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Sample file

Section I:

Introduction

It is a truth throughout the Kingdom of Ellis that the holiest of men seek out a life of quiet solitude, to better commune with Halek and the divine. It is only natural that less holy folk would seek out those who are more holy – to learn, to receive advice or blessings, and to become closer themselves to God; the success of a hermit means that he is no longer alone in the quiet. The fame that comes from being holy brings in the distractions and corruption of the larger world.

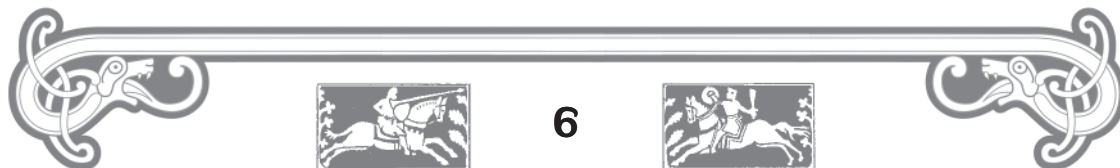
This is what has happened to the small monastery of St. Ascelin de Farille, now known as St. Ascelin's of the Prophecy. It was here that Heirton was visited by the saint and given his divine mandate to rule wisely and justly. Countless pilgrims now flock to St. Ascelin's to receive advice and their own divine inspiration. Royal patronage has brought money and success to the small corner of Westmarch. And fame and gold has brought murder . . .

What is Mystery at the Monastery?

Mystery at the Monastery is an adventure for Ellis: Kingdom in Turmoil for 2-5 players and one gamemaster. While it is set in the world of Ellis and uses the rules of the +3 System, with only small alterations it could be made to work with any fantasy roleplaying game that did not rely too heavily on magic.

The adventure comes with pre-made characters but players are welcome to make up their own. GMs may need to make small changes in the introduction to accommodate the backgrounds of these characters and make sure that they can be successfully inserted into the backstory of the adventure.

Mystery at the Monastery is not a straight forward dungeon adventure. Things happen depending on what the PCs do. Clues missed at one point in the story may not be there the next day. NPCs each have their own motivations or secrets, and don't want strangers poking around. Things happen on a timeline, and only deviate from it if the player characters do something to interrupt the timeline. There is not one, correct way of solving the mystery or completing the mission. PCs may not agree on what to do.



Things may occasionally go wrong. Because of their great freedom, players may go off in completely the wrong direction or become convinced that the wrong person is the villain. For the most part, it is recommended that you, as the gamemaster, just go with it and let the players make their mistakes. After all, arresting the wrong person only to have another murder happen is a great staple of the detective genre. But it can go too far. Don't be afraid to have the abbot step in and take charge or discipline the party if they get too far out of hand. Don't forget to use your Quest List – adding to it can be a great way to get people back on track. There are also troubleshooting sections scattered throughout to address problems that may come up.

The adventure is laid out in three sections: an introduction, the central plot and an epilogue. In the introduction, the characters are each given a reason to travel to St. Ascelin's and meet each other in the process. There is a quick encounter to merge them into a team and get them working together before they arrive at their destination. At the monastery, the central plot hits them as soon as they walk through the front gate and continues through to the climax and the unmasking of the villain. After that however, the characters still have many options before them and can decide what to do with the villain and how to respond to what they may have learned in the process. There are also some ideas about what sort of future adventures the characters might be able to have.

As the characters arrive but before they are introduced to the adventure itself, they are offered a tour of the monastery. This is a great tool for introducing them to their home for the next few days and builds a feeling of dread and mystery surrounding the place. It also gives a detailed description of the monastery of St. Ascelin of the Prophecy and the area around it. A map is also included which you can give the players.

The many people inhabiting the monastery and neighboring village are described in sidebars throughout the text, on the pages that they are most likely to be encountered. There is also an index in the back to make it easy to find them if any of the player characters go looking for one of them. There are quite a few non-player characters – don't let that intimidate you. You generally only have to worry about one at a time, plus descriptions and roleplaying tips are provided to help guide you while playing them.

Some of these character listings are short, while others are longer based on their importance to the story. Just because someone gets a small listing, doesn't mean that he or she can't become important in your version of the story. Different players will form attachments to different characters, so be prepared to add detail and background if needed.

Throughout the adventure, while describing places, situations, events and people, you will find sections in grey, italic text. These bits of description can be read directly to the players or paraphrased as you see fit. They illustrate what is commonly perceived about the place or person and do not give away any secrets.



An Overview of the Main Plot

A generation ago when Heinrich visited the monastery and had his visitation from the saint, the abbot was a young man named Eloi de Valmet and his scribe was an Ellian lad called Giraldo dela Montisi. The two of them heard the future king's recounting of his experience and entered it into the archives of the monastery.

