

RAGING SWAN PRESS

20 THINGS #44:
ALCHEMIST'S LABORATORY



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20 THINGS #44: ALCHEMIST'S LABORATORY

Are you a busy GM? Does session prep take too long? Do you never have time to work on the cool little details that can bring your session to life? Well fear not! That's where the 20 Things line comes in. This supplement gives you, the time-crunched GM, the tools to effortlessly add verisimilitude and detail to your adventure. Use the material herein either before or during play and bask in your players' adulation.

This instalment provides five pages of flavoursome details compatible with virtually any fantasy roleplaying game and is designed to help you to flesh out and bring to life an alchemist's laboratory.

CREDITS

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FOREWORD

Welcome to this Raging Swan Press System Neutral Edition supplement. Herein you'll find evocative, inspiring text designed to help you—the busy GM—run better, quicker and easier games.

This book is compatible with most fantasy roleplaying games. It's impossible to create a truly system neutral book, though, and some generic game terms—wizard, fighter, human, elf and so on—lurk within. These generic terms are easily modified to the GM's system of choice.

One special note about the NPCs in this supplement. While some are magic-users, fighters, clerics and so on, others are simply normal folk. Because different game systems handle normal folk differently we've made no attempt to note their "class" leaving them simply as "female human" and so on.

USING THIS BOOK

You can use these tables either during session prep or "on the fly" during the actual session. Roll on the desired table and describe the result. Remember:

- Some players may assume because you describe something it is important. This may slow down the party's progress through the adventure. This isn't necessarily a bad thing.
- Modify any result so it fit with your game.
- Ignore or re-roll inappropriate results.
- Have fun!

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1: ALCHEMISTS AND THEIR ASSISTANTS

An alchemist's laboratory self evidently needs an alchemist. However, beyond the alchemist other folk—the alchemist's assistants—might work in and around the laboratory. Some assistants might be skilled alchemists in their own right while others serve as guards, porters, cleaners, cooks and more.

Use the folk below to portray folk the characters encounter in the laboratory; note, few if any references appear below as to the type of work an NPC does (so that they can fulfil any role you desire).

1: ERFANNA NACKLE

Happy, slightly-obsessed gnome with a dark secret.

Wearing grubby clothes and a stained apron this one-eyed, rotund gnomish woman has a smile plastered across her broad, welcoming face.

Erfanna Nackle (NG female gnome) finds fascination in the alchemist's art. She is obsessed with experimentation, and can't wait to have a laboratory of her own.

Personality: Friendly and cheerful, Erfanna seems in many ways to be a typical gnome. Sorrow for her twin brother, Janel, however, gnaws at her heart. He died in a tragic accident a decade ago, and she yet grieves for him.

Mannerisms: Sometimes, when she thinks no one is looking, Erfanna's smile falters and a faraway look comes into her eyes.

Hook: Erfanna was blamed for her brother's death and left her home in shame. Since then she has been essentially alone in the world. She craves a deep connection with other people, and if the characters are nice to her she offers them her services. If they set her up in her own laboratory, she promises to craft them all manner of hitherto unknown wondrous elixirs, potions and salves.

2: GILLON DUERRAL

Borderline alcoholic, fiercely loyal to his employer.

A fine handaxe hangs from the broad belt worn by this black-haired, dishevelled dwarven man.

Gillon Duerral (LN male dwarf fighter 3) prizes loyalty above all things and is staunchly loyal to his employer. Gillon has many skills—cook, distiller of alcohol and carpenter. He is a skilled warrior.

Personality: Gillon is quiet, thoughtful and introspective. He also love brandy, whisky and all other hard spirits. Gillon is a dreamer and has big plans (see "Hooks" below).

Mannerisms: Gillon is never far from his silver hip flask (which is normally tucked into his belt). He has developed an incredible tolerance to alcohol and often takes a quick sip when he thinks no one is looking. He speaks quietly—for a dwarf.

Hook: Gillon hopes to invent a process to make his beloved liquor even more potent than normal. He believes there is a market for super-strong alcohol, and dreams of discovering the process himself, and setting himself up in business.

3: JUSSO ANO

Enthusiastic, but in (desperate) need of training and restraint.

Short brown hair frames this man's face, which is set into a mischievous grin. The man wears ragged, stained clothes and the faint air of destitution hangs about his person.

