

THE ALCHEMISTS

by

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Based on a True Story

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FADE IN:

SUPERIMPOSE:

"THE ALCHEMISTS"

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

FRANCIS Preyhausen, aged about 40, sits at his desk, writing by the light of a CANDELABRA. The light of a FULL MOON streams through the open window.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

Wenzel Seyler found the Philosophers' Stone, he made gold for Emperor Leopold Habsburg, and became a Baron. (beat) He survived his enemies, and he survived himself. (beat) I was there, and this, I swear, is the truth of the matter...

EXT. PASTURE - NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: MAP, MORAVIA/AUSTRIA

CAPTION: "BRUNA, MORAVIA, 1350"

A WOLF HOWLS in the distance; an OWL HOOTS nearby. FREDERICK Gualdus and KARL Steiner, in brown monastic robes, stand in a meadow under a FULL MOON, squeezing dew from a twisted sheet of LINEN held between them. More sheets, soaked with DEW, hang from poles stuck in the ground. Dew drips from the twisted sheet into a FUNNEL in a BOTTLE. A basket is filled with plugged bottles; a third with twisted sheets. Karl shivers and yawns and almost loses his grip.

FREDERICK

Be careful, Brother Karl!, If it touches the earth, the potency will be lost!

KARL

Frederick, I feel as if I am dreaming, and walking in my sleep!

FREDERICK

The full moon is affecting you. Fight it! We are almost done!

EXT. HUT - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

The monks' hut stands near the Zwitta River.

INT. HUT. - NIGHT

Frederick and Karl are seated at the table. Frederick is grinding SULFUR with a MORTAR and PESTLE. Karl is writing a MANUSCRIPT. A retort sits on a tripod over a coal fire in the fireplace. Yellow oil drips into a flask receiver, attached with clay and strips of cloth.

INT. HUT - DAY

Frederick is sitting at the table, writing a manuscript. Karl is seated on a stool at the fireplace, stirring a white powder in a crucible. Smoke billows, and they run outside, coughing.

FREDERICK (CONT'D)

Too much niter, too fast! Make haste slowly, Karl!

KARL

Aggh! Ach! Choo!

SERIES OF SHOTS - INTERCUT WITH ALCHEMY IMAGES:

A) INT. HUT - DAY

Frederick is spooning a white powder into a flask, half-filled with yellow oil.

B) INT. HUT - DAY

The flask has been sealed, and sits in a pan filled with sand. Frederick sets it atop a bed of coals. They kneel, cross themselves, and begin to pray in Latin mumble.

C) INT. HUT - NIGHT

A few weeks later: the contents of the flask are black, and it has a pale violet glow about it. Karl sits at the table, writing by the light of a candle. Frederick is asleep on his cot.

D) INT. HUT - WEEKS LATER - DAY

Frederick sits watching the flask. The compound now is white. He adds a coal to the fire, and pumps the bellows slowly. Karl sits at the table, writing a MANUSCRIPT.

E) INT. HUT - WEEKS LATER - DAY

MONTAGE: The contents of the flask pass through every color.

F) INT. HUT - DAY

The compound has turned dark red: the Philosophers' Stone. Frederick and Karl kneel, cross themselves, and pray in a Latin mumble.

G) INT. HUT - DAY

A crucible filled with molten lead sits in the bed of hot coals. Frederick wraps a grain of the red glass in a bit of candle wax. He stirs it into the lead with an iron nail. A LOUD METALLIC CRACKLE and FLASH OF BLUE LIGHT startles them. They look into the crucible to see pure gold with the iron nail stuck in it. Frederick smiles, and Karl looks amazed.

H) INT. HUT - DAY

Frederick and Karl are sitting at the table with a small COPPER BOX (12" x 12" x 6"). It contains four small BOTTLES, each filled with pieces of the red Philosophers' Stone. Karl places the MANUSCRIPT in the box, and shuts the lid.

I) EXT. HUT - DAY

Frederick is walking away, leading a mule that carries two small sacks. Karl watches from the door of the hut. Frederick turns to take a last look, and waves goodbye.

J) EXT. ST. THOMAS' MONASTERY - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

SUPERIMPOSE: "ST. THOMAS' MONASTERY, 1352"

Several monks' huts and a few small wood buildings have been erected, and the monastery is under construction. The monks and some masons are building a small stone chapel.

K) INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Two monks are chiseling the base section of a small pillar next to a small hole in the floor.

LATER

Karl places the COPPER BOX in a hole in the floor of the chapel, and the monks push the base of the pillar over the hole.

L) EXT. CHAPEL - 300 YEARS LATER - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

SUPERIMPOSE: "ST. THOMAS' MONASTERY, 1670"

The chapel is in ruins. The modern monastery has been built nearby.

M) EXT. DAWKS' PRINT SHOP - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

SUPERIMPOSE: "LONDON, 1680"

Dr. BECHER pauses and looks up at the shop sign as he approaches and enters.

CLOSEUP: SIGN "THOMAS DAWKS, HIS MAJESTIES PRINTER"

INT. DAWKS' PRINT SHOP - DAY

Dawks picks up a copy of MAGNALIA NATURAE and comes forward to greet Becher.

DAWKS

Greetings, Doctor Becher! Behold,
your booklet, Magnalia Naturae!

CLOSE UP: "MAGNALIA NATURAE"

Becher happily pages through the booklet. He speaks with a German accent.

BECHER

Ah! Yes, goodt, goodt! You have
done a fine job, Mister Dawks, and
I thank ye kindly.

EXT. ROYAL SOCIETY OF LONDON - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

SUPERIMPOSE: "ROYAL SOCIETY OF LONDON FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF
NATURAL KNOWLEDGE"

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: "JOHAN BECHER, ISAAC NEWTON, ROBERT BOYLE,
EDMUND HALLEY, ROBERT HOOKE"

Isaac Newton (age 39), Edmund Halley (26), and Robert Hooke (47), Robert Boyle (55), sit at a table with Dr. Becher at the head.

Other unidentified gentlemen sit in armchairs about the room. Everyone has a glass of wine in hand or nearby. Halley's telescope stands in front of a window in the background. Becher bows as he acknowledges each quest.

BECHER

Gentlemen, I am honored by your learned company this fine evening. (beat) Sir Isaac Newton... Edmund Halley... Robert Hooke... It pleases me greatly to present my new booklet, Magnalia Naturae, which Sir Robert Boyle here did urge me to publish. Today I shall give you a more personal account. (long beat) We have all heard of the Philosophers' Stone that transmutes base metals to noble gold. Yet, we must ask if such a thing might really exist. (beat) Well, now our doubt is resolved by two Friars of the Augustine order. (beat) And the truth of it is attested by many men of great quality, by the Holy Roman Emperor Leopold Habsburg himself! (beat) I myself was witness to these events.

Becher picks up his glass of wine from a small tray on the table.

EXT. ST. THOMAS' MONASTERY - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

SUPERIMPOSE: "ST. THOMAS' MONASTERY, 1676"

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Francis is serving the Mass with another monk. He stands to the left of the altar, holding a tray with the pitchers of wine and water. Dozens of monks kneel in the pews, with several priest in the front row.

BECHER (V.O.)

Thanks to Friar Francis Preyhausen, that we know so much about this matter. And his honesty is most admirable, for he did not steal the treasure, nor claim some for himself, when he could. But honesty seldom gets what it deserves.

PRIEST
Dominus vobiscum.

FRANCIS
Et cum spiritu tuo.

PRIEST
Oremus.

The priest picks up the pitcher of wine from Francis' tray.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Dr. Becher picks up his glass of wine, sips, and continues speaking.

BECHER
Wenzel Seyler was born in Vienna,
about the year 1650. (beat) About
twenty-five years later, he was
caught in bed with the wife of the
precinct Governor, Count de
Collebrat...

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

WENZEL Seyler is carousing in bed with the WIFE of the GOVERNOR (Count de Collebrat) when the cuckold bursts in and starts poking at Wenzel with a sword. The wife cringes under the sheets, and Wenzel tries to protect himself with a pillow as he scrambles for his pants.

GOVERNOR
Scoundrel! Lecher!

WENZEL
Ow! Agh! Ow! Oh!

WIFE
Eek! Eek! Oh! No!

GOVERNOR
Silence, whore!

A guard comes running in and corners Wenzel with a pike.

BECHER (V.O.)
The fear of prison was the
beginning of wisdom for him.
(MORE)

BECHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
(beat) With the help of a priest,
suddenly he found religion, and
Wenzel entered the Augustine
Monastery at Bruna in Moravia.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

A) EXT. MONASTERY GATE - DAY

Wenzel, two guard escorts, and a priest stand at the open gate of St. Thomas' monastery. Wenzel and the priest enter, and a monk slams the gate shut behind them.

B) INT. CELL - DAY

Wenzel stands at the door of his cell, crowded with a cot, table, and stool. He wears the Augustine habit, and his hair has been cut short.

C) INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Wenzel is attending Mass with the other monks. The priests sit in the front rows. Francis is serving Mass with another monk.

D) INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Wenzel and Francis are among a dozen monks studying under the supervision of a stern priest.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Francis and Wenzel walking in the monastery garden.

WENZEL
How did you come to be here,
Brother Francis?

FRANCIS
Oh, my father pressed me to enter
the Church. (beat) I have
education, but no livelihood, and I
will never inherit the family
estate unless the plague takes my
elder brothers. (beat) I came here
a year ago, but I am mortally bored
already. I feel trapped in limbo
with a bunch of pompous celibates.

WENZEL

Well, at least you are innocent. My sins are venial, so this is like purgatory to me. Yet escape is possible, with money...

EXT. OLD CHAPEL - DAY

Wenzel and another monks are digging up rocks and tossing them into a wheelbarrow. Other monks are doing likewise nearby. The old chapel stands in the background.

BECHER (V.O.)

After a year of probation, Wenzel Seyler took the monks' vows. Still, he planned to escape, though he had no means. So when he heard the legend of a treasure, hidden in the monastery, he tried to find it...

MONK #1

...Even if the story is true, and you find the gold, the Abbot will spend it to glorify the Church, and feed the poor! Ha ha!

INT. CELLAR - DAY

Wenzel is alone in the cellar, dowsing with a willow branch.

BECHER (V.O.)

The man had no scruples about using magic to help himself, and fortune favored him thus.

EXT. MONASTERY GARDEN - DAY

Wenzel looks about furtively, then tries to dowse.

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

An OLD WOMAN sits beside the road, selling milk, cream, and cheese from a small cart.

BECHER (V.O.)

The monks were allowed out of the monastery on Saturdays... (beat) And thus he met an old woman who practiced witchcraft in secret.

OLD WOMAN
Fresh milk, cream, cheese! Fresh
milk, cream, cheese!

Wenzel approaches her and begins an inaudible conversation.
She gives him a cup of milk to drink.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Becher sips his wine, sets the glass down.

BECHER
She gave him a ball of wax, covered
with strange figures, and she said
it would roll to the place where
treasure was hidden. (beat) Now,
this may sound absurd to men of
science, yet I have seen the ball,
and tested it myself.

INT. COTTAGE - DAY

Wenzel sits on a bench at a table, reading the old woman's
book of spells. She hands him a cup.

OLD WOMAN
Drink this potion, my dear. It will
strengthen your magical powers.

He sniffs the potion, then quaffs it with a grimace.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)
Yes, yes! Good!

MINUTES LATER

He begins to slouch as the potion takes effect.

WENZEL
(slurring)
What wash in that drink?

OLD WOMAN
Laudanum.

WENZEL
Law wha...?

OLD WOMAN
Laudanum, dear boy. The milk of
poppy.

Wenzel slides off the bench. The old woman lays him out on the floor, then fetches a small box from a shelf. It contains a wax ball with a hole in it, and a plug. The ball is covered with magical symbols.

MINUTES LATER

The old woman is kneeling on the floor. She lifts Wenzel's robe and apparently milks him, cackling happily as Wenzel snores.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

Tee hee hee!

MINUTES LATER

The old woman finishes filling the wax ball with Wenzel's sperm, and plugs the hole, then licks her fingers and cackles. She begins to mumble an incoherent magic spell...

HOURS LATER

Wenzel looks groggy, and yawns as she presents him with the wax ball. He peers at the symbols, and sniffs it.

OLD WOMAN (CONT'D)

Wenzel, behold! (beat) If there is a treasure hidden in the monastery, this magic ball can find it! Now watch this! Behold, this is my gold wedding ring.

WENZEL

I am beholding.

She places the ball and ring several feet apart on the floor. Wenzel watches in amazement as the ball wobbles, then rolls to the ring. She picks them up, and hands the ball to him.

OLD WOMAN

I will give this to you, Wenzel, but you must promise to give me some gold if you find the treasure.

WENZEL

I promise you, I shall! Thank you!

EXT. MONASTERY YARD - DAY

Wenzel crosses paths with the ABBOT and two priests who accompany him. One of the priests whispers inaudibly to the Abbot.

ABBOT

Friar Wenzel Seyler! Come to my office.

WENZEL

Yes, Abbot!

INT. ABBOT'S OFFICE - DAY

Wenzel stands before the Abbot.

ABBOT

Friar Seyler, it is our custom for the old fathers to have a young friar assist them. I have decided that you shall attend to Father Albert.

WENZEL

Yes, Father Abbot, I shall. Thank you.

INT. ALBERT'S CLOISTER - NIGHT

Father ALBERT is sitting in a chair by the fireplace, and Wenzel is sitting on a stool. He adds another coal to the fire.

WENZEL

Father Albert, I have heard other monks tell of a treasure hidden in our monastery. Do you know the story?

ALBERT

Yes, I do. It is said that our first abbot was a master of alchemy, and paid for the construction of this monastery with the gold he made. Supposedly he buried a treasure in the old chapel.