What most people do not know, is that a few years later, the since crowned King Heinrich returned to St. Ascelin's and had Eloi and Giraldo *change* the prophecy to more closely match what had actually happened. Abbot Eloi had been reticent, but eventually bent under the will of Heinrich. From that day on, the King became a great parton of the abbey.

Eloi confided in Giraldo that he felt that the original words of the saint to be sacred, and that it was wrong to change them.

Giraldo dela Montisi went on to have a brilliant career within the church and is now the Archbishop of Lycea. He is also one of two or three men expected to be candidates to replace the current primate when age and infirmity catch up with him. Giraldo is worried about the old prophecy and has sent a trusted friend to St. Ascelin's to keep an eye on old Eloi to see if the abbot might decide to release it before his death.

That agent is Bartolomeo di Vincara, the monastery's exchequer and the overseer of the workmen, who has performed those duties exceptionally well. He was never able to befriend Eloi as much as he would have liked but kept his ear to the ground and did learn that the old abbot not only kept a private journal, but was also close friends and confidants with another monk, Gunter von Tirell, the Guestmaster.



Upon Abbot Eloi's death – of natural causes – Bartolomeo wrote a letter to the archbishop, asking for instructions. Giraldo, knowing from the primate's court that his enemies were making a bid to put their own man into St. Ascelin's, replied that Bartolomeo should do whatever was necessary to find the original prophecy and any document that may refer to it (like Eloi's journal).

Bartolomeo took his time, trying to be subtle, but was thwarted by Hervé's near immediate assumption of the abbot's position. Eventually, the announcement came that they were getting a new abbot and drastic measures were required. His first attempt was against Father Étienne, the master of the monastery's markets in Carasse and Zinfarel and a confidant of Abbot Eloi's. Ambushing the priest outside of the monastery was easy and safe, but yielded no information. Another attempt was necessary.

Disguised, Bartolomeo lured Gunter into the new guesthouse and tortured him, making him reveal where the journal was. While wrapping up he was interrupted and accidentally revealed his identity to Gunter. In his panic and in order to keep his secret safe, he murdered the old guestmaster and fled.

The player characters arrive the next day while the leaders of the monastery are still trying to figure out what to do. They are put in charge of the investigation and must see if they can solve the Mystery at the Monastery.

Sub-Plots

At the same time, there are several other things going on, just to make things complicated.

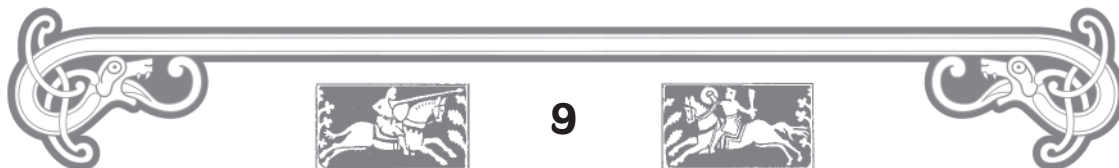
The monastery is getting a new abbot and the PCs are the ones escorting him in. So not only are there all of the worries and concerns (as well as the toadying and jockeying for position) that come with a major change in power and leadership, the party is placed firmly in the camp of the newcomer. They are the invaders and while they may be able to help the monks through this difficult time, they also have no connections to any of them and no investment in seeing the traditional power structure maintained. In other words, while they may have their uses, they are *dangerous*.

The monastery is expecting a very special visitor: old King Heinrich's niece, Blanche, the Countess of Falair. She has come to St. Ascelin's because she is being pressured by King Jehan to remarry and she needs advice. She is quite pleased with the place she has carved out for herself in Falair and does not want to lose the independence or control she has. She also does not care for the man chosen for her to marry, Urbano di Sothorn, her own cousin. She has come to the place where her uncle was given guidance from the saints, in the hope that they will guide her, or as many folk see it, to delay the inevitable for a month or two.

While no one could fault the lady for coming here for such an honorable and holy purpose, it is hardly a secret that the Count of Westmarch is no friend of King Jehan's. If her true purpose here is to make contact with the enemy – either with agents of Westmarch or his friend Rikhardt, the Prince of Rilov – it would surprise no one. That gives the visit an importance which it wouldn't otherwise have, and there are some who would like to make sure that such a meeting does not occur.

One of those people is the king himself, who has sent a Knight of Halek, Harsten the Bleak, to St. Ascelin's to do what he can to keep the Countess from meeting any messengers. Ostensibly he is at the monastery to heal his soul but he is actually tasked with interrupting Blanche's visit as much as possible. He has a few accomplices with him, hiding in the forest nearby.