Jusso Ano (NG middle-aged male human) embodies extreme enthusiasm about alchemy, invention and the exploration of his field. He works feverishly with the alchemist for experience (and the coin necessary to keep his own small laboratory going).

Personality: Jusso has a reputation for being a bit wild and relaxed about safety and the like. He and his employer are constantly at odds—particularly over the alchemist's "ridiculous" focus on health and safety in the laboratory. Jusso is a devout follower of Abarin (N greater god of industry and artifice) and if he had an iota of patience could have made an excellent priest.

Mannerisms: Jusso speaks quickly—the words pouring out of him like a torrent; only the sharp-eared understand him.

Hook: While friendly, Jusso is poor—the cost of ingredients and the "occasional" repairs to his workshop stymie his attempts to get rich. He would be delighted to secure a rich patron—someone who could fund his research and help him out now and then with contributions toward his laboratory's repairs. He'll also do a deal on training!

4: SIPRI MIEMO

Works for an assassin guild.

Tall and sly, this man moves with deft grace. Scars and tiny burn marks cover his hands and forearms.

Sipri Miemo (NE male human assassin 6) masquerades as an alchemist's assistant, but is actually a member for an assassin's guild who has insinuated himself with the alchemist to learn his secrets.

Personality: Seemingly a pleasant man, Sipri does all he can to ingratiate himself with his employer and his employer's customers. Sipri is opportunistic and always looking for a better angle. He carefully pumps the characters for information about their needs and adventures, under the guise of his protecting his employer's interests. Black-hearted, and utterly without morals, Sipri could be both a terrible enemy or a dependable ally—if the price is right.

Mannerisms: Sipri eyes are constantly in motion; perceptive characters feel Sipri is evaluating or measuring them up.

Hook: The alchemist Sipri works for is rumoured to have discovered—or to be about to discover—a new form of explosive paste. The applications of such a discovery are legion—particularly for assassins intent on killing their targets while avoiding the dangers of actually striking them down. If Sipri feels the characters will distract or delay the alchemist from manufacturing this explosive paste he tries to get rid of them. (He doesn't resort to violence as this might draw too much attention, but does try to talk them out of engaging his employer).

5: VILPPU OTRA

Maniacally obsessed with death and life.

With long black hair tied back in a ponytail and taught, angular features this man has a haughty, aloof aura.

Vilppu Otra (N middle-aged male human) believes alchemy—not magic—holds the secret to conquering death. Obsessed with this notion, he works feverishly in his laboratory. His research has led him to some dark places, and he has come to the attentions of a powerful necromancer who has secretly started to guide and aid Vilppu's work.

Personality: Manically obsessed with his work, Vilppu cares for little else. He sleeps only when he must and prefers to work at night. When he needs money, he reluctantly seeks out additional work in the surrounds; sometimes working as an apothecary, herbalist and doctor for those too poor to afford magic healing.

Mannerisms: Vilppu's speech is short and curt, unless he is discussing his research—something he only does with interested, learned individuals.

Hooks: Vilppu requires fresh corpses for his research; he has reached the point where he must try his elixir of life on the dead. Rumours of grave-robbing reach the characters ears, and if they investigate the trail might lead back to Vilppu.

6: VILUTAR LEMPO

Fugitive hiding from her powerful patron.

Old and stooped, this white-haired woman has white hair and a careworn expression on her face.

Vilutar Lempo (NG old female human wizard 4) fiercely protects her anonymity. In another life she was Tilda Miela and worked for the lord of a far-off land. When she discovered the depths of his depravity, she fled taking much of his gold and all her research. Now, she lives in fear of being uncovered by the lord's agents.

Personality: Quiet and guarded, Vilutar finds it hard to make friends, and is lonely. She is also tired—tired of running and tired of hiding—and just craves peace. She still loves her work, but it is becoming increasingly hard to muster the energy to continue.

Mannerisms: Through long practise and habit, Vilutar always has one eye on the door. For one of such an advanced age, she has a surprising amount of nervous energy.

Hooks: Vilutar is nervous; strange folk have been seen hanging around the streets near her workshop and asking questions of her neighbours. She fears she had been discovered by her previous master's agents and does not know what to do. If she encounters the characters—perhaps if they ask her to craft something—she asks them to investigate the matter in lieu of payment (once she has satisfied herself the characters are no the agents she fears so much).



