and trapping exotic beasts.

Although Bokk's activities were dubious, neither Valespire's secular authorities nor the Church considered them illegal. That changed when Church Inquisitors received a tip that some of Bokk's secretive clients included members of the Circle, a notorious order of outlaw arcanists engaged in heretical research into dangerous and forbidden subjects.

Three weeks ago, a group of Inquisitors launched a raid on Bokk's townhouse and warehouses, where they discovered that he was not only trafficking with members of the Circle, but that some of the "specimens" he'd sold to clients included "civilized" slaves: goblins, ogres, saurians, drakes, and others.

Bokk was arrested as he tried to burn his ledgers, but enough of them survived to identify a handful of his customers as possible Circle supporters. Those living in Valespire have already been taken into custody, but the partial records implicate other clients living outside the city, including one Dr. Magnus Croatalorn, lord of a manor located a few days' journey north.

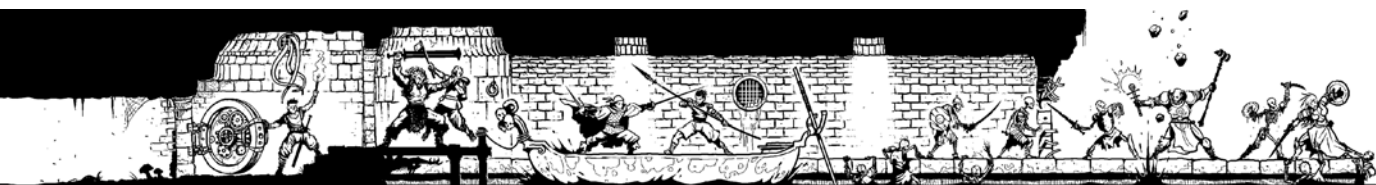
According to Church records Croatalorn is age 48, a scholar, and the youngest son of a country gentleman. He inherited the estate a decade ago, after his brother Ethan's death. Croatalorn studied in Valespire, where he received a doctorate in medicine, yet some who knew him claim he was more of an alchemist. Adding to suspicion, letters from Dr. Croatalorn have been found in the homes of other confirmed heretics.

The Church dispatched two trained Inquisitors, Elessandra and Zebulon, to the manor house. If Croatalorn was found guilty of heresy or other crimes, the Inquisitors were to confiscate any blasphemous research, or failing that, destroy it. Then they were to administer the ultimate sanction of the Forsakening, a Church poison that paralyzes the victim and slowly steals his memories.

Elessandra and Zebulon never returned. That was over a week ago. It's possible their investigation continues, or that Croatalorn has fled and they are in pursuit, but it's worrisome that there's been no word from them.

As representatives of the Church, you are to journey to Croatalorn Manor and determine the fate of the missing Inquisitors. If they have come to grief you must either rescue or avenge them, and if necessary you're also to complete their mission: arrest or slay Croatalorn and any others who hinder you, and confiscate all illicit research you discover (or failing that, destroy it).

Keep safe any innocents you find. This is not their crusade, and they should not suffer for the Circle's crimes.





It takes little time to outfit for this expedition. You're soon on the road north and after a few wet days and some comfortable overnight stays at roadside Coaching Inns, you find yourself approaching Croatalorn Manor...

If the adventurers are merely associates of the Church, rather than clergy or Inquisitors, they may be offered a material reward. Additional impetus can be provided if Elessandra or Zebulon is established as an acquaintance or family to one or more heroes, though this works best if the Inquisitors are introduced in previous adventures.

AGENTS OF THE CIRCLE

If the adventurers include one or more Circle Magisters, other Circle members, or trusted associates, begin by reading or paraphrasing the following.

Unlike the Church with its secrets and rigid hierarchy, the Circle is a loose association of like-minded truth seekers. Yet sometimes that search leads members to trouble. Case in point: Lord Magnus Croatalorn, dedicated researcher, doctor of medicine, skilled alchemist, and noted dabbler in the fields of zoology and taxonomy. Lord Magnus dwells at Croatalorn Manor, a small country estate a few days north of the capital city of Valespire. He inherited the estate after his older brother's death from a tragic illness, and the place is not merely his home but also his lair for alchemical research.

Though a recluse, Lord Magnus corresponds avidly with several Circle members. They claim that recently his letters have focused on passionate theories about natural philosophy, cogent descriptions of his dissections of rare species, and brief surveys of his quiet life as a country gentleman with his wife Lunalia (his brother's widow, whom he married some time after the funeral).

Magnus is a staunch free thinker, often railing against divine dogma. In particular he criticizes the Church's assertion that "each of the thousand thousand species of the Realm is created in the likeness of its own lords." He regards the idea as absurd superstition, and his recent letters have also hinted of a remarkable achievement that will directly refute this and many other Church claims, rocking the Road Wardens to their very foundations.

Unfortunately, it appears that agents of intolerance have gotten wind of Lord Magnus' noble work, and as usual they're seeking to destroy what they cannot understand. Church authorities in Valespire have

sent elite Inquisitors to Croatalorn Manor, and Lord Magnus' letters have ceased. At least one of his associates in the city has been taken into custody and more are soon to follow, but this is far from the Circle's greatest concern. If even some of Lord Magnus' bold claims are true, the Church may soon capture or destroy some of the most important work in a generation, if they haven't already.

Fortunately, Circle spies within the Church report the Inquisitors sent to Croatalorn Manor are few in number. They are led by a zealot named Elessandra and carry a dangerous Church weapon: a poison called the Forsakening that dooms its victims to a slow, irreversible loss of memory before an agonizing death. Oh, the discoveries that might be forever lost if these fanatics are successful...

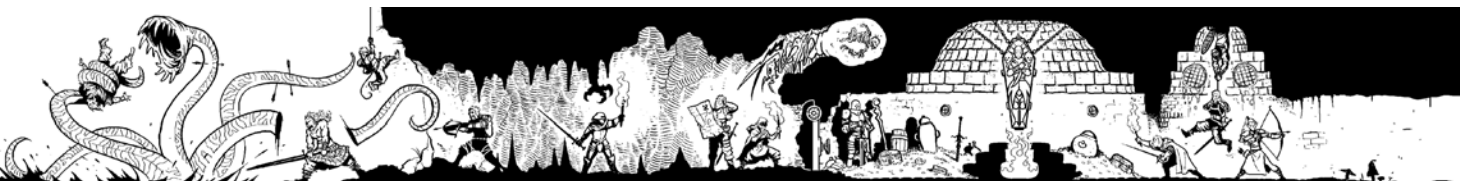
These discoveries and the Circle's eternal gratitude await those who travel to Lord Magnus' home and check in on the situation. Even if it's too late for the good doctor, perhaps some of his research can be saved. You're to seek out unique arcana and knowledge, plus any specimens and samples you can save from the laboratory. Decimate those who would quash these things, for a message must be sent this day... to all who would cruelly dispose of the truth.

It takes little time to outfit for this expedition. The back roads and open country you must travel to arrive at the manor aren't pleasant, but they keep you out of sight and hopefully offer the element of surprise as you close in on the estate...

As with the Church introduction, this skews the available information according to what the Circle believes, or wants to believe, about Magnus and his research. Though some in the Circle hierarchy — in particular those who've corresponded with Magnus — suspect that his research may have in fact gone too far, all hope for the best, and so the heroes' mission is initially one of defense, and mercy.

Of course, this may put the heroes in a difficult situation once they learn what Magnus has actually been doing in the dungeons beneath Croatalorn Manor. How they react to what they find there, and the choices they make in response, are one of the most interesting challenges they face in this adventure. This is an excellent opportunity for individual heroes and the party as a whole to make some profound decisions about what they believe in, and how that impacts their role in or relationship with the Circle.

There is also excellent grist here for follow-up adventures in which the Circle decides what to do about Magnus' work. Everyone in the shadow organization likely believes that the researcher's ultimate aims have merit, but the means he used





to pursue them, and the uncertain results he achieved, are likely to turn most of the organization against him. A few driven or unethical Circle members, perhaps including one or more in touch with the heroes, may attempt to salvage some of what Magnus collected or learned, and if the heroes agree then it can set a dangerous course for the campaign moving forward.

The party may soon find itself on one side or the other, or caught in the crossfire, in an escalating conflict between two of the most influential factions in the Realm.

MONSTER DELIVERY SERVICE

Adventurers connected to neither the Circle nor the Church may be hired through intermediaries to procure a specimen for Lucien Bokk, and to transport it to Croatalorn Manor. In this case their standing agreement is that the cargo must be accepted by either Magnus or his wife to ensure payment, which should be enough to prompt an investigation of the manor when no one comes out to greet the party.

Begin the adventure by reading or paraphrasing the following.

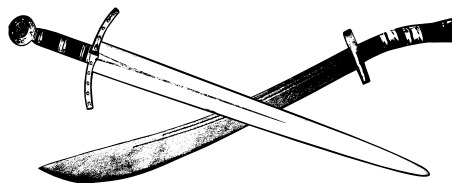
It's a simple snatch and grab mission. You've been hired through a series of middle men to find and secure a live wyvern for delivery to one Lord Dr. Magnus Croatalorn, the owner of a remote estate a few days' ride north of the capital city of Valespire.

You weren't told what Croatalorn might want with the creature, but the pay is good and the job seems straightforward enough. There are only two hitches. (There are always hitches.)

First, you haven't been able to take the main roads to the hamlet administered by Croatalorn and his wife Lunalia. If the wyvern were to slip free of its bindings or reveal itself at the wrong time, there would be way too many questions, and the people who hired you hate questions. Loathe them, in fact.

Second, while the pay is very good, it's also entirely contingent upon delivery. You're to deliver the wyvern only in person to Croatalorn or his wife, and full payment will only be made by one of them. Trust, sadly, is another thing your employers aren't well known for.

The trip has been largely uneventful and some of you may be counting your blessings as the hamlet comes into view. Still, something doesn't sit quite right about this job. Perhaps it's just the damp fog rolling in from the west, or the long days spent marching along back roads and open country to avoid the Road Wardens. Whatever it is, the knot tightens in your stomach as you start up the winding path into the small community...



SCENE 1: HAUNTED MANOR

In this first scene the adventurers enter and explore the manor, with the action unfolding like a haunted house mystery. They discover signs of a struggle — the house having been raided by the two Inquisitors — as well as a variety of notes and clues left behind by Dr. Croatalorn. Some of these writings hint at the nature of Magnus' research and help the party prepare for what they'll find in the lower dungeon.

Even a cursory search reveals Magnus lies paralyzed in his bed. He is cared for by homunculi minions, though the creatures spend most of their time in the dungeon as they are deathly afraid of Lunalia's ghost (the spirit knows Magnus is paralyzed and terrorizes the homunculi after dark). The golems encountered in this scene have limited intellect and only fight in self-defense, or if the adventurers try to move Magnus, or if they burglarize or otherwise damage the house.

The dungeon's entrance is behind a secret door in the manor house Ballroom, and Scene 1 ends as the adventurers descend to explore.

SCENE 2: THE HALLS OF TESTING

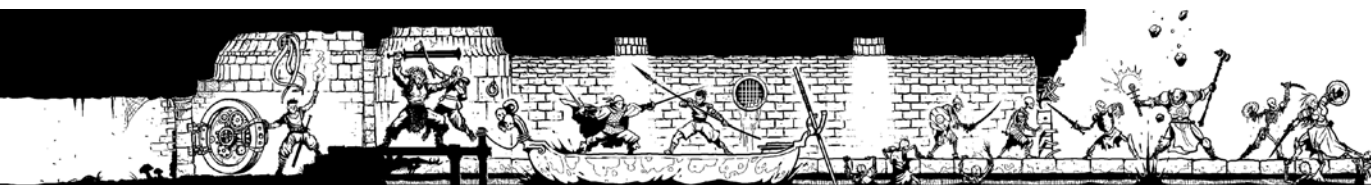
This lengthy scene finds the adventurers searching the first dungeon level and encountering Magnus' servants and some of his hideous experiments in taxonomy, dissection, and vivisection. It's on this dungeon level that (mostly) normal animals and prisoners are held for ongoing "tests." They're defended by more powerful flesh golem constructs.

This scene concludes as the party descends to the second dungeon level beneath the manor.

SCENE 3: THE LOWER DUNGEON

Here the adventurers delve into the heart of Magnus' obsession with the spark of all life. These early rooms in the second dungeon level focus on the many ways this research manifests — in some cases producing incredibly dangerous monsters and in others creating amazing masterstrokes of accidental alchemical genius.

The action shifts again as the adventurers move past the prototype rooms and into the deepest parts of the second dungeon level.





SCENE 4: THE PERFECT ORGANISM

This final scene takes place in the last three rooms of the lower dungeon level. Here, Magnus' flesh servants — led by the monstrous remains of his late wife Lunalia, the so-called “Golem-Bride” — prepare to complete his life's work. Inquisitor Zebulon is already dead by the time the adventurers arrive, his brain harvested and fed to a mass of primordial slime that Magnus hypothesized was similar to the earliest life of the ancient world. This theory proves false, however, and the creature turns out to be a variant chaos beast with the ability to consume and mimic its victims.

Only by defeating the Golem-Bride can the party finally put Lady Lunalia's ghost to rest, but defeating her will not be easy. She is served by other flesh golems specially designed to assist Magnus in surgery, and these become the front line in a final battle for Croatalorn Manor. The slime, which Magnus called his “Perfect Organism,” is potentially another powerful adversary in this scene, and could spell the heroes' ultimate doom if they're not careful.

After all is said and done, when the golems and other organisms are defeated, Magnus' inner sanctum awaits, filled with alchemical and magical treasures valuable to the Church, the Circle, and others.

OPTIONAL COMPLICATION: NEW ARRIVALS

If the adventurers spread their exploration of the manor house and dungeons over multiple expeditions, or if they're having too easy a time of it, the GM may complicate their lives by having one or more rival parties arrive. If the adventurers are loyal to the Circle, then an additional Inquisitor arrives with Church support. If they're loyal to the Church, a Circle Magister arrives with several brute hirelings. Independent adventurers may face either, or alternatively, one or more new monsters may be delivered and escape, rushing into the manor and possibly even into the dungeons in search of fresh prey.

This complication can take place outdoors — if the party is camped outside — or anywhere on the grounds, and can be triggered anytime the GM feels it adds to the fun, challenge, and danger of things. If desired, or if the party has the right composition and/or makes the most of the confrontation, it's even possible to turn things around, negotiating with or otherwise influencing new arrivals to help explore the rest of the grounds.

ADVENTURE TIMING

This is a location-based adventure. Progress is largely set by the adventurers themselves, allowing them to determine how much time they spend exploring the manor and each level. Reasonable breathers are assumed between scenes, during which abilities and spell points refresh. If this doesn't sit well with the group, scene shifts can alternatively be fixed to in-game events, like overnight rests.

Scene 1 has little combat but could take a couple hours or more if the adventurers examine every clue. Accordingly, you might want to set aside a full game session, but also be ready to treat the scene as little more than a brief interlude if the players press on.

Scene 2 is a lengthy dungeon crawl, and somewhat dangerous. Its pacing is largely dependent upon the players' tactical choices, though it also features several opportunities for negotiation with freed captives.

Scene 3 is smaller than Scene 2 but features deadlier adversaries and longer fights.

Scene 4 contains a few tightly linked locations and one involved fight potentially spanning all of them. The refresh right before this fight is intentional, as the action here is intense and the adventurers will need all the help they can get.

Since most opponents are programmed constructs or mindless monsters, the adventurers don't have to worry much about the enemy chasing them should they make a tactical retreat. This simply pauses the current scene, though if the adventurers spend much time elsewhere or pursue other efforts the GM may wish to restart at the top of a new scene upon their return.

With any significant period between visits, the GM may also want to make changes to reflect events in the party's absence. Events could even deviate from the scripted action: perhaps the adventurers are too late to save Elessandra, and she is converted into a monster herself, or maybe the Perfect Organism lords over the dungeon with the Golem-Bride as its slave.

MENACE

Laboratory of the Forsaken assumes a Menace of IV (Dangerous), though you can easily adjust that if you like (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 334). Keep in mind that a higher or lower Menace adjusts the number of Dramatic scenes, see the Scene Type entry at the start of each scene in this adventure. Please keep in mind: this assumed Menace can easily overwhelm inexperienced and/or low-level parties, and care should be taken not only to choose an appropriate Menace but also to offer the players a fair chance of survival regardless of the preset difficulty.

If you find that whatever Menace you've chosen is running too “hot” (that is, the heroes are having too difficult a time of





things), you may want to quietly adjust the number down without telling them. It isn't likely that any of them will notice this change unless you start recalculating adversary stats at the table. You may even want to prep two sets of stat sheets for this purpose if you're at all concerned.

Finally, keep in mind the various ways the party can enter and navigate through the manor's dungeon. Completely "clearing" the whole installation can be difficult for even the most veteran heroes, and easing a party that's having trouble toward helpful resources — like Magnus' Alchemical Sanctum (*see page 43*) — Remember, this is your adventure. You can and should run it your way. We've provided you all the creepy, high-adventure camp we can cram into one place, but it's your choice how much of it you use. Happy delving, and Stay Crafty!

CAMPAIGN QUALITIES

This is a notable skirmish between the Circle and the Church. Should the characters represent either of these two sides, the triumphant heroes campaign quality is recommended throughout this adventure. Note that triumphant heroes is typically only available as a permanent quality but we feel it's so appropriate here that we can and should ignore this restriction. The game's a toolkit, and this is just one example of how that ethic can be applied.

SLIDING DCS

To allow for play at any Threat Level, this adventure features sliding DCS (*see Fantasy Craft, page 370*).

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Baby Hybrids (Gorgons): These are the result of Magnus' experiments into species interbreeding. Over time there have been many different types, but as the adventurers arrive the only ones present are a pair of gorgons being cared for by a flesh golem called The Nurse (*see page 29*).

Captive Animals: A small collection of animals is kept in cages in the Halls of Testing (*see page 20*). These await unfortunate fates in Magnus' various experiments.

Dr. Magnus Croatalorn: The nefarious doctor is the impetus of the story, but he's been paralyzed by the Forsaking poison and remains little more than furniture throughout (*see page 16*). However, he's left behind a variety of notebooks and journals revealing his goals and personality. His body is sometimes tended by construct minions that otherwise continue to fulfill his last commands.

Elessandra: The only surviving member of the Church's first expedition to the manor is trapped in the Halls of Testing, facing off with the orc Nazdregga in a perverse test of mind and body (*see page 31*). If freed Elessandra may help the adventurers, especially if they serve the Church and are willing to help look for her partner, Zebulon.

Ethan Croatalorn: Magnus' elder brother was also Lunalia's first husband. Ethan is long dead now, secretly poisoned to pave the way for Magnus' ambitions.

Flesh Golems: These are the "muscle" of the laboratory, with orders to capture or kill intruders. They include the Butcher, the Nurse, and the Custodian (*see pages 28, 29*).

Golem-Bride: Somewhat more intelligent and free-thinking than Magnus' other creations, the Golem-Bride is composed of parts of his late wife Lunalia, along with some spare bits he threw in for good measure. With Magnus indisposed, the Golem-Bride runs his operations at the manor. She commands from the lower dungeon, and is encountered in the adventure's final scene. Lady Lunalia's ghost wants nothing more than the Golem-Bride's destruction, which is the only way her spirit can find peace.

Homunculi: These small organic constructs resemble tiny gargoyles. They perform routine tasks, act as servants, take notes, and feed captives. They defend themselves and protect Croatalorn's body, but are otherwise (mostly) harmless.

Hydralisk: Bred from a hydra and a basilisk, this creature guards the front entrance to the lower dungeon level. Its unusual stock leaves it in constant pain, and so it lashes out at everyone except those it's trained to ignore (Magnus, the Golem-Bride, a homunculus named Minion, one of Magnus' other golem servants, or anyone they escort into the level).

Jarn P'Tor: This rainbow-scaled saurian is soon to die in one of Magnus' mad experiments (*see page 30*). If the party ends the experiment — even if they don't release Jarn — he's eternally grateful and more than happy to help them whenever and however he can.

Jordark: This ogre is trapped in a holding cell, half-dead from starvation and dehydration (*see page 29*). He's happy to help the adventurers if they give him food and water, though he can only do so much in his severely weakened condition.

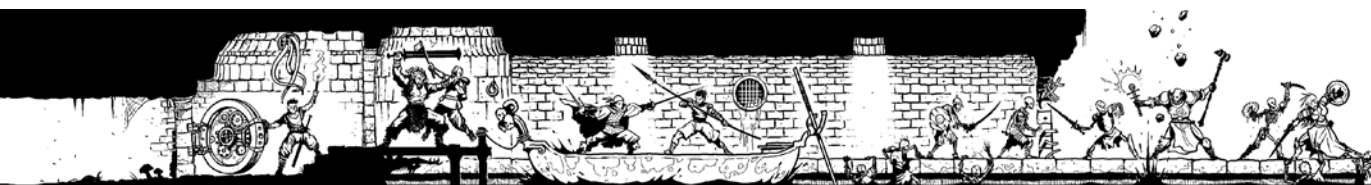
K'Varr: Clutch-brother to Jarn P'Tor, this saurian was killed in a recent experiment conducted by the Golem-Bride and the Surgeons. His remains can be found in the Vivisection Laboratory (*see page 40*).

Lucien Bokk: This wealthy merchant was recently arrested for consorting with the Circle and selling civilized species into slavery. He is not featured directly in this adventure, but may come into play in spin-off and follow-up endeavors.

Lunalia's Ghost:

The spirit of Magnus' late wife haunts the manor, bound close to the place of her suicide (*see page 14*). The homunculi fear and avoid her. She cannot rest until her flesh-golem doppelganger is destroyed.

Millie: This unfortunate goblin languishes in a cell in the Halls of Testing (*see page 27*). Her head has been grafted to the body of an enormous snake, and her eyes have been removed. In a desperate attempt to shield her from this horror, her subconscious mind has manufactured the fiction that her arms





are bound and that she's crawling around in the dark. Millie is perhaps the saddest of a very sad collection of victims in Magnus' menagerie.

Minion: Encountered in the Gas Chamber in the Halls of Testing (see page 26), this homunculus is Magnus' favorite creation. It isn't any different from the others of its kind, but something about it made Magnus smile every time it flew by.

Nazdregga: This orc thief was traded from slave master to slave master until she got here, and now she's convinced she'll die in Magnus' cells. Nazdregga is currently trapped in a brutal mind game, pitting her against Elessandra the Inquisitor (see page 31).

Perfect Organism: The culmination of Magnus' life work, this massive slime was cultured to reflect the earliest life in the Realm. Magnus believed that by awakening and observing this creature he could make countless discoveries about every species that lives or has ever lived. In truth the "Perfect Organism" is a unique breed of chaos beast, with the ability to replicate those it consumes. The Perfect Organism is one of the greatest threats in this adventure's final scene (see page 46).

Surgeons: These fast, precise flesh golems are equipped with vivisection tools where two of their four hands should be. When Magnus was conscious the Surgeons assisted him in the delicate work of dissecting and reassembling bodies. Now they serve the Golem-Bride, helping her complete the last of Magnus' objectives.

Vaslarac: This drake languishes in the Halls of Testing, missing several non-essential organs (see pages 24 and 29). Vaslarac is a well-known brigand who preyed on travelers south of Valespire before his capture. He may help the party, though only if he's promised revenge and/or treasure; otherwise he flees the area at the first opportunity, seizing as much loot as he can carry along the way.

Zebulon: Partner and traveling companion to Elessandra, this Church Inquisitor is killed shortly before his remains are found in the Vivisection Laboratory. Zebulon's brain is fed to the Perfect Organism just before the start of Scene 4, prompting its awakening (see page 39).



SCENE 1: THE HAUNTED MANOR

A country mansion north of Valespire, late afternoon

OBJECTIVES

- Explore the manor house
- Find Dr. Croatalorn
- Learn what Croatalorn is doing with his acquisitions, and liberate or reclaim as many as possible

CHALLENGES

- If panicked or provoked, the homunculi servants may lash out.
- Lunalia's ghost may confuse the party or even directly interfere with their efforts.
- The dungeon entrance isn't immediately evident, and the party must be diligent and focused to find it.

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Standard (Dramatic if playing Menace V)

GM Briefing: There are few dangers in this scene. It largely sets the stage for what's to come. The party arrives at the manor. They discover Magnus has been paralyzed by a mysterious ailment and is tended by homunculi. They may also find clues hinting at a secret laboratory beneath the house.

Gear: The adventurers begin with their personal gear.

LOCATION

Croatalorn Manor is an impressive two-story wooden house resting on a stone foundation. The house faces north and has a sloped roof with a small tower peaking up through its northwest corner.

The two-story manor is surrounded by a 7-ft. stone wall with a single wide iron gate. The gate is unlocked (the Inquisitors left it open).

There are two additional buildings on the premises: a stable and a wood shed. Neither of these areas is fully described here, as they contain nothing of note beyond the obvious: stalls and hay piles in the former, and piles of wood and kindling in the latter. Magnus doesn't travel nearly as much as his late brother, who added the stables, and so they are vacant now (when Magnus needs to get about, he hires a wagon).

The surrounding grounds include a somewhat unkempt, overgrown garden with a pair of alder trees, several juniper bushes, and a sizable herb patch. A successful team Survival check (Easy DC) draws the party's attention to the lack of visible animals; this sort of homestead would commonly raise chickens, pigs, and the like to feed the residents.





A paved path leads to the manor's front porch and door. There is also a large set of double doors on the west side of the house. All of the building's windows are shuttered and curtained, though at night slivers of light can be seen at the edges of the tower windows (the light is always on, but it isn't bright enough to be seen through the edges of the window during the day).

The adventurers may enter the manor through the front door or side entrance. In either case the door is locked but no skill check is required to enter (the door can easily be forced open without a roll). The heroes could also force their way in through windows, or smash their way through the wooden walls given a few minutes. Again, no skill check is required.

Ambience: A creaking old manor house, full of spooky sounds

Terrain: Indoor/settled

Culture Interests: None

ACTION

The adventurers may wish to ask around the area before heading to the manor. We recommend running this as a brief flashback to avoid investing too much game time in the sequence. This also sends a message that there probably isn't much to be gained, and may keep the players from feeling the need to dig too deep. There isn't in fact much to be gained, though a little can be gleaned simply by asking around.

With a successful team Investigate/Canvass check (Easy DC), the party learns just the very basics...

"Lord Magnus? He an' his wife live in the large manor on Whisper Hill. They don't mix much with us common folk, an' we don't mix with them, 'cept to send our tithes up every fortnight."

For every 5 by which the party's result beats the DC, another bit of information is learned. The GM can string all this boxed text together as one unbroken description, or it can be paraphrased or roleplayed, as desired.

"Though between you an' me, m'lord's been getting many visitors of late. Over the last few years, more than a few covered wagons 'ave come up this road. Some brought buildin' supplies, maybe, or servants hired from far off lands. The nobles love their exotics, eh?"

"Some of those wagons, though... I could swear I 'eard strange noises from inside. Growls and hisses and such... Now, I've 'eard tell that Lord Croatalorn collects odd beasts. No one knows why. Maybe his lovely wife cooks them, though others say he has a private zoo, or that he's an alchemist or wizard an' renders the critters down for parts!"

"Maybe it's true... There's a story hereabouts of a farmer whose kid got sick. He went to the Lord and Lady asking for help, an' they gave 'im a potion that not only fixed the kid right up, he never got sick again! Well, that last part may be a tall tale, but the healin's true. At least as I understand it."

"He's a strange fellow, our lord... Cold and grim. Not like the old lord, his dead brother Ethan, gods rest his soul... That was... What? Ten years ago now. Ethan was a lot more outgoin' than Magnus... He and Lady Lunalia... They were always out and about, visitin' with we little people, or goin' to the fair. Truth be told I always thought Lunalia was the reason they were so forthright, but she's married to Magnus now an' he hardly ever comes out of the manor. Nor does she anymore..."