An alliance with the Countess of Falair is very important to Prince Rikhardt and his allies, so he has not sent just any messenger, but instead, his own daughter. Lady Neda has traveled overland from Cambria with a group of nuns to make contact with Blanche and negotiate with her. The party meets the nuns in her party early on in the adventure and may come to suspect that there is something suspicious about them.



In addition to all of this skullduggery, there is the mundane fact that the monastery is a mess. When King Heinrich first came here forty years ago, it was a small and humble place, but its fame and importance has spread across the kingdom and brought pilgrims from near and far. The patronage of the king has allowed them to expand – they have a new chapterhouse, a new guesthouse nearly completed and a grand new minster is under construction. A veritable army of workmen, masons and artisans prowl the grounds of the abbey, turning the place into a hornets' nest of activity rather than a refuge of quiet and serenity.



Using Custom Characters

This adventure is pretty open to most sorts of characters – the only real qualification to be sent to St. Ascelin's is that he or she is trusted by one of the lords of Kor. That said, there are a few character types that are probably less appropriate. Bards or minstrels will find it difficult to ply their trade, though their social skills will still be useful. Knights and soldiers, likewise, should be able to do more than just fight if they are going to participate in the adventure. Scoundrels and Outlaws should be avoided, though with a little imagination they might be shoehorned into working.

One character should have a background in Law or in the Inquisition, even if he is retired now, so that he can be put in charge of the trial of Garçon. A character with a background as a woodsman or hunter is also good, as some of the footprint clues will only be available to characters with the Tracking skill.

After the characters are finished, decide which lord would be most appropriate to give out each of the missions: the Archbishop for a priest/lawyer type, the Count of Kor for a knight or soldier, the Bishop of Mysterik for a monk, friar, priest or scholar, a knight, courtier or diplomat for Heinrich of Kor and a nun or other female character to be traveling with the nuns.

The abbess of St. Ascelin's, Carlotta of Arun, has fallen in love with one of the monks, Nathan the Demaran and they have

sworn secret vows of marriage. They have few opportunities to see each other in private but do manage it occasionally. One of those late-night meetings occurred last night and they interrupted the murderer without getting a good look at him.

Guillermo di Ferro, master of stonemasons, has noticed the meetings of the abbess and the sacristan. He has been bugging Nathan for two months and though it bothers his conscience greatly, has been paying the man out of the monastery's treasury.

And thrust into all of this are the player characters.

Beginning the Adventure

Mystery at the Monastery is designed for between two and five player characters. Your group may use the characters at the end of the adventure or make their own. If you decide not to use the provided PCs, read the sidebar for some ideas and things to keep in mind while making characters.

Each of the player characters has their own reason for going to St. Ascelin's. Read each of the following introductions privately to the appropriate player or better yet have a mini, one-on-one roleplay session with each player, following the outline of the descriptive text. Or to save time, you could print out the description of each scene and give it to the player.



Darien and the Archbishop of Kor

You are summoned to the Archbishop of Kor, the most powerful and important churchman in the county. Rumor has it that he may someday become the primate. He is not the sort of person you keep waiting, so you follow the messenger back to the archbishop's palace.

You are kept waiting for over an hour before he appears, dressed resplendently in his full regalia of white silk, gold and jewels – he must have come straight from mass. Without speaking, he offers you his hand and you kneel and kiss the signet ring upon it. He motions for you to rise.

“I have heard many things about you, Darien, and I must say that I am impressed. Your faith, your knowledge of the law and your love of justice all commend you. As do your level-headedness and your willingness to venture out into the world. I have a task, that only a man such as yourself can perform. It will require traveling and several weeks of your time, and will necessitate a great deal of delicacy and tact. So, I ask you, would you listen to what I have to propose?”

“Good. There is a monastery in Westmarch that holds its charter directly from the primacy, so it falls to the primate himself to choose a replacement abbot when such a thing becomes necessary. Well, the old abbot has passed on into the arms of Halek, and a new one has been chosen. A man here in my own service, so it is my responsibility to be sure that he reaches his new calling. I would like to pass that responsibility on to you.

“You’ll do it? Excellent. On your return you will be appropriately compensated. Believe me, this appointment is very important to me . . . and to God.

“Why? Because Charles is a good, pious man, who has worked hard to gain the respect and dignity he has received. Because he will perform his duties well and show the appropriate loyalty and deference to those who have helped him get to where he is now.