WENZEL

Father, I have seen your books, so I know you study the magic arts. (beat) You can trust me not to speak of it to anyone.

(MORE)

WENZEL (CONT'D)

(beat) I also know an old woman who practices magic, and I have got from her a wax ball with power to discover hidden treasure. I saw it work with her gold wedding ring!

ALBERT

I am curious to examine the thing. Show it to me!

INT. OLD CHAPEL - DAY

Father Albert watches as Wenzel lays the wax ball on the floor, but nothing happens. After a few seconds, he picks it up and tries again at another spot, but again nothing happens. Then he places it near the pillar. The ball wobbles a bit and rolls to the base of the pillar. They repeat the test with the same results.

ALBERT

That is most interesting! Yet, though a treasure may be hidden here, we have no way to break down the pillar, and the abbot would not allow us.

EXT. OLD CHAPEL - NIGHT

A winter storm rages, and lightning strikes the old chapel, knocking down part of the wall and setting fire to the roof.

BECHER (V.O.)

But fate had other plans, and a great storm arose one night soon after, and lightning badly damaged the old chapel.

INT. ABBOT'S OFFICE - DAY

The ABBOT is talking to Father Albert.

ABBOT

I have decided to have the masons demolish the old chapel. We can use the stones elsewhere.

ALBERT

I should like to supervise them, Father Abbot. That is holy ground, and I would say prayers there until their work is finished.

ABBOT

I am pleased to hear you say so,
Father Albert, for I plan to assign
you to the task.

ALBERT

Thank you, Father Abbot.

INT. OLD CHAPEL - AFTERNOON

The roof and walls of the chapel have been demolished, and several piles of cut stone lay about on the floor. Only the floor and the base section of the pillar remain. Wenzel and Father Albert watch closely as the masons smash it with sledgehammers and wedges. Master Mason MENDEL stands nearby, overseeing the work. The hole in the floor becomes exposed as a chunk of stone falls away, and the corner of the copper box is visible, now green with corrosion. Father Albert steps forward quickly to cover it with his robe.

ALBERT

Stop! Stop! Master Mendel, that is
enough for now! (beat) We can
finish this tomorrow. Go now to the
kitchen, and tell Father Benz that
I sent you.

MENDEL

(reluctantly)

Very well, Father Albert. Thank
you! Men, let's go eat!

When the masons have walked about a hundred feet away, Father Albert speaks to Wenzel.

ALBERT

Push the stone away, Wenzel! Use
that pry bar.

Wenzel struggles with the pry bar, and manages to move the pieces of the base and retrieve the box. Mendel looks back at that moment and sees Wenzel hide the box under his cloak.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Take me back to my room, Wenzel.

WENZEL

Yes, Father Albert.

INT. ALBERT'S CLOISTER - DAY

Father Albert is seated at his table with the copper box open and the four bottles and manuscript beside it. Wenzel stands beside him, looking disappointed.

WENZEL

There is no gold here! The story
was a lie!

ALBERT

I doubt that Father Steiner buried
this box as a joke. If there is
some virtue in this glass, the
manuscript may tell us how to use
it.

DAYS LATER

INT. ALBERT'S CLOISTER - DAY

Wenzel enters with a bucket of coal and sets it by the fireplace next to a small pile of firewood. Father Albert is seated at the table, studying the manuscript.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Wenzel, go to the kitchen and find
an old pewter dish. (beat) Oh, and
bring an iron pan, and a large
nail. But let no one see you!

WENZEL

Yes, Father Albert.

INT. MONASTERY KITCHEN - DAY

Wenzel looks around to see if he is being watched, then hides a pewter plate under his robe. Another monk notices him, but says nothing.

INT. ALBERT'S CLOISTER - DAY

Pieces of pewter lay in a small pile on the floor, and a small iron pan sits on a bed of coals in the fireplace, filled with molten pewter. Wenzel blows on the coals through an iron pipe. Father Albert is sitting at a table, using a knife to scrape a tiny fragment from a chunk of the red glass. Then he drips a bit of wax from a candle, scrapes it up, and wraps the bit of glass with it.

ALBERT

Now we shall see if I have understood the manuscript truly, and found the use of this glass. Drop this into the pan, and stir it with the nail.

Wenzel adds the wax and stirs the molten pewter. The transmutation happens suddenly with a LOUD METALLIC CRACKLE and FLASH OF BLUE LIGHT. Wenzel jumps back, and Father Albert almost falls off his chair. They look into the pan, and then at each other, astonished. The pewter has become gold, and the iron nail stuck is in it. Wenzel starts to giggle hysterically.

WENZEL

Hee hee hee! Ha ha! Ha!

LATER

Father Albert hands a few small nuggets to Wenzel, and speaks confidentially.

ALBERT

When you go into Bruna tomorrow, take this to a goldsmith. Tell him you have melted down some Roman coins that you inherited, and you wish to sell the gold. You may keep the money, but let no one know of it. No one!

WENZEL

Thank you, father Albert!

ALBERT

Wenzel!

WENZEL

Yes, father?

ALBERT

Tell no one! No one!

WENZEL

Yes, father!

INT. GOLDSMITH'S SHOP - DAY

The GOLDSMITH #1 is testing one of the nuggets on a touchstone. The other nuggets sit on a balance scale.

GOLDSMITH #1

I will pay you twenty ducats.

WENZEL

I, I will accept that.

INT. WENZEL'S CELL - DAY

Wenzel sits at his table, looking at his little pile of ducats while he munches on a roast chicken leg and swigs from a bottle of wine.

INT. ALBERT'S CLOISTER - DAY

Wenzel and Father Albert are sitting before the fireplace.

WENZEL

Father Albert, I have been thinking about the treasure.

ALBERT

I'm sure you have, my son. And what have you thought?

WENZEL

I think that since I helped to discover it with my wax ball, half of it should belong to me.

ALBERT

Oh, no, Wenzel, not yet. We know not how to manage this thing. (beat) Besides which, you have no need for money here. And if you were enriched by this tincture, it would prejudice your soul, and you might become a most miserable man. (beat) Henceforth, however, I will allow you two crowns every week for your diversions. But for now, I will not part with any of the glass, for I must study the manuscript more carefully. Apparently this glass is the Philosophers' Stone, and it hath other powers and virtues, more precious than gold.

WENZEL

What might those powers be, father?

Albert reads from the manuscript.

ALBERT

The author says, our blessed Stone hath virtue to conquer all disease, and bestows a long life in good health upon its happy possessor. For the power to transmute metals is only the beginning of its wonderful powers. (beat) Wenzel, we must be most careful if we would live to enjoy this treasure with peace of mind. For otherwise, the envy of greedy men may well get us killed.

WENZEL

Oh... Amen...

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Dr. Becher sips his wine, sets the glass down, and continues speaking.

BECHER

Wenzel enjoyed his allowance for the next few weeks, but all the while he worried, thinking that the old priest might tell the abbot. Therefore he cogitated how he might get the box and escape from the monastery, but he had no way to do so. Father Albert kept it locked in his desk, and he never left his room except with Wenzel, to attend Mass and take his meals. (beat) Then one day...

INT. ALBERT'S CLOISTER - DAY

Wenzel enters Albert's cell, toting a bucket of coal. He finds Albert sitting on his bed, coughing, gasping, and clutching his chest.

ALBERT

Fetch me a cup of wine, quickly!

SERIES OF SHOTS:

A) INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Wenzel is rushing through the corridor with a cup of wine, holding one hand over it to stop its sloshing.

B) INT. ALBERT'S CLOISTER - DAY

Wenzel finds Albert sprawled on his bed, gasping, struck dumb with a stroke, and reaching out blindly. Instead of helping him, Wenzel takes the copper box from the cabinet, then wraps it in a blanket. He peeks out the door, then leaves.

C) INT. WENZEL'S CELL - DAY

He enters with his prize.

D) INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

He hurries back into Albert's room, then emerges and calls for help.

WENZEL
Help! Help!

Several monks come running, too late. Father Albert is dead. His cup of wine is spilt on the floor.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Dr. Becher sips his wine.

BECHER
Now, it just so happened that the monastery held a solemn debate about alchemy, and by chance friar Seyler was chosen to argue that metals can be transmuted! But he knew nothing about it, so he was easily baffled...

Dr. Becher sets down his glass.

INT. WENZEL'S CELL - NIGHT

Wenzel swigs some wine from a cup. The bottle sits on his table. He is copying from Father Albert's manuscript. He stops, peers at his notes in the candle light, and reads aloud .

WENZEL
...And thus the alchemist can convert the elements... (beat)
first by purifying them... (beat)
and then by rotation... (beat)
Mmmm... That sounds good.

INT. AUDITORIUM - DAY

All the monks and priests are gathered for the debate. Wenzel stands at the podium, nervously reading from his notes. His opponent stands at another podium. Between them sits a priest at a table, acting as MODERATOR.

WENZEL

...And thus the alchemist can make one element out of another, uh... first by purification, uhhh... then by rotation, uhhh... of fire into water, and water into air, and uhhh... air into earth. And, ummm... thus are the base elements transmuted to silver or gold, uhhh... by alchemy. But the ultimate means of transmutation is by the Philosophers' Stone.

The monks and priests in the audience begin to chuckle and laugh, and Wenzel loses his temper.

WENZEL (CONT'D)

Why do you laugh? I can prove it to be true!

MODERATOR

Hold thy tongue, fool! I can sooner turn thee into a cow, than thou to transmute the metals!

Wenzel is chagrined, but he remains silent as the audience continues to snicker at him.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Wenzel and Francis are walking in the monastery garden.

FRANCIS

Today you claimed you are able to transmute metals. That was very foolish of you, even if it is true.

INT. MONASTERY KITCHEN - DAY

Master Mendel sits at a table with his fellows, talking inaudibly to Francis, who stands holding a pitcher of water.

FRANCIS (V.O., CONTD.)
Besides, there is a rumor in the
monastery, that you and father
Albert found a treasure in the old
church, and that the masons saw you
with a copper box.

INT. MONASTERY KITCHEN - DAY

Francis is talking with Monk #1.

FRANCIS (V.O., CONTD.)
And I heard that you took a pewter
plate from the kitchen...

INT. GOLDSMITH'S SHOP - DAY

Monk #1 is selling a ring to Goldsmith #1. They are talking
inaudibly.

LATER

INT. MONASTERY KITCHEN - DAY

Francis is talking inaudibly with Monk #1.

FRANCIS (V.O., CONTD.)
And that a monk of the Augustine
order sold some gold to a goldsmith
in Bruna...

RETURN TO SCENE

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Francis and Wenzel stop walking. Francis sits on a bench as
Wenzel stands nervously.

FRANCIS (CONTD.)
You may claim that your money was
sent by your family, yet people
believe it was you who sold the
gold. (beat) Wenzel, I do earnestly
desire that you declare the truth
of this matter to me!

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Wenzel falls to his knees and clutches Francis' robe.

WENZEL

Brother Francis, I beseech thee,
swear not to tell anyone the secret
I will reveal to you! Swear it to
me! (beat) Give me your help, and
when we flee from here, we will
have great wealth, and advance to
high dignities together! But you
must give me your most solemn oath
of faith and secrecy!

FRANCIS

I swear upon my very soul, I will
keep your secret, if you will share
it with me! We will hazard this
together. Now get up before someone
sees you like this!

Wenzel stands up.

WENZEL

By all that I hold sacred, I do
swear my fealty to you, brother
Francis.

Francis stands up.

FRANCIS

Upon my soul, and the Holy Bible, I
swear the same to you, brother
Wenzel. Let us go to the chapel to
seal this oath!

INT. CHAPEL - DAY

Wenzel and Francis kneel together, praying inaudibly.

INT. WENZEL'S CELL - DAY

Wenzel shows Francis the wax ball, copper box, bottles,
manuscript, and gold.

WENZEL

...And thus we found it. (beat) And
this is the gold we made with it.

FRANCIS

I would not have believed you, but this gold is very convincing.

WENZEL

Francis, I dare not sell more of this gold myself, if I am under suspicion. You should sell it for us. Then we shall have the money we need to escape from here!

SERIES OF SHOTS:

A) INT. GOLDSMITH'S SHOP - DAY

The goldsmith is counting out 100 ducats for Francis.

B) INT. WENZEL'S CELL - NIGHT

Wenzel and Francis are feasting happily on roast chicken and wine. They click their cups together in a toast.

C) EXT. STREET - DAY

Wenzel is talking to a pretty woman standing in a doorway. He hands her a coin, and they slip inside.

D) EXT. MONASTERY GATE - DAY

Wenzel enters the monastery gate with the woman; she is wearing a man's clothes, periwig, hat and cape.

BECHER (V.O.)

Friar Wenzel arranged for a certain wanton woman to come into the monastery with him, dressed in a man's clothes, and wearing a wig, on pretense of being his cousin Anastasio from Vienna. But the visits became frequent, and often lasted overnight, and the rumor of it came to the Abbot's attention.

INT. CELL - DAY

Wenzel and ANASTASIO are intercouring too loudly.

ANASTASIO

Oh! Ohh! Ohhh!

WENZEL

Shhh! Quiet!

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Two monks are listening at the door of Wenzel's cell. They look at each other with jaws agape, then scurry away.

MINUTES LATER

Abbot Brecheisen listens at Wenzel's door as two priests and several monks watch. The abbot tries to open it, but the door is locked.

ABBOT
Friar Seyler! Open the door!

INT. WENZEL'S CELL - DAY

Wenzel is climaxing with the woman.

WENZEL
I'm coming! I'm coming!

He dons his robe and unbolts the door. The abbot shoves it open and enters, glowering. The woman cowers under the blanket as the priests and monks gawk at her from the corridor.

ABBOT
Good heavens! It's a woman! Get dressed, you whore!

PRIEST
What are we to do? If we give her to the magistrate, the public noise of it will shame us with infamy!

