

Mistress Marta's School

(*Shaun Hately*)

Mistress Marta (*Friends or Foes* p. 38) started running a small dame school in Ongus about fifteen years ago. Her pupils came from diverse backgrounds – mostly from the children of merchants in the surrounding community, but with more than a few children from more privileged, even noble, backgrounds, and even more poor children and orphans who she took on as charity cases. These good works seem to have attracted some sponsorship and patronage from the wealthy – nobody seems entirely sure who – which has allowed her to buy a large warehouse in the Southgate ward of the city and convert it to a larger school. The location seemed perfect to the new owner – although she would have reconsidered if she had known that the 'church' across the road is, in fact, the headquarters of the Crooked Rooks, the closest thing Ongus has to a guild of thieves.

What few know is that Mistress Marta has an ulterior motive behind her school – albeit one she sees as benevolent. Marta is a powerful sorceress, a retired adventurer, who saw the Magical Academies of the south and works towards a day when her school might stand openly among those. For now, she works in secret, taking those pupils who she sees as having the most potential and training them as apprentices. But her school truly is a place of learning for all its pupils, whether they have that potential or not.

This new school building is one of the oldest surviving buildings in the area, having survived a fire that ravaged much of what surrounded it – a long, narrow, former series of warehouses reconstructed internally as a purpose-built school. On the ground floor there are six classrooms – simple rooms with benches and tables for the pupils, and a desk for the teacher – a cloak room, a sick room, an excellent library (probably one of the finest in Ongus), Mistress Marta's own study, and a kitchen and refectory where students are fed an excellent luncheon each day – there is food enough for a child to survive even if they are not being fed elsewhere. Behind a simple door, there is a staircase to an attic that the Mistress has converted to her own private apartment, although before somebody can enter that domain they must pass through a small chapel dedicated to the True Faith. Mistress Marta gives every impression of being a devoted and devout believer which may be why her school has avoided problems with the Church – while her abilities and intentions with regards to sorcery are not generally known, they are an open secret among the powerful of Ongus and this requires special care in not forcing a response from Church authorities. This caution is also the reason why Mistress Marta keeps the most obvious signs of her talents – her private rooms devoted to her adventuring past and the study of her art – in part of the attic hidden behind a secret door off her bedchamber.

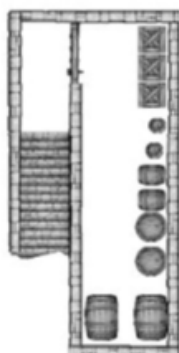
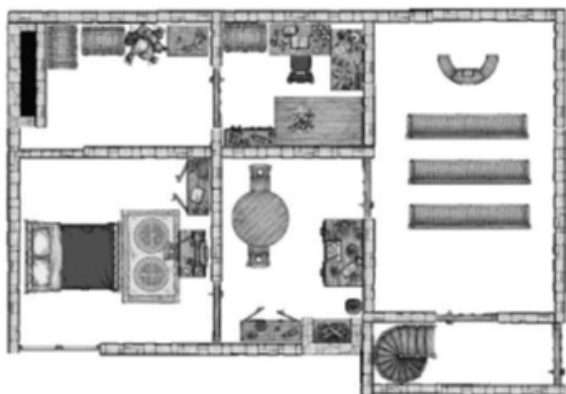
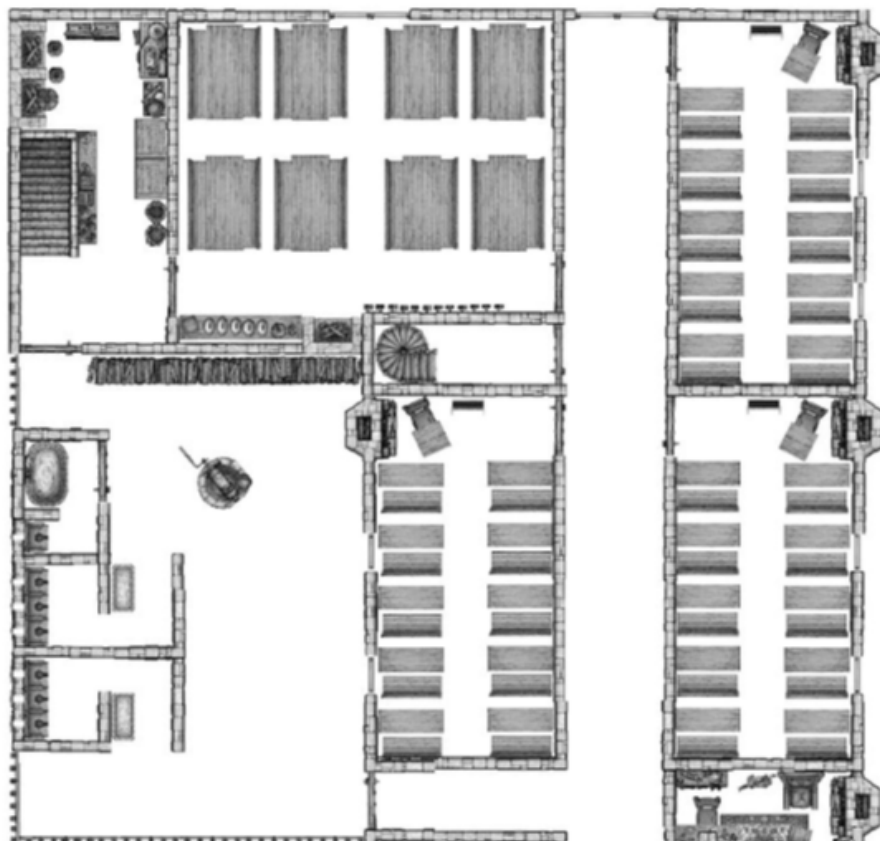
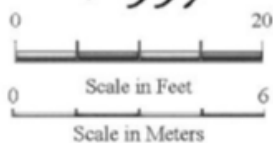
There is a cellar below the kitchen where foodstuffs are stored, and a well and outbuilding in a fenced yard behind the school – this outbuilding contains separate privies for boys and girls, and a private bathroom used by the Mistress herself.