“I have asked you to do this because it may not be as simple as it sounds. It is possible that others oppose this appointment and may seek to block it, which is why I have chosen you for your knowledge of canon law. It may also be that my enemies will stoop to violence, so I have also requested an escort from the Count. I trust in God that it will be sufficient.

“I will see you off tomorrow, from here, after first mass. Make what preparations you have need of, but tell none of your mission. The fewer that know, the better. Godspeed.”

Johan van Delft and the Count of Kor

As one of the Count's newer and lowest ranking household knights, it is a surprise when one of his pages comes to you one morning, summoning you to the Count's chamber. You are bleary and hungover, having the night before been feasting and boasting. Now that you think about it, you vaguely remember having been insulted by another young knight but instead of starting a fight, you wound up turning his insult back on him and humiliating him. Is there more that you don't remember?



When brought before the aging Count, he is in the stables being shown some new horses. He is dressed in fine cotton in bright colors, but the clothes themselves are worn and showing their age. Several of his advisors and friends are nearby in the stables, looking at the horses and trying to look like they're not paying attention to the two of you.

"Ah, Johan, there you are. Recovered from last night? No? Well, your head will mend. You are young. The young mend easily.

"I wanted to tell you that you handled yourself well last night. Many would have been quick to anger, quick to violence. But despite the ale, you kept your head, kept your temper. I like that. Though I'll wager you made yourself an enemy.

"So I'd like to help you. Reward you for your wit and get you out of the way for a time for tempers to calm and for people to forget what has happened. What do you say?"

"Ah, smart boy. Course you should be suspicious. Let me ask you something. Do you know where I got this?" He opens his tunic to expose a massive scar and discoloration across his right chest and shoulder.

"No? You do, you do. Everyone knows the story, but they forget my part in it, forty years ago. Old King Heinrich, Halek rest his soul, and I were both young once, and I once took a lance that was meant for him. Nearly killed me. Would have killed me, if Heinrich hadn't have taken me to a little monastery and had them look after me. He prayed over my dying body and was visited by the saints.

"See! I told you that you knew the story. Now Heinrich is dead and I am old and little better than dead. Everyone wants to tear down what Heinrich and I have built. They want to throw away a generation of peace. His sons, my own son . . . they don't care about the law or what is right. They only care about land and gold.

"What has this got to do with you? On getting to it. I'm getting to it. Can't an old man reminisce? What it has to do with you is that the little monastery that nursed me back to health all those years ago . . . the nice abbot who took me under his wing while I recovered is dead and his replacement is leaving from here tomorrow to trek down into Westmarch. I want you to go with him, make sure he gets there. Ask the priests to do their special service for Heinrich. Easy enough, eh?"

"Except I want you to do more than that. There's a woman there, staying there on pilgrimage. Gone there to get advice from her fallen uncle. I want you to take a letter to her, in secret, and use all of those wonderful words you showed us last night to convince her not to do what her heart must be crying out to do, the poor thing.

"You don't understand? Of course you wouldn't. This woman, Blanche is her name, she's being forced to marry a man she hates. And if she marries him, she'll lose control of her dead husband's lands and they'll go to him, and she hates that even more. You have to convince her of her duty. Her liege has chosen her a husband. They are his lands that she is stewarding. It is her duty to be humble and obey. Convince her, but do so in private. Give her some peace.

"You shall have my friendship, is that not enough? No? Then take your pick of any of the beasts here. That should be a token of my good faith. Then gather your things, for you leave at first light."



Rudolf the Short and the Bishop of Mysterik

Sent from the prestigious Monastery of St. Volros, you have been sent by your Lord Abbot to bring messages to the Bishop of Mysterik. Your abbot and the bishop are good friends and they both suspect some sort of inappropriate conspiracy between the Archbishop of Kor and several other important nobles of the area. The details of this you are not privy to, but the letters you carried for the bishop concern them.

You have stayed with the bishop for several days while waiting for his responses and have been treated well. Finally you are about to leave, when the older man catches you readying your horse.

“Ah, my friend! I am glad that I have caught you before you left. Please come back inside, for I have just received word that affects us both.”

After you have returned inside to the bishop’s private room and some warmed cider has been brought to you, he says, “The message I have just received is very troubling and a bit inexplicable. It requires bold action and I have few people I can trust to perform it. What I am about to ask you must remain a strict secret between you, me and your master, Abbot Valmer.

“You are no simpleton and I am sure you have your own suspicions about what Valmer and I suspect. He trusts you with this knowledge, and so must I. The Archbishop of Kor, Hugh, is in league with many nefarious folk and while I am not sure exactly what they plan, it is not be entirely good. Many of his . . . associates . . . have strong Cordovan ties or interests. I fear that they plan a revolt or some sort of action against Ellian rule. I cannot imagine it would be successful, but even if it was think of the death and destruction it would cause.