APPROACHING THE MANOR

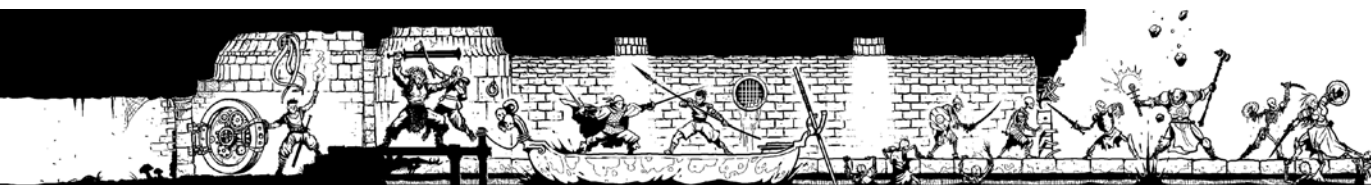
An early evening arrival is suggested, in order to convey the atmosphere of a traditional haunted house. However, cautious adventurers may choose to camp outside or at a local villager's home and wait for daylight before venturing close. This has little impact on the adventure, though the GM might choose to evolve situations inside if the party procrastinates too much before entering.

Please refer to the Location section for an overview of the manor exterior (*see page 10*). If the GM wants a more involved and atmospheric description as the party approaches, the following covers the basics. Again, evening is assumed here, and the description is written assuming the adventurers approach from the north, facing the front of the manor, which is why the woodshed isn't mentioned, for example.

The darkling shape of a two-story manor looms out of the fog, perched atop a low hill. A single-story structure extends from the building to the southeast, and several crooked trees dot the area.

Approaching the lone iron gate that splits the seven-foot surrounding wall, you make out a paved path leading to the front porch and door. Both are nearly lost to shadow and the manor's windows all appear to be shuttered, though a single light glimmers through the highest tower window.

Again, if approaching when it's light out, do not mention the light from within the tower window.





A. FRONT DOOR AND ENTRANCE HALL

The front door is locked but no skill check is required to enter (it can easily be forced open without a roll). Paraphrase or read the following as the adventurers enter.

The manor's interior is attractively designed, with polished wood floors and paneling, and high ceilings.

B. CLOAK ROOM

In the center of this small room is a coat stand with three travel-stained cloaks of various sizes (all of which smell of earth and decay). A stout oak walking stick leans against the coat stand, topped with the golden head of a crab (this ornamental cap is worth 50 sp). A couple pairs of men's working boots are located nearby.

Should anyone search behind the cloaks, they find a dust-covered life-size stone statue of a common laborer with one arm outstretched, now serving as a makeshift rack for two rarely used hats. Upon close inspection the statue is found to be very realistic, showcasing the model's muscular form but presenting him in a decidedly non-heroic pose. Strangely, the sculptor also chose to capture a look of shock on the model's face.

In fact, this is one of Lucien Bokk's teamsters, a man named Porrid, who stupidly peeked at a basilisk he'd delivered. He paid the ultimate price for his curiosity, and if he is somehow restored he's both pitifully grateful and dedicated to his saviors for life. If needed, he shares the Laborer statistics (*see Fantasy Craft, page 246*).

Whether restored or not, Porrid offers an important clue about what lurks elsewhere in the manor. In fact, though the basilisk that transformed him is now dead (from a failed hybridization experiment), its "child" lives on as the guardian of the lower dungeon (*see page 33*).

C. STUDY

This comfortable sitting room has a cozy fireplace, a thick rug, two heavy leather-bound chairs, a polished mahogany desk, and a silver oil lamp. Atop the desk is an orc's skull with a candle melted into it.

Near the desk is a stylized floor-to-ceiling anatomy diagram that details the placement of major organs, bones, and muscles in humans, goblins, orcs, and ogres of both sexes.

Hanging from the ceiling is the skeleton of a man-sized lizard. A successful Knowledge check (Tricky DC with a synergy bonus from Survival) reveals this to be no mere alligator or giant lizard, but a basilisk (the same creature that petrified the poor teamster whose statue-form can be found in the Cloak Room).

There is also a large stuffed bear in the corner of the room.

Finally, a large bookcase runs along one wall. Examination of the dozen titles nestled there reveals several rare and learned works on medicine, chemistry, anatomy, natural philosophy, and zoology, including *A Chronicle of Exotic Lizards and Serpents* by Augustus Qual, and *Paramelchior's Banned Work of Circle Philosophy: The Secret Machinery of the World*.

Written in the margins of *Paramelchior's* book is a scrawled note (*see page 53*).

NOTE FOUND IN THE STUDY

"A thousand thousand species, each created in the likeness of its own lords!"

So sayeth the blind faith of the Church. But unlike the Church, the Circle does not require faith. Faith is belief without regard to evidence. There is no reasonable evidence that gods created the races in their own image. My vivisections have shown that the brain is the seat of intelligence, that if a serpent has the head of a man, it speaks as a man. So, I ask... did the gods of mice and pigeons have their same puny brain? How could life have been born from that?

D. BALLROOM

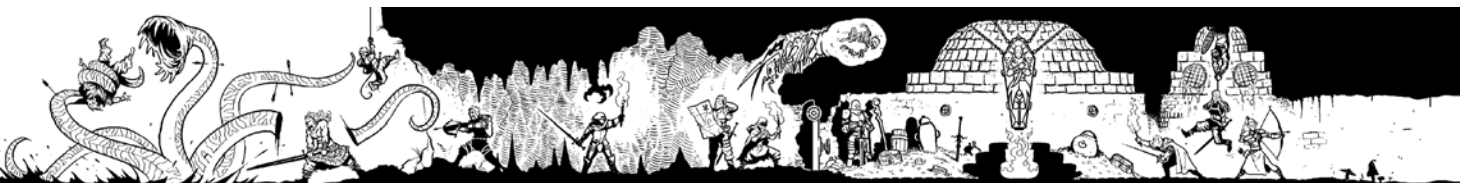
The manor's side door is locked but no skill check is required to enter (it can easily be forced open without a roll).

Within, the southwestern corner of the manor is given over to a long two-story ballroom (a staircase in the north of this room leads up to a balcony that runs partway along the room's north and east walls on the second floor).

The Ballroom is a large, fairly empty space lined in cedar wood paneling, with a pair of huge paintings hanging on the south and west walls. A cheap-looking silver-plated candelabrum hangs from the ceiling, and a double-door on the west wall opens to the garden outside.

Signs of a recent struggle are obvious here, but there are no weapons or blood stains (the homunculi are trained to keep the manor tidy except for the Bathroom, which Magnus has declared is off-limits). The fight appears to have taken place entirely in this room, with no evidence that it spilled into other areas.

Adventurers who examine the wood floor notice several deep scratches and scuffs near the outer doors, as well as in the center of the room and near the middle of the east wall (the direction and concentration of the marks is revealed with a successful Search check (Average DC) focusing on the whole room). Some of these appear to be large claw marks, though the creature that made them cannot be identified.





The two paintings are done in oils, each a similarly realistic style. The frames are gold, with a motif of crabs and sparrows.

- The western painting depicts a young man and a younger woman. The man is perhaps 30, the woman in her late teens. Both appear happy and smiling, and wear matching rings. The man stares directly ahead, while the woman is looking up at him. He has long black hair, handsome features, and is stylishly dressed in the fashions of perhaps a decade ago. She has a pretty face, long curly red hair, green eyes, and wears a green and silver gown.
- The southern painting is of a bald man with piercing eyes wearing a velvet robe, standing beside the same woman as before. Here she's in her 30s and wears a black and silver gown. Both wear the same rings as the couple in the other picture. The man gazes fondly at the woman, his arm wrapped possessively about her, while she looks down at her feet, lips thin, her expression unreadable.

The woman in both paintings is Lunalia, and if any adventurers have seen her ghost they recognize her features. The dark-haired man is Ethan Croatalorn and the bald man is his brother, Magnus. Anyone who's seen Magnus' paralyzed body in the Master Bedroom recognizes both he and the ring he wears (a family heirloom inherited with the estate).

On the east wall, directly opposite the painting of Lord Ethan and Wife, is a loose portion of wood paneling that conceals a secret panel. When removed this reveals a lever, and pulling the lever triggers a counter-weight for a secret door. A third of the east wall grinds open to reveal a concealed flight of stone steps descending into darkness. A faint animal odor rises from below.

There are three main ways that the players might discover the secret door...

- If the party has visited the bathroom and read Lunalia's message, the phrase "my first lord stares at the stairs below" is a reference to her first husband, Ethan, whose painting faces the secret passage.
- If one or more adventurers specifically ask to tap this room's walls looking for hollow areas beyond, they find the lever with a successful individual or team Search check (Average DC).
- A general search of the room only finds the secret panel with a successful individual or team Search check (Hard DC). If the marks on the floor have previously been found, this DC drops to Average.


E. STAIRWAY AND CLOSET

Here a spiral staircase leads up to the manor's second floor. The area beneath the stairs is accessible through a door with a foot-wide, circular hole four feet up from the floor. This is unlocked and opens into a compact closet lined with high shelves.

On the lowest shelf is a pile of blank wax tablets. The two highest shelves each hold a small round basket, filled with torn bits of parchment, scraps of cloth, and feathers. These have a dry, musky smell to them, as if something was living in them. Further evidence, or so it seems: a cat-sized water bowl and food dish on other shelves nearby. These food dishes contain candied fruits, fresh turnips, and salted fish, and the bowls contain not water but fine spirits (these nests are actually for the homunculi who serve Dr. Croatalorn, and they have similar tastes to their master).

If the adventurers linger here, there's a chance two of the homunculi — probably those tending the doctor's body — fly into the closet for a rest and a bite of food. The creatures flee at the first sight of intruders, unless the intruders are known to have attacked Magnus, in which case the homunculi try to evade the intruders and then go to the dungeon levels for help in avenging their master. Statistics and notes for running these creatures is found in the Cast section of Scene 2 (*see page 30*).

Among the scraps of paper in the nest is an old note, dated seven years ago (*see page 52*).




NOTE FOUND IN THE STAIRWAY CUPBOARD

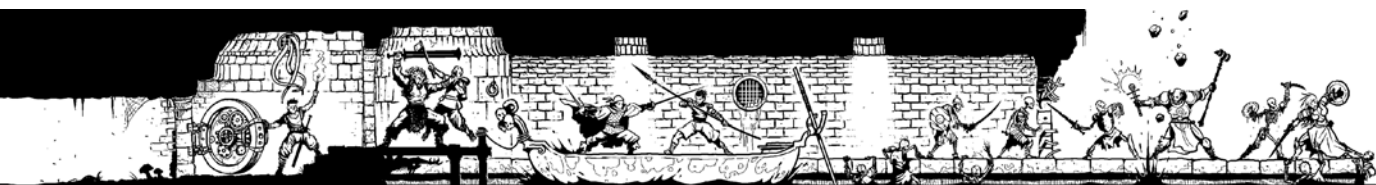
The question of origin is crucial. In his "Six Great Ages of the World," the esteemed Heroclitus of Zhar proves the Age of Ice was the beginning of all. I therefore deduce that the oldest, or original, of the Folk species is that with the greatest resistance to cold. To test this I have devised an experiment in which a variety of folk races are repeatedly exposed to freezing temperatures and their reactions cataloged.

Particularly interesting results were observed in the cold-blooded races. This leads me to believe that all races were not created simultaneously by "gods" since such species as the Saurians could not have survived if, as Heroclitus states, "in the ancient days, the entire world was covered with a blanket of ice and snow." Such species must be younger, doubtless created by others like myself.

My research drives me to this conclusion: most beasts are formed through spontaneous gestation, from primeval slime and chemicals, while hybrid creatures and beast-folk - goblins, naga, and the like - are the product of ancient human arcanists working at the dawn of time! I can prove this. I must prove it.

I have sacrificed everything for my research: my brother, my lovely wife. His wife. No matter! I cannot falter. This quest is all I have left.







F. BATHROOM

This room contains a large bronze bathtub, inlaid with ivory and gold, and its tiled floor is decorated with green and blue images of dolphins and merfolk at play. The windows are shuttered and the room is musty, as if it hasn't been opened in a long time (Magnus forbade anyone from entering after Lunalia's passing). A light layer of dust covers everything, though it's clear someone has been here in the last several days; indeed, someone has — Elessandra, during the Inquisitors' search of the manor (see page 5 for her full accounting of what happened before the Inquisitors' capture).

Sitting on two nearby shelves are a lone, unlit candle and several small dishes and cups with a faint patina suggesting they once held soaps and oil. A full-length mirror stands in a corner of the room.

Close examination of the tub reveals the faint crusty residue of old, dried blood along the waterline.

This bathroom is haunted by the ghost of Lunalia Croatalorn, Lord Magnus' deceased wife. She committed suicide here, and has a limited ability to manifest at this place.

At some point, perhaps when the PCs are examining the tub, or maybe when only one of them is in or searching the room, read or paraphrase the following.

Suddenly the temperature in the room drops, and your breath becomes visible. The high window's shutters quickly slam open and shut, and a dusty candle flickers to life though no flame is near.

Something shifts in the bathroom mirror and the ghostly image of a woman appears there, as if standing on the other side of the glass. She is in her 30s, with a thin but pretty face, green eyes, and red curly hair. Her lips move, as if she's trying to say something.

She points to the tub and out of the corner of your eye you see it's now full of blood.

The adventurers cannot communicate with the woman though it's clear from her body language that she's frightened and pleading. Attempts to put out the candle fail, as it flickers back to life the moment the wick is exposed. The shutters slow their slamming and eventually stop altogether, just as...

The gory water in the tub begins to churn. It fountains up, splashing over the edges of the tub before the bulk of it rises, independent of all reason, and slowly takes the shape of... a female humanoid.

The shape lingers for a moment, looking disturbingly like someone skinned alive, and then it raises a hand in your direction.

This is unnerving and everyone within line of sight to the shape must immediately make a Will save (DC 15) or suffer 3d6 stress damage.

Assuming the adventurers haven't had enough and either left or fled the room...

WHAT IF THE HEROES ATTACK THE GHOST?

Lunalia's ghost isn't fully manifest during this scene, and cannot be physically harmed. Should the heroes attack or otherwise try to harm the spirit in any way, it simply vanishes, along with the words on the mirror and all other attempts to communicate with the heroes.

This is, of course, the work of a ghost attempting to communicate from the other side. It is also quite temporary, as the words vanish not long after the adventurers leave the room for other parts of the manor.

The message can be read or paraphrased, and is provided as another handout as well (see page 55).


BLOOD-SCRAWLED MIRROR MESSAGE

*Please slay my body, let me rest
To help you fill this last request
My first lord stares at the stairs below
He writhed and died so long ago
My second lord lies forsaken in frozen scream
Yet still I must labor to serve his dark dream
To show creation is not divine
Seek monstrous truth past ancient slime
Hurry! For blood devout flows down the drain
I carve, I torment, I deal in pain
Nor am I alone, for many others do cry
I cannot stop, please help me die
Strangers, you cannot falter in this quest
Unless we kill you like the rest*

G. WASHROOM

This small side room shares a wall with the stables, which are only accessible from the outside. The washroom contains a wood basin, a shelf with bath salts and crude soap, a stiff full-sized brush, and several tiny scrub brushes seemingly sized for dolls (the homunculi also use this room, as the bathroom is haunted).





A drying rack holds freshly laundered men's clothes, with a well-made robe and two nightshirts. Stuck inside the pocket of one nightshirt is another scrap of parchment (see page 51).



NOTE FOUND IN THE WASHROOM

Note to Self:


Hybridization of pseudo-hydra female and basilisk stock was successful! Physical mating proved impossible, so artificial insemination with treated basilisk seed was necessary. Subject was force-fed weekly doses of fertility potion to ensure successful hybridization.

My dear wife has been so helpful, much more useful than the others. I miss her laugh, and her sweet scent, but it is so much more convenient now that she is willing to assist in my good work.

Enough. After seventeen weeks a clutch of four eggs has been laid. These hybrids are smaller than those recorded in Qual's 'Chronicle,' and of unusual mottled color, but larger than basilisk eggs by far.

After female hydra attempted to eat own eggs (one lost, one cracked) it was returned to testing cells for punishment. Was forced to improvise an incubator, which I hope will not unduly compromise the experiment. Honestly, do hydras have no maternal instinct at all?

Guests tomorrow, local miller. May have the cook the cracked egg for breakfast, as I doubt it will be viable. I flatter myself that, beyond a scientist, I am quite the gourmand! Will be interesting to see if ingesting basilisk-hydra eggs have any unusual effect on humans...



H. KITCHEN

A great brick fireplace dominates the kitchen, and a large trestle table rests in the center of the room. Shelves and cabinets line the walls, along with tall racks displaying silver plates, glass goblets, and fine porcelain dishes.

A door in the southwest leads into a small pantry that contains jars of pickled cabbage, two enormous cheese rounds, several baskets of vegetables, bags of browning apples, and haunches of not-too-fresh rabbit and goat meat.

An unrolled parchment scroll lies on the kitchen table, weighed down with a bottle of ink, a dagger, and a heavy (decorative) brass key. A quill pen lies beside the bottle. The scroll contains the start of a letter, written in ink in a strong hand. The letter ends abruptly in a large splotch of ink, as if the writer was disturbed in mid-thought and suddenly abandoned his missive (see page 54).



LETTER FOUND IN THE KITCHEN

Dear Master Bokk,

I am indeed most grateful for the splendid basilisk specimen you last delivered. This time your hired men followed almost all my advice regarding its care and feeding, and so I have no complaints regarding its health. Is it not a dreadful waste when living creatures expire before we have a chance to make proper use of them?

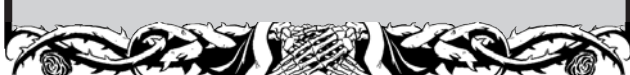
My sympathies for what happened to your man Porrid, although in truth he did not listen and has only himself to blame. You are quite certain I should keep him? I have yet to find a suitable spot to stand him, and my servants are uncomfortable knowing where the statue came from.

I am most looking forward to the wyvern you have promised me. It will be invaluable to my studies of the draconic condition. Could the two-legged wyvern be the vital link between the legless wyrm, the four-legged winged drake, and its larger cousin, the mighty dragon?

With regard to the question you raised in your last letter: of course I will publish a monogram of my findings, though I fear its circulation must of necessity be private and limited. Rest assured that you might have a copy for your family if you wish. It is gratifying to hear that your delightful daughter has scholarly interests! Would that I was blessed with such children, but I'm afraid that my wife's recent illness has left her barren. Also, please inform your daughter that she should never apologize for such academic curiosity! It is the truest mark of intelligence, and surely what divides the best of our folk from the lesser brute forms like the goblin, saurian, and ogre.

Ah, that reminds me! I have a special request. With the direction of my current research, I will require more special deliveries. I appreciate the challenges you face in acquiring these exotic specimens for me, but know that they are so much more useful than mere beasts or monsters. I will append a detailed list of my requirements.

As before, I would prefer to keep our transactions to simple exchanges. I have pried myself away from my research to manufacture eight more flasks of the elixirs you desire, and they await your next delivery. I must also stress the importance of discretion, especially in view of the recent rumors. If my experiments were to prematur-[an ink blot obscures the rest of the message]





I. DINING ROOM

This expansive room contains a large trestle table covered in a linen cloth, with wooden benches on both sides and a single chair at the table's foot. A second chair at the head of the table is overturned and lies on its side. The chairs are walnut, covered in black velvet and leather, with the arms carved like the pincers of a crab. The floor is strewn with rushes.

J. GUEST BEDROOMS

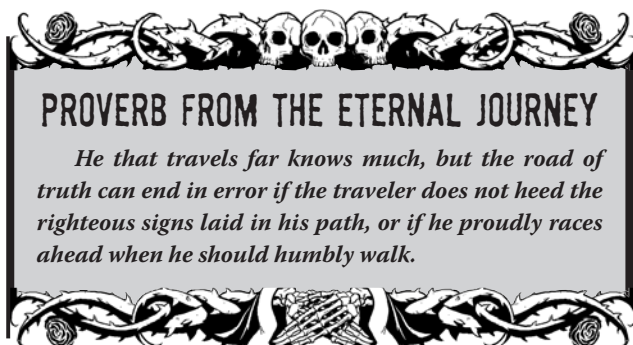
Each of these second-floor rooms contains a large bed covered in a plain quilt and sheets. Each also has a small chest for clothes, a stool, and a compact dressing table.

The corner bedroom (J1) was occupied by Inquisitor Elessandra when she posed as a guest of the manor. A few of her things remain: a traveler's pack tossed carelessly on the bed, as well as a woman's change of traveling clothes and a few personal grooming instruments (a comb and a nail file).

The second bedroom is where Elessandra's partner, Zebulon, was put up. On his bedside table is a small, well-thumbed, leather-bound book: a collection called *The Eternal Journey*, easily recognizable by any native of the Realm as a book of sacred Church hymns and parables. The book has small leather mark that opens to a short proverb (see page 56).

Anyone with an Interest in the Church of the Road-Wardens recognizes this as a favorite Inquisitor saying. It was one of Zebulon's personal favorites, and the book has great meaning to him. If an adventurer displays it to The Perfect Organism after Zebulon's brain is used to awaken the creature, the Organism recognizes the proverb and it hesitates for a full round, which may be crucial in dealing with this new horrifying life form (see page 46).

If anyone checks the front of the book, there's also an inscription: "To Zebulon, my brother in faith"



PROVERB FROM THE ETERNAL JOURNEY

He that travels far knows much, but the road of truth can end in error if the traveler does not heed the righteous signs laid in his path, or if he proudly races ahead when he should humbly walk.

K. LADY'S CHAMBER

This is clearly the chamber of an aristocratic lady. There's a dressing table, a fine gilt-edged silver mirror, and a delicate set of chairs here, along with a shelf full of porcelain dolls. An easel stands in the corner, covered with a fine silk cloth, and underneath is a partially completed portrait of the view outside

this room's window, as it looked several years ago. Lunalia was a gifted painter, but this final piece she never finished; she took her own life well before the final brush strokes.

The room smells of fine perfume and lavender, but a Notice check (Easy DC) reveals that this masks a faint odor of decay, like spoiled meat, which clings to everything.

A large, ornate walnut wardrobe sits in one corner of the room. It holds a collection of noble women's clothing and shoes, in fashions a decade out of date.

Finally, in the drawer of a simple writing desk is a dagger forged of superior material and an old, leather-bound holy book (of the Road-Warden faith). Many of the book's pages are stabbed or ripped. Under the book is a gold locket with a snapped chain, worth perhaps 25s. Within is a miniature portrait of Ethan Croatalorn, youthful, dark-haired, and handsome. Anyone who's been to the Ballroom downstairs recognizes this as the same man in the western portrait (see page 13).

L. MASTER BEDROOM

This room is the base of the tower from which light is seen outdoors (though again, only at night — during the day, sunlight obscures the faint illumination otherwise visible around the edges of the window).

This room is the only part of the second floor where the ceiling rises above 10 ft., and the outer walls here are lined with high windows.

Read or paraphrase the following as the party enters.

The centerpiece of this room is a canopied four-poster bed covered with a thick quilt and three plump pillows. On the bedside table is a magnifying glass and nearby is a small desk, covered in papers. A massive throw rug made of bear fur dominates the floor.

A man in a nightshirt and cap lies on the bed. One arm is stretched out awkwardly, extending away from his body. A handsome ring adorns one tightly curled finger.

The man is immobile. His mouth and eyes are open, but they're wide and vacant. His face is twisted in a frozen rictus of fear, drool seeping from his mouth.

The ring is a family heirloom, inherited with the estate after Ethan Croatalorn's death. By tradition, Magnus and Lunalia wore the rings to signify their marriage (though of course Lunalia had already worn hers when married to Magnus' brother). Each ring is made of silver and gold, and worth perhaps 250s. The topmost letter on the desk lies next to an overturned inkwell (see page 54).

In this letter, "The Willow's Dew" is a reference to the source of the Forsaking poison, a secret known only to those with an Interest in the Church who also make a successful Knowledge check (Tricky DC with a synergy bonus from Medicine).





LETTER FOUND IN THE MASTER BEDROOM

Note to Self:

I forgot and left my other notes downstairs. So far below, too far too walk. I must summon a Nurse to kerry me to Lunalia. These notes are so I will rememmer. A phrase goes throuh my mindd, over and over. "The Willow's Dewe. Cure for the Willow's Dew." Why is thatt important? So hard to remember. Ev-erything is a sircle. I reemember now. The Inquisiter ate my brane. Curst daart! I will dew the same too her companeon. My puls slowss, yet I heer it echooing incide my chest, thump, thumppp, winding down like the grate clock in the Valespear skool. My hands are stiffeningg, like my feeet. I keep dropping the penn, and my survant must dive to grabb it. This time he cot it in mid aire. Clevver little ting. Did I make hem? I cannot rememberrrr... I cannot remembr so mucchh. I create lifes. I created life. I rreeemember I killed my brothr and merried his widow and watched her drown in bluud. My finul memoree... Let my body rest, she cry. I cannot, sweet Lunalia, you laabor for meee below. Make her talk, my wife! You are my only hope. I must acks ask Minion to hellp me kloose my eyes to restt, eyelllids no longur work — fogg in my brane. My wyf is ded. Why do shesstand befour meee? She shimer in the darkk, laffing at my state, demanndinng I das-troyy whatt I have madde, my lasst hooppe. My circle begiins and eeends. Leters swwiim. I mu— zy s Ong uh u ftag su—

DIRECTION

Here are some questions you might be asked, and answers for you to offer or implement.

Q: The marks on the floor indicate the fighting was limited to the Ballroom. Is that right?

A: Yes. The fighting didn't erupt until the Inquisitors found the secret passage leading down to the dungeon, and they were unfortunate enough to almost immediately run into Magnus' golems. The combat continued in the Ballroom with more and more of Magnus' creations joining the fray until the intruders were finally overwhelmed. The Forsakening poison was delivered with Elessandra's final blow, moments before she was brought down and captured. Elessandra can recount the full story if she's rescued from the Gas Chamber (see page 26).

Q: Is anyone looking after Magnus' paralyzed body?

A: Lunalia's ghost frightened off most of the homunculi (the spirit is more active now that Magnus is paralyzed). The tiny golems only come up in pairs now, once a day, to check on their master's condition.

CAST

LUNALIA'S GHOST (SPECIAL NPC)

(A dripping noise and a chill sensation)

Description: Lunalia's spirit manifests as a translucent image of her in life, blood dipping from her slashed wrists. Her face is sad, her eyes red. Her hair is wet. She is the woman seen in both portraits in the Ballroom (see page 13).

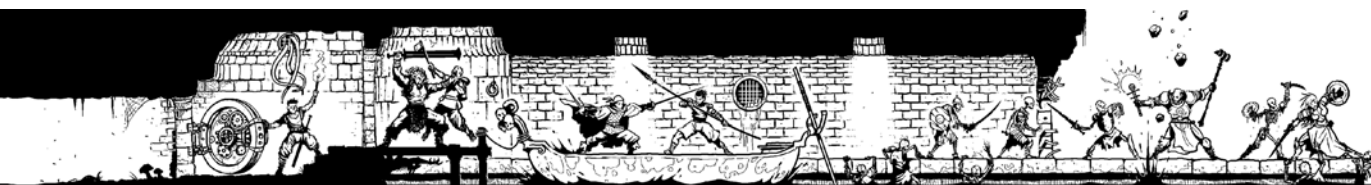
Motivations: Lunalia cannot rest while her body — revived as a flesh golem — is committing what she views as atrocities.

A little over fifteen years ago, then 19-year old Lunalia Vandacrede, youngest daughter of a wealthy Valespire merchant, married Lord Ethan Croatalorn, northern landholder of a small manor. They'd met during a reception in Valespire and fallen in love. Lunalia was a kind soul and an aspiring artist.

The couple lived happily for some years, until Ethan fell ill and died suddenly. Widowed and childless, Lunalia was pressured by her family to marry Ethan's heir and younger brother, the scholarly Dr. Magnus Croatalorn, who had been staying with them and who stood to inherit the estate. Lunalia wasn't attracted to Magnus — the man had made untoward advances while his brother was still alive — but he promised to care for her, and to indulge her artistic interests, so she acquiesced.