ABBOT BRECHEISEN
We will keep her here till midnight, then cast her out. No one will see her then. (beat) And you, Friar Seyler, will remain in your cell! (beat) You, whore, come with me!

INT. ABBOT'S CLOISTER - NIGHT

The Abbot is sitting in a chair, spanking Anastasio across his lap. Her hands are bound, and she is in her underwear. The abbot has an ecstatic expression on his face, his tongue is lolling, and he is breathing heavily.

ANASTASIO
Oh! Oh! Ow! Oh! Please, no! Mercy!

ABBOT BRECHEISEN

Silence!

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Two priests are listening at the abbot's door. One of them stoops to peek through the keyhole. They are breathing heavily, obviously excited.

EXT. MONASTERY GATE - NIGHT

Anastasio giggles as she exits the monastery, escorted by two monks.

ANASTASIO

Tee hee! Come see me on Zwitta
Strasse when you are in town!

MONK #3

Ha ha! Perhaps I shall!

Anastasio disappears into the night. The monks shut the gate.

MONK #3 (CONT'D)

Surely, Brother Wenzel will burn in
Hell for this sin! The abbot will
see to it personally!

MONK #4

Ha ha!

INT. CORRIDOR/CELL - NIGHT

Francis taps on the door of Wenzel's cell, then slips a note under the door, followed by the first foot of a thin rope.

FRANCIS

Psst! Wenzel! Wenzel!

Wenzel hops out of bed, picks up the note, and pulls in the rope. It is about 30 feet long. He reads the note by candlelight.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

A) EXT. MONASTERY GROUNDS - NIGHT

Wenzel sticks his head out the window, sees Francis, and lowers the copper box.

Francis unties the rope, and Wenzel pulls it back into his cell. Francis slips the box under his robe, then hurries away.

B) INT. FRANCIS' CELL - NIGHT

Lit by a candle, Francis is sitting at his table, reading the manuscript and Father Albert's notes. The copper box lays open on the table with the bottles.

C) EXT. MONASTERY GROUNDS - DAY

Wenzel stands stripped to his underpants, with his arms around a tree and his hands tied. He groans as a priest whips him. The other monks and priests are gathered to watch. Francis is among them.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Dr. Becher sips his wine.

BECHER

Now, Prince Charles of Lichtenstein was a keen student of chymistry, and Francis was acquainted with his steward. He managed to convince the man to deliver a letter appealing for his help, and a small amount of the Philosophers' Stone to the prince, with instructions for its use.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

The LOUD METALLIC CRACKLE and FLASH OF BLUE LIGHT startle PRINCE CHARLES. When he looks into the crucible and sees solid gold, with the iron rod stuck in it, he grins with delight.

INT. SALON - DAY

Prince Charles hands a small box to his steward KURT.

PRINCE CHARLES

Kurt, I enjoin you to return to Bruna, and give secret assistance to the friars Seyler and Preyhausen.

(MORE)

PRINCE CHARLES (CONT'D)

I commit my seal to your custody,
to make use of it for the purpose,
if the need arises.

KURT

It shall be done as you command, my
lord.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Francis intercepts FRIAR JAKOB, who carries a tray with a
slice of bread, a pitcher of water, and a key.

FRANCIS

Brother Jakob, is that food for
brother Seyler?

FRIAR JAKOB

Yes, it is. Bread and water is all
he gets to eat.

FRANCIS

His cell is near mine, and I'm
going there now. I can take this to
him, if you like.

FRIAR JAKOB

I thank you. But bring the key back
to me quickly.

FRANCIS

I shall, brother.

INT. WENZEL'S CELL - DAY

Francis enters, puts the tray on the table, and pulls a
chicken leg from his pocket. Wenzel grabs and devours it
while Francis produces a lump of wax from his pocket and
makes an impression of the key.

FRANCIS

Wenzel, I have a plan...

INT. FRANCIS' CELL - NIGHT

Francis is sitting at his table, illuminated by candlelight,
carefully filing a key.

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Francis unlocks Wenzel's cell with the new key, and hands him a tiny vial as he comes out.

FRANCIS

Here is some of the tincture as you asked.

WENZEL

Thank you, Francis. I think perhaps you should bury the box until we need it.

FRANCIS

That is a good idea. I will do it.

They hurry through the corridor, and stop at an exit. Francis opens it and peeks outside.

EXT. MONASTERY - NIGHT

They run across the grounds to a side gate in the wall of the monastery.

EXT. MONASTERY WALL - NIGHT

Kurt stands waiting with two horses. He hands Francis a letter, closed with Prince Charles' seal.

KURT

Francis, you must get away from here as soon as you can, and go to Felisburgh. This letter will give you audience with Prince Charles.

FRANCIS

Thank you, Kurt! Godspeed!

INT. ATTIC - NIGHT

Kurt locks Wenzel in an attic room with a tray of food and a bedpan. He drips some wax on the lock from the candle he is carrying, and impresses it with Prince Charles' SEAL.

INT. CORRIDOR - DAY

Friar Jakob sets a tray with bread and water on the floor, then reaches in his pocket for the key. He unlocks the door, steps inside, then runs out and stumbles on the tray, spilling the water.

FRIAR JAKOB
 Help! Help! Friar Seyler has
 escaped!

INT. GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY

The Abbot stands before Governor Collebrat with the
 MAGISTRATE.

GOVERNOR
 Shut the city gates, and search
 every house!

MAGISTRATE
 Search every house!? Are you
 serious?

GOVERNOR
 Do I look happy? Start with the
 nobles! Use all your men, and
 soldiers too! (beat) I swear to
 God, I will castrate that damned
 monk!

EXT. PRINCE CHARLES' MANSION - DAY

Kurt confronts the magistrate and his men at the front door.
 Two of the prince's guards block the door.

KURT
 This is the house of Prince
 Charles! You cannot enter here
 without his permission!

MAGISTRATE
 The Emperor's laws say otherwise,
 and even the prince must obey them.
 Shall I arrest you for resisting my
 authority?

KURT
 I am not so foolish as that, sir,
 but I protest, and I shall report
 your intrusion to Prince Charles!

MAGISTRATE
 I would expect you to. Now stand
 aside!

INT. MANSION - NIGHT

The magistrate's men go quickly from room to room, followed by Kurt.

MINUTES LATER

They finally reach the sealed room in the attic. The magistrate is tired already, and Kurt speaks up.

KURT

Sir, this is the private closet of Prince Charles, which he sealed up himself. It cannot be opened without incurring his most royal displeasure.

CLOSE UP: SEALED LOCK

MAGISTRATE

I am satisfied here. Come, men! We have the entire city to search.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

A) EXT. CITY GATE - DAY

Prince Charles' carriage leaves the city, escorted by two soldiers on horseback.

B) EXT. ROAD - DAY

Kurt and Wenzel sit opposite each other in the carriage. They smile, then gaze out the window at the passing scenery.

C) EXT. MONASTERY GATE - DAY

Francis leaves the monastery with a group of friars on their Saturday outing. He carries a small sack.

D) EXT. STREET - DAY

Francis is walking behind the other monks, and he stops as they go around a corner. After waiting a few seconds, Francis turns around and hurries away unnoticed.

E) EXT. FARM - DAY

Francis rides away on a horse. The farmer looks at money that Francis has paid him.

F) EXT. OLD WOMAN'S COTTAGE - DAY

Francis rides away on his horse. The Old Woman cackles as she looks at the gold Francis has given her.

OLD WOMAN
Tee hee! Ha ha!

INT. SALON - DAY

Prince Charles is sitting with Wenzel and Francis, who are dressed in plain clothes. The Chamberlain PIETRO stands beside the Prince.

PRINCE CHARLES
Unfortunately, Wenzel, I cannot continue to hide you here. Governor Collebrat still searches for you, and if his spies find you, they will obtain a mandate from the supreme Consistory at Vienna, and that will be the end of you. (beat) I advise you, therefore, to go to Rome straightaway, and obtain a discharge from your monastic vows. (beat) My chamberlain Pietro here will accompany you. He is Italian, and shall serve as your agent. I shall provide you with a letter of introduction, and a thousand ducats for your expenses.

WENZEL
Thank you, your Highness.

FRANCIS
Yes, thank you, my lord. You are most considerate and kind.

PRINCE CHARLES
Think nothing of it. It is simply the right and best thing to do.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Wenzel and Francis are walking in the garden, ignoring the manservant watching them from a distance.

WENZEL
Francis, I think it would be wise of you to find lodgings in Vienna.
(MORE)

WENZEL (CONT'D)

Attend the morning Mass each day at Saint Stephan's Cathedral, and I will meet you there when I return.

FRANCIS

I agree. I shall leave immediately.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Francis casually leaves the estate on his horse.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Wenzel and PIETRO are riding horses, and leading two packhorses.

PIETRO

Whoa! I must piss!

Pietro dismounts, and Wenzel does the same. Suddenly Pietro pulls out a pistol and aims it at Wenzel, startling him.

PIETRO (CONT'D)

I shall kill you here and now unless you give me your gold-making stone!

WENZEL

I, I call God to witness, sir! I do not have it with me! I sent it away with friar Francis!

PIETRO

Liar! Open your bags! And take off your clothes!

MINUTES LATER

Wenzel stands in his underwear; his clothes are scattered on the ground.

PIETRO (CONT'D)

Damn it all! Well then, we will come to terms, or I will kill you anyhow! I want your ducats. Then go your way, and I will tell Prince Charles that you escaped.

INT. SALON - DAY

Prince Charles slaps Pietro.

PRINCE CHARLES
 You fool! How could you let him
 escape?

PIETRO
 Your Highness, he fought like a
 madman!

FLASHBACK:

EXT. ROADSIDE - DAY

Pietro and Wenzel gesticulate as they discuss matters.

PIETRO (V.O., CONT'D)
 And my pistol fell in the mud, and
 it would not shoot!

MINUTES LATER

Pietro and Wenzel ride back towards Vienna, with Pietro far
 in the lead.

PIETRO (V.O., CONT'D)
 And he ran away into the forest,
 and I could not find him!

RETURN TO SCENE:

Prince Charles hits Pietro again.

PRINCE CHARLES
 Damn you, idiot! I have lost the
 greatest treasure on earth, and a
 thousand ducats too! (beat) Get out
 of here before I kill you!

Pietro beats a hasty retreat.

EXT. ST. STEPHAN'S CATHEDRAL, VIENNA - DAY (ESTABLISHING)

INT. CATHEDRAL - DAY

Wenzel enters to find Francis attending Mass.

FRANCIS
 What happened? Why are you back so
 soon? You look terrible!

WENZEL

The chamberlain robbed me. I am lucky to be alive. (beat) Thank you, dear God! (beat) I'm hungry.

EXT. PARK - DAY

They sit on the grass, eating bread and cheese, drinking from a wine bottle. Wenzel keeps looking about nervously.

FRANCIS

We must be more careful if we would live to enjoy wealth and freedom.

WENZEL

What can we do? I am at my wits' end! Only the Emperor or the Pope can save us now.

FRANCIS

I know the steward of Count Hans DePaar, who is an alchemist, and a favorite of the Emperor. I will try to arrange a meeting. Otherwise, yes, we should leave Austria. There is no safety for us here.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

Count HANS DEPAAR is about 50 years old, afflicted with arthritis, and walks with a cane. Wenzel is slowly pumping the bellows as DePaar watches. The LOUD METALLIC CRACKLE and FLASH OF BLUE LIGHT startles DePaar. Then he beams with delight upon seeing the mass of gold with the iron rod stuck in the crucible.

HANS DEPAAR

You have transmuted me into a believer, friar Seyler. I shall make an appeal to Emperor Leopold immediately. Meanwhile, you shall be my guest, if you will.

WENZEL

I am most grateful to you, Count DePaar. The gold is yours to keep, of course.

INT. IMPERIAL COURT, HOFBURG PALACE - DAY

EMPEROR LEOPOLD sits on the throne. He is 35 years old, short, ugly, and has bad teeth. Count DePaar stands before him, leaning on his cane as he pleads his case. Dozens of nobles, courtesans, clergy, servants and guards attend in audience. Dr. Becher is among them, and a Jesuit priest.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

I can give no great heed to your proposition, Count DePaar, especially since I have report that your monk is a fugitive and leads a dissolute life. Moreover, he is reported to practice magic!

Count DePaar pauses to ponder his words before responding.

HANS DEPAAR

There is great weight in the objections made by your Imperial Majesty. (beat) And though I would not presume to impose upon you, it seems reasonable to me to consider this thing apart from the persons it concerns. For all men are sinners, yet must we therefore reject all their inventions and the good works they do? (beat) As for me, I have no reason to love alchemy, for I have suffered much loss by it, and never found any truth, save in this tincture of friar Seyler. (beat) I appeal for your permission to examine this matter, and ask you to deputize some persons to witness a transmutation, and test the gold.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

Count DePaar, I commend you for your eloquent discourse. Yet, though you mean well, perhaps you are deceived, for we all know that modern chymistry has shown ancient alchemy to be untrustworthy. (beat) But I also know full well how my father the emperor Ferdinand tested alchemy, and highly prized what was shown to him by Baron Chaos, and rewarded him for it. For that reason, I can believe there may be some truth in alchemy.

(MORE)

EMPEROR LEOPOLD (CONT'D)

(beat) Therefore, Count DePaar, I order you to make a trial of the tincture with witnesses skillful in chymistry, to determine this matter. Then I shall make my decision. (beat) Doctor Becher is given to the examination of alchemists' claims, so he shall see to it on this occasion. And my confessor father Spiess shall represent the clergy. So be it.

HANS DEPAAR

Your Imperial Majesty is most gracious, and I am very thankful. With your leave, I will attend to your command, this instant.

Emperor Leopold nods, and DePaar withdraws with a bow aside to the Secretary, who dictates inaudibly to a scribe.