“In any event, the archbishop’s cousin, a man called Ciaran of Corunbras, has just been appointed to be the new abbot of a very important abbey, the Monastery of St. Ascelin, the one where King Heinrich received his divine calling. It is a very wealthy institution, and it may be only for this reason that Hugh has called in many favors to give this position to his blood kin, but I fear there may be some greater ploy behind it. I think you can see how this would be important both to me and to your lord?”

“Then I would ask you to do something. As we speak, an expedition is being formed in Corthil to escort Charles to St. Ascelin’s. If you ride hard, you could meet up with that party on the road, journey with them, and see if you cannot get more information about what motives our enemies have in this monastery in Westmarch.

“What reason do you have to join them? Hmmm. That you travel south, to Rhéainne perhaps, on orders from your master, and wish to travel with them for safety on the road. Then, once you you learn where they are going, you could profess an interest in seeing that holy place? They are well known for a special mass in honor of the dead king and the miracle that took place there. The Mass of the Prophecy, I believe they call it. Give your blessing to the new abbot? Stay for his investiture and then be on your way. Return here and thence to your home.

“What say you, my friend? Will you do it?”



Horst von Enfold and Heinrich of Kor, son of the Count of Kor

"I am so sick and tired of being locked in here like some sort of common criminal!" your lord Heinrich bellows one night after supper. He is under house arrest right now, forbidden to leave his castle after threatening to disobey his father and support Rikhardt instead of Jehan in the upcoming war.

Other knights look around the hall nervously, not knowing what to do or say. It is not like Heinrich to be openly angry.

Rising above the cowards in the room, you say, "My lord, lead us out of this prison, and we will follow you wherever your fate directs, be it to the snowy fields of Rilov or the hot sands of Ellia."

There is much talk after that, but it is only talk. Calmer, more timid voices drown out any talk of action. Ale and cider are passed around. Messengers come and go. Heinrich retires early. Night falls and men sleep.

You are awoken before the dawn by a page kicking you in the side. You are about to get up and break his leg, when he says, "His lordship wants you to help him dress." Surprised by this honor usually left to one of his favorites, you hurry to his chamber.

"You spoke well last night, Horst." Heinrich says as you help him on with his tunic. It is a rich crimson, of cotton trimmed in ivory. "It is good to have loyal men like you that I can trust. Believe me, one day I will ride out of here and you will be at my side.

"But that day is not come yet. Things need to be in place before . . . One does not break an oath to his lord, to his father, without preparing first.

"So, I am leaving some of those preparations to you. Don't look so surprised. You are a man of action, so I am giving you some action.

"I support Rikhardt and Rikhardt is going to be the next king. I need him to know that. I need him to know that at least some of Kor will not oppose him. I need to know what he plans to do in Kor and when or where or how he wants me to support him. Understand?"

"Good. And no, I'm not sending you to Rilov. Jehan and the Knights of Halek have the Rilovans completely isolated. Nobody gets in or out of there. At least that's what Jehan is bragging. No, I have a better idea. The Countess of Falair is pissed off, because Jehan is trying to marry her off to one of his supporters. She doesn't want to get married and has done everything she can short of open rebellion to avoid it.

"Now she's announced that she's going off to that monastery where King Heinrich had his vision from Halek. She could be going there to put off Jehan and try to get herself some time, but I'm betting that she's going there to meet someone. Either someone close to Rikhardt or someone connected with the Count of Westmarch.

"Exactly. She's in the same situation I am. Rebel or knuckle under. If we're going to rebel, we want to make sure Rikhardt knows about it so we can all win together.

"And that's where you come in. I want you to go to that monastery. Talk to Countess Blanche or whoever else you're sure is from Rikhardt. Find out what they need and assure them that we're with them. Got it? Can you do that?"



“Good. Now, I just got word last night that there’s a party of people heading to this monastery right now. Escorting the new abbot down there. The new abbot was one of my tutors as a youth, so you can tell them that I have sent you to give him my congratulations and with gifts upon his investiture. That should give you enough time to find out who to talk to.

“Remember Horst, this has to remain a secret. This can’t get back to the king or my father or we’re both for the rope. Got it? I’ve got the butler putting together a few gifts. Get yourself ready to go and he’ll get you those and you can be off.”

Ulrika and Lady Neda

The Béguinage of St. Gertruda in Cambria has been your home for many years. Before that, you were married with two little children living the life of a successful burgher. When fire struck the town, your husband and children died in the flames, but you managed to escape. Lost and with no family, you and several other widows of the town petitioned Queen Nora, who built for you all the first Béguinage in Cambria. Eight years later, it is a thriving abbey containing nearly a hundred souls.