It wasn't for some time that she learned of her new husband's odd obsession, and only through a series of compounding clues: the dismissal, accidental death, or maiming of his brother's original servants; the strange noises and voices emerging from Magnus' private chambers, which were always locked tight; the constant construction deep in the wine cellars, with no sign of workmen; the many times she was locked in her chambers "for her own safety" just as mysterious wagons of "supplies" arrived; and later, the harrowing cries and foul odors rising from the cellars below. Eventually, Lunalia's curiosity got the better of her, and she discovered the secret door leading down into Magnus' dungeon. There she found her husband's hellish experiments... and was captured by his inhuman servants.

Lunalia's horror at these affairs led Magnus to once again confine her, vowing to brew a potion that would "make her love him again." Unable to escape and unwilling to face whatever Magnus had in store for her, she drew a bath, slid into the warm water, and slit her wrists. She expected this would finally put an end to her suffering, but once again Magnus had other ideas. Upon discovering her still-warm corpse, the doctor extracted her brain and reanimated her as a flesh golem. This final outrage





was enough to anchor her soul to the manor as a ghost, with a lone driving need to destroy the abomination made from her remains.

For these last years Lunalia's ghost has haunted the manor, but remained as terrified of Magnus in death as she had become in life. The ghost's infrequent manifestations delivered warnings to the occasional visitor, and tried — rarely with any success — to comfort other victims of his atrocities. The ghost also tried to warn the Inquisitors when they visited, materializing to help them find the dungeon. This triggered the confrontation that ended in Magnus' paralysis, though sadly for her the doctor's flesh golems — led by her own former body — overwhelmed the Church agents and dragged them away.

Lunalia's spirit now hopes that others may come to end Magnus' legacy of madness, and in destroying her walking corpse they might also free her soul from the chains that bind her to this earth.

Notes: Unlike some ghosts, Lunalia's spirit doesn't roam. She only manifests in the immediate vicinity of her death (the Bathroom), or close to what's left of her body (the Golem-Bride). She has on occasion pushed out into adjacent rooms — far enough that the homunculi are afraid to spend very much time above ground in the manor house — but doing this takes a great toll, forcing her into dormancy for a time.

The ghost cannot speak either, except in the Golem-Bride's presence, which makes it difficult to convey her plight to newcomers. As the Golem-Bride is damaged this restraint is gradually lifted, though the ghost can still only say a few words. The adventurers aren't likely to encounter the Golem-Bride until Scene 4, when Lunalia's ghost reappears to steer them toward its destruction (see page 41).

Lunalia's Ghost (Medium Folk Spirit Undead Walker): Str 10, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 11; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init I; Atk II; Def IV; Res II; Health II; Comp II; Skills: Impress VIII, Intimidate III; Qualities: *Attractive III, feat (Comely, Repartee Basics), honorable*

Attacks/Weapons: Ghostly Wail (shaking attack III: 20 ft. aura, Will DC 20 or become *shaken*)

Gear: None

Treasure: None

NEXT STEPS

Scene 2 begins as the party enters the first dungeon level from the hidden stairway in the Ballroom. This of course demands that the party find the secret door, which can be accomplished with a variety of Search checks (see page 13).

The fact that there's more to the manor underground can be learned from Magnus' final letter in the Master Bedroom on the second floor (see page 57).

Additional hints about the secret-door can be deduced from Lunalia's message in the Bathroom. (see page 55). If the party is still having a hard time, the GM can introduce a disturbing odor rising up through the secret door, allowing for a fresh Search of the room, possibly with a lower DC.

Should none of these clues and directives help, the GM can fall back on a prepared event: a pair of homunculi exit the secret door from below, on their way up to the Master Bedroom to check on Magnus. Statistics and notes for running these creatures is found in the Cast section of Scene 2 (see page 30).

SCENE 2: THE HALLS OF TESTING

The first level of the dungeon beneath the manor house

OBJECTIVES

- Explore the first dungeon level
- Liberate captives, including Elessandra the Inquisitor

CHALLENGES

- Several flesh golems guard the level, and some are more powerful than others.
- Many prisoners are held here. Nearly all are innocents deserving of rescue, but some may attack unless treated gently.
- Several lethal experiments are underway here. Most are tricky or impossible to circumvent.

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Dramatic (Standard if playing Menace III)

GM Briefing: Here the party explores the manor's first dungeon level. They find unnatural monsters bred in captivity, and others brought here to languish in Magnus' deranged experiments.

Gear: Anything carried out of Scene 1

Important Notes: Like much of this adventure, this scene can be extremely dangerous, especially if the party aims to completely "clear" the dungeon. If you're at all worried that the heroes may have trouble with this or later scenes, you may want to avoid or omit certain encounters, such as one or more of the flesh golems. This can be accomplished simply by having the golem out "wandering" when the party reaches the location where it would normally be found.

LOCATION

The walls and floors here are made of brick and stone blocks. Doors are thick oak reinforced with iron bands. Unless otherwise noted all doors are unlocked, their well-oiled hinges ensuring they open easily and with little noise.





Ambience: The floors here are free of dust, suggesting regular passage. Everywhere the adventurers encounter strong, musky animal scents and stench (from the imprisoned creatures), and within 30–50 ft. of cells they may hear whines, shrieks, and growls. Lit torches are placed every 20 ft. or so in the corridors of this level, keeping them well illuminated at all times (not all rooms are lit, however). If a specific degree of illumination is required, all areas in this scene have dim lighting (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 218).

Terrain: Indoor/settled

Culture Interests: None

ACTION

As with the manor in Scene 1, the Halls of Testing are organized by room, with descriptions lining up per the map on page 62). The map labels start fresh here (with numbers instead of letters), and these continue into the Vivisection Laboratory in Scene 3 (see page 39).



1. STORAGE ROOM

The hidden staircase in the manor's Ballroom opens into this large room, which Magnus converted from a wine cellar into food storage for his servants, as well as the staging area for new specimens. Read or paraphrase the following as the party enters.

The stairway leads down into a room with a bare earthen floor. The air here is cool, musty, and smells like a barnyard. There's also a faint whiff of fish, goats, and smoke.

Half the room is bare, and the other half holds a maze of wooden boxes, barrels, and baskets. A shelf supports a deep stock of linens, oils, lamps, and candles.

There are two exits: one door to the north and another to the south. Both open inward.

The barrels contain ale, wine, flour, salted fish and eels, and pickled vegetables. The crates contain oats, grains, and dried vegetables. The baskets hold great heaping piles of mushrooms. It's a lot of food for a large barracks, let alone two minor nobles

and their personal servants. There's no need to point this out to the players, though they may deduce it on their own.

A lone creature hides in the stacks, beside a barrel of dried fish that it's clawed open. It's a strange hybrid of goat, cat, and drake: in fact, it's an immature pseudo-chimera. The hybrid keeps its distance, assuming everyone and everything is a threat. If approached, it lashes out for a single round and flees until and unless cornered, in which case it fights to the death. The pseudo-chimera can be used as a lure to draw the adventurers deeper into the Halls of Testing, in a direction of your choosing (see *Cast*, page 28 for its statistics and more about its behavior).

2. ARMORY

This is the manor's armory, a holdover from the days when the Croatalorns kept human retainers. Read or paraphrase the following as the party enters.

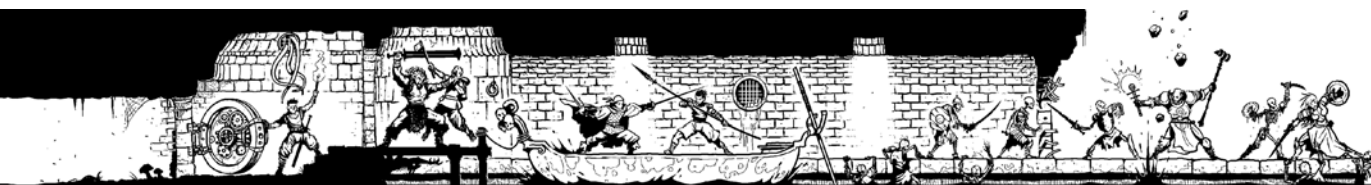
The walls of this small room are hung with racks of weapons, including 3 boar spears, a halberd, a cavalry axe, a light crossbow with 40 bolts, 2 long swords, a short sword, and a pair of metal shields. Basic tools for sharpening and oiling arms are found on a nearby bench, and a pouch, a dagger, and 2 well-crafted maces are located on a stout wooden table. The dagger and maces seem to be in much better condition than the weapons on the racks.

The shields bear the House Croatalorn crest: a silver crab on a black field.

The weapons on the table were seized from the captive Inquisitors. Each has the keen upgrade, granting the keen 4 quality. The dagger's blade and the mace shafts are carved with various sacred symbols the adventurers may identify with a successful Knowledge check. This check has an Average DC, or Easy with an Interest in the Church of the Road-Wardens or 1+ Steps in any Church Alignment Path (see *Time of High Adventure*, page 71). All three weapons bear residual bloodstains, indicating recent hard use; in fact, they were used in the battle against Magnus' golems.

The leather pouch was also taken from the Inquisitors, and contains 3 darts designed to deliver the Forsaking poison, though all doses have evaporated.

All other items in the armory are normal, having no added qualities, upgrades, or adornments.





3. THE BUTCHER'S CHAMBER

This small room is a grisly mess. Large meat haunches hang from hooks here, smelling relatively fresh but hardly pleasant. The air is abuzz with flies and the floor is stained a deep crimson.

From a half-open door in the rear right corner of the room you hear the sound of scraping metal.

Even close examination of the “meat” can’t identify it. The parts are humanoid but they’re too large to be human, or any common folk for that matter. The adventurers’ best guess is that it must be giant, or maybe ogre. There’s also a large tail, strung up across several hooks, that’s definitely from a reptile of some sort, as well as several enormous ribs from a bear-like creature, and the breast and legs of some great bird (perhaps a giant eagle).

The corner door leads into a side chamber where the Butcher is busy sharpening his tools...

This side room is positioned at a forty-five degree angle to the meat locker, its side wall intersecting this room’s corner, and the area beyond is even smaller. It’s roughly square, with a heavy table in the center. A large sharpening stone is mounted on the table, where a hulking half-naked male humanoid stands, wearing only a ragged apron. As you enter he’s swiping a giant cleaver against the stone, though it looks plenty sharp already.

The humanoid glances up at you, and grins...

This is the Butcher, one of three flesh golems on this dungeon level (see *Cast*, page 28). His job is cutting apart those animals and specimens that succumb to Magnus’ experiments... as feed for the others. Of course, he isn’t above adding intruders to the supply.

4. ANIMAL CAGES

When the characters are outside the door to this room, read or paraphrase the following.

Even through this thick door you hear a cacophony of bestial cries. You also detect a strong, musky animal smell.

Adventurers who enter with a light source are confronted with the following...

Your light source reflects off myriad eyes peering out from wire cages against the right and rear walls. There’s a split-second of silent surprise or confusion before the room erupts in barking and shrieking and bleating...

...while those who enter without a light source find the following...

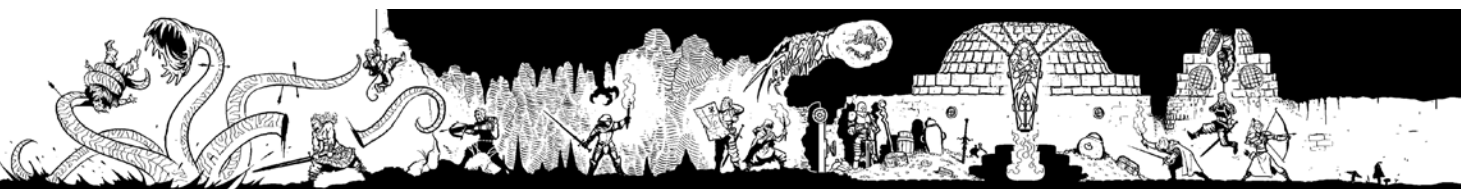
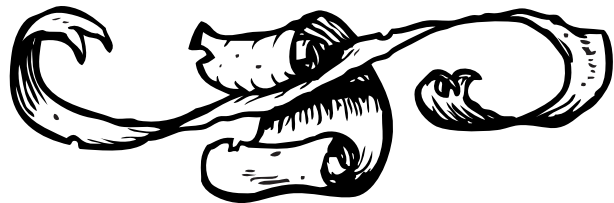
This room is dark and you get the sense that you’re not alone here. A moment later your suspicions are confirmed as what sounds like a huge pack of animals erupts in barking and shrieking and bleating, all around you...

Casting light into the cages reveals they contain the following captured animals, all held as specimens for further experimentation.

- Cage 1 holds a mongrel dog with sad, cautious eyes.
- Cage 2 holds four skittering white rats.
- Cage 3 is large but contains only a lone pigeon.
- Cage 4 holds an aging she-goat.
- Cage 5 holds a white rabbit.
- Cage 6 holds a three-eyed kitten with rabbit ears and a serpent’s tail.
- Cage 7 holds a rat with feathered pigeon wings and sharp bird-like talons.
- Cage 8 has been gnawed open from the inside. Its occupant is nowhere to be seen.

All of these animals have metal tags pinned through their ears (or in the bird’s case, around its leg). All are secured in the cages, and none of them are large or threatening enough to attack the party.

The cages are lined with bits of old paper. A cursory search reveals that several of these scraps are torn from books and journals, though most are too mangled to read. A successful Search check (Average DC) turns up one surviving, urine-soaked page in the kitten’s cage, written in Magnus’ hand (see page 58).





PAGE FOUND IN THE ANIMAL CAGES

I have performed countless vivisections on fish, mice, rabbits, pigeons, dogs, deer, eagles, bears, beasts, and lately monsters of all sorts. I have mastered the art of forming homunculi as few alchemists before me. I have restored corpses. Yet why do my creations fail to breed true? I can indeed mimic life, yet some spark eludes me. My last creation crawled from the vats... yet its organs were inside out. Another was born with two bodies, yet only one heart, and perished quickly. The answer lies in a return to the first principals, to the primordial slime of the ancient past. I must return to the beginning, the first ooze, seeking the lost matrix that generates all life, and the spark that animates it.

I believe the solution must lie in the things that are older than plants, the ancient, creeping... {the rest of the page is missing}

5. MATERNITY CELL

This room holds captive humanoids used as breeding stock for hybrids. Read or paraphrase the following as the party enters.

The air here reeks of sour vomit. Three large, crude wooden beds lie in a row, beside a small desk and chair. A lit torch illuminates the area. A closed door is visible in the irregularly angled south wall.

Shackled to the nearest beds are an orc and goblin, both female. The orc's eyes are glazed over and she is listless. Her belly is swollen in late pregnancy. Another female goblin on the third bed has already died.

The floor is filthy. One corner is a mess of afterbirth and blood.

Judging by the crusted blood about her loins, the goblin on the third bed died in childbirth.

The surviving orc, Lindzagh, is quite mad; she isn't hostile and barely knows her own name, muttering about "the thing inside me..." and how "the gods have forsaken us." No statistics are necessary given her dire state, though the adventurers may take pity and attempt her rescue. In this case, she has the Orc Peasant statistics, though without any weapon (see *Fantasy Craft*, pages 247 and 249).

The goblin female, Ozra, is also pregnant, though she's only a few weeks along. She's still vital and savage enough to pose a threat to the golems when awake, and so she's been deeply

sedated. She can be awakened with a Heal spell, though this only results in her immediately attacking everyone in the vicinity. She has the Goblin Peasant statistics (found on the same pages).

The torch sconce here triggers a secret door leading into a corridor that winds down and around, eventually exiting through another secret door in the Womb Chamber (see *Room 22*, page 41). Pulling the sconce down and to the right opens the door, and closing the door returns the sconce to its default position.

As this door leads directly into the very center of Magnus' laboratory — indeed, it's how he typically accessed the lower dungeon level — he made sure it was of the highest possible craftsmanship and he's taken every possible precaution in concealing it (he also had the architect killed after the door was built, though the man dramatically underestimated his costs, so Magnus believes he deserved it). As a result of all this care, finding the door requires a successful Search check (Desperate DC). Also, this check may only be attempted if the adventurers specifically ask to search for secret doors in this room — it cannot be found as part of any other non-magical search of the chamber.

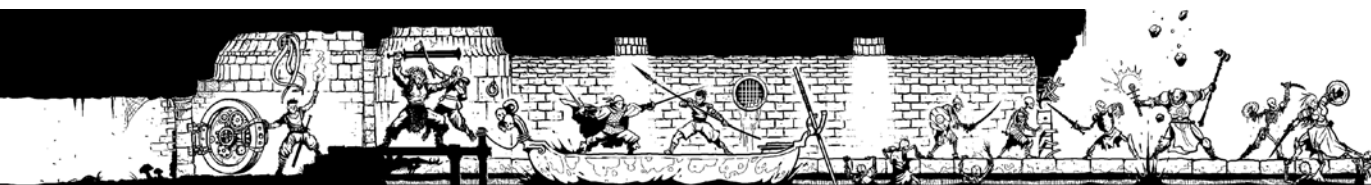
It's possible, of course, that the party may have access to the Detect Secret Doors spell, which costs no spell points and reveals this door with a successful Spellcasting check. If this is also undesirable, you should add a permanent Counter Magic III spell cast upon the center of this room. Note that this violates the typical casting rules — in that Counter Magic doesn't have an enduring Duration — but that's easy enough to explain away as an extraordinarily expensive, unique spell effect tailored just for the occasion. Magnus did, after all, throw an awful lot of money at the dungeon's design and construction.

Heading down to the Womb Chamber skips the adventure forward to Scene 4 (see page 38), though the party may still play through Scene 3 if they back-track, and may even return to Scene 2 at a later time if they want with a new scene shift just before they finish off with this level.

6. GORGON NURSERY

Anyone listening at the door to this room hears the cries of children, or so they think. Read or paraphrase the following to those who enter.

This circular chamber houses four cribs, the lot illuminated by an oil lamp on a nearby shelf. Three of the cribs are empty but one holds a swaddled infant. A second infant is cradled in the arms of a tall figure dressed in a dirty white robe, sitting in a fancy antique rocking chair. The figure's skin has a bluish tint and its spindly limbs seem far too long. Something metallic glints out from under and around the bundle...





Incautious adventurers may decide to act at this point, attacking or trying to communicate. If not...

The figure slowly looks up, its face revealed as a hideously deformed patchwork of mismatched flesh. Perhaps this... thing... was once a woman, though as she rises you find yourself doubtful. She stands fully six and a half feet tall, every part of her seemingly stretched beyond the breaking point. Yet she stands, and strides, with a strong, assured gait.

Unless the adventurers interfere — you may want to remind them she carries an infant — continue with the following.

The woman steps over to one of the empty cribs, whispering into the swaddle. "We have visitors, little one, but they're early, aren't they? Much too early... You aren't ready yet. Not enough meat on you yet... Not enough at all!"

She gently lowers the child into the crib and checks its wrap.

One last chance for the adventurers to respond before...

"You aren't here for them, are you?"

The woman twists toward you, her hands free and out in the open. It's only now that the source of the metal glint becomes clear: the top halves of her fingers have been surgically replaced with long silver blades.

She steps toward you, her head tilting to the side as her flesh-quilt lips curl up at both ends. Her blade-hands lift up with calculating menace.

"You're here to join them!"

This is the Nurse golem, created to care for Magnus' hybrids (see *Cast*, page 28). Like the Butcher she is compelled to capture or slay all intruders, and driven to murderous bloodlust by the tortured flesh-memories of her donor bodies. On a cellular level the many parts of her know that she shouldn't exist, and so they fling her into battle with equal parts zeal and suicidal abandon. The Nurse will either serve her creator in this twisted travesty of life, or find ultimate release in violent death.

After the fight, the adventurers' curiosity or compassion may get the better of them...

In each crib you find a child carefully tucked into the cutest, softest blanket you've ever seen. At first none of the baby is visible, the blanket carefully laid over its face, but as the child notices your presence the blanket shifts, and then falls aside. One tiny snake head pokes up and out of the blanket, and then another, and

another, until it becomes clear that the child's head, its scaly green head, is surrounded by a writhing mass of tiny serpents.

The snakes uncoil and rise up, curiously seeking whatever has awoken them, and the rest of the baby's face is revealed. Its eyes are covered with thin black cloth of the same superior tailoring.

The baby coos as it rouses from its slumber. It smacks its tongue and lips in hunger...

Now the adventurers have to decide what they're going to do with two baby gorgons. They are, after all, just helpless infants — at least as long as their blindfolds stay on.

7. GUARD ROOM

This room controls access to the prisoner cells. Read or paraphrase the following as the party enters through the door at the end of the corridor leading south from Rooms 1 and 2.

Torches are positioned on either side of all three entrances into this large room. In its center is a brick well with a winch and two metal pails. A brazier of coals and a large bucket filled with porridge sit on a table at the far side of the chamber.

Several ceramic mugs rest on a shelf above the table. Some are quite tiny and others are oversized, perhaps made for giants. Metal trays and bowls are stacked nearby, mostly stained with the remains of previous meals. An assortment of chains, whips, collars, and brands hang from hooks on the walls, and a closed cabinet stands in the far corner.

This place is often visited by Magnus' constructs. Most still need to eat and drink, and others come here for food and drink for the prisoners, or for water to bathe them. During the party's first minute in the room, the GM may wish to have a homunculus fly up out of the well carrying a tiny cup (surprised as it gets a drink).

Less than a minute after the adventurers enter, the guard returns...

Lumbering in from the east is a hulking, hideously ugly man-shaped figure with a sloping brow and tiny mismatched eyes. A long surgical scar is visible across his head.

The brute stands perhaps 8 feet tall. He wears a ragged coat and belt, upon which hang a laden pouch, a key ring, and a heavy club.





This is one of three flesh golems on this level: the Custodian (see *Cast*, page 28).

He is assigned to watch over the creatures in the cells (Rooms 9 through 14) — sometimes to keep them in and other times to keep them safe from outsiders, or themselves. The Custodian's method for all these things is largely the same — grab a target, beating it over the head with his great club if necessary, and squeeze it into submission. In the end everything eventually goes to sleep in the Custodian's arms, so he can return it safely to its cell. Every so often one of them resists a little too hard and he snaps or crushes something vital, at which point he drags the remains off to the Butcher to add to the stew (see page 28).

The Custodian also guards one of Magnus' personal creations, an alchemical mix he calls "Repulsion Oil." Three vials of the creamy, mucous-colored stuff are found in the Custodian's pouch, sealed with wax and bearing strange alchemical symbols. With a successful Knowledge check (Tricky DC, or Average with the Chemistry Crafting skill focus), these symbols are identified to mean "ooze" and "disorientation."

Magnus created the oil as a safeguard when dealing with some of the creatures on the lower dungeon level. The oil disrupts the senses of oozes, having the same effect as an Oil of Blurring, though only against creatures with the Ooze Type. Each vial contains a single dose of the substance, which can be spread across a character to protect him from all oozes, or over a single ooze to protect all characters from that creature. In either case the oil lasts 10 minutes.

The cabinet on the far wall contains many glass bottles, beakers, and jars for sample collection, along with bandages, ointments, and tonics to tend the captives as needed. Mixed in with these is a small journal Magnus had only just started before the Inquisitors' arrival. The most recent (incomplete) entry can be found on page 49.



ENTRY FROM WELL ROOM JOURNAL

Daily Journal Entry:

Bokk's hunters brought in a new specimen, a wonderfully fierce young male drake, reddish-black of scale and only slightly injured by the harpoon used to bring it down. It threatened, it bellowed, it blew smoke from its nostrils, but I was not deterred. After weighing it (529 pounds) and measuring it (12 feet and 2 inches from snout to tail), my golems strapped it to the stone table with strong chains, attached the iron muzzle to muffle its cries, and pinned its wings with my longest iron needles. Only then did I begin my examination.

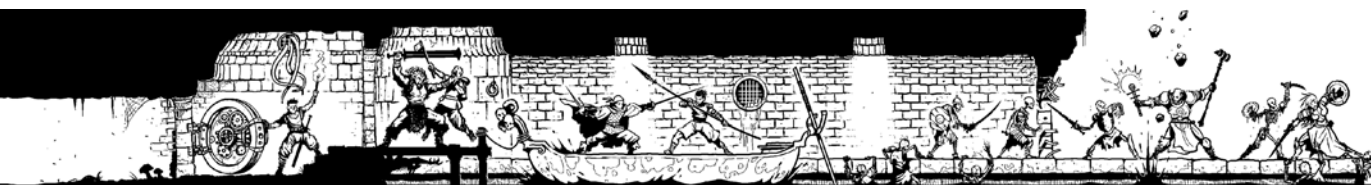
Minion dutifully recorded my observations on his tablet and Luna had her easel out to paint the proceedings. My love's new body retains some of her skill as an artist, and she drew the most marvelously intricate diagrams of the beast's wing musculature as I dissected it. This despite the creature's annoying writhing!

The drake is both like and unlike the other reptilians I have examined. In fact, it had much less in common with the saurian than I expected. Riddles! What organ generates the drake's fire? As Luna sponged away the blood a brilliant idea came to me. Perhaps I should extract just one organ at a time. I can apply healing potions, sew the creature up, and induce it to breathe fire each time until I identify the organ in question.

I will need much more healing elixir, for a constant bath of vitalizing fluids will be needed to sustain the beast through this battery of tests. It is a costly bother, but necessary. I cannot lose such a beautiful specimen before I have made full use of it.

I do wish my minions had procured a female drake as well, but I suppose beggars cannot be choosers. Perhaps Luna can extract some of this one's seed and we can try inseminating the basilisk again. It would yield an interesting hybrid to be sure, and with enough seed I might be able to try later with a saurian or wyvern. I still believe that all the draconic races sprang from such experiments, and I am eager to see if I can expand on the work of my esteemed predecessors.

Indeed, differentiation of key characteristics among the folk species is crucially important to my research regarding the original source-breed. Are the differences merely cosmetic or do they run deeper? My newest experiments will attempt to answer these questions, and... [TEXT ENDS ABRUPTLY]





8. CELL CORRIDOR

This corridor bisects the guard room with no doors or other physical barriers on either side of the intersection. Thus the Custodian has a ready view of all the cell doors in both directions.

Long, smooth stone corridors extend to the east and west from the well room. The west one turns left at the end, heading out of sight to the south.

Three metal doors are visible in each direction, each barred from the outside. The air in both directions smells of sweat, decaying flesh, and waste — the stench of misery. Faint moans are heard from the cells.

Each cell door is secured with a heavy bar that can easily be lifted out of its cradle, along with a common pin lock (Average Prestidigitation check to open). A high, square metal window in each door can be unlatched and swung open to look inside, and a second wide flap midway up the door can be swung down to deliver plates of food.

The prisoner(s) and other contents of each cell are described in the following sections. Unless otherwise specified, the boxed text for each cell can be read or paraphrased as the door is opened or as the adventurers open the window and look inside.

9. HOLDING CELL

Two folk lay on mats of straw here. The first is a very dead orc and the other is a listless male ogre with matted, filthy hair and a scraggly beard. He wears dirty rags that scarcely conceal the weeping sores all over his body. By the look of it the ogre hasn't eaten in some time and is suffering from starvation. Still he has the strength to raise a glance in your direction. He wavers, unsure whether you're here to help, and he reaches for a gnawed bone nearby. It's hard to tell, but you're pretty sure the bone is what's left of a goblin's leg...

The ogre's name is Jordark, not that he'd readily remember it at this point. He's half-crazed from lack of sustenance, and unless he's talked down with a successful Impress check (Tricky DC, which drops to Easy if he's offered food) he attacks anything that looks edible — though not very well in his condition (he is effectively fatigued IV until fed and healed).