2: 20 THINGS TO SEE IN A LABORATORY

Sought after by rulers, yet often shunned by the populace for their creative madness, alchemists are on a journey of exploration and science. Strange liquids and apparatus, unheard of substances and terrifying results are the bread and butter of the often crazed men and women who call this occupation their own.

1. Large glass vats contain thick yellow liquid pregnant with large golden bubbles. The raising bubbles pop so noisily conversation is difficult near them.
2. Heating plates made from thick metal slabs fixed onto a stone kiln heat some strange-smelling substances in copper bowls and pans.
3. Racks on the walls and tables hold hundreds of glass and clay test tubes filled with a plethora of multicoloured powders. The vials, all made of thick glass, are weighted to prevent tipping yet one has fallen and released a golden powder onto the alchemist's desk.
4. Crystal bowls with copper framing heat over crackling fires. Thick white gasses swirling over sandy chemicals, struggle up glass tubes to be collected in sealed glass jars.
5. A mortar and pestle of thick black-streaked granite hold the powdered residue of incinerated plants. The powdery white ash has clumped together from the moisture of a nearby water flask.
6. A many-tiered athanor (a furnace) made of heavy clay bricks has hundreds of conical flasks on its shelves. The metal door at its base has been left slightly open by an inattentive apprentice and the glowing ashes are starting to spill out.
7. Polished crystal stirring rods change colour depending on the temperature of the solution they are stirring. Of varying lengths and thicknesses they are used in different substances, and sometimes cause explosions if used incorrectly.



8. Jars of odd ingredients are hidden at the back of high shelves. Amongst them lie the skin from a ghoulish hand and the brain of a serial murderer stored in glass jars filled with vinegar. Many of the ingredients are illegal and should the authorities find them the alchemist will be in serious trouble.
9. On a stone shelf overlooking the alchemist's desk sits a jar holding a pickled monkey head. The head is a failed experiment to create a homunculus, and still holds a semblance of life. Perceptive characters notice the eyes twitch occasionally and its tiny badly-formed hands grasp at things beyond its glassy prison.
10. A troll's hand rests in a jar of weak acid to suppress its regeneration abilities. The hand's green, warty skin is now pitch black and covered with smooth scales, giving it a slightly demonic appearance.
11. Two copper rods that flash every now and then with a bright electrical spark are attached to a confused jumble of tubes and wires. The electrical charge is being generated by a reaction between the stomach acid of a giant fly and the powdered clay found in the nearby marshes.
12. Hanging herbs and dried parts of strange animals dangle from the roof beams overhead. Amidst the monkey arms and chicken legs the calcified arm of a pigmy witch doctor still contains part of his spirit and it silently waits to wreak its revenge on the alchemist and anyone unfortunate enough to be nearby.
13. A pot of bubbling green liquid sits on a heating plate at the back of a desk, bubbling gently. A distracted alchemist may leave it heating too long allowing it to boil over and fill the area with choking, soporific gas.
14. Thick liquid, whose bubbles pop like farts, gently simmers in a thick metal cauldron hanging over a fire. Despite looking like a typical witches' dinner the liquid is used to make thick white glaze that heat-proofs the outside of clay ovens and jars.
15. Retorts made from nut-like plants not affected by sputtering flames boil away gases before being sealed with a tarry black paste. The chemicals stored within violently explode when exposed to air, typically when they are thrown at the alchemist's enemies.
16. A sand bath being used unsuccessfully to vaporise dragon's acid takes up most of the top shelf of a stone kiln. Hidden behind it lies a forgotten tube of chemicals.
17. A glass jar containing the white powdery residue from a random experiment lies precariously on the edge of the alchemist's desk.
18. Pans of dried plants ready to be incinerated to make soda ash for glass rest above kilns near vents where the heat can dry them out. Several vats of the precious ash are stored nearby ready for the local glassblower to collect.
19. The contents of a steel bowl rattle and pop furiously over an intense white flame. The liquid—a thin red blood-like substance splatters over the nearby workbench.
20. Glass globes with sporadically bubbling liquid, which changes colours every few minutes throwing eerie light around the laboratory, offsets the usual dreary glow of the various other light sources in the laboratory.

3: 20 ALCHEMICAL MISHAPS

Due to the bizarre and wide range of chemicals alchemists use in their intricate experiments, alchemists and accidents often go hand in hand. Not only are the mixtures they make dangerous if handled incorrectly, the creatures and places they are gathered from present dangers to the untrained or careless. Not all accidents are immediately apparent and left to develop can cause more problems than a simple explosion or release of stinking gas.