Life here is quiet, filled with simple work, praise to the heavens, and lately, songs of praise and mercy to the recently dead king. That quiet is broken by the arrival of two new women. They are immediately taken before the abbess, and you are summoned there a short time later. When you arrive in the chapterhouse, there are only three people there, the abbess, a strange woman wearing men’s clothes and a scarred warrior standing off to one side. The woman, barely more than a girl really, tall with short, black hair, turns to you looks you over.

“You are Ulrika? My Grandmère has sent me to you, for you and your sisters owe her a great boon. I am here to call in that debt.

“Yes, I am Neda, daughter of Prince Rikhard and granddaughter of the king. I am here in secret. My presence here must remain a secret because my enemies would stop at nothing to capture me. That is why I am here. I need to travel inconspicuously. That is difficult for a woman.

“But not as difficult for a béguine or a nun. So I will adopt the habit of one of your order and a group of us will travel together to the place where I must go, a nunnery in Westmarch. You, Ulrika, will lead us and be our guide. It will be your duty to get us there safe and keep any suspicion away from us.

“Our story will be the the truth. It is always best that way. We are a group of nuns dedicated to St. Gertruda, who are praying for King Heinrich’s soul there in Halek’s great hall. We are making pilgrimage to Westmarch, to the Monastery of St. Ascelin, where Halek’s holy saint visited the king and gave him leadership. What better place to honor the fallen king? We will ask them for their special service in honor of the fallen king, the Mass of the Prophecy.

“The abbess has already picked eight others who will travel with us, making us a group of ten. I am ready to leave as soon as you and your sisters are. What say you, Ulrika? Will you return the queen’s generosity?”



Section II:

Prologue

Prologue Quest List

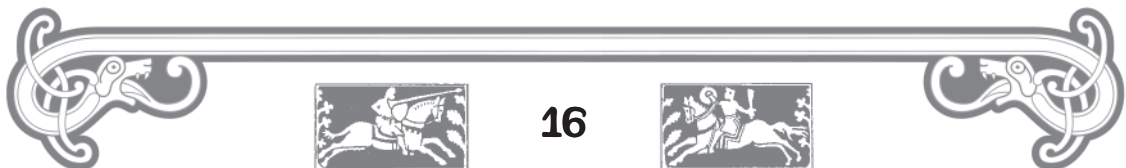
Bring the party together	2 CP
Defeat or drive off the toughs	1 CP
Arrive at St. Ascelin's	1 CP
Explore the monastery	1 CP
Listen to the Mass of the Prophecy	1 CP

The last quest won't actually happen during the introduction, so we'll add it to the next Quest List as well, with an increase to its value. Was it put on there? To affect the mood of the adventure. With it on there, the players expect to arrive at a peaceful monastery where people just want to worship. It lulls them into a false sense of security.

Overview

The adventurers meet up. First Johan and Darien meet with the Archbishop and are introduced to Charles. They all set off together and are met along the way first by Rudolf and then by Horst. Now a group of four PCs and one NPC, they all encounter the fifth player character, caught in the middle of a village quarrel. This encounter can be used to teach the combat rules but it also introduces the traveling nuns.

The party eventually arrives at the monastery and meets Carlon at the front gate.



The Adventure Begins

It is a cold morning in Corthil, with a heavy mist hugging the ground and little more than a faint glow coming from the east. As Johan approaches the archbishop's residence, he sees three figures at the front door. The archbishop is wrapped in furs but still shivering in the morning cold. He motions Johan to join them.

Ask each of the players to describe their characters – not just their age, height, and appearance but also how they are dressed and how they act. After that is done, the archbishop provides introductions, unless the PCs beat him to it.

The archbishop is tall and thin, with a large aquiline nose. He has bushy eyebrows that shroud quick, darting eyes. Next to him, nearly as tall as the archbishop and with more than a little family resemblance, is a younger man dressed in newly made riding trousers and cloak. He looks cold and impatient, blowing on and rubbing his hands together to keep them warm.

The archbishop fixes Johan with a piercing gaze, taking in every small detail of his appearance with his hawk-like eyes. "You are Johan van Delft?"

"Excellent. The Count is most generous to offer us one so highly spoken of. These are your charges: Charles de Corunbras, the Abbot of St. Ascelin's and Darien the Demagogue. They are holy men, not warriors, and may have to lean on you should any hardship befall you. Are you willing to accept this burden, knight?"