With some vittles and attention (any Cure Wounds or Heal spell, or a successful Medicine check with an Average DC), Jordark loses the fatigued condition and explains that he's been here for two months, during which time he's been subjected to a variety of experiments: lengthy immersion in cold water; sleep deprivation; electric shocks; and "other things I won't talk about" (he's a former soldier and still very proud). He further explains that between the experiments he was weighed and

measured, and that samples of blood and other bodily fluids were drawn.

Jordark was captured by slavers, along with three goblins, his traveling companions. They were all brought here and sold ("for just 20 silver a head... disgusting"). The others starved. "Except for Ralz," he says, gazing at his makeshift club with sorrow. "He hung himself."

More about Jordark, including his statistics, can be found in the Cast section (see page 29).

10. RECOVERY CELL

The door to this cell is very heavy, made of iron rather than cheap metal like the rest. There is no barred window, and a bucket of water sits just outside. When the party opens the door, read or paraphrase the following.

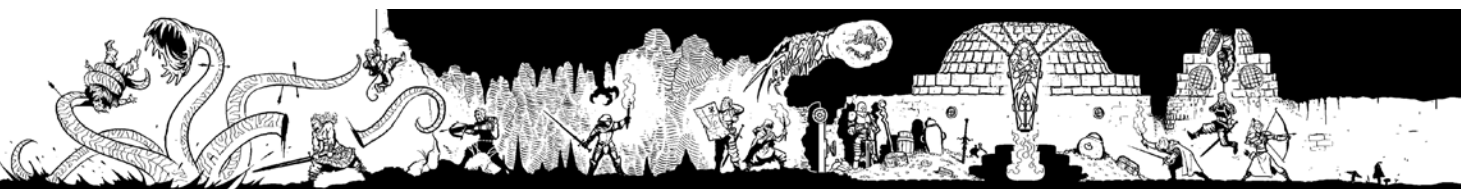
The moment this cell door opens a raging drake presses out into the corridor, rising up and spreading its wings as far as the corridor will allow. A chain is wrapped around the beast's maw, holding it closed, though from the look of it the links will snap any second.

The drake's body is covered in surgical scars and its reddish-black scales have a sickly pallor, though the creature moves with great purpose. Its eyes are flooded with rage and fury, and it's already looking past you, sure you're no match for its might.

This is Vaslarac the Black, a drake brigand known for terrorizing the highways south of Valespire (see Cast, page 29). Adventurers who succeed with a Knowledge check (Average DC) recognize the creature and recall that the Crown placed a 1,000s bounty on his head, and that he mysteriously went missing some weeks ago.

Vaslarac has been enduring Magnus' tests, waiting for the chance to escape, and he's decided that this is it. His one all-consuming drive is to escape the manor, preferably with as many valuable trophies as he can grab on the way out. Should he find and kill (or even better, eat) the good doctor along the way, all the better. The only things that give the drake pause are members of his own species and saurians, both of which he views as kin. All others are fair targets, though Vaslarac doesn't stick around to kill everyone unless he has to — he'd much rather just get on with his escape.

During the first round, Vaslarac can use neither his Bite nor his Breath Weapon. The chain snaps at the start of Round 2, freeing him to act as he will. Vaslarac is ruthless in his attempt to flee, always choosing attacks and other actions that remove obstacles first and foremost. He specifically avoids attacking saurians and drakes unless he must to get past them, and even then he chooses the least aggressive or damaging option available.





Saurians and drakes can also possibly press through Vaslarac's bloodlust so cooler heads can prevail. This involves a cooperative Impress or Intimidate check (Tricky DC), and again, is only an option for saurians and drakes. Even with success, however, Vaslarac only pauses for a moment or two, so the pitch had better be quick, and good. Vaslarac responds well to talk of retribution against Magnus and his servants and holdings, as well as the promise of valuables. Other proposals are unlikely to find traction, though the GM should give Talkers their moment, and reward creative presentations.

11. MONITOR ROOM

A foot-tall, winged reptilian humanoid flies by as you peer into this cell. It pauses for a moment to size you up, mutters to itself, and claws something onto a wax tablet it carries. Behind the creature, the room contains a small wooden table where a flickering candle and a pile of unused wax tablets are set.

The flying creature is a homunculus (see *Cast*, page 30). It is charged with monitoring the experiments in the other cells, and like all of Magnus' servants it cares little about anything beyond its instructions. The remarks it makes in the tablet are written in unique shorthand, but a few vague details can be gleaned: times, dates, several binary observations, and the like.

12. ACID TEST

This cell's door lock is slightly more intricate than the others (Tricky DC instead of Average). There is also a lever in the wall next to the cell window. It has three positions and is currently set to the middle.

Looking through the window before playing with the lever reveals the following.

This cell contains a rainbow-scaled saurian strapped to a heavy iron bed frame. On a post above him is a glass container housing a clear liquid that slowly drips onto the saurian's chest. With each drop the saurian's scales sizzle and burn, his body contorting in new agony.

The mechanism controlling the container disappears into the cell wall, several feet above a lone desk and stool. On the desk is a partially inscribed wax tablet, a few scraps of parchment, and a candle.

So long as the lever remains in the middle position, the flow inflicts 1d3 acid damage every 2 rounds. Pushing the lever up releases the flow of acid at full strength...

The container tips forward, draining much faster than before. The increased flow splashes over the saurian, whose screams reach a fever pitch before he slips out of consciousness. Thereafter the flow begins to melt his hide, threatening to eat straight through his torso.

The full-speed wash inflicts 2d6 acid damage per round, and lasts six rounds before the acid supply is exhausted. This could very well kill the saurian, as he's already suffered significant damage (he's at 1/2 his total vitality, rounded up, by the time the party arrives).

Alternatively, pushing the lever down staunches the acid flow entirely...

The container tips back, the flow ending. The saurian continues to wince per the drip's former timing, but after a few beats he turns his head toward the door. His face displays confusion and gratitude.

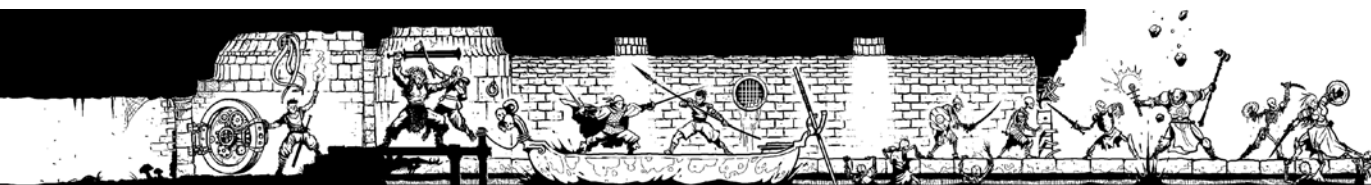
The saurian continues to suffer damage from previous acid drops, and depending on his condition when the flow is staunches this may still kill him (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 210).

The saurian is Jarn P'Tor, a veteran hunter captured with a clutch-brother (see *Cast*, page 30).

Despite his excruciating pain he happily commits his arm to anyone who rescues him from the cell, though he does implore his saviors to help him find his sibling, K'Varr. Sadly, the other saurian is already dead, but there's no way for any of the characters to know that before they find his remains in the Vivisection Laboratory (see page 39).

The wax tablet on the desk bears shorthand inscriptions by the homunculi that most recently looked in on Jarn. With a successful Investigate check (Average DC), an adventurer can work out the basic function of the lever at the door. This check takes a full round, however, during which time Jarn continues to suffer additional acid damage unless something is done to prevent, block, or redirect the drip.

If the party rifles through the papers on the desk, they find another of Magnus' notes (see page 60).





NOTE FROM ACID ROOM

Note to Self:

Lost another specimen to shock. Must develop better elixirs to reduce trauma during vivisection. Pain management is crucial. New apparatus nearly complete. The acid drip will yield the final data. It may also reveal helpful information about derma properties. Two birds and all.

13. GAS CHAMBER

This cell's door is made of heavy iron like the one at the other end of the corridor (Room 10), and the window is made of inch-thick glass rather than metal. In fact, this glass is a sheet of alchemically treated one-way material Magnus has developed, allowing those outside to see in, but not the other way around. The glass' arcane composition also carries sound, letting those outside listen in on the occupants.

If the adventurers look in without opening the door, they find the following.

Two young women, an orc and a human, crouch at opposite ends of this small, bare cell, each brandishing a short, wicked knife at the other. Both wear only ragged shifts. A bandage is wrapped tightly around the human's head, covering her left eye. A grate is located in the floor between the women, yellow mist rising through it.

"The room is filling with poison gas," the orc says. Her accent is harsh, her tone frightened but defiant. "You want to die?"

"Everyone dies," says the human. "I give thanks my road has been long."

"You heard that witch!" the orc says. "Only one key opens the lock." She raises her knife and coughs again, heavier now. "I'll gut you... I'll do it."

"Don't play that monster's game," says the human. "I will defend myself, if I must." She coughs now, her measured breathing finally taking enough of the gas into her lungs. "Even if one of our keys does open the door, you think these Circle-spawned horrors will let us go? Are you that naive?"

The orc's coughing doesn't let her answer. She's spitting up blood now.

"Nazdregga," the human continues, "let us use this time to pray together. If the gods do not answer, we still die free, as proud folk, not murdering animals..."

At any point the adventurers may intercede, interrupting the conversation. A single turn of the cell door's key halts the gas, and another opens the door. Breaking the glass requires a successful Athletics check (Hard DC), though 10 or more points of lethal damage also do the trick. Once the door opens or the glass is broken, the gas begins to dissipate; otherwise it reaches a critical concentration within the room 5 rounds after the boxed text ends (and triggers the NPC actions at the end of this description).

Of course, this is yet another of Magnus' twisted tests, this time focusing on lung capacity and relative aggression. The occupants, an orc named Nazdregga and a human Inquisitor named Elessandra, have been told that the gas will kill them and that the only way to live is to kill the other and cut a key out of their stomach. All of this is laced with lies; neither of the keys actually opens the cell door, and the gas isn't in fact lethal but rather a concentrated, fast-acting knockout poison (see *Fantasy Craft*, pages 165 and 216).

Any character entering the room within 3 rounds after the door is opened or the window is shattered, or who's immediately adjacent to either when the room's seal is broken, is exposed to the gas while it's still effective. After 1 round, each exposed character must make a Fortitude save (DC 14) or fall unconscious for 1 minute.

A third occupant hovers in the upper right corner of the room, just out of sight from the window — a homunculus inscribing notes in a wax tablet. The creature is immune to the gas, not having to breathe, and it wears a tiny ring of invisibility Magnus had commissioned specifically for it (this is Magnus' favorite creation, which he affectionately calls "Minion").

Minion has been in the room since before the prisoners were brought in, so they have no idea they're being observed. Once the test is complete, Minion flies down to the lower level to deliver its findings to the Golem-Bride (the "witch" and "monster" the prisoners refer to in the boxed text). Minion has the same statistics as the other homunculi and acts in the same ways (see page 30).

The invisibility ring is sized for a Tiny character, so most adventurers can't wear it. In the unlikely event that one can, or in a campaign with a magic item marketplace or in which the party might have another use for the ring, it's a Level 3 magic item with one Lesser Charm (the ability to cast the Invisibility spell once per scene), 10 uses, and a Reputation Value of 30. It's a pretty thing, made of simple silver and polished regularly (because Magnus likes Minion to look worthy of his name).

If the gas reaches the critical concentration as described earlier, Nazdregga decides she'd rather live a killer than die a victim, and jumps Elessandra. They are well matched — the orc's superior mass and strength against the human's superior training and measured breathing as the gas seeped into the room — and so neither gains a clear advantage before they both collapse, unconscious.





Unless the adventurers do something within a few rounds after that, Minion exits the room intending to report his findings to the Golem-Bride. Without interference the homunculi locks the cell door and heads down the southern stairs (Location 15).

14. THE PSEUDO-NAGA

This cell is lined with straw and contains a massive coiled snake. It appears to be slumbering.

The snake isn't actually slumbering, and isn't actually a snake — not entirely, anyway. When the party makes enough noise to attract its attention, say by opening the door or window, they find the following...

The snake slowly uncoils to reveal... the head of a female goblin, grafted on through means you shudder to consider. The head's eye sockets are masses of scar tissue — the creature is blind — yet her pointy ears perk up as she turns toward the cell door. She comes up short, tethered to the far wall by a leather collar and chain.

"Please sirs, who are you?" she pleads in a sweet goblin voice. "My limbs are bound and I can't feel them anymore. Will you release me?"

This is Millie, a delusional victim of Magnus' early surgical experiments (see *Cast*, page 32). Millie's head and mind are those of a goblin, while the rest of her is a giant worm. In self-defense her mind has created the fiction that she is merely bound in a straightjacket and trapped somewhere without light. Correcting her sends her into an unthinking rage. Otherwise this sad creature follows her rescuers everywhere they go, slowly pressing forward like an inchworm. She continuously pleads for her release, with the occasional break to ask whatever else is at the tip of her tongue.

15. DOWNWARD STAIRCASE

The west end of the cell block corridor turns left and descends into darkness. The air here is damp and humid, smelling of yeast and fear...

Embarking down these stairs shifts the action to Scene 3 (see page 32).

DIRECTION

Here are some questions you might be asked, and answers for you to offer or implement.

Q: Can the party interrogate a captured golem or homunculus?

A: These creatures have (very) limited free will and are absolutely loyal to Magnus. There is nothing to be learned from them and they taunt intruders without fear, knowing there's nothing anyone can do to truly harm them.

Q: Do the Inquisitor weapons count as Prizes?

A: Nope. They're ordinary gear, albeit with expert craftsmanship and some built-in upgrades.

Q: I eat some porridge. What happens?

A: Nothing for several hours. Then you'll be busy for a while.

Q: Aww, those baby gorgons are cute. Can we keep them?

A: The GM may permit one or more of them to be claimed and raised, though years of careful rearing is required, and that's not counting the obvious potential pitfalls ("Daddy, Sandra just turned another sitter to stone"). Each adopted gorgon also counts as a Prize (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 186).

Less kind adventurers may see the baby gorgons as potential weapons, facing them at enemies as they proceed through the dungeon. This is effective but not exactly heroic, and is just grounds for you to dock them some XP — perhaps half of each adversary thus defeated (rounded down). This is of course entirely your call, and isn't appropriate for every party, story, or setting.

Q: How in the Realm did they get a drake in that cell?

A: Very carefully. Numerous sleeping agents and a Levitation spell were involved.

Q: If Elessandra is freed, what can she tell the party?

A: What Elessandra says to the adventurers depends mainly on their apparent loyalties. If they present themselves as loyal to the Church, she's happy to tell them everything she knows, while outsiders learn only what's needed to support her mission. Anyone she believes is loyal to the Circle must first prove they aren't working with Magnus and then prove they want to help her complete her mission before she tells them anything. Even then she keeps one eye on them at all times, expecting the party to betray her at the first opportunity.

Elessandra and another Inquisitor, Zebulon, were sent to Croatalorn Manor to investigate suspicious purchases of live monsters and folk slaves from Lucien Bokk, a Valespire merchant with ties to the Circle. They arrived at the manor house, passing themselves off as acquaintances of Bokk, and met Magnus and his creepy wife, as well as a few cloaked and hooded servants. After some verbal fencing the Inquisitors were provided manor rooms and left to their own devices for the evening.





While in the Bathroom, Elessandra encountered a ghost (Lunalia's, though Elessandra doesn't know this), and the words the ghost wrote on the Bathroom mirror led her to the Ballroom's secret door. She fetched Zebulon and they started down into the dungeon but they were almost immediately discovered by Magnus' golems. The ensuing fight forced the Inquisitors back up the stairs and into the Ballroom, where the bulk of the fighting occurred.

Magnus and the Golem-Bride arrived, bringing more golems with them, and soon the Inquisitors found themselves overwhelmed. It was surely with divine intervention that Elessandra was able to deliver the Forsakening poison with a precise dart shot to Magnus' neck. "At least he suffers the gods' wrath," she says, her eyes fixed in grim satisfaction. The last thing she saw before she was knocked unconscious was Zebulon brought down beside her.

Elessandra's memory of the next several days is a blur of fear and pain. Magnus slowly lost control of his mind and body as the Forsakening took hold, and he spent most of that time interrogating the Inquisitors for the cure. "Fortunately there is none," Elessandra says, "at least, none that we know." Magnus threatened to kill and animate the Inquisitors as flesh golems, and in a fit of rage the madman plucked out Elessandra's left eye.

She didn't wake up again for a long while, and by then Magnus had stopped visiting — "he must finally have succumbed" — but Elessandra's torment continued at the hands of his terrible wife. "She is undead, I think, or perhaps worse."

Elessandra didn't see Zebulon after her eye was taken, but the wife-thing constantly spoke of him. "You should know," she was told, "that your companion has a good brain, and it will not go to waste. In a sense, he might witness my husband's dreams realized, but will you? Tell me... How do I reverse Magnus' condition?"

When Elessandra refused to answer — again, because she couldn't — the wife-thing brought her to the gas room with the orc woman Nazdregga. There she was left, presumably to die.

CAST

PSEUDO-CHIMERA (STANDARD NPC, POTENTIAL ADVERSARY)

"Meow? Baaah! Hssss!"

Description: This experiment is roughly the size of a large dog, with dragon-like wings, four legs, and three heads: one of a large tomcat, one of a drake, and the last of a goat.

Motivations: The pseudo-chimera gnawed its way free of its cage and now wanders the dungeon in search of food. It's been feral since birth, when it gnawed its way out of its drake mother. Still, it realizes it's small and keeps its distance, assuming

everyone and everything is a threat. If approached, the creature lashes out for a single round and flees until and unless cornered, in which case it fights to the death.

Notes: It is unlikely this creature will be much of a threat to most parties. This is intentional, as it's just a taste of what's to come deeper in the dungeon.

Pseudo-Chimera (Small Beast Flyer/Walker — 78 XP):

Str 14, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 7, Wis 12, Cha 10; SZ S (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 60 ft. winged flight, 30 ft. ground; Init I; Atk V; Def I; Res IV; Health III; Comp I; Skills: Notice III, Survival IV; Qualities: *Charge attack, condition immunity (flanked), damage reduction 2, frenzy I, swift attack 1, tough I*

Attacks/Weapons: Goat's Head (Gore I: dmg 1d4+2 lethal; threat 19–20; qualities: *bleed*), Cat's Head (Bite I: dmg 1d6+2 lethal; threat 18–20), Drake's Head (Bite I: dmg 1d6+2 lethal; threat 18–20), Drake's Breath (fire damage attack I: 20 ft. cone; dmg 1d4 fire per 2 TL, Ref DC 10 for 1/2 damage)

Treasure: 1T

THE BUTCHER, THE NURSE, & THE CUSTODIAN (SPECIAL NPCs, ADVERSARIES)

Description: Magnus created these three flesh golems from the remains of servants who once worked for his family, along with a few body parts harvested from locals who mysteriously went missing. Each is stitched together with steel thread, metal clamps, and similar strictures. Their faces are twisted in rage, their mismatched eyes betraying their inner torment.

The Butcher has a huge cleaver blade grafted to his right hand, while the Nurse has long, sharp finger talons. The Custodian has no specific combat apparatus, though he carries a great club and can engulf opponents within his massive arms to crush them (it's what he does to subdue captives when they need to sleep, except with more force). Each of the golems is a twisted mockery of life: the Butcher is weighed down by an immense bulk of impossible muscles; every part of the Nurse's body is unnaturally elongated, like putty worked too hard for too long; and the Custodian is warped and revolting, a misshapen pretzel of humanity that hurts and seethes with every step.

Motivation: Upon their creation the golems were magically bound to follow Magnus' orders, and those of the Golem-Bride. The Butcher's duty is to collect the bodies of departed prisoners, carve them up, and make stews from the parts to feed the others (and the oozes at the lower level). The Nurse looks after the hybrid children in Room 6 (*see page 21*), and the Custodian acts as jailor and rudimentary physician for those in the cells to the south. All have orders to confine or kill intruders and escaped prisoners, and each takes sadistic joy inflicting pain whenever possible, perhaps to distract from their own suffering.





Flesh Golems (Large Construct Walkers — 59 XP): Str 16, Dex 8, Con 10, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ L (2×2, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init I; Atk IV; Def III; Res II; Health V; Comp I; Skills: None; Qualities: *Achilles heel (fire), clumsy, damage reduction 3, fearless II, feral, monstrous defense I, spell defense IV, stench, tough I*

Attacks/Weapons: (Butcher / Nurse): Claw III (dmg 2d8+3 lethal; threat 19–20)

Attacks/Weapons: (Custodian): Squeeze III (dmg 2d12+3 subdual, upgrades: alternate damage (subdual); notes: Grapple benefit), great club (dmg 2d8+3 lethal, threat 20, error 1–2, qualities: massive)

Treasure: None, but each has a ring of keys for all the locks in the dungeon

BABY GORGONS (STANDARD NPCs, POTENTIAL ADVERSARIES)

Description: Magnus' current crop of hybrids is a variation on the "common" gorgon breed, with scaly green and yellow skin and a wreath of snakes instead of hair. Both babies in the Nursery are blindfolded to protect the Nurse and their other caretakers.

Motivation: Despite the danger posed by their gaze attacks, these are infants. Their aggression is more about discomfort than anger, and ends as soon as they're fed, changed, and rocked for a little while.

Baby Gorgons (Tiny Folk Walkers — 44 XP): Str 6, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 16, Cha 12; SZ T (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init IV; Atk II; Def I; Res IV; Health I; Comp I; Skills: None; Qualities: *Condition immunity (flat-footed), damage reduction 1, darkvision I, fearsome*

Attacks/Weapons: Snakes (Bite I: dmg 1d4 lethal + weakening poison; threat 18–20; upgrades: venomous), Petrifying Gaze (petrifying attack I: 80 ft. gaze; Fort DC 10 or be turned to stone)

Gear: Diaper, baby bottle, blindfold that can easily come off

Treasure: None

JORDARK (STANDARD NPC, POTENTIAL ADVERSARY)

"Is that food? Can I eat it?"

Description: Bokk's slavers captured this ogre some months ago, snatching him and his three goblin traveling companions from a small community just outside Valespire. Magnus ordered Jordark be denied food as part of another deprivation experiment just shortly before the Inquisitors arrived, and the Custodian doesn't have the capacity to reject that order now that the master is indisposed. Consequently Jordark is close to death when the party reaches his cell.

Motivations: Jordark is desperate for anything to eat, especially now that the last of the bodies have turned in the cell. If the ogre sees any opportunity to eat he seizes it, even if it risks his life (anything is better than starving to death). If Jordark is offered food and tended as described on page 24, he can be convinced to come with the party, especially if promised a way out of the manor. He can even fight, though not for long in his condition (he is effectively fatigued IV until fed and healed).

Jordark (Large Folk Walker — 32 XP): Str 14, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 8, Cha 10; SZ L (2×2, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init III; Atk IV; Def II; Res III; Health I; Comp I; Skills: None; Qualities: *Feat (Rage Basics), feral, fearless I, improved stability, tough I*

Attacks/Weapons: Club (dmg 1d8+2 subdual; threat 20; materials: crude)

Gear: None



Treasure: None

VASLARAC THE BLACK (SPECIAL NPC, POTENTIAL ADVERSARY)

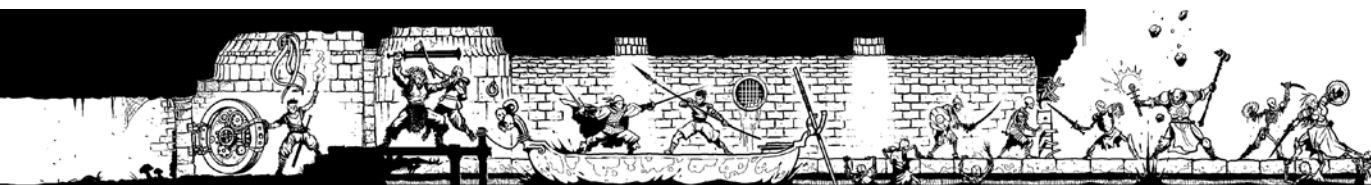
"Die, monstrous human scum!"

Description: This drake's lean body is covered in multiple recent surgical scars. When he is first met a chain is wound about his jaws, holding them shut, but he snaps it the following round.

Motivations: Not all the prisoners in Magnus' cells are innocent victims. Before he was captured Vaslarac robbed and killed travelers on the highways south of Valespire. Indeed, he'd gained something of a reputation for himself, and he may be recognized by one or more of the adventurers (with an Average Knowledge check) as an infamous brigand with a 1,000s bounty on his head.

Vaslarac was brought down when he attacked one of Lucien Bokk's caravans. At first the slaver-merchant planned to turn the drake in for the bounty, but then Magnus asked for a drake and offered far more for the beast's delivery.

Since Vaslarac's arrival at the manor, he's been subjected to many painful experiments that have left him weak of body but not of spirit. He's been playing possum, lulling his captors into a false sense of security and waiting for the right moment to break free. Vaslarac strikes out against any non-draconic characters who open his cell. Saurians and other drakes may be able to talk Vaslarac into helping the party explore the rest of the manor (with a successful





Tricky Impress or Intimidate check), though the drake's loyalty extends only so long as his vengeance continues to be sated, and he is given the chance to claim manor treasures as his own. The first time Vaslarac can make off with a big score, he's off like a shot. Given half a chance, he'll also savagely consume Magnus' body, Forsakening or no.

Vaslarac (Large Beast Flyer/Walker — 55 XP): Str 12, Dex 10, Con 8, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ L (2×3, Reach 2); Spd 40 ft. winged flight, 30 ft. ground; Init V; Atk IV; Def III; Res III; Health III; Comp II; Skills: Acrobatics IV, Intimidate VI, Tactics IV; Qualities: *Cold-blooded, menacing threat, tricky (Cheap Shot)*

Attacks/Weapons: Fire Breath (fire damage attack II: 20 ft. beam; dmg 1d6 fire per 2 TL, Ref DC 15 for 1/2 damage), Bite II (dmg 1d10+1 lethal; threat 17–20), Claw II (dmg 1d8+1 lethal; threat 19–20)

Gear: None

Treasure: None, but he has a hoard of buried loot in a cave several day's journey from the manor (5A)

HOMUNCULI (STANDARD NPCs)

"New specimens! New specimens... Tell us how you feel."

Description: Tiny cousins of golems, these creatures resemble bald, copper-scaled, bat-eared lizard gargoyles (their faces having a vague resemblance to Magnus' own). The homunculi speak in squeaky high-pitched voices, and correspond in a unique shorthand Magnus developed for many of his own notes.

Motivation: The homunculi are magically compelled to serve Magnus — and only Magnus — in all things. When he was still in control of his body, they took his dictations, served food for him and his guests and staff, and fetched whatever he needed. Now that he's unable to give them new orders, the homunculi act on previous ones, which include observing ongoing experiments and recording subject conditions and actions on wax tablets, using their claws as styluses. The homunculi also clean, though only when nothing else demands their attention. A pair of homunculi are also charged with periodically looking in on Magnus, and they do so every few hours (these are the homunculi the GM can introduce if the adventurers are having a hard time finding the way down into the dungeon during Scene 1).

The homunculi were originally much more alert and intelligent than they are now, but their mental processes have been disrupted by the Forsakening poison coursing through Magnus' system (they share a telepathic and empathic bond with him).

In their reduced capacities, the homunculi mistakenly assume the adventurers are escaped test subjects. Their commands don't include combat of any kind, so they don't try to "recapture" the party; instead, they either fly to the nearest flesh golems for assistance or take the chance to make some

observations about the subjects while they're out of their cells. The homunculi flit about the party's heads, asking how they feel and what they want (though they have no intention of giving it to them). They take notes about the adventurers' physical and emotional states, their actions, and their words. The homunculi are especially interested in any details that relate to species traits, including unique abilities and attacks. Unless the adventurers threaten the homunculi the creatures may even tag along with them, asking questions and making observations along the way, commonly at extremely inopportune moments (say, when the party is under attack).

When forced to defend themselves, the homunculi rely on their Bites and try to withdraw as soon as possible (they only remain to defend Magnus, should he be assaulted in their presence).