INT. SALON - DAY

Dr. Becher and FATHER SPIESS are seated when Count DePaar enters with Wenzel. The Emperor's letter lays on the table, stamped with royal seal.

HANS DEPAAR

Gentleman, allow me to introduce Friar Wenzel Seyler. (beat) Friar Seyler, this is Father Spiess. He is the personal confessor of Emperor Leopold.

WENZEL

Father Spiess, it is an honor to meet you.

FATHER SPIESS

Good afternoon, friar Seyler.

HANS DEPAAR

And this is Doctor Johan Becher.

WENZEL

Good afternoon, Doctor Becher.

HANS DEPAAR

Gentlemen, the Emperor has commissioned us to investigate friar Seyler's claim that he can transmute base metals into gold.

(MORE)

HANS DEPAAR (CONT'D)

(beat) Doctor Becher, you practice alchemy, and you have written several excellent books about the art. And, as the Emperor's privy councillor of commerce, you also test the claims of many alchemists. I ask you, therefore, have you ever seen any supposed gold made by alchemy, that passes testing by assay?

BECHER

Count DePaar, since I was commissioned by the Emperor in the year 1667, I have never found any truth in any of the claims made by any alchemists. Still, I continue to hope that the Philosophers' Stone might really exist.

HANS DEPAAR

I assure you, Doctor Becher, today you shall see the truth of alchemy.

FATHER SPIESS

I do not believe in alchemy, but I am willing to observe and testify concerning this matter, if his Majesty commands it.

HANS DEPAAR

He does, Father Spiess, as decreed in this letter. (beat) Shall we proceed to the experiment? Everything is prepared, so we need not delay.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

The group stands around a small metal furnace.

HANS DEPAAR

As you can see, Doctor Becher, I own one of your famous portable furnaces. (beat) Here are several ounces of the best German tin, and new Hessian crucibles. Please examine them, so you can be certain there is no gold hidden within.

DePaar hands Becher a magnifying lens. Becher selects a piece of tin from a small pile on a table and peers at it with the lens.

BECHER

I want to keep some pieces to test later in my laboratory, Count DePaar.

HANS DEPAAR

Of course, Doctor Becher. And take any of the crucibles too, as you please.

Becher smashes one of the crucibles on the floor, then picks up a piece of the bottom and scrutinizes it.

BECHER

I am satisfied that there is no apparent trickery here.

FATHER SPIESS

Gentlemen, I fear of magical enchantment, and would bless these materials before we continue.

WENZEL

Oh yes, please do, Father Spiess. It can only help.

FATHER SPIESS

In nomine patris et filius et spiritui sancto...

His voice trails off into indistinct Latin mumbling while Dr. Becher fills a crucible with pieces of tin and places it in the hole in the top of the furnace.

MINUTES LATER

Everyone is startled by the LOUD METALLIC CRACKLE and FLASH OF BLUE LIGHT. Dr. Becher and Father Spiess look into the crucible, and then at each other with amazed expressions.

INT. IMPERIAL COURT - DAY

Count DePaar, Father Spiess, Dr. Becher and Wenzel stand before Emperor Leopold. A crowd of courtiers look on. A Jesuit priest stands among them.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

I am eager to hear the particulars of your examination, Doctor Becher. What do you have to say about the matter?

BECHER

Your Majesty, I have prepared a written account, and all of us have subscribed to it.

Becher holds out a sealed envelope. The Imperial Secretary steps forward to receive it.

BECHER (CONT'D)

I examined the tin and the crucible closely, and the tincture that was used. I also tested the gold that was produced and found it to be the purest I have ever seen. I calculate that one part of the tincture transmuted ten thousand parts of tin to gold. (beat) We also repeated the experiment to our satisfaction. (beat) Your Majesty, I am pleased to say that friar Seyler possesses the true alchemical tincture, the Philosophers' Stone.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

How very interesting! And what is your opinion, Father Spiess?

FATHER SPIESS

Imperial Majesty, I am not an alchemist, nor a chymist, yet it did appear to be a genuine transmutation. On my part, in God's name, I blessed the materials to prevent any magical mischief. Indeed, it appears to be a small miracle of rare device.

Emperor Leopold pauses to look at each of them in turn.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

Father Spiess and Doctor Becher, I thank you for your service in this matter. (beat) And I enjoin thee, Count DePaar, to treat friar Seyler kindly, and to assure him of my favor. (beat) I advise thee, friar Seyler, to refrain from further scandal. You will assume the Augustine habit again, and amend your manners so as to satisfy the clergy.

(MORE)

EMPEROR LEOPOLD (CONT'D)

(beat) I shall investigate this matter further, and make a final decision for its disposition. So be it.

WENZEL

I, I am most grateful, your Imperial Majesty!

Emperor Leopold nods and smiles benignly.

HANS DEPAAR

I humbly thank your Imperial Majesty, and shall discharge this commission as you command.

INT. DEPAAR'S STUDY - NIGHT

Hans DePaar sits at his desk, impressing his seal on an envelope. A second envelope lays to one side, already sealed. FATHER DUNELL sits watching him.

BECHER (V.O.)

The very same day, Count DePaar arranged for his confessor father Dunell to vest friar Seyler with his Augustine robes once again, and he wrote letters to the abbot and the governor, informing them of the emperor's command.

INT. ABBOT'S OFFICE - DAY

Abbot Brecheisen throws the letter down on his desk and glowers at Father Dunell.

INT. GOVERNOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Governor Collebrat throws the letter on his desk and glowers at Father Dunell. Then he picks up a glass of wine, takes a gulp, and slams it down.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Becher sips his wine, then sets his glass down.

BECHER

Count DePaar hoped to persuade Wenzel to call for Francis Preyhausen to bring him all of the tincture, thinking himself safe from violence under the emperor's protection. But Wenzel easily perceived the real intention, and he made a pretext to attend Mass, and managed to slip away from DePaar's men.

INT. ROOM - DAY

Wenzel and Francis are sitting across from each other at a table with the copper box between them. Wenzel removes one bottle and puts it in his pocket. Francis stands up, shuts the box, locks it in a cabinet, and puts the key in his pocket.

WENZEL

Brother Francis, we have endured many hazards together, and now we have the Emperor's promise of protection. Still, I fear that we must always beware. (beat) Now, only you and I know how much of the Philosophers' Stone we really possess. Therefore I will take one bottle, and pretend that is all. The rest we shall bury again. (beat) And I think you should remain incognito until we can act with confidence.

FRANCIS

I agree completely. We must be more careful than ever. Let us go bury the box together.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Count DePaar arrives in his carriage. The driver sets a footstep for him, and helps him down.

INT. SALON - NIGHT

Wenzel is sitting in an armchair, sipping wine and watching the logs burning in the fireplace. When Count DePaar enters, he rises and bows.

WENZEL

Good evening, Count DePaar!

HANS DEPAAR

Good evening, Wenzel.

DePaar pulls a pistol from his belt and lays it on a table. Then he takes a sealed letter from his coat pocket.

HANS DEPAAR (CONT'D)

Wenzel, my son, today I had audience with the Emperor, and he gave me this sealed decree. (beat) He demands the tincture of thee, and says that if you refuse to deliver it, I must execute the sentence of death upon thee.

WENZEL

(flabbergasted)

I, I cannot believe that he would do such a thing. I wish to read the decree!

Wenzel reaches for the decree. DePaar picks up the pistol and points it at Wenzel.

HANS DEPAAR

Alas, my dear friend, the Emperor commands that if you open this decree, I must execute you immediately! (long beat) Yet, if you heed my advice, we may yet free ourselves from this misfortune. (beat) You are not alone! I am your friend! I offer you my fatherly love!

WENZEL

I welcome your advice, Excellency!

HANS DEPAAR

Both of us need the Emperor's protection, and surely we shall be forced to give him the tincture. (beat) Yet we may both keep it, if we pretend to try to multiply it in quantity and potency, as the adept alchemists claim. (beat) And after some time has passed, we shall say that the glass was broken by the heat of the furnace, and we lost all the tincture.

(MORE)

HANS DEPAAR (CONT'D)

(beat) For the truth is, the Emperor's court is not worthy of such a treasure, and it would only be prostituted there. Emperor Leopold needs gold to pay for the wars against France and the Turks. (beat) But to engage thysself to me in greater faith, you must give me half the tincture, and we shall make a mutual oath to be faithful, one to the other, as long as we live. And what has passed between us tonight shall remain our secret.

WENZEL

(reluctantly)

I would sign a written agreement on these terms, and confirm it with our mutual promise.

HANS DEPAAR

As you wish, Wenzel.

Count DePaar raises a glass of wine.

HANS DEPAAR (CONT'D)

Let us drink to our success!

Wenzel raises his glass.

WENZEL

To our success!

As they sip their wine, Depaar grips his hip and grimaces. He puts down his glass.

HANS DEPAAR

Damn the gout!

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Dr. Becher puts down his glass of wine.

BECHER

Now, few days later, Count DePaar suffered a severe attack of gout. And to relieve the pain, he drank some potable gold that the alchemist Burrhy had prepared but poorly, and it only caused him more grief.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Count Hans DePaar is on his deathbed. His brother PETER DEPAAR stands at his side as Father Dunell administers Extreme Unction. There is a small desk at the foot of the bed.

BECHER (V.O.)

His physician administered other remedies to no avail, and his symptoms grew worse. Count DePaar sensed his death approaching, and called for his brother Peter, his only heir, for he was a bachelor.

HANS DEPAAR

Peter, listen carefully, and heed my words. (beat)

FLASHBACK:

INT. PARLOR - DAY

Frederick is reading Hans DePaar's palm. An amazed look comes over his face. He pauses, then continues inaudibly.

HANS DEPAAR (V.O., CONT'D)

Years ago in Italy, a soothsayer named Frederick Gualdus foretold that I would obtain the Philosophers' Stone, and then soon after I would die! (beat) The first part of the prophecy is fulfilled, and now my death is near...

RETURN TO SCENE

HANS DEPAAR

I know that you have spent as much time and money as myself in the vain practice of alchemy. I have nothing more valuable to give you, Peter, than the portion of the Philosophers' Stone that I have obtained. It is sealed up in that desk. I shall entrust it to Father Dunell, and upon my death, he shall deliver it to you.

PETER DEPAAR

Dear Hans, I doubt very much that your end is nigh, so I will take my leave for tonight. Sleep well, my brother. I shall return tomorrow.

HANS DEPAAR

Father Dunell, I entrust this desk to you now, to deliver to my brother.

FATHER DUNELL

Your Excellency, it shall be done as you wish. I shall take the desk with me tonight.

HANS DEPAAR

Thank you, Father.

EXT. ST. FRANCIS' MONASTERY - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

EXT. MONASTERY COURTYARD - NIGHT

Father Dunell arrives in DePaar's carriage, accompanied by two men in a wagon with the desk. The coachman places a footstep and helps him down. The other men unload the desk and carry it into the building after the priest.

LATER

As the carriage and wagon leave through the monastery gate, the Spanish BISHOP CASTILLE and his entourage arrives in three carriages, accompanied by several soldiers. The bishop's face is seen in passing.

EXT. MANSION - NIGHT

The STEWARD is instructing a servant, LUDWIG.

STEWARD

Ludwig, ride to Count DePaar and inform him that his brother has died this hour.

LUDWIG

Yes, sir.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Ludwig is galloping to Peter DePaar's estate.

EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Peter DePaar and Ludwig gallop on horseback, followed by two men in a wagon.

EXT. ST. FRANCIS' MONASTERY - NIGHT

Peter DePaar knocks loudly at the monastery gate. The PORTER MONK opens the peephole, then opens the gate slightly.

PORTER MONK
Yes, sir, what do you want?

PETER DEPAAR
I am Count DePaar, and I must speak
with Father Dunell immediately!

PORTER MONK
Your Excellency, this is an
unreasonable hour for a visit.
Father Dunell has retired for the
night.

DePaar barges in, and slips a coin into the monk's hand.

PETER DEPAAR
Take me to him, now!

The flustered monk stares at the coin. DePaar slaps another into his palm.

PORTER MONK
But... I...

PETER DEPAAR
Now, my good monk!

PORTER MONK
Yes, Excellency. Follow me. (beat)
Quietly, please!

He leads the way, carrying a lantern.

INT. CORRIDOR - NIGHT

Count DePaar pounds on Father Dunell's door as the monk and the other men stand by.

PORTER MONK
Shhh! Please be quiet!

DePaar ignores him and keeps knocking loudly. Father Dunell finally opens the door, yawning and squinting, dressed in his nightgown, and wearing slippers.

FATHER DUNELL

Why do you wake me at this ungodly hour?

PETER DEPAAR

Father Dunell, my brother has died, and I have come for the desk. It belongs to me now.

FATHER DUNELL

Count DePaar, I am shocked by your rudeness. Please wait until morning, and the desk will be delivered to you in the presence of the Abbot.

PETER DEPAAR

I cannot wait until morning. I will have it now, if you please.

DePaar motions to his men, and they enter the room to take the desk. Father Dunell tries to stop them, and they shove him aside.

PORTER MONK

Help! Help! Alarm!

Several monks come out of their cells, dressed in their underwear, and rush to aid Father Dunell. Then Bishop Castille appears, dressed in his nightgown.

BISHOP CASTILLE

What is all this commotion? Who are these people?

FATHER DUNELL

Bishop Castille, Excellency! I was the confessor of Count Hans DePaar, who died this night. He entrusted this desk to me, to deliver it to his brother here, come now to take it by force! I only ask that he wait until morning, to receive it with the Abbot as a witness.

BISHOP CASTILLE

Unless this desk is made from the wood of Christ's Cross, there will be no more noise about it tonight!

(MORE)

BISHOP CASTILLE (CONT'D)
 (beat) I will take receipt of this desk from you, Father, and I shall present it to Emperor Leopold when I see him today. And you...