1. Working under the intimidating glare of his alchemist master a mining apprentice strikes a vein of explosive material in a larger rock causing an explosion.
2. Leaking chemicals have weakened the insides of an athanor. When several experiments are bubbling away on its shelves the whole thing collapses sending chemicals and acids everywhere. The resulting mess is a bubbling frantic gloop that oozes outwards and traps everything—expensive glass retorts and apprentices alike—in its quick-drying embrace.
3. An unexpected explosion fills the laboratory with smoke sending the alchemist and his servants crashing through the equipment to escape. A dangerous sentient ooze is freed by their frenzied escape and begins to feed—at first on rats and spiders but eventually its trembling senses seek larger prey.
4. Invisible gas seeps from the edges of a cracked retort, filling the air with heady fumes that send people into peals of laughter and hysterical giggles.
5. The alchemist excitedly takes delivery of a dangerous creature frozen in specially made alchemical ice. Unfortunately, the creature has started to awaken and takes offence to being trapped in its icy prison.
6. A wagon containing explosive materials is attacked by thieves as it approaches the alchemist's laboratory. During the melee, the thieves accidentally ignite the explosive materials killing themselves and the drovers. The explosion causes a nearby building to collapse. Townsfolk are trapped in the ruins.
7. Stone shelves weighed down with too many jars collapse, dumping their contents on the floor. The resulting mixtures create dense, choking green gas. As the gas billows through the room, acid eats its way through the chamber's floors.
8. As the characters arrive at the alchemist's laboratory an experiment goes horribly wrong. A muted explosion, followed by an outpouring of smoke, from the building's windows are the obvious signs of disaster. The smoke, however, contains powerful hallucinogens and when the wind picks up it blows over the surrounding neighbourhood. The alchemist begs the characters for help.
9. An unruly apprentice has been disposing of chemicals in the nearby sewers. Strange slugs dwelling the sewers have feasted upon the chemicals, and have develop a taste for flesh after slaying the apprentice. Hungry, they begin to hunt.
10. The alchemist has been experimenting with the corpse of a murderer. Consequently, the laboratory becomes the home of a malicious haunting presence that causes experiments to go wrong with disastrous results.

11. Servants are confused to find the alchemist missing, when they arrive in the morning. All that remains of the alchemist are his boots.
12. Despite taking great care an alchemist's experiment releases a lethal invisible gas which kills him and his assistants. Local authorities barricade the building but a group of thieves sneak into the laboratory to steal the recipe.
13. The alchemist discovers how to turn lead into gold. Unknown to all, the transformation is temporary and wears off within a month leaving nothing but calcified metal behind.
14. Local glassmakers have provided the alchemist with shoddy work. Consequently, the alchemist drips acid on his legs maiming them so badly they have to be amputated.
15. Whilst making a rushed batch of ointment to cure a rampant disease savaging the locals the alchemist accidentally creates a slow-acting poison which kills the patients instead.
16. Joining forces with a distiller an enterprising alchemist tries to create bubbling gin (with disastrous results).
17. Whilst extracting the poison from the skin of toads and frogs the alchemist accidentally loses a frog. The ensuing deaths are a mystery to all except the alchemist. Terrified he will be found out and hanged the alchemist prepares to flee.
18. The alchemist is working under duress for an assassin who has captured his family. The alchemist plots a deadly accident for his captor, but it goes horribly wrong and innocent bystanders are killed while the assassin survives.
19. Rats eating from the refuse pile of the alchemist's laboratory become charged with manic energy. The rats breed repeatedly and succumb to a frenzy of eating. Nearby stores and granaries are ravaged, and the local authorities ask the characters to track down and kill the rats.
20. Whilst breaking down an exotic rock an alchemist releases an angry elemental trapped within the stone. As it breaks free, the elemental knocks over and absorbs many of the alchemist's chemicals. This exposure gives the elemental strange powers, making it much harder to defeat.



4: COMPLICATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

Meticulous in their work, many alchemists are not really known for their social skills or caring attitudes. Driven to the point of obsession they can inadvertently cause disasters just by trying to get a simple job done, bring an experiment to fruition or by searching for the rare substances used in their arts.

Use the situations below as hooks into intriguing and exciting side quests for the characters to complete in lieu of paying the alchemist for their service.

