# Alchemy and Intrigue Along the Red River

A Salt in Wounds Adventure for 5th Level Characters

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## Summary

In this adventure, the Player Characters will be summoned by Bakal -a brilliant and ruthless alchemist- who will offer to cure the PCs horrible mutations for a price: they must recover an artifact lost in Heartsblood Marsh. Advised to recruit the grippli slave Exelkel to act as their guide the party will traverse the Heartsblood Marsh facing the horrible monsters that make the swamp their home.

Finally, upon reaching the Fungal Sieve, the party will parlay with the alien intelligence that created the strange ecosystem and foil an attempted ambush on their way home. Delivering the Flexual Inversion Device to Bakal, the PCs will receive their cure (and perhaps an offer of more employment) with strict admonitions not to tell anyone of their activities.

Using ‘Alchemy & Intrigue’ in Other Settings

This adventure is designed for with the Salt in Wounds setting in mind. However, it can be adapted to any setting which features a strong swamp or sewer area; just changed the details to avoid mentioning the fleshy redness of the place (the creatures, hazards etc should fit in any swamp or sewer). The largest change necessary will be in adapting the Fungal Sieve.

## Introduction & Background

A century ago, Bakal Fillagreen -the finest alchemist the city of Salt in Wounds had ever produced- made a deal with Afrindi Gunterhix. the mad gnomish druid obsessed with preventing the leak of the Tarrasque’s essence from poisoning the land. In order to finish the growing of his Heartsblood marsh, Afrindi needed the Flexual Inversion Device -a powerful alchemical artifact- and Bakal offered to loan it out for a full century in exchange for being granted tutelage in druidic magic & secrets. It’s now time for Bakal to collect, but everyone he’s sent into the Marsh has failed to return… Bakal is unsure if they’ve been slain, and if they have been whether it was due to accident or malice.

Bakal has identified the party of PCs as perfect proxies; their skills are known, their afflictions/conditions provide for easy leverage, and they will be more or less expendable. The adventure begins when the PCs receive their summons from Bakal…

Reasons the PCs Would Get Involved

The adventure assumes that the PCs have all received a horrible mutation (have the PCs decide on their particular mutations, use the chart below, or see the ‘Corruption of the Tarrasque’ supplement for ideas). However, you can easily rewrite Bakal’s summons to invite the PCs for any number of reasons:

A large offer of gold

It’s actually one of the PC’s loved ones who is afflicted

An offer of information

Note, Bakal is a canny, well connected and powerful individual capable of offering the PCs nearly anything in order to get what he wants (namely, their risk and sacrifice in asking the Fungal Sieve for the Flexual Inversion Device to be returned).

## Summon to Bakal

As the PCs go about their day in Salt in Wounds, they all come face to face with a (Tarrasque) Flesh Golem which stands in front of them. The construct bows, and then holds out it its arm and opens its hands to reveal a small, neatly folded note written on brown paper. Read the following the PCs:

*I know you suffer from an affliction of this city, and I have the skills to heal you… though I will require assistance in return for this boon. At present time, I only ask that you listen to my offer to our mutual benefit. If you accept, meet me at my shop: Sage’s Row – Fourth Street, Brown Storefront halfway down at the cry of Noon Sharp.*

*-Bakal Fillagreen | Alchemist*

The party will most likely have questions about Bakal, here’s some common knowledge:

Bakal is a known alchemist

Bakal is considered the greatest (if one of the least showey) alchemists in the city

Bakal has a reputation for ruthlessness

Bakal is known for his skill in treating mutations.

Assuming the PCs accept his offer, the PCs meet outside Bakal’s neat but well appointed shop. The windows are barred and curtained, and the locked door out front has a sign that reads ‘closed’ until noon sharp, after which the door is quietly unlocked.

Inside, the PCs find a small table with four (or more depending on the number of PCs) chairs facing a formally dressed male half-elf with a horrendously scarred face. The door through which the came is flanked by a pair of still Tarrasque Flesh Golems, and there seems to be another door (behind a small counter for exchanging goods) behind Bakal. All around the room is wall to wall shelves featuring neatly ordered rows of phials, concoctions, and potions.

Bakal gestures small meal of properly cooked and seasoned meat as well as some white bread (a rare luxury in the city) and beckons the PCs to eat.

After the PCs get settled, read the following from Bakal.

‘Greetings, and thank you for coming. I know you’ve all suffered from the touch of the city, and I want to help you. But understand, I’m a businessman -not a charity- and I believe in gaining for all parties in exchange. Something of mine was stolen recently, and while the thief was slain thanks to my staff’ he nods to the Tarrasque Flesh Golem ‘The item in question -a tremendously small flask with a twisted apparatus on the top- was lost, dropped in the Red River. I have learned the

## Rescue of Exelkel

The party arrives at the Maw –Salt in Wound’s world famous slave market- to discover that Exekel has already been purchased and won’t be parted with cheaply.