PETER DEPAAR
 I am Count Peter DePaar. I am the Postmaster of Austria.

BISHOP CASTILLE
 Count DePaar, you may claim your desk from the Emperor! Now leave, posthaste!

Fuming, Count DePaar turns to leave, and his men follow. Bishop Castille gestures to the monks.

BISHOP CASTILLE (CONT'D)
 Bring the desk!

Two monks pick up the desk and carry it after the Bishop. The other monks return to their cells. Father Dunell yawns, shakes his head, and shuts his door.

INT. IMPERIAL COURT - DAY

Bishop Castille stands before Emperor Leopold on his throne. Two priests stand behind him with the desk between them. The court is crowded; Dr Becher is present.

BISHOP CASTILLE
 Your Imperial Majesty, I bring you greetings and salutations from Empress Margaret of Spain.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD
 Bishop Castille, you are most welcome here in Vienna. I trust you had a safe and pleasant journey.

BISHOP CASTILLE
 I did, your Majesty, until I arrived last night at Saint Francis' Monastery.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD
 Pray tell, what happened?

BISHOP CASTILLE
 Your Majesty, I have a grievous complaint to make against your postmaster, Count Peter DePaar.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

What? Count DePaar?

BISHOP CASTILLE

Yes, your majesty, the Count Peter DePaar. He came to the monastery late last night and made such a violent disturbance that everyone was awakened. And it was all for this desk! (beat) I humbly ask your Majesty to reprimand the Count. Such behavior is not tolerated in Spain. And therefore I deliver the desk to you for disposition.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

My dear Bishop, you shall have his most humble apology. But let us not dwell on it. We have important matters to discuss, in my privy chambers.

The Emperor rises, and everyone bows as he and Bishop Castille leave with the two priests and the desk in tow. The courtiers start gossiping indistinctly.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Dr. Becher sips his wine.

BECHER

The story raced through the court and the city, and soon reached Wenzel Seyler. (beat) And by means of Bishop Castille, he obtained an audience with the Emperor, and told him the whole story, how Count Hans DePaar had extorted the tincture from him, and forced him to vow secrecy, but now the Count was dead, and he was free from the oath.

INT. PRIVY CHAMBER - DAY

Wenzel stands before Emperor Leopold and Bishop Castille, who are sitting in armchairs.

WENZEL

Your Imperial Majesty, I am very glad that the Tincture has come into your hands.

(MORE)

WENZEL (CONT'D)

I have been determined to deliver it to you, but the violence of Count DePaar, and of Prince Charles and Count Schtick has prevented me. (beat) Therefore I implore you to grant me your protection, and return the tincture to me so that I may test its virtues and powers.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

Friar Seyler, now that I understand the events in this affair, I will extend my protection to you, and I shall entertain you in my court. Therefore, I commit you to the care and inspection of Count Austin of Wallenstein, the Governor of Hattshirr. (beat) The tincture shall be returned to you, that you may examine and enjoy it. But I shall keep some of it for safekeeping.

WENZEL

Your Majesty, I am eternally grateful for your mercy and understanding.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

My secretary shall make the necessary arrangements.

He nods to Wenzel, who bows his way backwards out of the chamber. The Emperor pulls a bell cord to notify the guards outside, and they open and shut the door.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Dr. Becher sets his wineglass on the table, and rubs his hands.

BECHER

Friar Seyler was well received into the Emperor's good graces, and he was assigned lodgings at the Imperial Bowling Green. He also performed some transmutations before the Emperor, and Count Austin made a gold chain in memory of the occasion.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Francis, dressed in his monk's robe, is riding in a royal carriage, escorted by two soldiers on horseback.

BECHER (V.O.)

And Emperor Leopold sent Friar Francis Preyhausen to Rome to seek a dispensation from the Pope, to release them from their monastic vows.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

A) EXT. ROOFTOP, VIENNA - DAY

A black-robed Jesuit priest releases a HOMING PIGEON with a message holder tied to its ankle. Cooing pigeons rustle about in their coop, with Hofburg Palace visible in the background.

B) EXT. ROOFTOP, ROME - DAY

The Vatican is visible in the background as the HOMING PIGEON lands at a rooftop coop full of cooing pigeons. A Jesuit priest unties the message holder from its ankle.

C) EXT. VATICAN - DAY

Francis enters the Vatican, accompanied by an Augustine priest. The Jesuit follows at a discrete distance.

INT. PALACE LABORATORY - DAY

Dressed in the Augustine habit, Wenzel is sitting at a table, drinking wine and talking inaudibly with Paul DELOURDES and Herman LECHLER. Several alchemical books lay open on the table. Specimens of various minerals lay about, and a mortar and pestle.

BECHER (V.O.)

Friar Seyler met many chymists and alchemists, yet none knew the true practice, so he only wasted his powder. Then some charlatans insinuated themselves upon him, and he learned many cunning frauds from them.

Delourdes is holding a crucible, and pointing into it.

DELOURDES

My favorite trick is to mix some powdered gold with wax in the bottom of a crucible and cover it with clay. When I pretend to make gold from lead, I poke through the clay with an iron rod and stir up the gold.

LECHLER

Ha ha! Yes, that's easy, and it works every time! I paid for my first tour of Europe that way, until that accident in Rome...

The three men chuckle drunkenly and drink up.

INT. PALACE LABORATORY - DAY

Wenzel, DeLourdes, and Lechler are distilling something smoky and smelly. Count Wallenstein and Dr. Becher come in to observe. The Count is frowning, shaking his head, and he holds a handkerchief to his nose.

BECHER (V.O.)

The many visitors soon became a noisome bother at the court, and Wenzel was always watched by Count Wallenstein. So friar Seyler told the Emperor that he needed to prepare some sulfurous substances, and the noxious fumes and stench would be a danger to the court. Therefore a laboratory was built for him in the Carinthian Fort, and he had the entire place to himself. And Emperor Leopold commanded me to assist him, so I got to better know the man.

WENZEL

Doctor Becher! Count Wallenstein!
Welcome!

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

Wenzel and Dr. Becher watch as masons construct a furnace in front of a window.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Dr. Becher sips his wine.

BECHER

Now, every alchemist knows the adepts' claim that the Philosophers' Stone can be increased in potency and in quantity. Therefore, many people asked to buy a bit of it, hoping to augment their portion. And friar Seyler was happy to sell it to them for much more than it was worth in the gold that could be produced. Count Savonius was one such customer.

INT. SALON - NIGHT

COUNT SAVONIUS hefts a small box onto the table and opens it to reveal 1000 ducats.

WENZEL

I thank you, Count Savonius. And here is a generous portion of the tincture for you to test. I wish you every success in your experiments.

COUNT SAVONIUS

I thank you in like wise, friar Seyler.

The Count looks closely at the vial, then puts it in his pocket. Wenzel closes the box and locks it in a cabinet. A SERVANT KNOCKS at the door.

WENZEL

Enter!

SERVANT

Dinner is served, master.

WENZEL

Shall we join the other guests, Excellency?

COUNT SAVONIUS

With pleasure a good appetite, Herr Seyler!

WENZEL
Call me Wenzel, please.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Wenzel is dining with Count Savonius and several other guests. Gorgeous Angelique is sitting next to him, sporting an extravagant necklace.

WENZEL
Angelique, my darling, you look ravishing!

ANGELIQUE
Oh, Wenzel, you are so charming!
And generous! This necklace is so beautiful! Thank you, my dearest!

She leans over to kiss him. Wenzel suddenly begins to gasp for breath, clutches his stomach in agony, and falls to the floor. The guests watch in horror and look aghast at each other. One of them stands up, runs to the window, and vomits. Angelique kneels on the floor, comforting Wenzel in her lap as she weeps for him.

ANGELIQUE (CONT'D)
Oh, Wenzel, Wenzel! Please, don't die!

EXT. FRONT DOOR - NIGHT

Count Savonius hands a note to his COACHMAN.

COUNT SAVONIUS
Go to Doctor Biliot at this address
and bring him here at once!

The coachman looks at the address and bows.

COACHMAN
Yes, Excellency!

LATER

Count Savonius greets DR. BILIOT as he arrives. The doctor is carrying a leather medical bag.

COUNT SAVONIUS
I want you to attend to his every
need -- and to mine.
(MORE)

COUNT SAVONIUS (CONT'D)

He has taken one thousand ducats from me for some of his tincture. I want it back, and the tincture too. The money is in the cabinet in his study, and the key is in his pocket. Find the tincture for me, and the thousand ducats are yours to keep.

DR. BILIOT

I understand, Excellency.

COUNT SAVONIUS

Good. I shall send my carriage back for you. Good night, doctor.

Count Savonius climbs into the carriage, and the coachman shuts the door for him.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Dr. Biliot finishes examining Wenzel, who is unconscious and moaning. Angelique sits beside the bed.

DR. BILIOT

It appears that he has been poisoned with arsenic. I have administered vitriol. Now we must wait. (beat) There is nothing you can do here, fraulein. You might as well go home.

ANGELIQUE

Yes, Doctor Biliot.

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

Dr. Biliot opens the cabinet, removes the box of ducats, then puts it in his medical bag.

BECHER (V.O.)

The unscrupulous doctor found the Count's ducats easily, but Wenzel had hidden his tincture well, so Biliot failed to find it.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Wenzel is sitting up in bed, and Angelique is fussing over him. She kisses his brow.

He pulls her to him kisses her lips, and nuzzles her bosom. She giggles and lays back in his lap, smiling lasciviously.

BECHER (V.O.)(CONT'D)
And soon after, to everyone's surprise, friar Seyler began to recover his health.

EXT. VATICAN - DAY

Francis is smiling as he leaves the Vatican, holding a sealed letter. A Jesuit priest follows discretely.

BECHER (CONT'D)
And a few weeks later, Francis Prehausen returned from Rome with the papal dispensation.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

A) EXT. ROAD - DAY

Francis is riding in a royal carriage on his way back to Vienna, escorted by two soldiers on horseback. He is now dressed in plain clothes.

B) EXT. ROOFTOP, ROME - DAY

A Jesuit priest releases a HOMING PIGEON with a message attached. The Vatican is in the background.

C) EXT. ROOFTOP, VIENNA - DAY

The HOMING PIGEON lands at the rooftop coop in Vienna. Hofburg Palace can be seen in the background. A Jesuit priest picks it up and unties the message from its ankle.

INT. SALON - DAY

Francis is sitting in an armchair, sipping wine. Wenzel stands happily reading the papal dispensation. He tosses it on the table, then tears off his monk's habit and throws it into the fireplace.

WENZEL
Cheer up, Francis! Our dream has come true! We are free from the Church, and we have wealth, honor and fame, and women!

FRANCIS

Mmmm... Forgive me if I am less than enthused, for I am tired from my journey, and I exhausted my relief in the indulgences of Rome. (beat) Wenzel, I am very worried by the many strangers you have attracted. (beat) I think it would be best for me to remain incognito while I am in Vienna. Only you may know where I reside. (beat)

WENZEL

I agree, Francis. We may enjoy the Emperor's protection, but lesser men will always seek to steal our treasure.

FRANCIS

Soon I shall go traveling again, to study alchemy in the great libraries. We know nothing of the proper use and the powers of the Philosophers' Stone, and no one here in Vienna knows any more than we do. Perhaps I may meet someone who can teach me the true practice. (beat) I shall send you letters to keep you informed of my progress.

WENZEL

I shall provide you with all the money you may need.

FRANCIS

Thank you, Wenzel.

EXT. ST. STEPHAN'S CATHEDRAL - DAY

Wenzel and Angelique are leaving the cathedral after getting married. Dr. Becher is among the many guests who follow them out. He stands quietly watching as the others cheer and throw flowers at the newlyweds.

BECHER (V.O.)

Soon after, Wenzel married a very crafty woman named Angelique who had attended to his sickness and his desires. (beat) But in Vienna she was accounted as a common whore.

(MORE)

BECHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 (beat) And he was visited by
 persons of the highest rank, and
 was mightily respected by the most
 eminent ladies, countesses and
 princesses.

INT. BANQUET - DAY

Wenzel and Angelique are celebrating their wedding banquet.
 Francis and Dr. Becher are among the guests..

WENZEL
 My friends, I do fancy that the
 elements all conspire together to
 make me happy! Eat, drink! Be happy
 with me!

The guests laugh drunkenly. Francis manages a wan smile, and
 Becher sips his wine.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Dr. Becher sips his wine, then sets the glass down.

BECHER
 As a spectator of the scene, I
 thought he was living in a fool's
 paradise. (beat) It reminded me of
 Cornelius Agrippa, who wrote in his
 book The Vanity of Sciences, that
 if he were master of the
 Philosophers' Stone, he would spend
 it all in nothing but whoring, for
 he could easily make women
 prostitute themselves thereby, and
 yield to his lust. (beat) And that
 is just what Wenzel Seyler did. He
 squandered it all in debauchery.

MONTAGE:

Wenzel and Angelique are carousing in bed with a series of
 women and men in orgiastic combinations, climaxing in a
 chorus of passionate moans and cries.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Wenzel and Angelique lay beside each other in bed, breathing
 fitfully. They are covered with chancres, and their eyes are
 closed.

BECHER (V.O.)

But Wenzel and Angelique were so depraved, that soon they contracted the French disease. Yet Wenzel made another miraculous recovery.

LATER

Wenzel stands beside the bed, weeping; Angelique is dead. The doctor pulls the sheet over her head.

BECHER (V.O., CONT'D)

I believe that the medicinal virtue of the Tincture saved him, because he had handled it so often, and it strengthened his blood. But he knew nothing of it, so he could not treat his wife, and she died.

MONTAGE:

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Wenzel carouses serially and in combinations with dozens of women and some men, climaxing in a chorus of passionate moans and cries.

LATER

He lays in bed after it all, looks at the woman sleeping beside him, and sighs as tears well up in his eyes.