1. Shipments of meticulously prepared high-quality silica must be taken to a glassmaker but another alchemist has got word of the shipment and wants to take it for his own. The alchemist asks the characters protect the shipment.
2. An alchemist experimenting with the restorative powers associated with necromancy needs the contents of a recently hung criminal's stomach. Unfortunately, the criminal yet hangs from the city gates as a warning to other criminals.
3. A vial of powdered red dragon scale has been stolen by an apprentice working for a rival. The scales were to be used in making fireproof clay for ovens in a local orphanage. Powerful people in the area sponsor the orphanage, and the alchemist is desperate to retrieve the powdered dragon scale before the theft is discovered.
4. Pretending to be an alchemist, a necromancer needs bits of dead bodies or undead creatures for his work. He asks the characters to retrieve the contents of several graves and pays a bonus for interesting bits of "monsters" should the party find any. Unfortunately a local church has found out about the necromancer and their spies report back to paladins and clerics who are enraged at this activity.
5. A local wizard needs distilled gorgon's blood for use in the creation of the mortar for his tower. Unfortunately, the wizard is a sworn enemy of the only local alchemist skilled enough to properly distill the blood. In addition to hunting down the beast the characters must talk the alchemist into taking the job—which may necessitate doing the alchemist a favour.
6. Seeing a desperate opportunity a corrupt guard has seized a batch of precious chemicals destined for the alchemist's laboratory and tries to sell them on the black market. The alchemist hires the party to get the chemicals back.
7. Miners have discovered a rich vein of rare chemicals in a new dig. The alchemist hires the party as protection from the bandits targeting the mine. When the characters reach the mine, they discover many of the miners are stealing the ore and a corrupt foreman refusing to pay his workers.
8. After selling rare ore discovered in a creature's hoard to an alchemist, the party run into trouble when the alchemist accuses them of cheating him on the quality. The alchemist sends thieves after the party to get his money back.
9. Rumours spread of a rare creature spotted in the local area. A rich alchemist hears the rumours and hires the party to kill the beast. Unknown to the characters other parties are after the creature themselves, and react badly to their rivals.
10. A local mine rich in a soft, malleable stone perfect for creating alchemical equipment has been dug too deep and is now under attack from unseen horrors from below. The horrors are in fact hallucinations caused by a strange gas present in the mine and the party—investigating on behalf of a local alchemist—find themselves the target of enraged miners before encountering the strange gas themselves.
11. An alchemist's rival offers to sell cheap goods to the party. Unfortunately, many of the items are flawed in some way; some fail completely while others have much reduced efficacy or even randomly activate.
12. Birds are plaguing an alchemist by breaking his windows to get at the shiny things inside his laboratory. Investigation reveals a local wizard is sending the birds to disrupt the alchemist's work so he might steal the alchemist's workbook.
13. When an experiment goes wrong hallucinogenic gasses are released into the local sewers causing disruption and chaos in the nearby streets. Exploration of the sewers leads to a hidden laboratory and an unaware alchemist irate at being disturbed by adventurers.
14. Oozes and slimes form part of a clumsy alchemist's research but he recently carelessly let one escape—and one of his servants disappeared as a result. The servant's family ask the party to investigate the disappearance.
15. Young nobles are extorting an alchemist for hangover cures and love potions. After they refuse to pay for the second time the alchemist asks the party for help.
16. A druid petitions the party for help as an alchemist is destroying the natural habitat while searching for ingredients for his experiments. The alchemist is unaware of the damage he is causing and beseeches the party to act as mediators so he can rectify his mistakes and secure the ingredients he desperately needs.
17. Children target a cantankerous old alchemist with their ire, throwing stones through his window and causing a minor explosion which results in a fire. As the flames spread various chemicals and experiments catch fire with colourful and dangerous results.
18. A noble pays an alchemist for fireworks for a party but the alchemist takes the money and leaves town. The noble hires the party to track the alchemist down. When they reach him they find he is using the money to support several families ruined by the noble's greed.
19. A rare (and dangerous) creature is plaguing the area after hunters killed its young and harvested the body for rare ingredients. A trail of clues leads back to an unscrupulous alchemist and his jaded mercenaries.
20. An ageing alchemist needs help making a homunculus but has somehow managed to follow the instructions incorrectly with potentially disastrous results. Now the semi-sentient homunculus cavorts about the alchemist's laboratory, making the alchemist's life a misery.

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