Homunculi (Tiny Construct Flyers/Walkers): Str 8, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 8, Wis 12, Cha 7; SZ T (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 40 ft. winged flight, 20 ft. ground; Init IV; Atk IV; Def II; Res III; Health III; Comp II; Skills: Acrobatics III, Blend IV, Investigate III, Search III, Spellcasting II; Spells: Living Library I, Read Magic; Qualities: *Cagey I, class ability (Burglar: look out!; Mage: spell secret (Living Library I)), expanded spellbook I, telepathic*

Attacks/Weapons: Slumbering Bite (Bite I: dmg 1d4–1 + knockout poison; threat 18–20; upgrades: venomous)

Treasure: None

JARN P'TOR (SPECIAL NPC)

"We mussst think carefully before we plan our next move if we are to ssssurvive this deadly mazzze."

Description: This rainbow-scaled saurian is the latest victim of Magnus' ongoing exploration of pain tolerances. Jarn is discovered strapped onto a metal bed frame under an acid drip, and he's already suffered significant damage (he's at 1/2 his total vitality, rounded up, by the time the party arrives). The scales on his chest are badly burned by the drip but he is a veteran hunter, cool and collected, and assuming the experience doesn't kill him he bounces back quickly.

Motivations: Jarn and a clutch brother, K'Varr, were captured by Bokk's monster hunters several weeks ago, as they were on their way home to one of the Realm's western swamps. Jarn has not seen K'Varr in some time, and fears the worst (he's right — the other saurian is already dead, the remains awaiting discovery in the Vivisection Laboratory).

Should the party rescue Jarn, or merely end the misery of the acid test, the saurian gladly helps them however he can. He's a competent hunter, and though not as experienced or hardy as the adventurers his bravery is unquestionable. All he asks in return is a promise that should K'Varr still live, the party will try to save him, or that if he isn't, the party will help Jarn recover the remains for a proper funeral.





Notes: Jarn could make an excellent Personal Lieutenant if he survives the adventure and one of the adventurers later chooses the feat. In this case, his XP value is 47.

Jarn P'Tor (Medium Folk Walker): Str 12, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init IV; Atk V; Def III; Res II; Health III; Comp II; Skills: Notice III, Search VI, Sneak III, Survival VI; Qualities: *Aquatic I, cold-blooded, class ability (Scout: killing blow, trophy hunter), darkvision I, favored foes (animal)*

Attacks/Weapons: Bite I (dmg 1d8+1 lethal, threat 18–20), Tail Slap I (dmg 1d8+1 lethal, threat 20, qualities: *reach +1*)

NAZDREGGA (STANDARD NPC)

“Curse you, I don’t want to die!”

Description: Nazdregga is a lean and muscular orc woman with yellow eyes and black scraggly hair. A thief by trade, she picked the wrong merchant’s pocket and was sold into slavery for her trouble. She passed from owner to owner until she ended up in one of Bokk’s caravans. Severe burns are visible on her arms and legs, souvenirs of her time here at the manor. She speaks with a harsh, clipped accent.

Motivation: After three weeks in the cells and being thrown into a death trap with a Church Inquisitor, Nazdregga is ready for a change of scenery. She’s a practical woman and isn’t looking for revenge; she’s content with simply getting out of this alive so she can return to her family in Valespire. Sadly, Nazdregga is more than a little fatalist by nature, and assumes there’s no chance of escape — until there is. Like any good fatalist confronted with a desperate chance to prove herself wrong, she fights tooth and nail to get away the moment it looks like she actually can.

Notes: Being a member of the Valespire underground and a professional thief, Nazdregga could make an excellent Contact if she survives the adventure and one of the adventurers later spends the necessary Reputation to secure her support. In this case, her XP value is 45.

Nazdregga (Medium Folk Walker): Str 12, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground (Run 150 ft.); Init IV; Atk III; Def V; Res II; Health II; Comp II; Skills: Blend VII, Disguise IV, Prestidigitation VII; Qualities: Always ready, class ability (Assassin: quick on your feet 1/ session; Burglar: stash it), grueling combatant, light-sensitive, superior runner I

Attacks/Weapons: Dagger (dmg 1d6 lethal; threat 19–20; qualities: bleed, hurl)

Gear: None

Treasure: None

ELESSANDRA THE INQUISITOR (SPECIAL NPC)

“This ungodly mess is exactly why I’m supposed to be here.”

Description: Elessandra is a fit, athletic human female with short black hair and one icy blue eye (the right one — the left is covered with a bandage that’s tightly wrapped around her head). She is presently barefoot like all the prisoners, and dressed in a ragged gray shift. Her body is covered in cuts and bruises. She speaks with a cultured Valespire accent that suggests a good education or high birth.

Motivations: As a dedicated Church agent, Elessandra believes in the institution’s mission and is fiercely dedicated to its ideals (see *Time of High Adventure*, page 71). She is calm, cool, pious, and given to understatement in the face of danger. She is intensely moral but also stern and deadly when facing those she considers evil, including the worst members of the Circle. She is absolutely without species prejudice, believing all intelligent folk are equally deserving of life.

Elessandra is embarrassed at her capture and believes it is due to her own overconfidence. She allowed her superiors to send her here without a full briefing, and now the best she can make of this situation — assuming she survives — is to liberate the other innocents suffering with her. Once free Elessandra is determined to destroy Magnus’ research in all its forms, not just to deliver a blow to the Circle but also to ensure his atrocities cannot be repeated. Privately, Elessandra yearns to find and rescue her partner, Inquisitor Zebulon (though if she learns of his fate, this goal shifts to ending his misery).

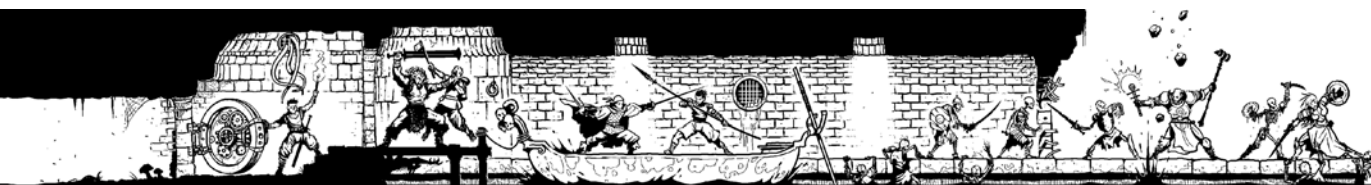
Should the adventurers be loyal to the Circle, Elessandra may still band with them but only to reach her objectives and never in violation of her personal or religious beliefs. In this case she spends the entire time questioning the adventurers’ choices, hoping to undermine their resolve by forcing them to confront the obvious fallacies in the Circle worldview. She points to Croatalorn’s madness as a clear example of the dangers of their chosen path. Converting even one character is considered a major coup for the Church, not to mention a huge strategic asset in the struggle against sorcery in the Realm.

Elessandra (Medium Folk Walker — 76 XP *): Str 12, Dex 12, Con 14, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 14; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init III; Atk V; Def IV; Res III; Health: VI; Comp: I; Skills: Athletics V, Intimidate VIII, Resolve IV, Ride III, Survival V, Tactics V; Qualities: *Class ability (Captain: battle planning I (I want them alive!, press on!); Paladin: stand in judgment I), devoted (Heroism I and II), fearless II, Interests (Alignment: The Church)*

Attacks/Weapons: Dagger (dmg 1d6+1 lethal, threat 19–20, qualities: bleed, hurl); she usually carries her ritual weapon, a mace, which is currently locked in the Armory (see page 19)

Gear: None

Treasure: None





* Elessandra is not typically an adversary but due to her staunch views there's a remote possibility she may become one. Her XP value is provided in case this happens.

MILLIE (STANDARD NPC)

"Everyone tells me I have exquisite legs. What do you think?"

Description: Magnus considers "Millie" the most successful of his first generation hybrids (those created purely through surgery rather than breeding). In this case he took the head of a goblin spice merchant's daughter and grafted it onto the body of a giant worm, creating a primitive naga form. Magnus also removed the goblin's eyes in a vain effort to keep her mind stable after the ordeal.

Millie moves by pressing forward like an inchworm. This is horrific and staggeringly sad to watch, especially as she pleads for the heroes to free her so she can move "normally."

Motivation: There is little reasoning with Millie. The horror of the procedure has left her permanently insane, though she acts merely pathetic and the adventurers may wonder if they can somehow satisfy her bizarre requests. They can't. To shield her from her terrible fate, her subconscious mind has concocted a false memory — that her limbs have been bound in a straightjacket, forcing her to crawl on her belly, and that she cannot see because she's trapped somewhere with no light.

Millie is a gentle soul and for a goblin she's exceedingly well bred and spoken. So long as her delusion is humored she makes a genuine effort to befriend the adventurers. After all, she believes them her rescuers, and who is more deserving of kindness and praise? Her greatest affront is that she follows the party around asking incessant questions — about them, where they come from, what's happened while she's been imprisoned, and of course, whether they'd be kind enough to release her from her bonds. She's especially focused on that last point, bringing it up every chance she gets.

If Millie is made to understand her actual fate, she flies into a rage, lashing out at anyone and everyone she can reach. At that point some part of her hopes someone will fight back and kill her. At least then the nightmare will end.

Notes: Millie is not treated as an adversary even if she attacks the party (killing her isn't exactly a challenge, even for the least prepared adventurers). Instead, XP is awarded for interacting with her in the Rewards & Penalties section (see page 50).

Millie (Medium Beast Walker): Str 12, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 12; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init II; Atk II; Def II; Res III; Health III; Comp II; Skills: Notice III. Qualities: *Damage reduction 1, feat (Lightning Reflexes)*

Attacks/Weapons: Bite II (dmg 1d8+1 lethal + necrotizing poison, threat 17–20, upgrades: venomous)

Notes: Millie is permanently *blinded*.

NEXT STEPS

By this time the adventurers may have freed several prisoners, and they may want to accompany them back to the surface. The action doesn't shift to Scene 3 until the party descends to the lower dungeon (via the stairs at Location 15).

SCENE 3: THE LOWER DUNGEON

The second dungeon level deep beneath Croatalorn Manor

OBJECTIVES

- Navigate the lower dungeon without being eaten or captured
- Possibly search for Inquisitor Zebulon and/or the saurian K'Varr
- Reach Magnus' Vivisection Laboratory alive

CHALLENGES

- One of Magnus' most powerful hybrids guards the entrance to this level.
- His experiments have wrought more than even he bargained for, and not everything forged in his crucible is as it seems. Mysteries abound, and some of them want to eat the party.

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Dramatic

GM Briefing: The lower dungeon is where Magnus conducted much of his initial research into the nature of life. The first thing the party encounters here is another hybrid, but after that the focus shifts to the alchemist's fascination with the primal building blocks of life itself, and the many wonders and horrors that emerge from this, Magnus' life's work.

Gear: Anything carried out of Scene 2, potentially including Magnus' Repulsion Oil (see page 44), which can help against the oozes here and in Scene 4.

Important Notes: Like much of this adventure, this scene can be extremely dangerous, especially if the party aims to completely "clear" the dungeon. If you're at all worried that the heroes may have trouble with this or other scenes, you may want to avoid or omit certain potentially lethal encounters, such as the gatekeeper hydralisk in Room 16.

LOCATION

The lower dungeon is only partly finished. Many of the walls are rough natural stone rather than fitted blocks, and most surfaces are slippery with moisture. Patches of (harmless) gray mold speckle everything.





Ambience: Muggy, dark, and foul. The air is alive here with a dense blend of acrid, yeasty chemicals (again, harmless, though the party may assume otherwise). This level is far warmer than above (due to the furnace and vats), and except where noted the only illumination is whatever the adventurers carry (*see Fantasy Craft, page 218*).

Terrain: Indoors/settled

Cultural Interests: None

ACTION

This scene begins as the party descends the staircase from the first dungeon level (Room 15). The steps open directly into the Hydralisk Kennel.

16. HYDRALISK KENNEL

Like most of this level, this room is unlit. Assuming the party descends with a light source, or has members who can see in the dark, read or paraphrase the following.

The stairs descend into a rough-hewn stone room, ending just across from a corridor leading out and to the north. This corridor continues for only a short bit before turning sharply east.

The way past is guarded by a bizarre creature that lives chained under the stairs: the hydralisk (*see page 37*). Unless the adventurers take care to be stealthy and make a successful team Sneak check against the beast's Notice, continue with the following.

The room opens up to the left of the stairs, and as you consider the reason this space has been left empty you hear the rattle of a chain. The shadows dance and something emerges from below the steps... Its claws scrape across the stone as it scuttles out into the open and turns to face you, its maws dripping with anticipation. It is a mass of limbs and heads with strange glowing eyes.

You hardly have time to count the creature's extra parts and note the heavy collar around its neck before it lunges forward, dragging a chain behind.



If the adventurers enter without a light source and also make a successful Sneak check, read or paraphrase this instead

By the time you reach the floor you identify the sound of animals snoring beneath the stairs. There's a rustling, accompanied by a chain rattling, and then the snores continue.

The hydralisk is the pride of Magnus' early breeding program: a deadly blend of basilisk and hydra. It is trained to attack anyone other than Magnus, the Golem-Bride, Minion, one of the other servants, or anyone they escort into the level.

Adventurers may note the chain and either retreat up the stairs or rush deeper into this level, possibly engaging with ranged weapons when beyond the creature's reach. The latter won't save them from the hydralisk's petrifying gaze, however, and merely evading the beast doesn't remove its threat the next time the party passes through the room.

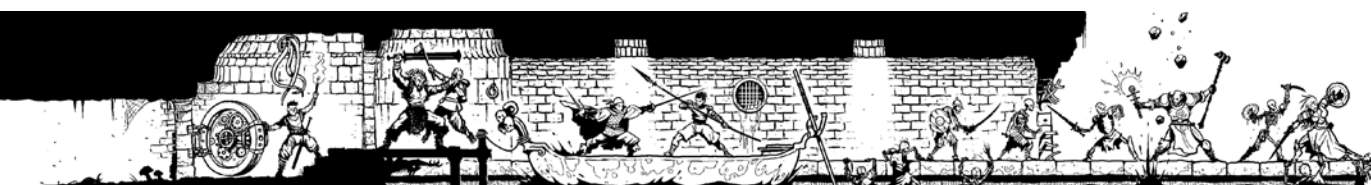
17. WHAT REMAINS

After all the suspense in the manor house and such a harrowing exploration of the first dungeon level, the adventurers may not be prepared for what they find at the very doorstep of Magnus' laboratory — but unless they remain open-minded and compassionate even in the face of so much adversity, they may very well miss the chance to save countless innocent lives. Here's what they find as they reach this area...

Not far along the northeastern corridor you find a crack in the left wall — just large enough for the biggest of you to slip through. Rough cavern walls continue beyond, leading down a gradual slope. The ground here is squishy but the air is surprisingly clean, free of the stench and sting wafting up from further down the corridor.

Before the furnace was built (*see Room 20, page 36*), Magnus had his servants dig through the heavy limestone here to reach a natural pool where he could dispose of alchemical byproducts, as well as the results of failed experiments. The cavern has gone unused in the months since the furnace was lit, but Magnus hasn't yet had the cavern resealed. Perhaps this is for the best, as unbeknownst to anyone the pool has become home to something completely unexpected — a new form of life.

Of course, the characters may not realize what they've found at first, especially given how this new species interacts with them. Any adventurers who step through the break in the corridor wall and down into the cavern find the following...





The cavern continues a short ways before spilling into a long, wide passage extending at a slight decline toward the southwest. The limestone walls here are slick with moisture, and stalactites have formed across the ceiling. Drops from these regularly hit the soft earthen floor and make ripples in a pool that's collected at the bottom of the southwest passage.

Sweeping the cavern with a successful team Search check (Easy DC) reveals only that nothing seems to live here. There are no insects, vermin, crustaceans, or other small creatures, which is strange for the setting. Make a concurrent team Notice check (Tricky DC), not letting the players know that it's being made, and with success read the following as if it's gleaned with the Search check (whether that check was successful or not).

Soon enough each of you is wet from the drops falling from the ceiling and the dense mist hanging in the cavern air. A few of the drops seem thicker than the others, and they occasionally bead up on your gear, slowly seeping across and strangely, into your items.

The adventurers may at this point assume the heavy drops are acid and flee the room. Worse, they may start stripping down and taking measures to save their equipment, scrubbing it clean or using minor destructive magic to dispose of the seemingly corrosive liquid. However, this liquid is in fact the previously mentioned new life, and this is its well-meaning effort to help the party and hopefully hitch a ride out of the dungeon at the same time.

This new life form can temporarily combine with inanimate matter — even a magic item — softening and seeping into it like water soaks fabric. This initially looks very similar to acid damage, and it also temporarily weakens the item against damage, though the rules impact is different. Hopefully this clues the players in that something else is going on...

- First, the process takes time. Though the creature's fluid form clings to a suitable object — strongly enough that gravity no longer draws it down but not strong enough to resist being flicked off — it seemingly just sits there for the first minute or so. The object doesn't immediately suffer any actual damage, though there's no way to know this (even a Tinker spell doesn't reveal whether a target object is damaged — it merely repairs any damage that's there). Ultimately, the adventurers have to take it on faith that the fluid isn't harmful, just as they have to assume the best of the situation to save this fledgling species.
- Second, an item combined with one of these creatures isn't actually damaged at all, though its ability to withstand

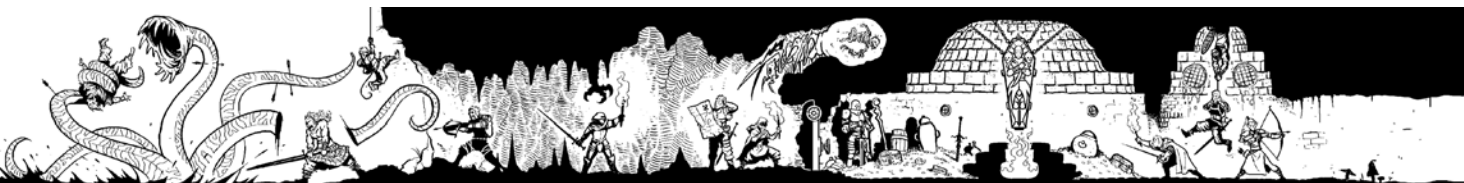
damage is reduced. For the first 10 minutes after a creature combines with an object — while its body is settling into the material — the item's Damage Save and the number of Saves it can fail before being broken or destroyed are each decreased to 1/2 normal (rounded up). This has a visible effect, which is what the adventurers see with that successful Notice check (in the most recent boxed text). Removing the fluid anytime during the first minute while this is happening leaves the object softer and more flexible than normal, though it returns to its full durability within another minute or so. Sadly, this also instantly kills the creature. Removing the fluid after a minute but before its bonding is complete is even worse, as it both kills the creature and forever destroys the item (even if it's magical).

There is an upside (remember, the creatures are trying to help). Should the fluid be left on until the bonding is complete — a process that takes 10 minutes or more, depending on the item's durability (if a firm time is required, go with 10 minutes or a number of minutes equal to the item's full normal Damage Save, whichever is greater) — then the bonded item is made significantly stronger. Its Damage Save and the number of Saves it can sustain are each doubled so long as the creature remains.

The creatures are also mildly empathic and able to project emotional impulses into organic beings within a hundred feet or so. They have no formal language, so they "speak" in visual metaphor, their projected impulses appearing to those affected as visions of calm and bliss (as the affected perceive those things themselves). The creatures do this reflexively the moment they seem threatened — say, as soon as anyone starts to wipe them off a piece of gear. Of course, the adventurers may view this as yet another form of malevolent manipulation, reacting with more violence against the creatures. This is yet another point at which faith and optimism prove useful.

Even if the adventurers embrace the "upgrades" to their gear — something they can all do with every item on their persons, as there are literally hundreds of the creatures in the cavern — there's still one last test in store for them. The benefit to their gear lasts only as long as the creatures remain combined with it. While this new life is benevolent it's also biologically driven to escape the cavern and explore new places, perhaps even find a new, more suitable home. The adventurers can't communicate with the creatures, even if they realize the fluid is sentient, so there's no way to learn specifically what is desired. The empathic images continue for as long as the creatures are nearby; a recurring theme is rainfall and vast horizons of water.

The first time the characters spend at least a day on or near any large body of water, or in an area with heavy rainfall (like a jungle), the creatures begin emerging from their gear. This process takes just as long as before and leaves the items brittle during and after the transition for an equal period (10 minutes or a number of





minutes equal to the item's full normal Damage Save, whichever is greater). Thereafter, the items return to their normal durability, though with a brilliant luster that increases their value by 10% with any buyer who cares for appearance.

Once fully emerged, the creatures drip into whatever larger body of water is available (a lake, the sea, or ground water), and depart for good. They leave each adventurer with one of the most pleasant images he or she has ever seen, and plant it so deeply in their minds that it also grants Stress Resistance 5 for a week.

Malicious adventurers may want to forever keep the creatures merged with their gear. The only way to do this is with a Permanency spell cast on each item. This kills the creatures combined with it and treats the increased durability as a new "combinant" upgrade that has no impact on Complexity and lasts until the item is broken or destroyed. In its final moments, any creature subjected to this instills all characters within its empathic range with a deeply planted memory of dread that doubles all stress damage suffered in the following week. Any other creatures present for the atrocious act immediately begin emerging from the gear, letting gravity take hold so they can flee their aggressors, no matter the surrounding terrain.

A final hint as to the nature of the creatures, if the party turns to magic for answers: a Detect Emotion spell yields that the fluid has a Disposition of Friendly toward the adventurers — at least until threatened, at which point it becomes Unfriendly (the creatures aren't capable of Hostility and cannot become Adversarial). No other Detect spells reveal anything, which is in itself a clue: the creatures do not have an Alignment, nor can they lie, nor are they magical or poison.

18. PROTOTYPE ABIOGENESIS POOL

The following description assumes the party arrives from the Hydralisk Kennel (Room 16). Reverse the details for a party arriving from the secret passage leading into the Womb Chamber (Room 22).

The corridor eventually turns north and then west, ending at one long side of a large oval room lit with a soft reddish glow. The yeasty, chemical smell is strongest within this chamber.

After a narrow hemispherical ledge at the corridor opening, the floor suddenly drops away, forming a shallow basin some 15 ft. below, which is filled with a pale, milky fluid. Another hemispherical ledge is positioned across the room, before a gleaming metal door that opens to the west. There is also a narrow pipe just above the northwest corner of the pool, from which a clear liquid drips into the basin.

There doesn't appear to be a direct path to the door without climbing down and slogging across the basin.

The fluid in the basin is a complex mixture of precursor chemicals — the foundation of Magnus' research into a "primal elixir of life." He calls the alchemical process taking place here "abiogenesis" — the creation of life from non-living matter. The conditions in this chamber are meant to recreate those Magnus imagined were present at the dawn of time, when he believes the first slimes, oozes, and puddings spontaneously emerged from a similar primordial soup.

The basin's floor is concave and 4 ft. deep at its center. The fluid has the consistency of porridge and is the temperature of blood. It has two primary effects...

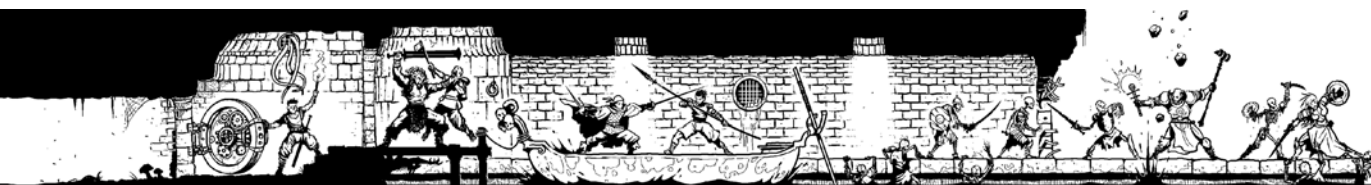
- Any character possessing 4 or fewer ranks in Athletics suffers a -1 penalty with attack checks, Reflex saves, and skill checks (except Athletics checks made to swim). Swimmers don't suffer these penalties (*see Fantasy Craft, page 227*).
- Any non-Ooze character who is submerged in, swims through, or swallows the fluid, or whose broken skin is exposed to it, must save against it as a fast-acting, potent debilitating poison: after 1 minute, each exposed character must make a Fortitude save (DC 16) or suffer 2 temporary Constitution impairment (and then another check is required after each subsequent minute, until the save is successful). If any characters are carrying the cavern creatures from Room 17 on their gear, these beings are unaffected, being a form of Ooze (*see page 38*).

More immediately dangerous are the creatures that have gestated here: an entire mob of jellies (*see Cast, page 38*). Unlike the benign beings in the previous cavern, these are quite hostile. They swim through the slime like mobile extensions of it — indeed, they gain one-half scenery cover while submerged — and like sharks they sense vibrations through it, attacking anything they come across.

If the party prudently fears creatures may lurk in the liquid, they can confirm their suspicions simply by tossing items into the basin. Anything of coin size or larger causes enough vibration to attract one or more jellies, letting the party make a team Search check (Average DC) to spot independent movement through the liquid. This DC becomes Easy if the item(s) tossed in are organic and therefore something the jellies can consume. Cunning adventurers may even try to snipe the jellies with ranged attacks as the creatures expose themselves.

The slime isn't flammable, so attempts to burn the pool have little success, and tossing torches and other flaming objects at the jellies has no effect on the creatures and quickly douses the flame.

Another way to deal with the jellies is to use the Repulsion Oil found in the Guard Room on the upper level (*see Location 7, page 44*). The party may want to save their scant stockpile of the stuff, however, especially if they rightly guess that Magnus'





research may have yielded even more powerful oozes to be found deeper in the dungeon.

These jellies were an unexpected byproduct of Magnus' experiments and he initially had his servants catch them and toss them into the furnace (see Room 20, page 37).

However, he's mostly lost interest since his work shifted to the Womb Chamber (see Room 22, page 41). Now Magnus lets the jellies swim freely here, acting as a second layer of security against those who might intrude on his laboratory.

Concerning the two other exits from the room...

- The steel door in the southwest is locked (Tricky Prestidigitation/Disable check to open).
- The pipe in the northwest is covered with an iron grate that can be wrenched free without a skill check. The pipe is only wide enough for a Small or smaller character to fit through. It winds at an incline for a bit before leveling off and eventually exiting into the Chemical Reagent Storeroom (Location 19, see next).

19. CHEMICAL REAGENT STOREROOM

Anyone entering through the doorway finds the following...

This smallish, roughly circular room contains two huge iron cisterns, one painted yellow and the other painted black. Piping connects the two cisterns, and another pipe exits the black one to disappear into the wall to the northeast.

There is an 8-ft. high wooden ladder in one corner of the room.

Small or smaller adventurers who enter through the pipe from the Abiogenesis Pool (Room 18, see page 35) instead find the following...

The pipe continues for a short distance and then turns abruptly to the southwest. Soon after that it ends in a thin metal seal.

The seal can be forced open with a successful Athletics check (Tricky DC), at which point anyone in the pipe sees the following...

Beyond the seal, the pipe opens into a tall metal container that stinks of the same acrid, yeasty smell as the pipe and the chamber before. The inside walls of the container are slick with a faint reddish-black, tar-like substance.

The container is 7 ft. deep and its lid only covers half its circumference, revealing a stone roof several feet above.

Unless an adventurer who entered through the pipe is especially tall for his or her frame, climbing gear or a helpful ally is needed to clamber out of the container (though no further skill check is required with assistance or the right tools).

Each cistern is 10 ft. in diameter and 7 ft. high. As described, each has a half-lid, leaving the other half open to the air.

- The yellow cistern stores various versions of a strong fungi-derived, antibacterial alchemical toxin that Magnus developed to kill off anything grown in the Abiogenesis Pool, just in case that experiment got out of hand. The cistern only contains a few gallons of the thin orange stuff, which on direct contact with anything from the pool causes both to immediately combust. This may of course pose a problem for any adventurers who slogged through the pool, inflicting 3d6 fire damage to those who merely walked through it or a whopping 8d6 fire damage to anyone who was submerged.
- The black cistern is a mixing vat where Magnus prepares new additions for the Abiogenesis solution. It's currently empty but remnants of the last additions are still visible along the cistern's inner surfaces, especially across the lower few feet (this is the reddish-black tar substance seen by anyone who crawls up the pipe from Room 18).

