

Alchemy (and Feelings)

By Eleanor Tursman

The famed Alchemist has accomplished what the world thought impossible-- they have created life, or a simulacrum of life, in the form of a homunculus. The Alchemist's apprentice has been tasked with the observation of the homunculus while the Alchemist is away meeting with the High Council of the Seven Mysteries. They will return in a month's time. *Alchemy (and Feelings)* is a game where two players develop the relationship between the homunculus and the apprentice both through freeform play and drawing activities. What will happen when the Alchemist returns?

Description of Play

In this game two players act out a series of prescribed scenes and activities. In each scene the players have full agency over their character's thoughts, actions, and the world around them. They may speak in character, pantomime, describe the actions they take, and detail their surroundings. Each scene includes a drawing activity meant to emphasize the introspective or collaborative aspects of play. Drawings can be representational, abstract, full of words-- whatever players are comfortable putting on the page. Drawing skill is not necessary for this game! All you need to play is some paper and writing implements. This game is best played at a table, and takes about an hour to play.

After creating your apprentice and homunculus, play follows as a series of three major scenes, with two short montage segments in-between. After reading the description for each of the major scenes, each player picks one of their listed questions. Share your question choice with the other player. For example: "I would like you to help me answer the question 'What power do I hold over you?'" Try to play into each others' questions and strive to answer both questions during play. In each scene the accompanying drawing activity acts as a cue for when to cut the scene. The montage segments between the major scenes are meant to condense many small moments between the characters into five minute chunks. Scenes are confined to the Alchemist's house, but montage segments may take place outside of the house. Lists of inspirational elements are included with each scene.

Character Creation

For each character, select an option for the first two questions and answer the third open-ended question. Make up your own answers if you don't see something you like. Tell the other player about your answer to each question.

For the *homunculus*:

What do you look like?

A normal human with catlike eyes, a machine with a beating heart, a dog with a lion's mane and a lizard's tail

What do you sound like?

A prim and delicate voice, a deep and sonorous voice, a soft and menacing voice

What is your passion?

For the *apprentice*:

What do you look like?

A young bright-eyed child, an wizened old person in flowing robes, a young adult with dark-circled eyes from long study

How long have you been the apprentice?

Worked with the Alchemist for decades, family apprenticed you half a year ago, left at the Alchemist's doorstep as a babe

What is your ambition?

Scene 1: First Meeting

Read Aloud: The Alchemist has been called away by the High Council of the Seven Mysteries to discuss the future of the homunculus. The Alchemist instructs the apprentice to care for the homunculus and keep it from leaving its room while they are away. "In particular," they calmly instruct, "do not damage it. And try not to get yourself killed. It would be a pity to have to hunt for a new apprentice." Once in the room, the apprentice finds that the homunculus is eager to leave to explore the rest of the house.

Apprentice: Ask the homunculus "In this scene please help me answer the question..." (*pick one*)

Homunculus: Ask the apprentice "In this scene please help me answer the question..." (*pick one*)

What is the division of labor in the house?

What do you [the apprentice] do that I find endearing?

How do I [the apprentice] like to show off?

What power do I hold over you [the apprentice]?

What about you [the homunculus] awes me?

What about exploring the house excites me?

Activity: Draw a picture of the other person's character, as you currently perceive them. Alternate between leading the conversation, and drawing while the other player leads. When you are done, pass your finished drawing to the other player. This is a cue that scene should end, or begin to wrap up.

Things that may be Off-Limits for the homunculus:

Observational Instruments

Fire

The Alchemist's private quarters

The kitchen and pantry

Direct Sunlight

The Alchemist's many tinctures and tonics

Sounds and colors that may be over-stimulating

Small Mammals

Montage Sequence One

A montage sequence is a five minute (or thereabouts) segment where the players take turns to describe brief moments in time. Each moment is a mini-scene composed of five sentences. Take turns painting the scene. The first and second sentences should be about the location of the mini-scene and what the first character is doing. The third sentence should be about what the second character is doing, starting with "And I am... ." The fourth and fifth sentences should be about how the characters are feeling, starting with "And I feel... ."

For example:

Apprentice: We are in the kitchen at dusk. I am preparing a light dinner.

H: And I am sitting on the countertop, complaining about your questionable human food.

A: And I feel irritated with you.

H: And I feel content.

The apprentice starts the first scene. Continue the montage sequence until each player has started two mini-scenes. Once you get a hang of the format you may choose to break from it when appropriate. You are not restricted to the house when framing mini-scenes.

Montage Scene Cues:

A secret	A deal	Homework
The family recipe	A compromise	Shopping
Cleaning rituals	What you admire	People-watching
The way you laugh	A new place	Gremlin problems
Breaking the rules	An old book	An obsession

Scene 2: A Villager's Plea

Read Aloud: A villager runs to the house and bangs on the door, begging for the Alchemist's famous draught for curing the green fever. The apprentice accepts their request, and hurries to the lab, only to find that none of the draught is readily available. The apprentice has made the draught once before with their master.

Apprentice: Ask the homunculus "In this scene please help me answer the question..." (*pick one*)

Homunculus: Ask the apprentice "In this scene please help me answer the question..." (*pick one*)

What went wrong when I last tried to make this draught alone?

How does it feel to create something?

What makes my perceived authority crack?

What would I rather be doing right now?

Why do I need your help?

What am I better at than you?

Activity: Draw together on a single piece of paper, detailing the ingredients going into the draught. Take turns drawing each ingredient that you add. The visual recipe is complete when it contains five or six ingredients. At this point the scene should end, or begin to wrap up.

Ingredients that may go in a draught:

Dragon's breath	Bat wing	Octopus ink
Moonshine	Cheese (the moldy kind)	Your strongest wish
Toad's Eyeball	Tears (the human kind)	Eleven silver coins
Werewolf hairball	A poem	Part of the homunculus

Montage Sequence Two

Follow the same structure as in the first montage sequence. This time, the homunculus starts the first montage scene.

Scene 3: The Alchemist Returns

Read Aloud: The Alchemist is back in town. They have been persuaded by the High Council of the Seven Mysteries that the homunculus must be disassembled and analyzed. They will shortly arrive at the house to meet the apprentice and homunculus. The Alchemist tells the apprentice what must be done, and that they must assist.

Apprentice: Ask the homunculus “In this scene please help me answer the question...” (*pick one*)

How has my perception of the Alchemist changed?
Can I be brave for another person?
What have I taught myself about alchemy in my master’s absence?

Homunculus: Ask the apprentice “In this scene please help me answer the question...” (*pick one*)

Would I fight for another person?
What is my worth?
What surprises do I still hold?

Activity: This scene is in two parts. Play the first portion of the scene before the Alchemist arrives in the room. Both characters know the Alchemist is returning. During the scene, draw the Alchemist together as you now perceive them. Take turns leading conversation and drawing while the other player leads. Play the second portion of the scene after the Alchemist has told the apprentice to assist in disassembling the homunculus. Each player performs a monologue encapsulating their response to a fourth wall (the Alchemist). The monologue can be performed as if delivered to the Alchemist directly, as if being practiced in a mirror, written as a letter, or as what the character wishes to say but never will. After each player is finished, the game ends.

Inspirations: *The Skeletons* by Jason Morningstar, *Howl’s Moving Castle* by Dianna Wynne Jones, *Fall of Magic* by Ross Cowman

Special Thanks to Elias Mulhall and Thomas Mothman for helping with the first draft, and to Dev Purkayastha for major revision help. Thank you to Elias Mulhall for playtest feedback.