The fees for the school are set at a penny per day per child, or one florin every two weeks (school runs for five and a half days each week), or a crown each month (those who can afford to pay by the month are charged more to help cover the costs of the poor) but many pupils attend for nothing – Mistress Marta has persuaded a significant number of wealthy patrons to support her mission. For these fees students receive teaching in reading, writing, and mathematics, as well as some broader subjects – the Mistress takes ancient and foreign languages very seriously – as well as one good meal a day. Many parents – particularly those who can supply foodstuffs through their trade – are encouraged to pay in kind, rather than in cash. The six classes are taught by six of the senior pupils of the school who have reached the stage that they are both pupils and teachers – children are assigned

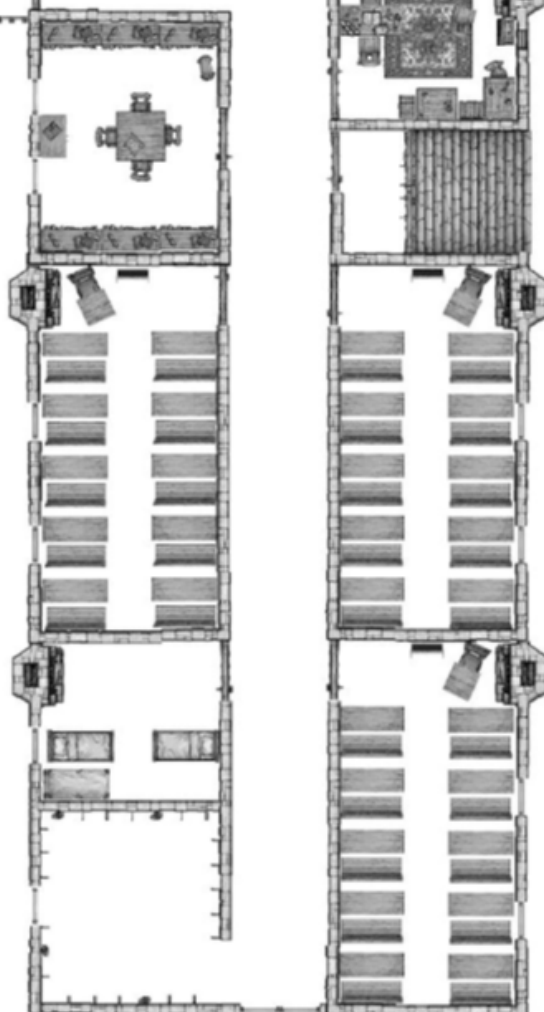
to a class based on ability, rather than age alone. Discipline is strict, even severe, although no more so than any other school in the city, and Mistress Marta's pupils will reluctantly acknowledge that their Mistress cares deeply for their welfare, even while still smarting under the effects of her birch.

Mistress Marta's School

(Ongus, Albion, cAS997)



Left - Cellar
Above - Attic
Right - Ground Floor



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