Separate mechanisms for each pipe are located outside the cisterns (one to release the toxin into the mixture vat, and another to release the contents of the mixture vat into the Abiogenesis Pool). If a release is forced — say, by an adventurer crawling up through the pipe from the pool — it must be repaired before it can be sealed again. This is a Tricky Crafting/Repair check with the Metalworking focus).

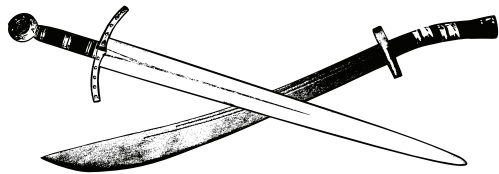
20. FURNACE

The heavy steel door leading to this room from the Abiogenesis Pool is warm to the touch, and vibrates slightly. The door is locked, requiring a Tricky Prestidigitation/Disable check to open. Beyond...

This irregularly shaped chamber looks to have originally been constructed of large stone blocks but a slow and intense heat has melted and fused the blocks together. It's also warped the room's original dimensions as the walls have sagged and settled into new angles.

The source of this heat is clear. The room's only furnishing is a huge, squat furnace with large access panels on all four sides. A wide smoke stack disappears into the ceiling above.





Magnus' servants use the furnace to dispose of failed experiments, damning evidence, and the physical remains of dead captives. It is fueled by a special alchemical brew fed in through the access panels along with whatever needs to be destroyed. The flames are currently burning strong but nowhere near capacity as with Magnus incapacitated the dungeon isn't operating at peak efficiency.

There is nothing special to be found here as everything brought to the room has long since been reduced to ash, yet the room still has its secrets. Years of burning exotic alchemical substances in the furnace, coupled with the unique conditions created by Magnus' special igniting materials, have granted the furnace the incredible ability to render down to ash literally anything in existence — even artifacts.

This can be confirmed if the adventurers fish around in the embers with metal weapons (which are fine so long as the exposure is limited to under an hour). One bit that still hasn't been completely destroyed, and which is found without a skill check by anyone spending at least a few minutes sifting, is a war hammer head bearing the inlaid emblem of Heralt Felldown, one of the founders of the capital city of Valespire, and one of the greatest heroes in the history of the Realm. This hammer is well known among adventurers as "Morning's Fury" and "The Leveler." It is, or was, a highly sought artifact for its historical value and ability to shatter buildings of the heaviest construction with a single blow.

Making use of the furnace can prove daunting. Either the adventurers have to keep coming back here to use it, or they must find a way to transport it — no small task given it weighs close to a ton. Regardless, the furnace only retains this ability for another year or so. After that the supply of alchemical components is exhausted, and without Magnus to brew more the furnace returns to normal.

In the event that the furnace is used as a weapon — say, by locking an unconscious character inside and igniting the light — the unfortunate victim within and everything on his or her person is utterly destroyed within the next couple hours.

The smoke stack mentioned in the boxed text weaves through the earth for nearly half a mile, finally opening just above a nearby hot spring. No one has noticed the smoke is out of place in the perpetual mists of the area, and it would take magic or weeks of digging to find out the true source anyway.

This room opens into another corridor leading northwest past the entrance to the Reagent Storeroom (Location 19). The corridor ends in another steel door and passing through that triggers Scene 4: The Perfect Organism (see page 38).

DIRECTION

Here are some questions you might be asked, and answers for you to offer or implement.

Q: What's happening to my gear? Get it off, GET IT OFF!!!

A: If you insist...

Q: That's intriguing. I wonder what happens if I let those drops do their thing...

A: (to yourself): There you go! Looks like a change of climate is in order soon, and some accolades from understanding mages.

Q: How insane do you have to be to build a monster-filled slime pit between the entrance of your dungeon and your hidden laboratory?

A: (deftly avoiding mention of the secret passage): Does the rest of the dungeon look sane to you?

Q: That anti-ooze oil sure was effective. Can I keep what's left?

A: Sure, though it's technically an elixir and will spoil (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 164).

CAST

HYDRALISK (SPECIAL NPC, ADVERSARY)

"Hssss. Zap!"

Description: A green-scaled, eight-legged, four-headed lizard the size of an alligator, the hydralisk is the result of Magnus cross-breeding a hydra and a basilisk. Its four jaws are full of razor-sharp teeth and slick with drool that slops from its mouths as it launches toward any unidentified prey entering the lower dungeon.

The creature wears an iron collar attached to a chain mounted into its kennel wall (10 ft. longer than needed to reach the farthest wall).

Motivation: The hydralisk is in constant pain from various internal and joint ailments, plus rapid aging brought on by its unnatural stock. It takes out its frustrations on anyone it hasn't been trained to identify (i.e. anyone other than Magnus, the Golem-Bride, Minion, one of their servants, or someone escorted by them).

The hydralisk can't see when using its petrifying gaze (scintillating gray beams shoot from its eyes), so it only employs the attack when in desperate need, or when prey has run outside its Reach.

Notes: Remember that because the hydralisk has at least 3 natural attacks, it can take a full action to flurry (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 235).





Hydralisk (Large Animal Walker — 101 XP): Str 14, Dex 10, Con 16, Int 2, Wis 10, Cha 9; SZ L (2×2, Reach 2); Spd 20 ft. ground; Init III; Atk VII; Def III; Res VI; Health V; Comp —; Skills: Athletics I, Notice III, Sneak I, Survival I; Qualities: *Always ready, charge attack, cold-blooded, condition immunity (flanked), damage reduction 2, darkvision I, feat (Combat Instincts, Iron Will), improved sense (scent), monstrous defense I, never outnumbered, regeneration 5, swift attack I, tough I*

Attacks/Weapons: Bite I × 4 (dmg 1d10+2 lethal; threat 18–20), Petrifying Gaze (petrifying attack II: 50 ft. gaze; Fort DC 15 or be turned to stone; notes: the hydralisk is *blinded* for the rest of the current round each time it uses this attack and so the attack's XP value has been halved, rounded down)

Treasure: 1A, 2T

JELLIES (STANDARD NPCs, ADVERSARIES)

"Glorp slurp glorp..."

Description: These simple creatures were born of Magnus' early experiments into "abiogenesis," or the process of drawing life from inanimate matter.

Motivation: Much like their somewhat more evolved brethren found elsewhere in the wild, these creatures exist only to consume — in this case everything and anything organic, so they may grow and consume larger organic things.

Though animalistic, the jellies aren't stupid, and once they identify a threat they don't reveal their positions in the pool until necessary to attack (remember, they benefit from 1/2 scenery cover while in the slime).

Until attacked, the jellies remain in the pool. Indeed, they remain even after consuming any intruders, as the slime is a far more comfortable environment than the dungeon's dry corridors.

Jellies (Large Animal Ooze Swimmer/Walker — 42 XP): Str 12, Dex 2, Con 16, Int 2, Wis 2, Cha 2; SZ L (2×2, Reach 1); Spd 10 ft. ground, 30 ft. swim; Init I; Atk III; Def I; Res I; Health V; Comp —; Skills: Athletics III; Qualities: *Achilles heel (fire), aquatic II, blindsight, critical hesitation, shambling, superior climber II, tough I, tricky (Mix-Up (Grapple))*

Attacks/Weapons: Slam II (dmg 1d8+1 acid; threat 19–20; upgrades: grab), Squeeze I (dmg 1d12+1 acid; notes: Grapple benefit)

Treasure: None

NEXT STEPS

The final confrontation is at hand. The northwest-facing door past the Furnace Room and the Reagent Storeroom leads to the Vivisection Laboratory, and Scene 4.

SCENE 4: THE PERFECT ORGANISM

Deep in the dungeon's second level, the Golem-Bride completes her husband's masterpiece...

OBJECTIVES

- Defeat the Golem-Bride, putting Lunalia's ghost to rest
- Defeat the Perfect Organism and prevent untold destruction beyond the manor
- Seize the fruits of Dr. Magnus Croatalorn's labors, for the Church, for the Circle, or for the party

CHALLENGES

- The Golem-Bride isn't stupid, and commands the other golems with a fair amount of strategy.
- Once awakened, the Perfect Organism is dangerous to every living thing around it. Even before it emerges from the Womb Pool, adventurers and others may become trapped in its deadly embrace.
- Hidden threats lurk in Magnus' laboratory and the Organism's breeding room. Some are obvious; others are not.

SYNOPSIS

Scene Type: Dramatic

GM Briefing: As the adventurers arrive in the deepest part of the dungeon, the Golem-Bride is just feeding Zebulon's extracted brain to the vestigial creature in the Womb Chamber (Room 22). This is the last of Magnus' instructions for awakening the Perfect Organism, realizing his life's work.

- If the party arrives from the Furnace (Room 20), the Golem-Bride soon emerges into the Vivisection Laboratory (Room 21) and orders the other golems to attack. Behind her, in the Womb Chamber (Room 22), the Perfect Organism slowly awakens. If the fight goes on too long, the creature emerges from the Womb Pool and joins the fray.
- If the party enters through the secret passage leading from the Maternity Cell (Room 5), they come across the Golem-Bride just as she's dipping the brain into the muck. It's a disgusting view but offers the adventurers their best opportunity to destroy the creature before it gains sentience.

Either way, the final battle for Croatalorn Manor is at hand. There are one or two surprises in store, including a visit by Lady Lunalia's ghost. This time she can talk, though only briefly, and she concentrates on urging the party to destroy the Golem-Bride so she can finally rest in peace. If the adventurers succeed in this,





and the Organism has not yet emerged from the Womb Pool, the ghost may charge them with one last mission before she departs — obliterate Magnus’ ultimate experiment and save the world from its horror.

Gear: Anything carried out of previous scenes

LOCATION

This final scene takes place across the three dungeon chambers where Magnus did much of his most important work, and where he made his greatest discoveries. These three connected rooms are more of a home to him than any part of the manor above.

Ambience: The Laboratory (Room 21) is well-lit and except for the blood and gore from the recent unpleasantness (removing Zebulon’s brain and conducting a “routine” vivisection on the saurian K’Varr), it is stark and clinical. It smells of blood and waste.

The Womb Chamber (Room 22) is dark, lit only if the curtain to the Laboratory is pulled aside. It is also warm and wet — the ideal conditions for breeding new life. This room smells of... nothing any adventurer’s brain can rationalize (it’s a good thing the sting kills all sense of smell).

Finally, Magnus’ Alchemical Sanctum is reverent, seemingly a place of worship for him. Every book, vial, and candle is placed with meaning; every surface polished and primed with meticulous care.

Terrain: Indoors/settled

Culture Interests: None

ACTION

As mentioned in the Synopsis, this climactic scene unfolds differently based on the party’s approach. Rooms 21 and 22 have boxed text that varies accordingly. Room 23 is always the same as the party enters, and no matter who the adventurers are or who they’re loyal to, this final room acts as a unique reward for successfully navigating Magnus’ home and dealing with his foulest creations.

21. VIVISECTION LABORATORY

If the adventurers arrive from the Furnace (Room 20), the Golem-Bride has recently placed Zebulon’s brain into the Perfect Organism, and it will awaken in just a short time (at the start of Round 7). Read or paraphrase the following as the party enters the Laboratory.

The door opens into a large hexagonal room illuminated by a pair of oil lamps suspended from the high ceiling. A curtain hangs across an exit on the other side of the chamber.

Two low metal tables stand at the center of the room. Across each are splayed the dissembled remains of a body. One of the bodies was a male human — a thin but muscular man in his 30s — and the other looks like a male saurian. The human’s head lies open and his brain is missing.

This is not the only horror: on opposite walls flanking the tables are a pair of tall glass vessels filled floor-to-ceiling with an opaque, viscous fluid. Clouds of darkness roil within, occasionally pressing up against the glass with unexpected force.

A group of multi-armed golems clad in blood-spattered white robes and masks stand over the tables, half their arms ending in razor-sharp surgical instruments. At your entrance they all glance toward the curtain and wait...

Unless the adventurers act within two rounds, the Golem-Bride enters...

The curtain parts and a woman enters. She’s tall, with crimson hair and an uncomfortably shiftless expression. She regards you with all the emotion of a life-size porcelain doll, her dull green eyes never wavering, never blinking.

“Prepare them for procedures,” she finally utters, and the golems leap in your direction.

If the adventurers enter through the secret passage leading from the Maternity Cell (Room 5), the fight begins in Room 22, though it may quickly spill into this one, with the GM adapting relevant parts of the description into the ongoing combat narrative. If the combat somehow never leaves Room 22, this is what the adventurers find when they enter the Vivisection Laboratory...

The curtain opens into a large hexagonal room illuminated by a pair of oil lamps suspended from the high ceiling. A closed door is located across the room.

Two low metal tables stand at the center of the room. Across each are splayed the dissembled remains of a body. One of the bodies was a male human — a thin but muscular man in his 30s — and the other looks like a male saurian. The human’s head lies open and his brain is missing.

This is not the only horror: on opposite walls flanking the tables are a pair of tall glass vessels filled floor-to-ceiling with an opaque, viscous fluid. Clouds of darkness roil within, occasionally pressing up against the glass with unexpected force.





THE PLAYERS

The tall, crimson-haired woman is the Golem-Bride and the others are the Surgeons, which Magnus created to assist with vivisections and similar activities (see *Cast*, page 46).

Adventurers who viewed the paintings in the manor's Ballroom (Location D) note the Golem-Bride's eerie similarity to the woman depicted, though this creature lacks the spark of life captured on those canvases. Anyone who witnessed Lunalia's ghost in the Bathroom (Location F) makes the same connection, though no one could accuse the spirit of any semblance of life.

THE BODIES

The recently vivisected bodies deserve special mention, and have a dramatic impact on certain NPCs who may have accompanied the party from the Halls of Testing.

- The male human is Inquisitor Zebulon, close friend and traveling companion of Inquisitor Elessandra (see *the Gas Chamber*, page 26).
- The male saurian is K'Varr, clutch-brother to Jarn P'Tor (see *the Acid Test*, page 25).

If either NPC is with the party, their shock at finding these mutilated remains is enough to keep either of them from acting before the Golem-Bride's arrival, or until the party attacks, whichever comes first. At that point the NPCs steel themselves for battle and do their best to aid the adventurers. Elessandra is especially committed in the fight, privately swearing to her gods that Zebulon's death will be avenged, though she also reacts most poorly to the arrival of the Perfect Organism (see page 38).

After the last of the opponents are put down (including the Perfect Organism, which again, awakens in Room 22 at the start of Round 7 after the party enters), Elessandra and Jarn P'Tor are too consumed with grief to be much use to anyone. Elessandra busies herself with last rites for her fallen friend and then prepares his remains for the trip back to his family in Valespire. Meanwhile, Jarn carries K'Varr's body up to the surface to be set on fire (the siblings have no remaining family, and neither was much for ceremony).

RUNNING THE FIGHT

Whether the Golem-Bride orders the Surgeons to attack or the party seizes the moment and engages before her return, the battle unfolds in much the same manner. The golems are initially disorganized but quickly rally, and so no one gains surprise. Once the Golem-Bride arrives, the Surgeons attack with lethal precision, ganging up on single characters whenever possible. For her part, the Golem-Bride hangs back and directs the others, making full use of her Coordinated Attack feat and Rage Scream until she is forced into the skirmish.

WHAT'S IN THE TUBES?

There is another hazard in the lab: the floor-to-ceiling tubes contain two recently matured puddings that have yet to feed (see *Cast*, page 38). These can be freed on purpose by inflicting 6 or more points of damage on the glass, or the glass can be shattered with any ranged attack that suffers a 2-die critical miss, or any 2-die critical miss within Reach.

Once released, a pudding attacks the closest source of food, be it adventurer, NPC, or even golem. They aren't quite as fresh but they still move and act like a meal. Party members may guess what's in the tubes and use them to their advantage, attacking the glass when opponents are near. The tubes have a Defense of 5.

THE ORGANISM ARRIVES

As mentioned previously, the Perfect Organism awakens at the start of Round 7 after the party enters the room through the southern door (entering through the secret passage from the Maternity Cell changes the timing, as described in Room 22). Once it's awake, the Organism slowly drags itself out of the Womb Pool and toward the sound of any fighting, which has it entering an ongoing fray in the Vivisection Laboratory at the start of Round 10 (if the fight lasts that long). The GM rolls the creature's initiative at that point and can read or paraphrase the following as it arrives.

The curtain billows forward, as if from a draft in the room beyond, and then something... spills into the surgical theater, all black and slick and writhing. It's a rolling mass of what looks like undeveloped muscle and fat, given over to some terrible infection that's ravaged every inch of it. You know this is just your mind rationalizing what you're seeing, however, and by the time its massive bulk has fully entered the chamber it's already becoming something else, part of it pressing outward in the shape of a human face that contorts open and unleashes the most hellish scream you've ever heard.

This is the face and voice of Inquisitor Zebulon (the Organism can mimic characters whose parts it's consumed), and even to those who didn't know him this display is unsettling. Each adventurer and party ally must make a Will save (DC 15) or suffer 3d6 stress damage.

If Elessandra is present she takes the sight far worse, freezing in shock as Zebulon's face emerges. A moment later her legs give out from under her and she collapses to the floor, unable to act or defend herself for a full round (she is helpless during this time). Once Elessandra recovers she commits every action exclusively to annihilating the Organism, hoping somehow that will bring comfort to her fallen friend.





The Organism continues to use Zebulon's appearance and voice to unnerve the party and its allies (especially Elessandra, whose reaction amuses the creature). As noted in the Organism's description (see page 40), it also draws on the memories and emotions of those it's consumed, and these emerge through the fight whenever the GM feels a stalwart Church representative's outlook and passions can be twisted in interesting ways through the creature's newborn perspective. The Organism is deeply troubled by its own existence and lashes out at everything around it, frantically trying to end its anger and pain.

The Organism probably won't find an opportunity to consume anyone else, though it's still content to try when near a target and not being attacked. Characters on both sides of the battle are wise to take these chances to distance themselves from the creature.

SURPRISE! IT'S A GHOST.

Lunalia's ghost makes an appearance during the fight, at a moment of the GM's choosing (preferably when the Golem-Bride suffers a particularly damaging hit). The ghost is bonded to her remains and knows that only the construct's destruction will free her spirit from its continued torment. The GM can read or paraphrase the following when the ghost arrives.

In the corner of your eye you catch a spectral glimmer as what look like delicate fingers claw their way through some invisible barrier. Graceful arms follow, then slender shoulders and finally the semi-transparent visage of a beautiful young woman. She sports bright red hair and desperate, emerald green eyes.

The ghost's resemblance to the Golem-Bride is obvious to everyone, and anyone who's witnessed the paintings in the Ballroom (Location D) realizes they're all versions of the same person. Of course, anyone who witnessed the ghost in the Bathroom (Location F) knows this is the same spirit.

The ghost manifests more clearly (becomes less transparent) as the Golem-Bride suffers damage, and it gains the ability to speak when the construct suffers one or more wounds, or when the construct's vitality drops to 1/2 normal or lower (rounded up), whichever comes first. At this point the ghost devotes all her energy to urging the party to destroy her body.

"Burn it! Slice it to bits!" the spirit wails. "I beg you, end this nightmare!"

The Golem-Bride remains perky and unconcerned throughout, even as she nears death. She ignores the ghost, focusing all her attention on killing the intruders and salvaging her husband's work (she brutally attacks anyone who threatens the Organism).

Merely killing the Golem-Bride isn't enough, as Lunalia's fully materialized ghost explains...

"The body cannot remain. Please..."

The Golem-Bride's body must be destroyed (reduced to -25 wounds) to free Lunalia's spirit. Once that final deed is done the ghost departs, fading away with a warm gaze and a gentle smile. Only if Magnus' Perfect Organism still lives does she have something more to say...

"There is yet one last task at hand, kind souls... My husband's grand... 'masterpiece' still lives, and so long as it does countless others are in danger. He has created something... appalling this time, beyond even his darkest desires. I can do nothing to stop it, but you..."

"It is there," she says, pointing. "It defies all that is right with the world."

The ghost directs the party either to the Organism itself, if it is present in this room, or to the Womb Chamber if it has yet to emerge.

Lastly, if the GM feels the players haven't learned enough of what's happened at Croatalorn Manor and wants to fill them in, Lunalia's ghost is the perfect vehicle for that, just before she slowly fades away.

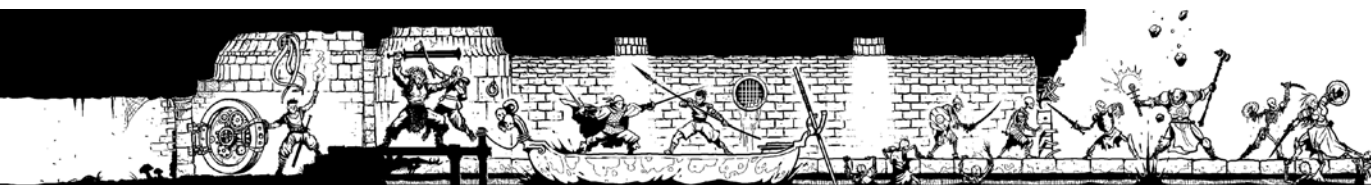
22. WOMB CHAMBER

This is where Magnus bred his masterpiece, the so-called "Perfect Organism." It took months of futile tests after years of precursor experiments in the Abiogenesis Pool (Room 18), but now the final ingredient needed to awaken the creation has been identified: a human brain.

A brain has already been extracted from Inquisitor Zebulon, whose body remains in the Lab. The Golem-Bride has just placed it into the Organism's formless mass as the adventurers arrive, whether they enter this room through the secret passage from the Maternity Cell (Room 5) or first enter the Vivisection Laboratory (Room 21). This triggers the creature's awakening, which takes 6 rounds. Thereafter, it takes the creature 3 full rounds to crawl out of the Womb Pool and start looking for food. Thus it arrives in the fight at the start of Round 10.

What the adventurers find here depends on their approach and what's already transpired. Arriving through the Vivisection Laboratory is discussed in that room (see page 39), while arriving through the secret passage from the Maternity Cell [Room 5] is covered here.

If the party enters the Womb Chamber from the Vivisection Laboratory after the Perfect Organism has left this room, read or paraphrase the following.





Beyond the curtain is a circular room covered in black tiles. The only light in this chamber spills in from the laboratory behind you, but it's enough to reveal that most of the floor here is given over to a deep concave depression. Merely 5 ft. of walkway stretches in a ring around the room's outer edge.

The depression is slick with dark slime that continues up onto the floor and past the curtain. This is clearly where the awful formless monster was dwelling before it joined the fight in the laboratory.

This room is warm and wet, and smells of something... It is one of life's great mercies that your sense of smell has just failed you. With luck it won't return until you're far from this awful place.

Leading east is a closed door made of heavy wood and reinforced with tight steel bands.

If the party enters the Womb Chamber from the Vivisection Laboratory before the Organism awakens (at the start of Round 7), read or paraphrase the following instead.

Beyond the curtain is a circular room covered in black tiles. The only light in this chamber spills in from the laboratory behind you, but it's enough to reveal that most of the floor here is given over to a pool filled with thick black slime. Merely 5 ft. of walkway stretches in a ring around the pool.

This room is warm and wet, and smells of something... It is one of life's great mercies that your sense of smell has just failed you. With luck it won't return until you're far from this awful place.

Leading east is a closed door made of heavy wood and reinforced with tight steel bands.

Finally, it's possible the party may enter the Womb Chamber room first, arriving through the secret passage from the Maternity Cell (Room 5). In this case they come upon the Golem-Bride just as she drops the brain into the Womb Pool. Read or paraphrase the following.



The secret passage gently curves and descends, ending in a pale stone wall. Another torch sconce is positioned here, and pulling it down and to the right causes the wall to shift sideways, as before.

As the door opens you're assaulted with a draft of warm, wet air that smells of something... It is one of life's great mercies that your sense of smell has just failed you. With luck it won't return until you're far from this awful place.

The room beyond is circular and covered in black tiles. Leading east is a closed door made of heavy wood and reinforced with tight steel bands.

It is dark but your light reveals that most of the floor here is given over to a pool filled with thick black slime. Merely 5 ft. of walkway stretches in a ring around the pool.

Across the pool from you, an eerily tall woman with crimson hair dips what looks like a human brain into the slime. It bobs for a moment and then quickly submerges, as if snatched down by some hungry beast. The woman slowly stands and regards you with all the emotion of an animated life-size porcelain doll, her dull green eyes never wavering, never blinking.

"Surgeons!" she finally says. "I am in need of your skills."

The tall, crimson-haired woman is of course the Golem-Bride and the Surgeons are other constructs Magnus created to assist with vivisections and similar activities (see *Cast*, page 46).

Adventurers who viewed the paintings in the manor's Ballroom [Location D] note the Golem-Bride's eerie similarity to the woman depicted, though this creature lacks the spark of personality captured on those canvases. Anyone who witnessed Lunalia's ghost in the Bathroom [Location F] makes the same connection, though no one could accuse the spirit of any semblance of life.

The Surgeons arrive at the start of the following round, entering through a closed curtain to the south. This triggers the fight described in the Vivisection Laboratory (Room 21), which unfolds as described except with (initially) different scenery. Of particular note is the Womb Pool, where the Organism is slowly awakening. When possible, the Surgeons take the opportunity to Grapple adventurers and fling (Move) them into the pool, hoping to provide Magnus' creation with a first meal or two.

Though the creature isn't yet coherent and can't take proper actions, it reflexively Grapples anyone flung into the pool, trying to Pin and hold them under its surface. Should the Organism awaken with one or more people (or golems) already held in its mass, it doesn't emerge from the pool and instead concentrates on consuming these hapless victims. Since the process takes a full minute (see page 46), it's probable that any adventurers in





this position escape beforehand, though the GM should still enjoy the chance to describe the monster writhing around them, inserting itself in the crevices in their clothes and armor, slowly forming wide, flat tendrils over their necks and faces...

KILLED IN THE WOMB (OR NOT)

Catching the Organism in the Womb Pool before it awakens is a prime opportunity to injure or even kill it before it can return the favor. Of course it's possible — particularly if the adventurers enter during a fight that starts in the Vivisection Lab — that no one may yet realize the slime in the pool is actually alive, let alone as dangerous as it is.

The Organism is *helpless* until the start of Round 7, which makes it trivially easy to dispatch if the fight has already ended (see *Terminal Situations* on page 217 of the *Fantasy Craft Rulebook*). If the fight continues around the creature's discovery, it has no Defense and any attacks made against it automatically hit. The party can wail on it to their heart's content until it's awake.

Perhaps the easiest way to hurt it in these circumstances, and perhaps even kill it, is to set it on fire (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 210).

Should the Organism survive to the start of Round 7 and any adventurers are unfortunate enough to be present for its awakening, the GM can read or paraphrase the following.

The pool churns, then froths, and then foams... A pillar of the slime slowly rises from the center, towering up several feet before splashing down onto the surrounding walkway. It writhes, dragging the rest of the stuff up and out of the pool. Every piece of it heaves, as if deeply sniffing the air in search of something to eat. Part of it presses outward in the shape of a human face that contorts open and unleashes the most hellish scream you've ever heard.

Once again, each adventurer and party ally present for this must make a Will save (DC 15) or suffer 3d6 stress damage.

THE SECRET DOOR

The passage from the Maternity Cell (Room 5) opens into the Womb Chamber's northwest wall. Like above, the door leading to this passage is concealed and no expense has been spared in making sure it stays hidden: finding it requires a successful Search check (Desperate DC), which may only be attempted if the adventurers specifically ask to search for secret doors in this room. The door cannot be found as part of any other non-magical search of the chamber.