If Johan answers quickly that he will protect Charles and Darien, this pleases the archbishop and he says:

The archbishop nods approvingly, "Well said. The trust the count puts in you is well-placed. Come, all of you, into my chapel and receive my blessing before you begin your journey."

He takes you inside his richly appointed house and into a surprisingly simple chapel. He says a short blessing, calling upon St. Rudek, the saint of travelers, to look after you all. You each receive either a standard blessing or the blessing of St. Rudek.

The standard blessing can be found on page 453 and the blessing of St. Rudek on page 579. If Johan answers in an unconvincing fashion or is slow to answer, the archbishop is not pleased:

"This is the sort of lout the count sends me? A guard who doesn't know how to guard? Come here, boy. Kneel. I charge you with seeing these two servants of God to their destination. In Halek's name, will you swear an oath to see them there?"

Agreeing to the oath gets them all invited inside for the blessing as above. Making a fuss here about not taking the oath or about being ordered around by a priest is not working together to bring the party together, and a small reminder of this fact by the GM should remedy things.

After the blessing, the archbishop encourages everyone to be on their way.



The More the Merrier

It is a hard day of travel to reach the next town, Asperg. Charles is quiet for the ride, lost in his own thoughts and prayers. The player characters are welcome to chat amongst themselves and get to know one another.

The small town of Asperg is no one's idea of a busy metropolis. There is a cathedral here and the characters could choose to impose upon the bishop's hospitality or stay at the town's only inn. The bishop gets them better food and a single room all to themselves, but the bishop insists on keeping them up half the night, congratulating Charles and toasting to his health.

Either way, the innkeeper or the bishop's steward tells the group that there was a priest asking about riders from the north earlier that day.

"Don't rightly know if he was looking for you in particular, but he asked if any riders from the north had come through or were staying the night. Told him I hadn't seen anyone and he went on his way. A nice enough fellow, a monk by the look of him. Never seen him before."

If the PCs ask around for a monk who is a stranger to the town, they can learn that he has been to the lord's keep to ask there as well. After that, it takes a bit of looking (a Hard Camaraderie check) to find out that he is staying with the priest of the town's smallest church (it has three). If they find him here, introduce Rudolf now, otherwise he finds them in the morning. If they go through the trouble to ask around, also let them know that a group of nuns passed through the town a few days before.

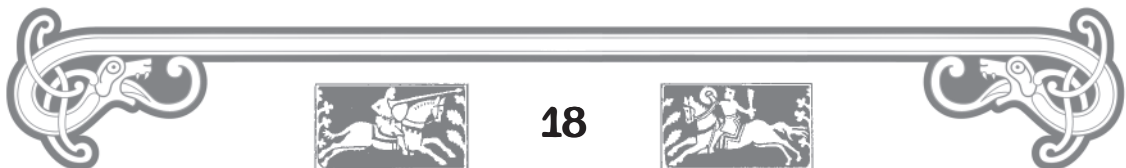
After a good night's sleep, you awaken to more of the same cold weather and as much barley pottage as you can eat. Not the finest meal but filling and warm. The town is waking as you leave and the groom has prepared your horses. Heading south, there is a man wearing monks robes waiting just inside the gate. He raises his hand in greeting as you approach.

Have Rudolf's player describe the monk and roleplay the meeting. If things don't seem to be going well, remind the players that they are getting character points for bringing the party together. Or you could always have Charles speak up, saying something as simple as, "Oh, let the monk come with us. It's the merciful thing to do."

That night, there is no town, only a village with a poorly maintained hovel that they rent out to travelers. The day after is an easy ride to Kelsmur which has a building that they call an inn, but it is little better than the place they stayed the night before. They could choose to stay with the lord in the keep.

That evening, after the inn or the keep has shut up for the night, there is a commotion, as a late traveler tries to gain admittance.

As you all are just drifting off to sleep, there is a great pounding on the door. The innkeeper (or the lord's butler) suspiciously goes to see who it is. There is a muffled conversation through the door before it is eventually opened. In staggers an exhausted and road weary man who asks for a warm meal and lodging for the night.



This knight is Horst von Enfold and he may be introduced at this point.

It is another day's ride to Colmar, which while still not large, does have both a cathedral and an inn. From there, the route leaves the road and onto a small dirt track. It is somewhat steep going, rising up out of the valley of the Garstun River and down into the valley of the Farille. The culture and language changes too, going from Cordovan to Falian within the space of a few miles.

We Won't Have Nun of That

Coming down out of the hills and into the village of Thierry-sur-Farille, the party encounters a commotion in the center of the village.

The village is like so many others that you have passed through. A cluster of a dozen or so small houses perch atop a low rise near the river. A church, hardly distinguishable from the houses except for a tall wooden cross in front of it, looks out over a center village green. A small, stone tower rises out of the hillside a few miles upstream.