### Cousin Rescue Attempt (optional)

Depending on how the PCs have ‘acquired’ Exekel, his (incompetent) cousins may attempt a rescue.

## Travel through Heartsblood Marsh

Travelling through Heartsblood Marsh, the party will face a variety of exploration and combat challenges that can be determined using the random encounter charts \*or\* selected by the GM based on whatever will most delight/interest the players.

## Audience with the Fungal Sieve

. Upon their arrival, read the following:

“The tangled stalks of fungus give way to a clearing that reveals a towering structure the size of a castle. Quickly, you realize that this imposing thing wasn’t built but grown. The surfaces writhe, sway, and undulate. It seems like the entirety of the red river (split into dozens of tributaries) join back to one another as they rush into a gaping, maw-like pore on the north side of the structure/creature.”

If Exekel is with the party, he will immediately rush towards the sieve. If bound/tied, he will pull against his bindings (making an opposed strength check to whoever is holding him). If questioned, he will explain that he’s “Happy to be home, happy to see father.”

Whether Exekel leads the charge, sprinting towards the door, or the PCs approach cautiously, a spintcher like pore opens to allow them to easily walk into the sieve. Through a series of chambers filled with various organic structures, each with paths leading off into other direction, more pores continue to Iris open allowing the party to move deeper and deeper into the fungal sieve.

Note: Emphasize to your players that –despite the fungal sieve being an evil aberration at a titanic scale- that any attempt at combat here will likely result in the PC’s deaths (as they are overwhelmbled by hundreds of gripplu/grungi or the chamber they are within is filled with river water and digestive enzymes.

After traversing dozens of rooms, the party arrives in the reception chamber of the fungal sieve. If Exelkel got away form them he is here, prostrate before a large wall of meat featuring a close section that looks like nothing so much as an eyelid. In the large chamber of flesh walls two frogmen are merged into them mumbling chants in a (most likely) unknown language (druidic).

The eyelid opens and the friendly face of a gnome extends out on a stalk of twined muscle. This is afrindi Gunterhix, the mad druid that created heartsblood marsh and merged with the seed fungus to guide his creation long past his natural lifespan.

Designer Notes: When I first ran this adventure, for Afrindi’s voice is did a bad, high voiced imitation of Max Headroom complete with stutters and repetitions.

He greets the party with a voirce which seems to emenate from his mouth even as it thrums through the walls.

“Welcome, welcome. It’s so good to have visitors. You’re servants of Bakal yes? Come to fetch the Kline distillation apparatus?”

Afrindig already knows this to be the case and will gently correct any attempt the PCs make to lie. He is happy to chat with the party about nearly anything and wil even ignore nearly any insult. However any insinuation that he failed as a druid/betrayed his origins (in a addition to any overtly hostile action) will cause his face to withdraw and the room to fill with acid which does 4d6 damage a round (in addition to drowning the PCs). After some banter (Afrindi has sorely missed company beyond his supplicants). A pustuole forms in the center of the room which splits open to reveal the intricate glasswork of the Kline Distillation apparatus which matches Bakals description of it.

As the party makes to leave, Afrindig says, ‘Hold a moment friends, it’s been so long since I’ve had visitors and I want to give you a gift. You may each ask a single question and I will answer.” Afrindi isn’t omniscient, but knows a lot; having absorbed the knowledge of any body that drifted down the red river for the last century. He will probably be able to answer any question about the city of Salt in Wounds and the surrounding area (including knowledge of 6 out of the 13 command words to release one of the meridian harpoons which hold the Tarrasque bound.) However, if the PCs ask a question to which he doesn’t know the answer he will most likely make up an answer on the spot with the perfect sincerity of the deeply insane.

Designer Note: Feel free to use Afrindi’s answers to lead into later adventures.

After answering the party’s queries, pore open to make a straight way for the party to exit the way they came. Upon exiting, a small bladder of spores explodes coating the party in sticky slime. This scent marks the party as under the protection of Afrindi so they can leave the Marsh unmolested (it might also have later effects up to the GM) but –even if harmless- have the PCs roll a constitution saving throw and after hearing they results state simply ‘you notes no effects.’

## Ambush

Leaving the Heartsblood Marsh (suspiciously without further incident), the party encounters a small group of ghouls, a ghast and axebeak who attempt to slay the adventurers as ‘servants of Bakal.’ These would be assassins carry the tokens of fifth house, and this encounter sets up further intrigue.

## Wrapping it Up

Assuming the PCs return to Bakal, they discover the master-alchemist has already prepared their cures and will happily accept the flask in exchange. However, he hints that he developed this cure by taking samples form cherished love ones or by breaking into the PCs’ residences in order to make a thinly veiled threat to encourage the PCs to keep this adventure to themselves.