It's possible, of course, that the party may have access to the Detect Secret Doors spell, which costs no spell points and reveals this door with a successful Spellcasting check. If this is

also undesirable, you should add a permanent Counter Magic III spell cast upon the center of this room. Note that this violates the typical casting rules — in that Counter Magic doesn't have an enduring Duration — but that's easy enough to explain away as an extraordinarily expensive, unique spell effect tailored just for the occasion. Magnus did, after all, throw an awful lot of money at the dungeon's design and construction.

The door is opened from the Womb Chamber by pressing three of the black tiles in a specific order. On the other side a torch sconce can be pulled down and to the right to open the passage, or reversed to close it.

23. ALCHEMICAL SANCTUM

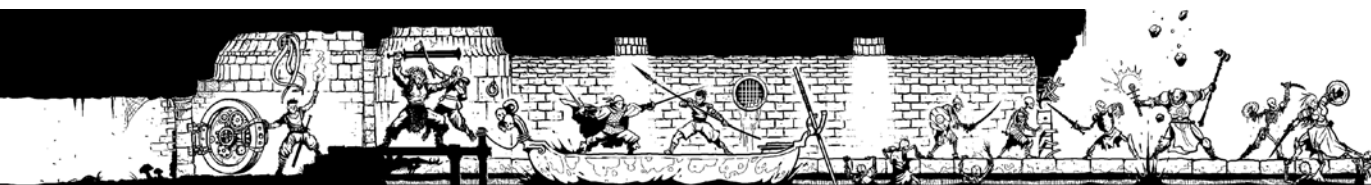
At last the adventurers find the proverbial brass ring: Magnus' private quarters, where he kept all of his most valued components and possessions. This is where the mad genius concocted many of his personal brews, and they can still be found and exploited (though sadly, the recipes exist only in the doctor's head). Other treasures may be found as well — additional plunder the party may find helpful whether they work for the Church, the Circle, or themselves.

The door into the Sanctum is locked and made of heavy wood with reinforced steel bands. It requires a successful Prestidigitation/Disable check (Tricky DC) to open and has a Damage Save of +18 with 3 saves. Once the party is in, read or paraphrase the following.

A cylindrical brick tower furnace dominates this triangular room, surrounded by a collection of copper tubes attached to glass condensers and a complex distilling vessel. Retorts hang on pegs along the walls, and high shelves hold beakers, bottles, flasks, porcelain cups, and other curios. A glass-fronted cabinet contains rows of neatly organized books and journals.
You have found Magnus Croatalorn's inner sanctum.

Rummaging through the room, the adventurers find a vast array of alchemical tools and other related items: there are crucibles, tongs, scoops, pincers, stirrers, spoons, and ladles, made of brass, copper, cast iron, and other metals. There's a fine balance scale, a small herb press, and several leather bellows of various sizes (not all of them still functional — Magnus was hard on them). Beyond what's in the boxed text the shelves have vials, crocks, and burlap sacks, each containing salts, powders, salves, acids, bases, more chemicals than the party can count, as well as exotic ingredients like dried animal carcasses, preserved insects, and even anatomical bits harvested from various higher species.

In total, all of this might yield a few thousand silver from the right dealer, or it can be used as a Chemist's Workshop (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 159), but the real finds here are the following...





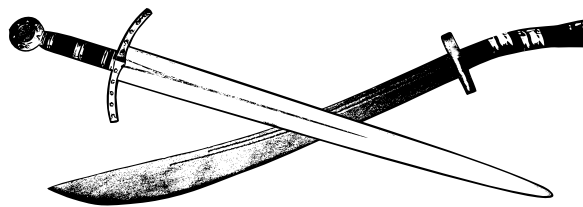
The furnace is an *athanor*, sometimes called an arcane furnace. It's designed to maintain a constant and even heat over long periods, often 40 weeks or more, to incubate exotic elixirs. If used here or carefully moved into another Chemist's Workshop, the *athanor* increases the threat range with related checks by 1 more (total +4 for the whole workshop).

- The curios in the room include a tiger's tongue pierced by a diamond stud (worth 150 sp), a basilisk egg (250 sp), strips of kraken tentacle (100s in total), a glove made of werewolf fur (75 sp), and a phoenix feather (300 sp). Any of these might also satisfy various spell Preparation Costs and other story needs, at the GM's discretion.
- Magnus' copious records detail the creation of the hybrids, golems, homunculi, and oozes, as well as lengthy alchemical experiments conducted in the Abiogenesis Pool and Womb Chamber. The Church would consider this material heresy while the Circle would hold it up as the preserved brilliance of an undisputable genius. In addition to the XP reward, delivering it to the party's patrons earns each adventurer an Instant Reward of 2 Reputation (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 344).
- Slid delicately between two of the journals is Magnus' final letter, written just hours before he was struck down by the Forsakening poison. This lengthy missive can be found on page 61.

Also stored here are several distilled (non-spoiling) elixirs, including...

- 8 carefully bundled flasks, each containing a Boost Charisma potion (these were promised to Lucien Bokk in exchange for "special deliveries")
- 4 bottles of creamy, mucous-colored slime (Repulsion Oil), which operate like Oil of Blurring against creatures with the Ooze Type, and last for 10 minutes each (see page 38)
- 2 vials of sweet-smelling blue fluid (distilled cocktails of Boost Intelligence and Confidence potions)
- 2 jars of thick brown lubricant (Restoration Oil)
- 1 bottle of thick green paste that smells like sour milk (a private concoction that dramatically improves the chance of pregnancy from cross-species breeding)
- 1 large beaker of red cherry-flavored solution (3 draughts of Healing potion)
- 1 vial of pink liquid (a persistent cocktail of Debilitating and Stupefying poisons) This elixir was a point of personal pride for Magnus. He called it "brain poison," after its chief component: a rare, scarlet-colored false morel whose complex, honeycomb-like infolded caps resemble the surface of a brain. Magnus used brain poison to kill his brother and servants; its slow action is nearly undetectable, mimicking a horrid disease of the bowels while also dulling the wits.

Except in the beaker's case, each container holds 1 use or application of the listed elixir.



CROATALORN'S LETTER

My Dear Master Calabari,

Natural philosophy is the obsession that has driven my life's work. You asked how I came to follow this path of ours, especially given my father's deluded devotion to the Church. When I was but 14 years of age I accompanied my father to the home of one Captain Nypharantes. (You may recognize the name: it was just last year when that famous navigator, at 71 years spry, was shamefully arrested by the Inquisitors for possessing a harmless artifact.) Of course I knew nothing of Nypharantes' activities at the time, and neither did my father or he would never have associated with him.

That night as I rested fitfully in a strange bed in the captain's guest quarters, I could not sleep. Earlier I had spied what appeared to be a copy of Horace's scandalous "My Journeys Among the Goblin Tribes of the Carnelian Islands," a recently published work that had in those days a reputation for containing lurid depictions of the barbaric mating rituals of orcs and goblins. Naturally, being a boy of tender years with an inquisitive mind I had a strong interest in such common trash. Youthful curiosity drove me from my room and I made my way to the study. Sadly, the book was nowhere to be found.

Disappointed, I instead flipped through some of the captain's other volumes, and under one bland cover — I believe it was "Church Hymns for the Devout Traveler" — I discovered an amazing text entitled "The Secret Machinery of the World" by Gaius Paramelchior. At the time I was unaware that this man was one of the Circle's founding intellects but the book being so cautiously hidden stole my attention, and I





spent until nearly dawn devouring its contents.

We have both read this book many times now, and I know you agree that it is one of the finest explorations of our craft ever to be inked to paper. You, however, discovered Paramelchior's genius as an adult. Imagine that spark ignited in one's youth... My impressionable mind reeled at the revelations! To know so early the lies perpetrated by the Church, and to be able to dedicate one's entire adult life to revealing and undermining its fallacies... It has been rapturous!

Such knowledge of the arcane, of worlds beyond our own, those bold theories on the origin of life itself... The idea that all life was not spewed from the careless loins of gods but crawled wretchedly from the primordial soup... My mind raced as I returned the book and scurried back to my bed. It was all I could do not to scream as my dullard brother snored nearby. What dreams I had that night!

So there you have it, old friend. I owe my awakening to boyhood desire and vulgar curiosity. The irony! Is that not a sign that the gods are fiction? That only Nature and Chance rule our lives?

In 40 days my latest distillation shall be finished, and I shall write again with results. For now, all I am sure of is that there is life in the vats, more advanced than what has come before. Eyes have begun to appear, and the hint of a face! I just need the final catalyst! Truly we live in exiting times...

Be well, be careful, and be cautious. The Church has spies everywhere, and we are fewer every day. I would not see your smile frozen in living death before you have the chance to appreciate the wonders I will unleash!

Your brother in the Circle,

Croatalorn



DIRECTION

Here are some questions you might be asked, and answers for you to offer or implement.

Q: If the Organism contains Zebulon's brain, does it have access to his divine abilities?

A: No. Zebulon's ties to his god and Alignment were severed when the Organism absorbed his personality.

Q: What if the party fails to kill the Organism, or retreats and leaves it alive?

A: It eventually kills everything in the dungeon and then the manor before venturing out into the greater Realm. Each sentient creature it consumes increases its cunning, and if it absorbs Magnus its intellect grows many times over (which still leaves it no "smarter" than a well-educated commoner, but that's enough to start scheming on a much larger scale). The doctor's obsessions also impact the creature, compelling it to seek out new species it hasn't eaten before, and to start absorbing elixirs and other magical and semi-magical substances. This may kill it, or turn it into something even more horrendous.

Q: Hey, where's all the coin?

A: Maintaining a laboratory, dungeon, and manor like these is hideously expensive. Magnus is a minor feudal lord, but spent most of what he claimed in supplies to feed his specimens and animals, and to buy glassware, monster specimens, slaves, and the chemicals used to make his golems. In the end he was reduced to trading potions for monster parts because he couldn't afford to pay in coin anymore.

On the up side, the alchemical goods in the sanctum are worth a small fortune.

Q: If the party retreats, will the Golem-Bride and Surgeons follow?

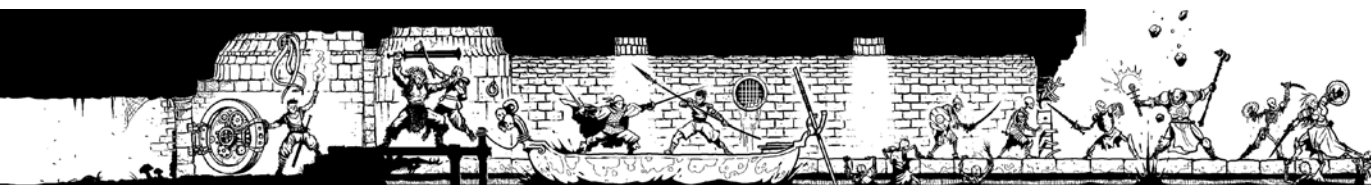
A: Yes, though they may have to deal with anything the party left alive elsewhere in the dungeon (such as any NPCs left behind to recover or guard the rear). No golems follow the party out of the manor; Magnus left them with strict instructions never to go outside.

CAST

THE GOLEM-BRIDE (SPECIAL NPC, ADVERSARY)

"You would look better with different heads. Fortunately, I can help with that."

Description: Magnus did his best to preserve his dead wife's beauty when he reanimated her corpse. He was not wholly





successful. The Golem-Bride is slender, with big green eyes and long red hair — all traits shared with Lunalia in life. However this creature also has a thin, immobile smile and her overlarge jade eyes are fixed in a dead stare. Her body doesn't so much move as jerk from place to place, sometimes fast, sometimes very slow. Her skin has a waxy, grayish pallor, and her face is slightly bloated. Her wrists are badly scarred. No longer curly, her hair hangs in long, lank strands to her waist, and is now an unnatural shade of crimson. She wears a long black gown embroidered with white lace, along with a red cloak, a gold tiara with a crab motif, and crab-shaped gold earrings. She carries a long, thin knife.

Motivation: The Golem-Bride was created as the perfect, obedient wife and assistant. She supervises the household and dungeon servants and carries out the doctor's wishes to the letter. Now that he is out of commission, the Golem-Bride is acting on his final commands, which were to complete his masterpiece, the Perfect Organism, and to force Inquisitors Elessandra and Zebulon to divulge the secret remedy for the Forsakening poison. The Golem-Bride is conditioned to be perky even as she orders the violent death of a captive or personally sees to someone's evisceration. In a fight, she stays back as long as possible, directing the Surgeons in their dirty work.

The Golem-Bride (Medium Construct Walker — 100 XP): Str 14, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init IV; Atk IV; Def V; Res IV; Health V; Comp III; Skills: Crafting IV, Medicine VI, Resolve IV; Qualities: *Achilles Heel (fire)*, *cagey I*, *damage reduction 3*, *expertise (Medicine)*, *feat (Bandage, Coordinated Attack)*, *fearless II*, *frenzy I*, *monstrous defense I*, *spell defense IV*, *tough I*

Attacks/Weapons: Stiletto (dmg 1d4+2 lethal; threat 18–20; qualities: AP 8, finesse), Long knife (dmg 1d6+2 lethal; threat 19–20; qualities: finesse, keen 4), Rage Scream (sonic damage attack III: 30 ft. cone; dmg 1d8 sonic damage per 2 TL, Ref DC 15 for 1/2 damage)

Gear: Bandages (10), chemist's kit, doctor's bag

Treasure: 1G, 1M (plus the tiara and earrings, which are each worth about 200s; and her silver and gold wedding ring, which is worth 250s)

SURGEONS (STANDARD NPCs, ADVERSARIES)

"A nip, a tuck, and you're close to done!"

Description: These lean four-armed flesh golems wear blood-spattered white robes and masks. Their bodies are covered in scars — many more than were required to stitch their parts together — and their two extra arms terminate in claw-like surgical scalpels, grafted on to replace their second set of hands.

Motivation: The Surgeons are comprised of parts from the dozen or so most loyal house servants to ever grace the halls of Croatalorn Manor (most of the parts were collected post-mortem, though Magnus made the magnificent sacrifice of

murdering the last couple victims so he could complete these golems). True to their title, the Surgeons assist in the "delicate" work conducted in the Vivisection Laboratory, and now that Magnus is indisposed they serve the Golem-Bride in all things.

Surgeons (Medium Construct Walkers — 64 XP): Str 14, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 6, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init II; Atk IV; Def III; Res II; Health V; Comp I; Skills: Athletics III, Medicine III; Qualities: *Achilles heel (fire)*, *damage reduction 3*, *feat (Horde Basics)*, *fearless II*, *monstrous defense I*, *repulsive I*, *spell defense III*, *swift attack I*, *unnerving*

Attacks/Weapons: Claw II (dmg 1d6+2 lethal; threat 19–20, qualities: bleed)

Gear: Doctor's bag

Treasure: None

PUDDINGS (SPECIAL NPCs, ADVERSARIES)

"Slurp..."

Description: Slick, seething masses of primordial cells, these creatures hover in their birth tubes like dark, roiling clouds at the cusp of winter. Suspended there in opaque viscous fluid they're almost beautiful... until they're released to seek out their first meals.

Motivation: Like the jellies in the Abiogenesis Pool, these creatures have no purpose in the world beyond consumption. These are especially hungry, given they only recently gained sentience and have yet to feed.

Puddings (Huge Ooze Walkers — 71 XP): Str 14, Dex 2, Con 16, Int 4, Wis 2, Cha 2; SZ L (3×3, Reach 2); Spd 20 ft. ground; Init I; Atk V; Def I; Res I; Health VI; Comp I; Skills: Athletics IV; Qualities: *Blindsight*, *critical hesitation*, *damage splitter*, *natural defense (acid)*, *superior climber II*, *tough I*, *tricky (Mix-Up (Grapple))*

Attacks/Weapons: Slam III (dmg 2d8+2 acid; threat 19–20; upgrades: grab), Squeeze III (dmg 2d12+2 acid; notes: Grapple benefit)

Treasure: None

"THE PERFECT ORGANISM" (SPECIAL NPC, ADVERSARY)

"I am... perfect. I am... all things. You can be perfect too... Join me."

Description: In his final days as more than a vegetable wilting in his master bedroom, Magnus was convinced that he'd stumbled onto the secret at the heart of the most confounding riddle of all time: from what source sprang all life in the world? He'd worked backward through years of trial and error, splicing and merging species until he found what he believed to be at the root of all of them. Sadly, what he actually did was spin off a new





and more virulent strain of a creature that's been threatening dungeoneers for hundreds of years, albeit one rarely seen or discussed in civilized parts of the world: a chaos beast.

The Perfect Organism does have a few unique traits. First, it can speak, though it can only use the voices of those it's made from, or consumed (as of this scene, that means only the voice of Inquisitor Zebulon). Second, it retains the memories and emotions of those it's consumed, and it can reason with these in ways that are close to human cunning. Finally, it can assume the shapes of its victims — in whole, in part, or in combination — though only for a round at a time. Perhaps if it were to mature these abilities would grow, and maybe it would gain new ones as well, but the adventurers aren't about to let that happen, now are they?

Motivations: Imagine being born with someone else's memories — someone who hates you and your creator with every fiber of his being. Now imagine desperately searching for yourself beyond this rage and finding nothing but insatiable, unfathomable hunger. This is the Perfect Organism's mindset in a nutshell. It's been given reason without personality, and it finds itself desperately wanting someone new in its mind to compete with its brain-donor's never-ending bile. So it lashes out at every living thing around it, hoping to satisfy its hunger (patently impossible, but it doesn't know that), and also to find solace in new voices (equally futile, though not for the same reasons).

Beyond seeding and feeding the Organism's self-loathing, Zebulon's memories work against the creature whenever it is presented with religious paraphernalia, like one of the Inquisitor's ritual weapons, or a Church holy book or symbol (like Zebulon's own copy of *The Eternal Journey*, found in Guest Bedroom J2). The first time this happens after the Organism awakens, flashes of Zebulon's faith flood through its mind, momentarily giving it pause; the creature halts and finds itself stunned for a full round.

An adventurer may think to try this on their own, based on the evidence in Rooms 21 and 22, but if not the GM can use the event to give the adventurers a brief reprieve if they're having a hard time, or just to add a little color to the combat. Elessandra can be the cause as she tries to reason with what's left of her former companion. Regardless, the Organism overcomes this weakness after that single round, and thereafter it is no longer fazed by similar displays.

"The Perfect Organism" (Medium Ooze Outsider Walker — 136 XP): Str 12, Dex 10, Con 10, Int 10, Wis 10, Cha 10; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 20 ft. ground; Init IX; Atk VII; Def III; Res VII; Health III; Comp IV; Skills: Acrobatics VII, Athletics VI, Sneak V; Qualities: *Condition immunity (paralyzed)*, *damage immunity (sneak attack)*, *damage reduction 2*, *darkvision II*, *feat (Elusive, Mobility Basics)*, *frenzy II*, *monstrous defense III*, *shapeshifter III **, *spell defense II*, *tough I*, *unnerving*

Attacks/Weapons: Claw I (1d6+1 lethal; threat 20), Chaos Touch (enraging attack II: Will save DC 15 or become enraged for 2d6 rounds, upgrades: supernatural attack (claw)), Devolving Touch (slowing attack II: Will save DC 15 or become slowed for 2d6 rounds, upgrades: supernatural attack (claw))

Gear: None

Treasure: 3A

* The Perfect Organism's shapeshifter quality works as described in the *Fantasy Craft Rulebook* (see page 234), except that it can only assume the shape of a character it's already at least partly consumed. At the start of this scene, the Organism can only assume the shape of Zebulon. Consuming enough of a character requires the Organism to share at least 1 square with him for 1 uninterrupted minute. During this time the creature involuntarily assumes bits and pieces of the target's appearance, his or her head sprouting from the creature's mass, for example, or a tattoo appearing across the creature's surface. The Organism may speak with hints of the target's voice or using phrases he or she says all the time. After this minute, the Organism can assume the character's shape and voice at will.

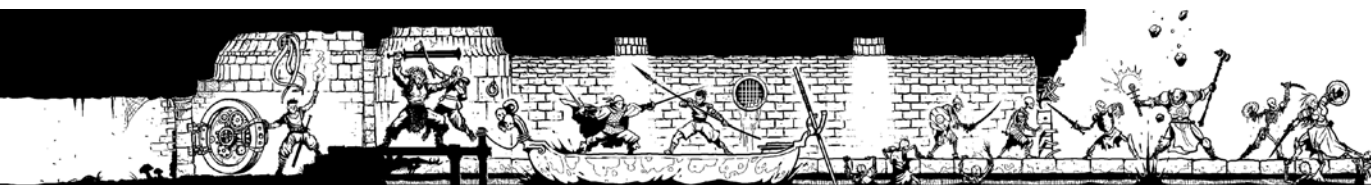
NEXT STEPS

Victory in the Vivisection Laboratory and the Womb Chamber marks the climax of the adventure. With all the manor's threats eliminated (save perhaps for anything the party bypassed or ignored), it's time to claim treasure and decide what to tell the commoners living in Croatalorn's province, if anything. Leaving the politics of the area to chance runs the risk of innocents sneaking into the manor to investigate, where they may fall victim to any dangers left behind. It's even possible they could be captured by surviving golems and used in new experiments, or consumed by the Organism, if it's permitted to live.

Eventually the King of the Realm appoints a new lord in the area, though he almost certainly does so without the benefit of knowing what happened to the old one. Whether the party delivers Magnus' sanctum scribblings to the Church or not, many more Inquisitors are dispatched in the interim to sanctify and then collapse the dungeon corridors before razing the manor to the ground.

Magnus' scribblings offer wild and potentially revealing insights that may be buried forever by the Church or spark countless new Circle experiments. There's plenty of new adventure to be had in either case, and if the adventurers deliver the works to one of these factions they're celebrated and offered many more chances to act on Magnus' legacy.

Surviving NPCs still need to get home, and so an outgoing, protective party will have plenty of reasons to travel in the coming days.





COMPLICATION: NEW ARRIVALS (OPTIONAL)

There are several reasons the GM might want to introduce new arrivals...

- The adventurers are being too cautious and need a nudge to pick up the pace.
- The adventurers could use a fresh challenge.
- The adventurers leave the manor and are gone long enough for another group to arrive.
- The GM thinks a new complication will add to the fun and danger of the current scene.

If the adventurers are loyal to the Circle, then an additional Inquisitor arrives with Church support. If they're loyal to the Church a Circle Magister arrives with several heavies. Independent adventurers may face either, or alternatively, one or more new monsters may be delivered and escape, rushing into the manor and possibly even into the dungeons in search of fresh prey.

A Church or Circle group may arrive with the same objectives as the adventurers, whether sent to help them or not. Any group could just as easily have another agenda, or additional motives, as suits the story the GM is telling and the particulars of the Realm in his world (or whatever other setting is being used).

The GM might want to bring in a party allied with the adventurers' faction, or introduce either group to support a struggling party's exploration of the manor and dungeon. In this case the additional party has no impact on experience gain (see page 49).

Sample Church and Circle parties follow. Leaders are detailed, while standard followers are chosen from the Rogues Gallery (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 245).

New monsters can be chosen as desired from the Bestiary (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 253).

The GM should be careful not to overwhelm the party, as described in *The Art of (Not) Killing the PCs* (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 243).

THE CHURCH GROUP

Inquisitor Roger Abilard leads a small cadre of Human Devotees, one per surviving adventurer (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 245).

INQUISITOR ROGER ABILARD

"I've seen where this leads. You won't like it."

Description: Roger is a grizzled veteran Inquisitor in his mid-50s, approaching too old for the job. Yet where his skin is aged his muscles remain firm and his mind is still quick as a whip. He's been with the Church for decades, and his long service affords him various personal flourishes, such as the family crest alongside the common Inquisitor marks on his tabard.

Motivations: Cynical and world-weary, Roger still trusts the gods to show him the way... for now. If he lives long enough he's sure to stumble down the path of doubt, but at the moment he finds precious certainty in the methods and practices of the Church. Roger believes someone must maintain order or the world will simply fall apart. Witnessing Magnus' diseased vision of the world only reinforces this view.

Unlike many Inquisitors, Roger doesn't view the Circle as evil. To him they're merely lawbreakers and troublemakers, in need of jailing and possibly rehabilitation. This mission may test those beliefs.

Years ago, Roger trained Elessandra and Zebulon, and he still thinks kindly of them. No matter the cost to him, he does everything in his power to save them, or failing that, to bring their remains home.

Roger Abilard (Medium Folk Walker — 73 XP): Str 12, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 12; SZ M (1x1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init III; Atk IV; Def V; Res IV; Health: IV; Comp: III; Skills: Athletics V, Intimidate VIII, Resolve IV, Tactics V; Qualities: *Class ability (Captain: battle planning I (I want them alive!, press on!); Paladin: stand in judgment I), devoted (Heroism I and II), fearless II, Interests (Alignment: The Church)*

Attacks/Weapons: Keen mace (dmg 1d8+1 lethal, threat 20, qualities: AP 4, keen 4)

Mounts and Vehicles: Riding horse (Spd 50 ft. ground (Run 250 ft.); Travel 7; SZ/Def L/IV)

Gear: Manacles, jaw trap

Treasure: 2G

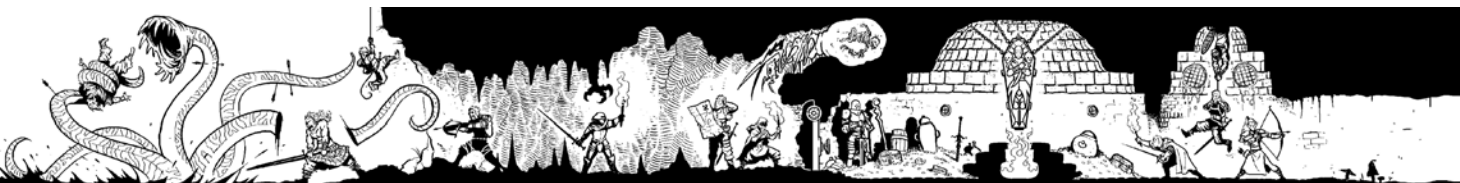
THE CIRCLE GROUP

Magister Cyrus Devon leads a small cadre of Human Brigands, one per surviving adventurer (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 245).

MAGISTER CYRUS DEVON (SPECIAL NPC)

"Here's a little something that came to me the moment I laid eyes on you..."

Description: Cyrus has an average build, a thin mouth, and long, straight black hair. His piercing amber eyes are well-known in taverns across the Realm, where his romantic triumphs are the stuff of minor legend. When traveling, Cyrus wears orange and brown robes, strings a lute over his shoulder, and has a sword sheathed





at his side. He's always humming a tune and often sells his voice to help with his public cover. Even in the cheeriest of moments, however, his smile never quite reaches his eyes.

Motivations: Beyond the bard routine Cyrus is a Circle expeditionary, charged with procuring arcane objects of all kinds. He's no coward, but he's also not used to the front line, and happily sacrifices others to save his own hide. He serves the Circle mainly for power, and hopes to rise through the ranks and eventually secure a place for himself in the elusive group's leadership. In the meantime he only delivers part of what he finds; the rest he keeps for himself or sells to the highest bidder.

Cyrus Devon (Medium Folk Walker — 73 XP): Str 10, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 16; SZ M (1×1, Reach 1); Spd 30 ft. ground; Init VI; Atk III; Def V; Res IV; Health: II; Comp: III; Skills: Bluff VII, Blend V, Investigate V, Spellcasting IV; Spells: Blur, Charm Person III, Darkness I, Detect Alignment, Entropic Shield, Illusionary Image II, Insanity I, Knock, Tongues I; Qualities: *Attractive I, Class ability (Assassin: Fake it, quick on your feet; Edgemaster: Blade dance I, carve), death throes (fire), interest (Alignment: Circle), rend*

Attacks/Weapons: Long sword (dmg 1d12 lethal, threat 20)

Mounts and Vehicles: Riding horse (Spd 50 ft. ground (Run 250 ft.); Travel 7; SZ/Def L/IV)

Gear: Partial leather armor (DR 1; Resist Fire 3; DP -1; ACP -0; Spd —; Disguise +0), mage's pouch

Treasure: 1C, 1M

REWARDS & PENALTIES

Don't forget XP for adversaries (listed in their stat blocks). Remember also that XP is gained for defeating adversaries, whether they're killed or not (see *Fantasy Craft*, page 337).