BECHER (V.O.)

After the death of Angelique, Wenzel Seyler exceeded all bounds of modesty, and indulged in every sinful excess. In three years time he spent more than ten thousand crowns in all manner of luxury...

SERIES OF SHOTS:

A) INT. SALON - DAY

Wenzel chooses from an assortment of fabrics as two tailors fawn over him.

B) LATER

Wenzel is posing for a portrait.

C) LATER

An effete decorator fusses about as workers carry luxurious chairs and small tables into the room. Wenzel's portrait hangs on the wall.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Wenzel is entertaining dozens of guests in the salon and the garden. Francis stands at a window of a study that overlooks the garden. Wenzel looks up from the party and sees Francis.

INT. STUDY - DAY

Francis turns away from the window. Wenzel enters, shuts the door, and sinks into an armchair, looking tired and slightly drunk.

WENZEL

Aren't you enjoying the party,
Francis?

FRANCIS

Oh, do forgive me, Wenzel. I don't
mean to seem unfriendly toward your
guests. But I have another matter
in mind.

WENZEL

It sounds serious.

FRANCIS

It is.

WENZEL

Then I shall leave you to dote upon
in private, unless you want my
advice.

FRANCIS

The matter is you, Wenzel, so do
stay and consult with me, if you
please. The party won't miss you
meanwhile.

WENZEL

Uhhh... Well...

Francis has Wenzel politely trapped in the chair.

FRANCIS

Indeed. (beat) Wenzel, I don't want to sound dramatic, but I tell you, man, I do fear you are at grave risk of losing your soul in the abyss of sin.

WENZEL

Ohhh... Uhhh... Well... You may be right, brother Francis. (beat) No, you are right! No matter how often I confess my sins and do penance, I cannot resist the next temptation! My lust seems to have no bounds! No woman resists me, not even wives or virgins! (beat) Well, there was one nun, but she was... special.

FRANCIS

Wenzel, Your penis is your Achilles heel! Sex killed Angelique, and it nearly killed you! Aren't you ever satisfied?

WENZEL

No... I am only satiated, for a little while at best. (beat) My life is a perpetual motion of wine and women, music and food. I haven't been sleeping well, and I have a headache every morning.

FRANCIS

That much is easily cured. Don't drink so much wine! Get outdoors once in a while to breathe fresh air! And bathe more often.

WENZEL

Yes, of course! Why didn't I think of that!?

FRANCIS

Maybe you are too drunk to think. (beat) Seriously, Wenzel, this cannot endure! You are wasting the Tincture, and you know not how to replace it. What will you do when it is all gone? Will you become a monk again?

WENZEL

Hmmm... Possibly... But not
Augustine, or Benedictine, nor
Jesuit. Perhaps I shall become a
Protestant, or a Moslem...

Wenzel's voice sinks into mumbling, then a mild snore as he pretends to pass asleep.

FRANCIS

Ach! Damn it, Wenzel! You are
impossible!

Francis glares, then leaves the room. Wenzel opens an eye to watch Francis leave. Alone, he sighs and frowns, closes his eyes, and groans. After a long beat, he begins to snore slightly.

INT. SALON - DAY

Wenzel and Francis are sitting in armchairs before a fireplace, sipping wine as they talk. Wenzel, slightly drunk, pulls a bottle of tincture from his pocket.

WENZEL

I have spent almost all of the
Tincture in this bottle. I need to
retrieve another from the box. I
shall go tomorrow.

FRANCIS

Wenzel, there is only one bottle
left. (beat) And it is not where we
buried it.

Wenzel rises from his chair with an alarmed look.

WENZEL

What do you mean, it's not there?!

FRANCIS

Precisely. I have moved it.

WENZEL

You moved it? And you did not tell
me? What are you trying to do?

Wenzel advances, glowering at Francis.

WENZEL (CONT'D)

Where is my tincture, Francis?

FRANCIS

Calm yourself, Wenzel. It is safe. But you are not. (beat) Your enemies can not harm you, yet you are destroying yourself with excess.

WENZEL

I don't want another sermon, Francis. Where is the tincture?

FRANCIS

It is nearby. And I will return it to you, when you must come to your senses, Wenzel. Your excesses, must stop!

WENZEL

I am a dissipated, dis-, dispensated monk, damn it, not a saint! Excess, you say? Ha! I won't know what is enough, until I've had too much!

FRANCIS

Wenzel, you are totally debauched and depraved, and your embarrassment of riches is shameful, yet you have no shame. (beat) You possess a great gift of God, that you could use to help people in need, yet you spend it on luxury and entertainment. I do not object to luxury, Wenzel, but this is wanton waste. (beat) Wenzel, do you remember the vows we exchanged with each other in the monastery, when we began this adventure? Eh?

WENZEL

Yes, of course.

FRANCIS

I want you to renew those vows with me. Now. Then will I return the tincture to you. (beat) Think about it. Let me know when you're ready to be sensible. I await you.

Francis leaves abruptly, and Wenzel remains staring into fireplace, chewing his nails as he worries.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

Wenzel sits at a table, weighing his remaining tincture on a balance scale. He writes some notes, then puts the quill pen in the ink pot, looks at his notes, scratches his head, and bites his nails. He gulps some wine, and looks worried.

BECHER (V.O.)

He foresaw that his supply of tincture would not last long at that rate.

LATER

Wenzel is performing a distillation. He pumps the bellows a few times, then peers into the retort. Suddenly it explodes, and he runs out of the laboratory, coughing, choking.

BECHER (CONT'D)

And though he hoped to increase it as the adepts teach in their books, he was no alchemist, so his experiments only resulted in further loss.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

Wenzel is experimenting with DeLourdes and Lechler.

BECHER (V.O., CONT'D)

Yet his needs were such, and so many wanted to buy his powder, that he resorted to a fraudulent scheme with the help of his partners Paul DeLourdes and Herman Lechler.

INT. LABORATORY - NIGHT

Wenzel is experimenting with DeLordes and Lechler.

BECHER (V.O, CONT'D)

They prepared the tincture with a mixture of powdered cinnabar, copper, and litharge all boiled together in aqua fortis, so that ignorant fools might mistake it for his real gold-making powder, and buy it for a high price. (beat) And by means of this and other swindles, he got many thousands of crowns.

INT. STUDY - DAY

Wenzel is selling a small bottle of red powder to BARON KARNSTADT, who hands him a bag of coins. Paul DeLourdes and Herman Lechler also are present, watching from across the room, and smirking at each other.

WENZEL

Thank you, Baron Karnstadt, I hope your experiment is successful.

BARON KARNSTADT

I thank you too, Herr Seyler. I shall make the experiment as soon as I return to my laboratory.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

Baron Karnstadt is attempting to perform a transmutation. He removes a crucible from his furnace with tongs and sets it on a brick counter. There is no gold. He frowns.

INT. SALON - DAY

Baron Karnstadt is angrily confronting Wenzel, DeLourdes, and Lechler, who are holding glasses of wine.

BARON KARNSTADT

You have cheated me, Herr Seyler! Return my money, or I shall bring a complaint against you before the court!

Wenzel puts his glass on a table.

WENZEL

My dear Baron Karnstadt, the verity of my tincture has been proven by the assayers at the Imperial Mint, and by many others, as you know. I can only suppose that you lack skill in the art, and made a mistake in the practice.

BARON KARNSTADT

Do not insult my intelligence, sir! I followed your instructions carefully, and I am well practiced in chymical science! I demand that you return the money I paid you!

WENZEL

In that case, Baron, I must ask you to return the tincture I sold to you.

BARON KARNSTADT

I used it all in the experiments!

WENZEL

Well then, would you like to make another trial of it? Perhaps you can get it right this time.

BARON KARNSTADT

The only other trial I shall make is of you, Herr Seyler, in a court of law!

The baron storms out, and the three scoundrels snicker in glee as they click their glasses together in a toast, and set their glasses down.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Dr. Becher sets down his glass of wine, and surveys his audience.

BECHER

The matter could not be kept secret, and people began to talk about it. Serious alchemists resented his prostitution of their science, and his many crimes of fraud. (beat) But he was in such good credit with the emperor, that it was not safe to impeach him.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The courtroom is crowded with observers, including Dr. Becher. Baron Karnstadt is in the witness stand.

BECHER (V.V.O., CONT'D)

Nevertheless, several of his victims took legal action, and they obtained a judgment against him.

BARON KARNSTADT

Then he said, would you like to make another trial of it? Perhaps you can get it right this time!

INT. PRIVY CHAMBER - DAY

Emperor Leopold is meeting with several high councillors, including Dr. Becher. Their discussion is indistinct except for snatches about "Seyler", "fraud", "court", "judgment" and "Your Majesty".

BECHER (V.O.)

Now the Emperor, unless he were to leave his favorite Wenzel to the judges, had to intervene. For so many complaints were made against him, and his infamy was so widespread, that Leopold thought it convenient to have it suppressed.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Dr. Becher sips his wine. He is slurring slightly.

BECHER

Gentlemen, the hour is getting late, so I will bring this story to a close. (beat) I will just say that the Emperor paid all of Seyler's debts, and got from him the rest of his tincture.

INT. PRIVY CHAMBER - DAY

Wenzel hands one of the small bottles of Philosophers' Stone to Emperor Leopold. It now contains only a small amount.

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

Wenzel, you are one of my favorite subjects, but you have caused me a great deal of embarrassment, and I am sorely irritated about it. Do not disappoint me again. Do you understand?

WENZEL

Yes, your Majesty. I promise to mend my ways and refrain from any further abuse of my privileges. (beat) I humbly apologize to you, my gracious sovereign. (beat) I am very sorry to have displeased you. I thank you for being so merciful to me.

INT. IMPERIAL COURT - DAY

Wenzel is kneeling before Emperor Leopold, who is placing a medallion on a ribbon around his neck. Dr. Becher is among the many courtiers present for the ceremony.

BECHER (V.O.)

Then the Emperor advanced him to the title of Baron Seyler of Rheinburgh. (beat) And furthermore, he made him the Hereditary Master of the Mint of Bohemia!

EMPEROR LEOPOLD

Rise, Baron Seyler, and go forth to your estate.

Wenzel rises to his feet, bows to the Emperor, and withdraws as the audience applauds.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Wenzel and his beautiful new wife are entertaining several aristocratic guests. Francis Preyhausen is among them.

BECHER (V.O.)

Emperor Leopold sent him away to Prague, where he now lives with his second wife. (beat) Her name is Waldes Kircheriana, a lovely woman of a noble family. (beat) And Baron Seyler made Francis Preyhausen the steward of his house.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Dr. Becher finishes his glass of wine, sets it down, and points to Robert BOYLE, who nods and smiles.

BECHER

I published this story at the request of Sir Robert Boyle, to tell the truth of the matter, and to silence the critics of alchemy. (beat) Now, if I have mistaken any of the facts, well then, Baron Seyler is still alive, and he is welcome to correct me with a more exact account.

(MORE)

BECHER (CONT'D)

(beat) And to conclude, I sincerely wish that, if God should bless any alchemist with the Philosophers' Stone, he puts it to better use than did Wenzel Seyler, for the benefit of humanity, and the glory of God. (beat) One can only speculate how Emperor Leopold has used his portion. But his Majesty did bestow upon me a single grain of it, and I keep it with me always, in this vial.

Dr. Becher produces a tiny vial from his pocket. It contains a tiny piece of the red Stone.

NEWTON

May we take a look at it, Doctor Becher?

BECHER

Certainly, Sir Newton! Pass it around.

Becher hands the vial to Newton, who is sitting closest to him.

NEWTON

Ah, what a wonderment! I would give anything to know the secret of its preparation!

Newton peers into the vial, then passes it to Sir Robert BOYLE, who is distracted.

NEWTON (CONT'D)

Sir Boyle?

BOYLE

Ah, yes. (beat) Gentlemen, I would like to add mention of a meeting I had recently with Count von Lamberg, son of the Lord High Steward to Emperor Leopold. He was in the company of Count Wallestein, who came here as an envoy to King Charles. (beat) I asked him to tell me about Baron Seyler, and he said he was very well acquainted with the man, and had witnessed several projections on lead and tin.

Boyle pauses to sip his wine.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

He also said that Baron Seyler had repaid sixty thousand florins of debts, and returned the pension given to him by the Emperor. (beat) The count also told me of a particular transmutation that Seyler performed before the emperor and Count Wallestein.

INT. EMPEROR'S PRIVY CHAMBER - DAY

Emperor Leopold and Count Wallestein are sitting in armchairs, watching Wenzel. He speaks inaudibly as he hands the Emperor a piece of silver that he has cut with shears from a plate. Wenzel dips a small brush into a cup that contains a dab of red paste, and paints around the cut in the plate. Then he sets the plate on a bed of red-hot coals in a brazier. The silver turns to gold as they watch.

BOYLE (V.O.)

He took a silver plate and cut off a piece to show that it was pure, then he spread a paste made of his powder on the plate and held it over burning coals, and the tincture turned most of it into gold.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Boyle looks around at the others, and gestures as he speaks.

BOYLE

And the Count showed me the piece of silver that had been cut off, and a piece of the transmuted plate, and later he presented both pieces to his Majesty King Charles.

Boyle takes an other look at the vial, then offers it to Edmund HALLEY.

BOYLE (CONT'D)

Mister Halley?

HALLEY

Thank you, Sir Boyle.

MINUTES LATER

The meeting is over, but Dr. Becher, Newton, and Boyle remain chatting. In the background, Halley is showing off his telescope to Robert Hooke and the other guests.

NEWTON

I would have you know, Doctor Becher, that you are being considered as a candidate for fellowship in the Royal Society. It shall come to a vote at the next meeting.

BECHER

Ah, that is sweet music to my ears, Sir Newton, for I would so enjoy such an honor!