SCENE 1: THE HAUNTED MANOR

A. Speaking with the locals before entering the manor: 10 XP

A. Recovering Magnus' missives: 10 XP per missive recovered

A. Encountering Lunalia's ghost: 10 XP

B. Correctly interpreting the ghost's message: 20 XP

A. Finding Magnus' body: 25 XP

A. Locating the secret passage to the Halls of Testing: 25 XP

SCENE 2: THE HALLS OF TESTING

A. Recovering Magnus' missives: 10 XP per missive recovered

A. Liberating *some* of the captive animals from the Cages (Room 4): 15 XP

B. Liberating *all* of the captive animals from the Cages (Room 4): 30 XP

C. Safely evacuating *all* of the captive animals from the manor: 50 XP

A. Putting *either or both* of the pregnant captives out of their misery: 10 XP

B. Liberating either of the pregnant captives from the Maternity Cell (Room 5): 20 XP

C. Liberating both the pregnant captives from the Maternity Cell (Room 5): 30 XP

D. Safely evacuating *both* the pregnant captives from the manor: 40 XP

E. Ensuring *both* the pregnant captives are cared for after the adventure: 60 XP

A. Safely evacuating the baby gorgons from the manor: 25 XP

B. Ensuring the baby gorgons are cared for after the adventure: 50 XP

A. Liberating Jordark from the Holding Cell (Room 9): 20 XP

B. Calming, healing, and/or feeding Jordark: 40 XP

C. Safely evacuating Jordark from the manor: 60 XP

A. Liberating Jarn P'Tor from the Acid Test (Room 12): 20 XP

B. Healing Jarn P'Tor: 40 XP

C. Safely evacuating Jarn P'Tor from the manor: 60 XP

A. Liberating *either* Elessandra or Nazdregga from the Gas Chamber (Room 13): 15 XP

B. Liberating *both* Elessandra and Nazdregga from the Gas Chamber (Room 13): 30 XP

C. Safely evacuating *either* Elessandra or Nazdregga from the manor: 45 XP

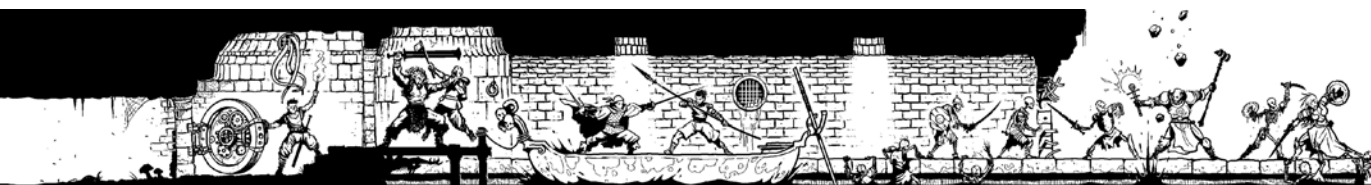
D. Safely evacuating *both* Elessandra and Nazdregga from the manor: 60 XP

A. Putting Millie out of her misery: 10 XP

B. Liberating Millie from her cell (Room 14): 20 XP

C. Safely evacuating Millie from the manor: 40 XP

D. Ensuring Millie is cared for after the adventure: 60 XP





SCENE 3: THE LOWER DUNGEON

A. Allowing some of What Remains in Room 17 to settle into the party's gear after killing one or more of the creatures: 25 XP

B. Allowing some of What Remains in Room 17 to settle into the party's gear *without* killing any of the creatures: 50 XP

C. Delivering some of the merged creatures to a suitable new home: 75 XP

D. Delivering *all* of the merged creatures to a suitable new home: 100 XP

E. Arranging for the rest of What Remains in Room 17 to be taken to a suitable new home: 125 XP

A. Recovering the remains of Heralt Felldown's hammer: 25 XP

SCENE 4: THE PERFECT ORGANISM

A. Giving the Perfect Organism pause by showing it a Church or personal item: 50 XP

A. Destroying the Golem-Bride's body, thus freeing Lunalia's ghost: 100 XP

A. Assisting Elessandra and Jarn P'Tor in preparing their loved ones' remains (or if the NPCs are dead or unavailable, personally preparing the bodies): 25 XP

A. Destroying Magnus' research library: 75 XP

B. Securing Magnus' research library: 150 XP

* A strict reading of these rewards assumes the adventurers are fundamentally heroic and well-meaning; those with other leanings gain these rewards for acting in accordance with their actual objectives. For example, a wicked party sponsored by slavers might earn evacuation rewards for retaining captives with potential value on the black market. Such a party would still earn evacuation rewards as written for any captives that don't have value outside the manor. As in all cases, the GM should tweak according to the needs of the setting, story, and characters involved.





HANDOUTS

NOTE FOUND IN THE WASHROOM

Note to Self:

Hybridization of pseudo-hydra female and basilisk stock was successful! Physical mating proved impossible, so artificial insemination with treated basilisk seed was necessary.

Subject was force-fed weekly doses of fertility potion to ensure successful hybridization.

My dear wife has been so helpful, much more useful than the others. I miss her laugh, and her sweet scent, but it is so much more convenient now that she is willing to assist in my good work.

Enough. After seventeen weeks a clutch of four eggs has been laid. These hybrids are smaller than those recorded in Qual's 'Chronicle,' and of unusual mottled color, but larger than basilisk eggs by far.

After female hydra attempted to eat own eggs (one lost, one cracked) it was returned to testing cells for punishment. Was forced to improvise an incubator, which I hope will not unduly compromise the experiment. Honestly, do hydras have no maternal instinct at all?

Guests tomorrow, local miller. May have the cook the cracked egg for breakfast, as I doubt it will be viable. I flatter myself that, beyond a scientist, I am quite the gourmand! Will be interesting to see if ingesting basilisk-hydra eggs have any unusual effect on humans...

NOTE FOUND IN THE STAIRWAY CUPBOARD

7*11*1155

The question of origin is crucial. In his "Six Great Ages of the World," the esteemed Heroclitus of Zhar proves the Age of Ice was the beginning of all. I therefore deduce that the oldest, or original, of the Folk species is that with the greatest resistance to cold. To test this I have devised an experiment in which a variety of folk races are repeatedly exposed to freezing temperatures and their reactions cataloged.

Particularly interesting results were observed in the cold-blooded races. This leads me to believe that all races were not created simultaneously by "gods" since such species as the Saurians could not have survived if, as Heroclitus states, "in the ancient days, the entire world was covered with a blanket of ice and snow." Such species must be younger, doubtless created by others like myself.

My research drives me to this conclusion: most beasts are formed through spontaneous gestation, from primordial slime and chemicals, while hybrid creatures and beast-folk - goblins, naga, and the like - are the product of ancient human arcanists working at the dawn of time! I can prove this. I must prove it.

I have sacrificed everything for my research: my brother, my lovely wife. His wife. No matter! I cannot falter. This quest is all I have left.

NOTE FOUND IN THE STUDY

"A thousand thousand species, each created in the likeness of its own lords!"

So sayeth the blind faith of the Church. But unlike the Church, the Circle does not require faith. Faith is belief without regard to evidence. There is no reasonable evidence that gods created the races in their own image. My vivisections have shown that the brain is the seat of intelligence, that if a serpent has the head of a man, it speaks as a man. So, I ask... did the gods of mice and pigeons have their same puny brain? How could life have been born from that?

LETTER FOUND IN THE KITCHEN

Dear Master Bok,

I am indeed most grateful for the splendid basilisk specimen you last delivered. This time your hired men followed almost all my advice regarding its care and feeding, and so I have no complaints regarding its health. Is it not a dreadful waste when living creatures expire before we have a chance to make proper use of them?

My sympathies for what happened to your man Torrid, although in truth he did not listen and has only himself to blame. You are quite certain I should keep him? I have yet to find a suitable spot to stand him, and my servants are uncomfortable knowing where the statue came from.

I am most looking forward to the wycern you have promised me. It will be invaluable to my studies of the draconic condition. Could the two-legged wycern be the vital link between the legless wyrm, the four-legged winged drake, and its larger cousin, the mighty dragon?

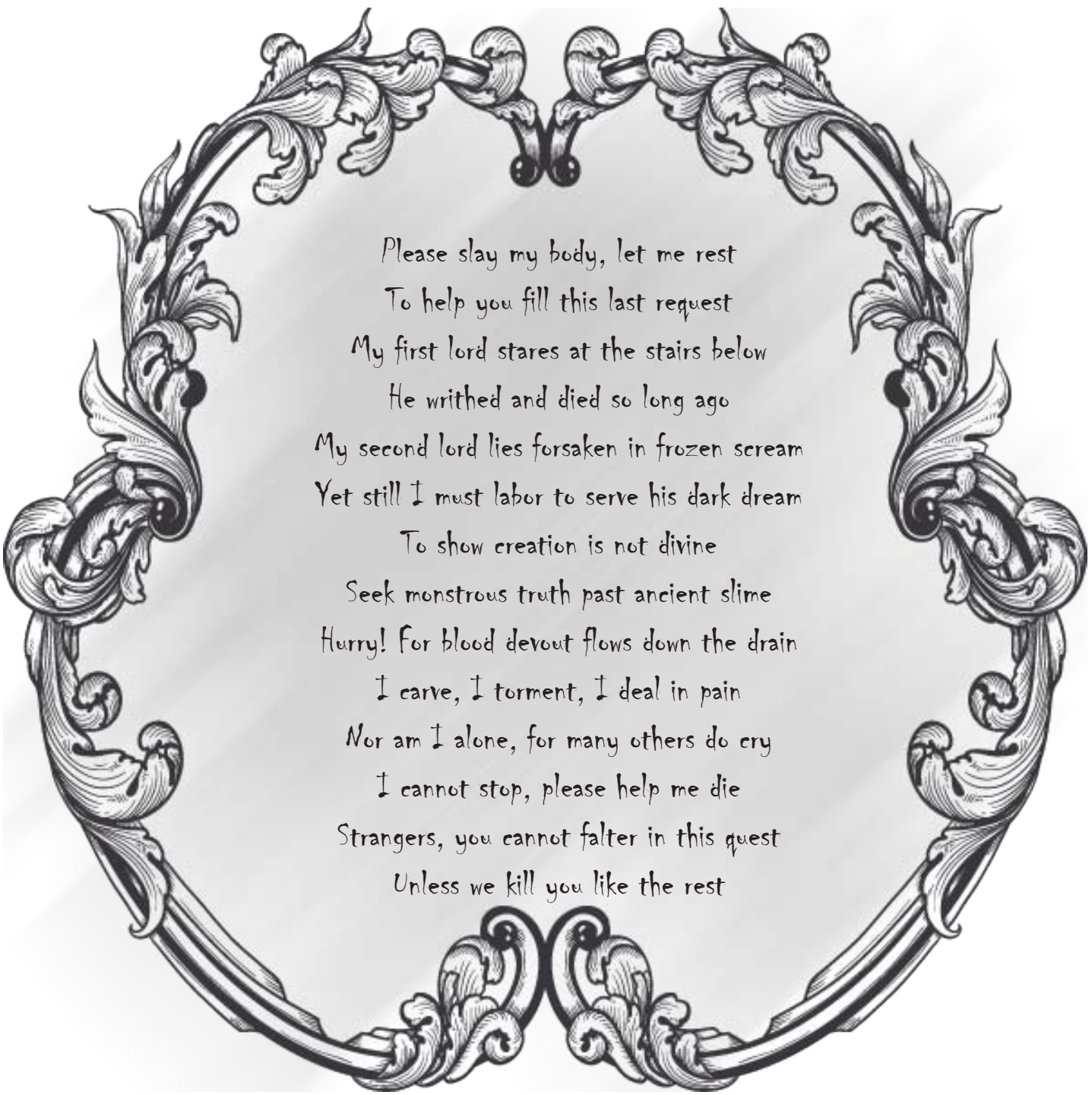
With regard to the question you raised in your last letter: of course I will publish a monogram of my findings, though I fear its circulation must of necessity be private and limited. Rest assured that you might have a copy for your family if you wish. It is gratifying to hear that your delightful daughter has scholarly interests! Would that I was blessed with such children, but I'm afraid that my

wife's recent illness has left her barren. Also, please inform your daughter that she should never apologize for such academic curiosity! It is the truest mark of intelligence, and surely what divides the best of our folk from the lesser brute forms like the goblin, saurian, and ogre.

Ah, that reminds me! I have a special request. With the direction of my current research, I will require more special deliveries. I appreciate the challenges you face in acquiring these exotic specimens for me, but know that they are so much more useful than mere beasts or monsters. I will append a detailed list of my requirements.

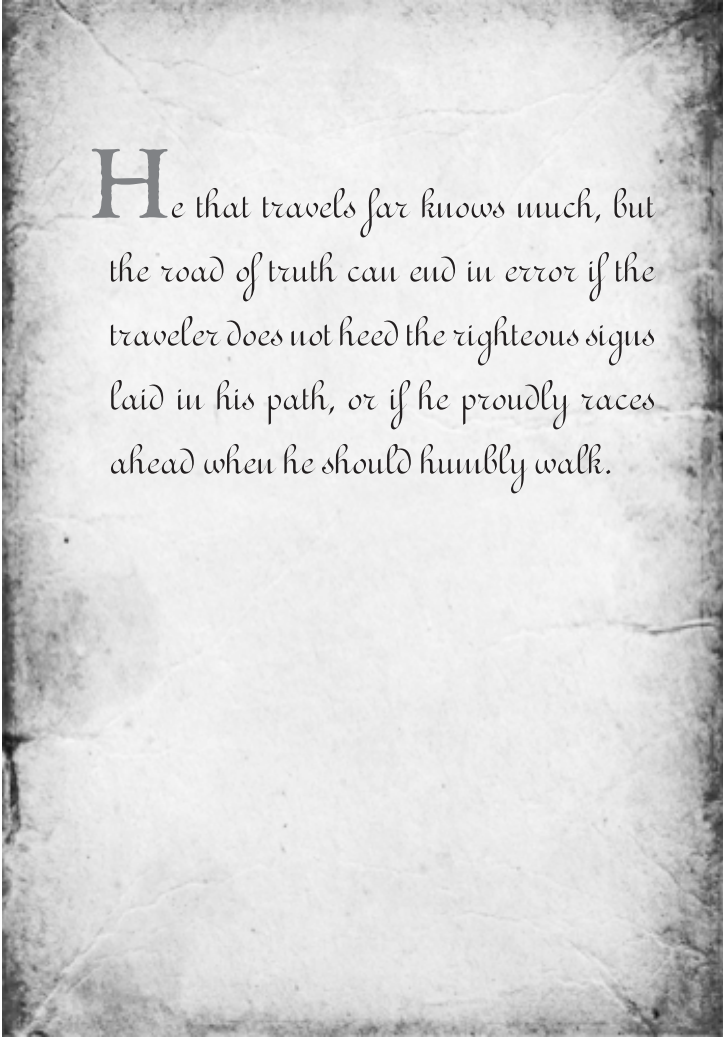
As before, I would prefer to keep our transactions to simple exchanges. I have pried myself away from my research to manufacture eight more flasks of the elixirs you desire, and they await your next delivery. I must also stress the importance of discretion, especially in view of the recent rumors. If my experiences have not

BLOOD-SCRAWLED MIRROR MESSAGE



Please slay my body, let me rest
To help you fill this last request
My first lord stares at the stairs below
He writhed and died so long ago
My second lord lies forsaken in frozen scream
Yet still I must labor to serve his dark dream
To show creation is not divine
Seek monstrous truth past ancient slime
Hurry! For blood devout flows down the drain
I carve, I torment, I deal in pain
Nor am I alone, for many others do cry
I cannot stop, please help me die
Strangers, you cannot falter in this quest
Unless we kill you like the rest

PROVERB FROM THE ETERNAL JOURNEY



He that travels far knows much, but the road of truth can end in error if the traveler does not heed the righteous signs laid in his path, or if he proudly races ahead when he should humbly walk.

LETTER FOUND IN THE MASTER BEDROOM

Note to Self:

I forgot and left my other notes downstairs. So far below, too far too walk. I must summon a Nurse to kerry me to Lunalia. These notes are so I will rememember. A phrase goes throuh my mindd, over and over. "The Willow's Dew. Cure for the Willow's Dew." Why is thatt important? So hard to remember. Everything is a sircle. I reemember now. The Inquisiter ate my brane. Curst daart! I will dew the same too her companeon. My puls slowss, yet I heer it echooing incide my chest, thump, thumppp, winding down like the grate clock in the Valespear skool. My hands are stiffeningg, like my beeet. I keep dropping the penn, and my servant must dive to grabb it. This time he cot it in mid aire. Clevver little ting. Did I make hem? I cannot rememberrrrr... I cannot remembr so mucchh. I create lifes. I created life. I rreeemember I killed my brothr and merried his widow and watched her drown in blund. My finul memoree... Let my body rest, she cry. I cannot, sweet Lunalia, you laabor for meee below. Make her talk, my wife! You are my only hope. I must acks assk Minion to hells me kloose my eyes to restt, eyelllids no longur work - fogg in my brane. My wyf is ded. Why do shesstand befour meee? She shimer in the darkk, laffing at my state, demanning I dastroyy whatt I have madde, my lasst hooppe. My circle begiins and eeends. Leters swwiim. I mu-zy s Ong uh u ftay su-

PAGE FOUND IN THE ANIMAL CAGES

I have performed countless vivisections on fish, mice, rabbits, pigeons, dogs, deer, eagles, bears, beasts, and lately monsters of all sorts. I have mastered the art of forming homunculi as few alchemists before me. I have restored corpses. Yet why do my creations fail to breed true? I can indeed mimic life, yet some spark eludes me. My last creation crawled from the vats... yet its organs were inside out. Another was born with two bodies, yet only one heart, and perished quickly. The answer lies in a return to the first principals, to the primordial slime of the ancient past. I must return to the beginning, the first ooze, seeking the lost matrix that generates all life, and the spark that animates it.

I believe the solution must lie in the things that are older than plants, the ancient, creeping

ENTRY FROM WELL ROOM JOURNAL

Daily Journal Entry:

Bokk's hunters brought in a new specimen, a wonderfully fierce young male drake, reddish-black of scale and only slightly injured by the harpoon used to bring it down. It threatened, it bellowed, it blew smoke from its nostrils, but I was not deterred. After weighing it (529 pounds) and measuring it (12 feet and 2 inches from snout to tail), my golems strapped it to the stone table with strong chains, attached the iron muzzle to muffle its cries, and pinned its wings with my longest iron needles. Only then did I begin my examination.

Minion dutifully recorded my observations on his tablet and Luna had her easel out to paint the proceedings. My love's new body retains some of her skill as an artist, and she drew the most marvelously intricate diagrams of the beast's wing musculature as I dissected it. This despite the creature's annoying writhing!

The drake is both like and unlike the other reptilians I have examined. In fact, it had much less in common with the saurian than I expected. Ridiculous! What organ generates the drake's fire? As Luna sponged away the blood a brilliant idea came to me. Perhaps I should extract just one organ at a time. I can apply healing potions, sew the creature up, and induce it to breathe

fire each time until I identify the organ in question.

I will need much more healing elixir, for a constant bath of vitalizing fluids will be needed to sustain the beast through this battery of tests. It is a costly bother, but necessary. I cannot lose such a beautiful specimen before I have made full use of it.

I do wish my minions had procured a female drake as well, but I suppose beggars cannot be choosers. Perhaps Luna can extract some of this one's seed and we can try inseminating the basilisk again. It would yield an interesting hybrid to be sure, and with enough seed I might be able to try later with a saurian or wyvern. I still believe that all the draconic races sprang from such experiments, and I am eager to see if I can expand on the work of my esteemed predecessors.

Indeed, differentiation of key characteristics among the folk species is crucially important to my research regarding the original source-breed. Are the differences merely cosmetic or do they run deeper? My newest experiments will attempt to answer these questions, and...

NOTE FROM ACID ROOM

Note to Self:

Lost another specimen to shock. Must develop better elixirs to reduce trauma during vivisection. Pain management is crucial. New apparatus nearly complete. The acid drip will yield the final data. It may also reveal helpful information about derma properties. Two birds and all.

CROATALORN'S LETTER

My Dear Master Calabri,

Natural philosophy is the obsession that has driven my life's work. You asked how I came to follow this path of ours, especially given my father's deluded devotion to the Church. When I was but 14 years of age I accompanied my father to the home of one Captain Nympharantes. (You may recognize the name: it was just last year when that famous navigator, at 71 years spy, was shamefully arrested by the Inquisition's for possessing a harmless artifact.) Of course I knew nothing of Nympharantes' activities at the time, and neither did my father or he would never have associated with him.

That night as I rested fitfully in a strange bed in the captain's guest quarters, I could not sleep. Earlier I had spied what appeared to be a copy of Horace's scandalous "My Journeys Among the Goblin Tribes of the Carnelian Islands", a recently published work that had in those days a reputation for containing lurid depictions of the barbaric mating rituals of orcs and goblins. Naturally, being a boy of tender years with an inquisitive mind I had a strong interest in such common trash. Youthful curiosity drove me from my room and I made my way to the study. Sadly, the book was nowhere to be found.

Disappointed, I instead flipped through some of the captain's other volumes, and under one bland cover I believe it was "Church Hymns for the Devout Traveler". I discovered an amazing text entitled "The Secret Machinery of the World" by Gaius Panmelchior. At the time I was unaware that this man was one of the Circle's founding intellects but the book being so cautiously hidden stole my attention, and I spent until nearly dawn devouring its contents.

We have both read this book many times now, and I know you agree that it

is one of the finest explorations of our craft ever to be inked to paper. You, however, discovered Panmelchior's genius as an adult. Imagine that spark ignited in one's youth... My impressionable mind reeled at the revelations! To know so early the lies perpetrated by the Church, and to be able to dedicate one's entire adult life to revealing and undermining its fallacies... It has been marvelous!

Such knowledge of the arcane, of worlds beyond our own, those bold theories on the origin of life itself... The idea that all life was not spawned from the careless loins of gods but crawled wretchedly from the primordial soup... My mind raced as I returned the book and scurried back to my bed. It was all I could do not to scream as my dullard brother snored nearby. What dreams I had that night!

So there you have it, old friend. I owe my awakening to boyhood desire and vulgar curiosity. The irony! Is that not a sign that the gods are fiction? That only Nature and Chance rule our lives?

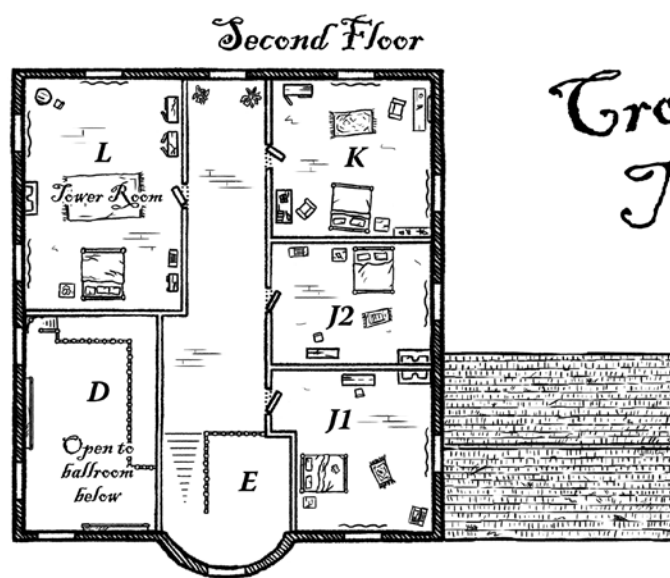
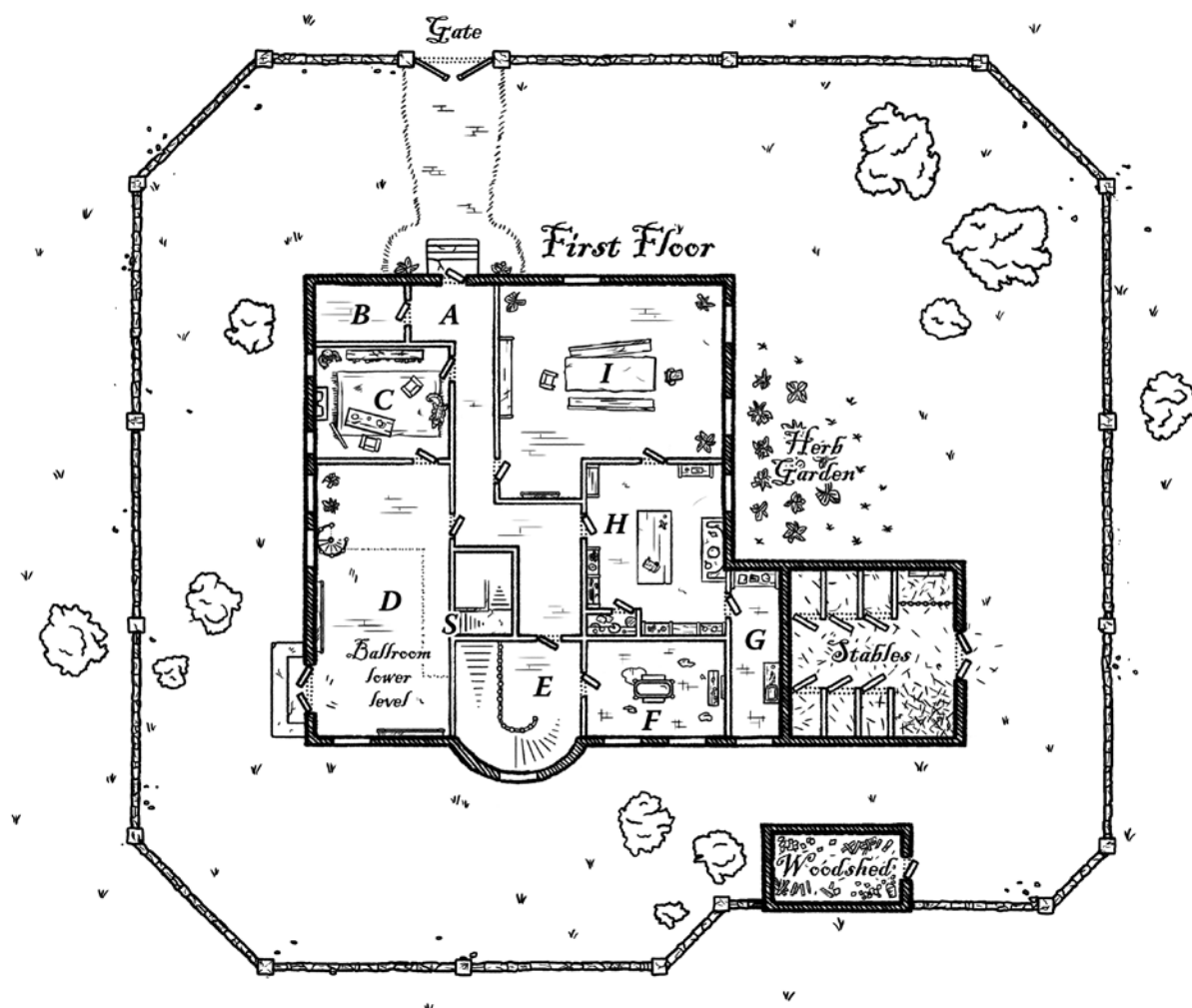
In 40 days my latest distillation shall be finished, and I shall write again with results. For now, all I am sure of is that there is life in the vats, more advanced than what has come before. Eyes have begun to appear, and the hint of a face! I just need the final catalyst! Truly we live in exciting times...

Be well, be careful, and be cautious. The Church has spies everywhere, and we are fewer every day. I would not see your smile frozen in living death before you have the chance to appreciate the wonders I will unleash!

Your brother in the Circle

Croatalorn

MAPS



Treatasorn Manor



Halls of Testing