NEWTON

Well, Doctor, I promise you shall have my vote!

BECHER

Why, thank you, Sir Newton!

INT. STUDY - DAY

SUPERIMPOSE: "PRAGUE, 1683"

Francis is holding a LETTER as he stands before Wenzel at his desk.

FRANCIS

Sir Robert Boyle in London has written a letter to me. He says... (beat) I regret to inform you that Doctor Becher passed away in London a few months ago, in October of 1682. (beat) He spoke often and well of you... (beat) I have enclosed a few copies of his booklet Magnalia Naturae, which he published at my behest... (beat) Here is a copy for you, Wenzel.

Francis hands a copy of MAGNALIA NATURAE to Wenzel.

INT. LABORATORY - NIGHT

Several lanterns hang from hooks on the walls, lighting the scene. Robert Boyle and Dr. Becher watch as their assistant furiously pumps the bellows of a furnace.

A near-empty retort sits in the hole atop the furnace, and the white liquid in the receiver and the retort glows brightly. Becher and Boyle move closer to peer at it. The glass retort cracks ominously, and they cringe in fear of an explosion.

BOYLE (V.O.)

Thanks to Doctor Becher's knowledge of phosphorus, we now can work a profit from the distillation of urine and sand by Brandt's process. (beat) It always dismayed him, however, that he was not elected to membership in the Royal Society.

INT. FRANCIS' OFFICE - DAY

Francis is studying Frederick and Karl's alchemical MANUSCRIPT. He silently mouths the words as he reads.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

If you want to meet other adepts who might be nearby, then dissolve a grain of your Stone in a bowl pure water and set it on the ground under a full moon. (beat) When you go to sleep that night, rub some of the water on your head, and pray to recognize your fellow. You will dream of him, and you will remember his name and place. (beat) Hmmm...

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

Francis is kneeling in the grass before a bowl of red water. The FULL MOON shines overhead.

FRANCIS (V.O.) (CONT'D.)

A strange beam of light will rise from the bowl toward the moon... (beat) Hmmm... Any adepts who know this will do the same, hoping to meet their brothers.

SPECIAL EFFECT: The WATER GLOWS with a RED LIGHT, and a ghostly BEAM RISES toward the moon. Francis watches in amazement.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The bowl now sits on a bedside table along with a single candle in a holder. Francis is sitting on the edge of the bed, rubbing his head with the red water. He blows out the candle and lays down to sleep. His head and the water in the bowl continue to glow softly in the dark.

FRANCIS (V.O.) (CONT'D.)

When you go to sleep that night,
 rub some of the water on your head,
 and pray to recognize your fellow.
 You will dream of him, and you will
 remember his name and place. (beat)
 Hmmmm...

LATER

Francis is dreaming. A mist clears to reveal Frederick Gualdus' face.

DISEMBODIED VOICE

Frederick Gualdus... Prague.

EXT. GARDEN - NIGHT

Frederick is standing before a bowl of red water.

SPECIAL EFFECT: The WATER GLOWS with a RED LIGHT, and a ghostly BEAM RISES toward the moon.

Frederick peers at the bowl through a RED GLASS LENSE, and sees Francis' face appear on the surface of the water.

DISEMBODIED VOICE

Francis Preyhausen... Prague.

INT. CATHEDRAL - DAY

Mass is being served, with hundreds of people in attendance. Francis is among them, and Frederick sits behind him. He is dressed inconspicuously, and appears to be about 50 years old.

LATER

Mass has ended and people are leaving. Frederick approaches Francis.

FREDERICK

Herr Preyhausen?

FRANCIS

I, I saw you in my dream! You...

FREDERICK

I am Frederick Gualdus. (beat) I knew Father Karl Steiner, the first abbot of Saint Thomas' Monastery. We prepared the Philosophers' Stone that you possess today.

FRANCIS

But the monastery was built four hundred years ago! How can you be so old?

FREDERICK

I am much older even than four hundred years. Seven hundred would be more accurate, perhaps eight hundred. I do not know exactly. (beat) The medicinal virtue of the Elixir cures all diseases, and bestows a long life, until God calls for your soul. (beat) The power to transmute base metals is merely one of its many powers.

FRANCIS

That is what the manuscript says, that was in the copper box!

FREDERICK

Yes, I know. I helped write it. (beat) Shall we take a walk?

EXT. PARK - DAY

Frederick and Francis are perambulating past a pond and a flock of swans.

FREDERICK

You need to learn the proper use of the Tincture, or you will be in peril of your soul, and cause great harm instead of good, like your friend Baron Seyler. (beat) Indeed, it is a miracle that he has survived to enjoy such good fortune.

FRANCIS

He and I are the best of friends,
sir, yet I must agree with you,
Master Galdus.

FREDERICK

I have actually been observing you
for some time already, Francis, and
I think you are worthy of
initiation into the mysteries of
alchemy. (beat) Baron Seyler,
however, has disqualified himself
by his many sins. Therefore, you
may not tell him or anyone else
what I teach you. Promise me that.

FRANCIS

I do so promise, Master Galdus.
(beat) I implore you to teach me
all you can about alchemy! I shall
be on my best behavior!

FREDERICK

Hmmph... Of course you shall, or
I'll abandon you to your fate.
(beat) And don't call me master so
often. It's embarrassing. I am also
simply Frederick.

FRANCIS

Yes, sir. Thank you, Frederick,
Master Galdus!

FREDERICK

Hmmph.

INT. STUDY - DAY

Francis is standing before Wenzel, who is seated at his desk.

FRANCIS

I used the tincture according to
the instructions in the manuscript,
and I met a real adept alchemist!
His name is Frederick Galdus, and
he is the master who taught Abbot
Steiner to make the Stone you
found!

WENZEL

Francis, Abbot Steiner lived three
centuries ago! How could... what is
his name?

FRANCIS
Frederick Gualdus.

WENZEL
How can he be so old?

FRANCIS
I asked him that, and he said it is
by the medicinal virtue of the
Elixir. Even so, few masters have
ever lived so long.

WENZEL
The Elixir, you say?

FRANCIS
Yes, that is what he calls it, and
the Philosophers' Stone, and the
Tincture.

WENZEL
Hmmm... Well, this should prove
most interesting!

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Gualdus is teaching Francis. Several alchemical books lay
open on the table at which they are sitting.

FRANCIS
Master, what is the Elixir? Is it
the Philosophers' Stone, or the
Tincture? I am confused by so many
names.

FREDERICK
They are all the same thing, in
different forms. But the Elixir is
the great Medicine. (beat)

FLASHBACK:

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

An unidentified ALCHEMIST holds the Philosophers' Stone up to
the sun, praying in a blissful mumble.

ALCHEMIST
In nomine deus, et filius, et
spiritus sanctus...

MINUTES LATER

The alchemist has filed a bit of the Stone. He tastes it tentatively. After a long beat, he dies, surprised.

FREDERICK (V.O.)

Many alchemists who attained the Philosophers' Stone ingested it hoping for perfect health and long life, but they met sudden death instead.

RETURN TO SCENE

FREDERICK

The Stone must be dissolved in wine and greatly diluted. (beat) A spoonful each day will cure any disease by a gentle sweat. (beat) But take care not to be injured, for the power is only medicinal, not surgical. It will not heal wounded flesh.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

Francis and Frederick move about the laboratory, selecting labeled jars of substances for an experiment and setting them on a table. Frederick stops to pull a silk pouch from his pocket, and a red glass lens from the pouch. He hands it to Francis.

FREDERICK

The Philosophers' Stone is the key to open heaven and earth. Through it, you can see through everything. (beat) Simply paint a glass with it, and behold! Look at the furnace.

Francis peers through the lens at the furnace, and sees an elemental SALAMANDER in the fire.

SPECIAL EFFECT: SALAMANDER CAVORTING in the coal fire.

FREDERICK (CONT'D)

Now look out the window!

Francis walks over to the window and looks through the lens out into a garden. He sees a glowing new world, populated with elemental spirits of water, air, and earth.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

SYLPHS flutter about in the air, FAIRIES flutter about, GNOMES peek from behind trees and rocks, and UNDINES splash in a small pond. They smile and wave at Francis standing at the window, watching through the lens, his jaw agape. Then he grins with delight.

RETURN TO SCENE

FREDERICK

All spirits will obey you, for the Stone elevates the soul to the highest realms. (beat) You can also know all things past and future, as much as God permits... (beat) but not your own death. (beat) And if you look through the lens at another person, you can diagnose their health. All these things and more will be shown to you.

Frederick opens one of the jars and shakes some of the contents into a crucible.

FREDERICK (CONT'D)

There is a new outbreak of the black plague in Vienna. I am going there tomorrow to fight it with the Elixir. Will you come with me?

FRANCIS

(reluctantly)
Yes, Frederick, if you wish.

FREDERICK

Do not worry about it, Francis. If you have been using the Elixir as I instructed you, it will protect you.

FRANCIS

I have been taking one drop every week. I do feel wonderful!

FREDERICK

Do so for the rest of your life, and you will scarcely show your true age.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

A CHURCH BELL TOLLS in the distance as Frederick and Francis, dressed in brown monastic robes and carrying lanterns, walk past a wagon filled with corpses of plague victims. Two men toss another body onto the pile. The DRIVER RINGS a small BELL a few times.

DRIVER

Bring out the dead! Bring out the dead!

They walk around a corner. The narrow street is empty except for them. They pass by a door painted with an X, sign of the Black Death. They look around to see if anyone is watching, then slip inside and close the door behind them. The CHURCH BELL TOLLS again.

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Their lanterns light up a tiny bedroom as Frederick looks through his red lens at a man and wife, laying together fully dressed on a bed. They are clutching crucifixes. Their faces are spotted with black buboes, and they gasp and moan weakly. Frederick pockets his monocle, takes a bottle from his pouch, and dribbles some Elixir into the man's mouth. Francis does the same for the woman. Then they cork their bottles, put them in their pouches, and leave the room.

INT. STAIRWELL - NIGHT

Frederick and Francis descend the stairs.

FREDERICK

We saved dozens of lives today, Francis. (beat) I wish we could do more, but we must be careful not to attract attention.

FRANCIS

Alas, the task is overwhelming! But it is gratifying indeed, to rescue these few souls at least from certain death.

FREDERICK

Yes, the elixir is a great gift of God to suffering humanity. But it is fraught with grave danger, as you know.

EXT. STREET - NIGHT

Frederick peeks out the doorway, then steps out with Francis following. The distant CHURCH BELL TOLLS.

FREDERICK

Only a few years ago in 1679, I secretly ministered to plague victims here in Vienna. Seventy thousand perished that year, and as many again in the next. (beat) I was able to restore thousands to health with my medicine. And then one day, I was trapped by a mob...

FLASHBACK:

EXT. STREET - DAY

Frederick is wearing plain clothes, and a cloak. He has a short beard. A desperate MOB #1 of howling men and women have him surrounded. JESUIT #1 is among them. Frederick pulls a bottle out of his pouch and tosses it to them. They start to fight over it.

MOB #1

Medicine! The medicine! Me! Me!
Give me some! Argh!

Frederick tears off his cloak and throws it to the mob. He manages to slip into a doorway as they tear at it. Then the mob passes around the corner, and Frederick runs away. Jesuit #1 follows him unseen.

INT. ROOM - DAY

Frederick has changed clothes, donned on a wig and hat, and shaved his beard. He peeks out the window, then leaves.

FREDERICK (V.O.)

I gave them what I had, and while they fought over it, I escaped, and shaved, and put on a wig and new clothes, and fled the city.

RETURN TO SCENE

MOB #2 suddenly comes around the corner a block behind them. A few men are carrying torches and lanterns; Jesuit #1 is among them.

MAN #1

There they are! They have the
medicine!

MOB #2

Medicine! The medicine!

JESUIT #1

Seize them, in the name of the
Church!

FREDERICK

Run!

As they race around the corner, Frederick drops his lantern, tears off his pouch and robe, and throws them to the ground. Francis follows suit. Frederick is wearing pants and a shirt under his robe, Francis is in his underwear, and both are wearing boots. Frederick pulls the bottle of Elixir from his pouch and drops it on top of his robe, then continues running. Francis does the same. They make it around the next corner just as the mob appears again behind them.

MAN #1

There! The medicine! Medicine!

The screaming mob starts fighting over the bottles and tearing at the robes and pouches, but Jesuit #1 hurries to follow Frederick and Francis.

LATER

Frederick staggers to an exhausted halt.

FREDERICK

Stop! Stop! I must rest!

FRANCIS

I think we lost them, or vice
versa.

FREDERICK

If it isn't the mobs, then it's the
damned Jesuits, or those silly
Rosicrucians, or the Allumbrados!
(beat) I need to travel again,
perhaps to America this time.

FRANCIS

Who are the Allumbrados, master
Frederic?

FREDERICK
 Allumbrados... The Illuminated.
 They're Spanish... pretenders all
 of them... elitist worms...

MINUTES LATER

Frederick and Francis are walking again down another street.
 Jesuit # 1 follows discretely, close enough to eavesdrop.

FREDERICK (CONT'D)
 Beware of all things Catholic,
 especially the Jesuits! They are
 the lowest form of Christian.

Frederick spits.

FRANCIS
 Why do you hate them so much?

FREDERICK
 The Jesuit Inquisitors have
 retarded the progress of science
 and civilization for two centuries,
 and they persist, in secret.
 (beat) We could be sailing amongst
 the stars by now, but for those
 Luciferian bastards. They think
 they are holy, but they're just
 shyte, pretending to be human,
 pretending to be Christian!

FRANCIS
 I had no idea...

FREDERICK
 If they ever capture you, you'll
 get plenty of ideas! You'll say
 anything they want to hear, for
 fear they will stretch and tear and
 burn and cut you again.

Frederick stops walking and rolls up his sleeve to reveal
 ugly scars on his arm.

FRANCIS
 Whoa! Jesuits did that to you?
 When?

FREDERICK
 A century ago. But there is no
 forgetting such pain, nor forgiving
 such cruelty. (beat) It is not safe
 for us here.

(MORE)

FREDERICK (CONT'D)

We might as well return to Prague.

(beat)

Francis, I think you are ready to learn some of the inner secrets of alchemy. But enough for today. Meet me on Sunday noon at the Clock Tower, and we shall talk about it.

FRANCIS

Thank you, master Frederick! I'll be there!

Jesuit #1 watches and listens.

EXT. CLOCK TOWER, PRAGUE - DAY

Francis is standing on the steps of the Staromestska Radnice (Clock Tower). He sees Frederick approaching, dressed like a beggar, and starts to walk toward him. Suddenly a carriage pulls up beside Frederick. Jesuit #1 is inside. Two men jump out and grab Frederick.

FREDERICK

Help! Francis! Help! Jesuits! Help!

The kidnappers shove Frederick into the carriage, then clamber in as Francis comes running. The carriage races away.

INT. STUDY - DAY

Francis bursts into the study, surprising Wenzel at his desk.

FRANCIS

Wenzel, the Jesuits have kidnapped master Frederick! (beat) We must help him!

WENZEL

Certainly, Francis, but how?

FRANCIS

They have headquarters in Prague. No doubt, they took him there!

WENZEL

I know the place. I will get some men to help us.

EXT. JESUIT ESTATE - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT (ESTABLISHING)

Light flickers through the window of a large cottage behind the Jesuit mansion.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

The cottage is equipped as a torture chamber. Candles light the interior. A coal fire burns in a brazier, with a poker stuck in it. Frederick is strapped to a table. Jesuit #1 stands holding up a vial of Elixir to examine it closely. JESUIT # 2 sits at a table with pen, paper, and an ink pot before him, taking notes.

FREDERICK

I shall be happy to confess anything. Just ask.

JESUIT # 1

I don't want a confession. I want instructions. (beat) I have heard there is a simple way to prepare the Philosophers' Stone very quickly, in less than a day. (beat) And I have collected a letter that claims you know this short way.

Jesuit #1 picks up a red-hot poker from the coal brazier.

FREDERICK

Please, there is no need to be brutal. I'm too old for this shyte.

JESUIT # 1

Oh, it's no bother at all, Herr *Gualdus*. Actually, it's my pleasure... Where shall we begin? (beat) Tell me, good Herr, what minerals are used to make the Philosophers' Stone? Eh?

SERIES OF SHOTS:

A) EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Frederick screams from within the cottage.

B) EXT. ROAD - NIGHT

Wenzel and Francis are riding in a carriage, racing toward the Jesuit headquarters. Several men accompany them on horseback. When the estate comes into sight, they stop and dismount. The driver remains behind as the other men climb over a wall.

C) EXT. JESUIT ESTATE - NIGHT

As they sneak through bushes toward the mansion with weapons drawn, they hear Frederic scream from within the cottage. Wenzel points, and they hurry there.

D) EXT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

The group is gathered at the door. Francis peeks in a window and sees the Jesuit about to burn Frederick with the poker. He signals to Wenzel, and they burst in.

INT. COTTAGE - NIGHT

Two men grab Jesuit #1; another knocks him out with a punch to the jaw. Another grabs one of the torture tools and bashes the second priest on the head, knocking him out too. MAN #4 keeps watch at the window. Francis and Wenzel release Frederick, who is grimacing and groaning. Francis produces a small bottle from his pocket and dribbles the contents into Frederick's mouth.

MAN #4

All's quiet, Baron.

WENZEL

Let's go, men!

Francis and three of the men pick up Frederick by the arms and legs and carry him outside. Wenzel remains in the cottage with the other three men.

WENZEL (CONT'D)

Well done! Now, if you will set this place on fire after we leave, I shall add a golden bonus to the reward that already awaits you!

MAN #4

Thank you, Baron! But what shall we do with these priests?

WENZEL

Let this be their Purgatory.

EXT/INT. COACH - NIGHT

Flames from the burning cottage flicker in the background. Wenzel and Francis sit together opposite Frederick, who is inebriated with laudanum and wine.

FREDERICK

(slurring)

Wash in that wine? It tastes like laudanum.

FRANCIS

Yes, Frederick, poppy juice to ease the pain. I remembered what you told me about Alexander Seton, and I came prepared.

FREDERICK

Good shinking. (beat) You shaved me from his miserable fate. You are my Shendivogius!

WENZEL

What? Who?

FRANCIS

Michael Sendivogius. He rescued the alchemist Alexander Seton 75 years ago. It's a long story. I'll tell it to you sometime.

FREDERICK

I'm so sleepy...

Frederick passes out and falls over. Francis lays him out on the seat.

WENZEL

He is a master of alchemy? He looks like a beggar, and he talks like a madman!

FRANCIS

Yes, he says that the adepts prefer to appear that way. (beat) But I have also seen him in most elegant attire, and speaking with inspiring eloquence.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Frederick is resting in bed. Francis is sitting in a chair, and Wenzel stands beside him.

FREDERICK

Baron Seyler, you are living proof that God works with cracked pots. (beat) You have survived your enemies and your sins, and proved the Philosophers' Stone to Holy Roman Emperor Leopold, and many others. (beat) Now it is a fact of history, and henceforth, science must organize around alchemy. I congratulate you for that happy accident. (beat) And I thank you for rescuing me.

WENZEL

It is all thanks to you in the first place, Master Gualdus. I am very glad to help you in any way I can.

INT. LIBRARY - DAY

Frederick and Francis are sitting at a table with several alchemy books and manuscripts spread before them.

FREDERICK

...And that is the arcanum of salt. And likewise for mercury. They are symbols. We do not use those substances to prepare the Elixir. In fact, I seldom use common mercury, except to make gold from it.

FRANCIS

If mercury is not the matter of the Philosophers' Stone, then pray tell, what is?

FREDERICK

Ahh... That is the greatest secret of alchemy. But I promised to teach you, so I will tell you now. It is called by every name, but its own is... Gur.

FRANCIS

Gur? I've never heard of it!

FREDERICK

Gur is a mysterious sulfurous vapor, exhaled by the earth. It is the astral stuff from which all the metals take their forms. (beat) I suppose I shall have to show you.

EXT. PASTURE - NIGHT

Frederick and Francis are walking through a snow-covered field under the full moon. They are warmly dressed and carrying baskets. Frederick sets his down and points to a large, clear gelatinous blob that sits on top of the snow.

FREDERICK

That is Gur. In the winter it can be found thus, on top of snow. In other seasons, we collect dew before dawn, before it touches the earth. This is the universal spirit, our virgin water.

As he speaks, Frederick takes an empty bottle, a glass funnel, and a glass bowl from the basket, then scoops up the blob with the bowl and pours it through the funnel into the bottle. Francis watches for a few seconds, then does the same.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

Frederick is standing beside a small furnace, distilling the gur in a retort. Several plugged bottles of the stuff sit in a basket on the floor beside the furnace. Francis is sitting at a table, writing notes as Frederick talks.

FREDERICK

...I prefer the short Dry Path for the Great Work, but the Wet Way is very beautiful to watch, if you have the time. (beat) It takes a year to complete, and much equipment and material. But this dry way can be done in one week, in one crucible, with a few minerals and salts. It is a great secret, known to only a few masters.

FRANCIS

But gur is watery, master Frederick. Is this then the wet path we are following here?

FREDERICK

Yes, Francis. (beat) I am not going to make this too easy for you. Make haste slowly. You need know how to use the Stone wisely, if you are to survive it. Why, just to sell the gold can be a problem. (beat) A few years ago in Paris...

FLASHBACK:

INT. GOLDSMITH SHOP - DAY

A GOLDSMITH #2 looks up when Frederick enters the shop.

GOLDSMITH #2

Good morning, monsieur. How may I help you?

FREDERICK

Good morning, monsieur. I would like to sell some gold.

GOLDSMITH #2

Hmmm... Show it to me, please.

Frederick pulls a bar of gold from a leather pouch and hands it to the goldsmith. He looks at it with a lens, then rubs it on a touchstone. He puts the bar on the counter and frowns at Frederick.

GOLDSMITH #2 (CONT'D)

This gold is made by alchemy!

FREDERICK

Why monsieur, whatever makes you think so?

GOLDSMITH #2

I know the gold from all the mines in Europe and Africa. This is better than any of them! You can be hung for this felony!

FREDERICK

Monsieur, you are mistaken. I believe this gold came from America, and it is perfectly natural and legitimate! Why, I have the receipts for it in my saddlebag. Wait a moment, I shall fetch them!

Frederick exits the shop.

EXT. GOLDSMITH SHOP - DAY

Frederick scurries away, looking behind him to see if he is being followed.

INT. GOLDSMITH SHOP - DAY

The goldsmith's scowl changes to a grin as he watches Frederick from the window. He hefts the bar of gold, then puts it in a crucible, adds coal to the furnace, and pumps the bellows.

RETURN TO SCENE

Frederick slowly pumps the bellows of the furnace as he stares into the fire.

FREDERICK

I possess enough wealth to buy the whole world, yet I may not use it, thanks to the wickedness of men.
 (beat) I am weary of this lonely life, shut out from friends and family, like Cain. (beat) Some day, gold will be as common as dirt. Then we masters of alchemy shall find rest, thank God.

Francis puts down his quill pen and looks at him thoughtfully.

YEARS LATER

INT. STUDY - DAY

Francis is sitting at his desk, writing a MANUSCRIPT by the light of a CANDELABRA . He appears to be about 40 years old. A copy of MAGNALIA NATURAE lays beside a small gold BOX on the desk. He puts down the quill and picks up a page.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

In the summer of 1718, newspapers in the Netherlands reported the death of one Frederick Gualdus, who drowned in the River Scheldt while fishing. His body was not found...

FLASHBACK:

EXT. RIVER - DAWN

Frederick is sitting in a rowboat, preparing to cast off from a small dock. JAN hands him a fishing pole, then a bucket of bait, and a small basket filled with bread, cheese, and a bottle of wine. The river is covered with fog.

FREDERICK

Thank you, Jan. I shall return by midday.

JAN

Good luck to you, Herr Gualdus!

Jan unties the boat and gives it a shove away from the dock. Frederick starts rowing, and quickly disappears into the fog.

MINUTES LATER

Frederick stops rowing, and drops a roped anchor stone over the side. Then he pulls a WHISTLE from his pocket and BLOWS twice.

FRANCIS (O.S.)

Hello! Frederick!

FREDERICK

I'm here!

FRANCIS (O.S.)

Keep talking till I find you!

FREDERICK

Well... A Catholic, a Protestant, and a Jew walked into a tavern. The owner looked at them and said, what is this, a joke?

FRANCIS (O.S.)

Oh, mercy... Perhaps you should sing instead.

Frederick breaks into an off-key song.

FFREDERICK

La la la, la la la...

FRANCIS (O.S.)

Do you know any more jokes?

FREDERICK

Hmmm... Ummm... A priest entered his fat donkey in a race.

(MORE)

FREDERICK (CONT'D)

And the town crier yelled, priest enters fat ass! (beat) That bothered the bishop, so he told the priest, do not race that donkey again! (beat) And the town crier yelled, bishop scratches priest's ass! (beat) That made the bishop very angry, and he told the priest...

Francis emerges from the fog and pulls alongside.

FRANCIS

Never mind, here I am. I've heard that story before, and I still don't get the point.

FREDERICK

It's a metaphor. (beat) Hold the boats together, please. I don't want to really fall in.

Frederick climbs into Francis' boat, and they row away.

EXT. DOCK - DAY

The fog lifts to reveal the empty rowboat at anchor in the river. Jan sees it and calls for help.

JAN

Help! Help! Somebody help!

Two men come running, and Jan points to the boat, talking incoherently. They clamber into a rowboat and cast off, pulling hard and fast at the oars.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

I never saw Frederick after that day, but he had taught me all I needed to know.

INT. LABORATORY - DAY

Francis sits on a stool before a small furnace, peering inside at the brilliant red stone inside a small flask that sits in a small pan filled with sand on a bed of glowing coals.

FRANCIS (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 And so, by the Grace of God, I made
 the Philosophers' Stone, with
 arsenic and gur, as I have
 explained. (beat) And now, I have
 told you enough, if only you will
 understand.

EXT. RUINED CHAPEL - DAY

Francis is burying a copper box in the rubble of a medieval chapel. A small pick lays beside the hole.

FRANCIS (V.O.)
 Yet even if you cannot make the
 Philosophers' Stone, perhaps you
 can find it, like Wenzel Seyler,
 since the master alchemists have
 buried it in many places.

RETURN TO SCENE

INT. STUDY - NIGHT

Beautiful wife SOPHIA knocks gently and enters. She is in her nightgown.

SOPHIA
 Francis, darling, it's very late!
 When are you coming to bed?

FRANCIS
 Any moment now, my dear Sophia.

Sophia sighs and pouts.

SOPHIA
 Do hasten, dear. I await you!

FRANCIS
 Yes, my love, any moment now... I
 shall come straightaway hence.

SOPHIA
 Mmmm...

Sophia smiles amorously at him as she leaves the room, closing the door gently behind her. Francis leans forward to open a small gold box sitting on the desk next to a copy of MAGNALIA NATURAE.

He picks out a piece of the red Philosophers' Stone into his other hand, then leans back and gazes at it. Francis puts the Stone on the copy of MAGNALIA NATURAE.

FRANCIS (V.O.)

As for Wenzel Seyler, he lived
happily ever after. (beat) And so
have I, thank God!

Francis stands, picks up the CANDELABRA, and leaves the room.

CLOSE UP: PHILOSOPHERS' STONE, glowing in the light of the
FULL MOON.

FADE OUT.