The village, however, is not peaceful. Shouts and mocking laughter can be heard from a crowd of people on the village green. As you approach you see that nearly the entire village is here, 60 or 70 people, and they are clustered in two groups, between which are sandwiched around a group of ten women dressed in the habits of nuns.

Everyone is shouting at once:

"That price is not fair and you know it," says one of the nuns to a tall, muscular man in a leather apron.

"Take it or leave it. You're lucky I'm offering to fix it at all!" the blacksmith yells back.

"Yeah! You tell her Michel!" says the crowd behind him.

"You've gone too far this time, Michel!" says the other group.

The women arrived earlier in the day after spending a cold, wet night on the summit of the hill. Their cart has broken an axle and they have spent all morning getting it and themselves to the village. They just wanted warmth, lodging and a chance to pray when they arrived, and got that from the local priest.

Unbeknownst to them or the PCs, the village is in the middle of its own problems. The local lord and his family are off at the Count's court and have left the deFer family in charge in his absence. The deFers have been taking advantage of their newfound power to settle some scores with other families and improve their lot, all the time claiming the moral right to do so because they were particularly punished by war with the Cordovans a generation ago.

Michel deFer saw these down-on-their-luck nuns as just another opportunity to bully. As the local blacksmith, he is the only one with the nails needed to attach the new axle to the nuns' cart. He has offered the services of his brother, Guy, to make the axle itself but there are other carpenters in the village who could do it. He is demanding 30 ϕ for this service, which should be valued at 6-8 ϕ .



Meanwhile, the village priest, Martin, and several families who have been targets of the deFers are fed up. They have overheard the the nuns' trouble and have come to their aid. As Ulrika and Neda started to try and haggle with the blacksmith a crowd grew, first of downtrodden villagers then of deFer supporters. Now it is an angry standoff.

Read this to Ulrika's player:

You have been traveling south for many days now. What started off as an exciting adventure has turned tiresome. Long hours walking, poor lodging and suspicious looks have made the journey a miserable chore. Now, the donkey-pulled cart that has been carrying your few belongings and allowing the others to rest their legs has broken its axle. It took the last of your energy and perseverance to get the contraption to this village to be repaired.

You have been welcomed to this place by some – the local priest took you under his wing right away and has fed and warmed you. But now, trying to deal with the blacksmith to repair the cart has turned sour. As you told him of your troubles he smiled in a most malicious way, told you in return how the people of the north had killed his family and confiscated his possessions. Eventually he tells you that he can fix your cart, but that it will cost 30 pennies, five times what the repair is worth and twice what you have.

As you are talking with this blacksmith – bargaining, trying to get him to be reasonable – a crowd forms. First of friendly faces trying to plead your case, but then a group of resolute faces, standing with the blacksmith. Before you know it everyone is shouting.

Charles of Corunbras

Roleplaying Tips: *Charles is calm and calculating. His outer serenity hides personal feelings of inadequacy and fear of making mistakes. Pause before making a decision. Speak calmly. Make the obvious, safe choice. Once he has decided on something, he clings to it, not being willing to admit that he made a poor choice.*

Charles has spent his entire life surrounded by ambitious men and it is all he knows. Unfortunately for him, he lacks the confidence in himself to be truly ambitious himself.

His long, narrow face is dominated by prominent eyebrows and large nose. He has very precise posture that adds height to an already tall man.

The new Abbot of St. Ascelin's is an intelligent man who is quite a capable administrator and theologian. His people skills are weak and he has no experience with farming or animal husbandry.

What do we do?

The decision is Ulrika's as there is no way to have a conference. St. Ascelin's is only another day's travel, so the nuns could just walk away and leave the cart in the village. This gets them jeered at by the deFer crowd and before they can get out of the way, someone on the opposing side throws a rock, starting the fight.

Starting a new attempt at bartering gives a minute or so of conversation and allow the other PCs to get close, but ends up with the crowd starting a fight.

Turning to the gathering crowds and imploring them to stay calm and peaceful is the best way to avoid a fight, but even this is difficult – it's a Hard check of the Calm skill.

The newcomers are ignored unless they immediately decide to intervene, otherwise they arrive just in time for the fight to start. If they do get involved, there is little they can do. Deciding to pay the blacksmith earns the ire of the other faction and starts a fight. Asking to know what is going on gets them repeating their grievances and that sets someone off to start the fight. Only a concerted effort to calm everyone down avoids a battle.



There are a total of sixteen young men willing to fight (eight from each side). They target each other, anyone who tries to stop them or anyone in their way.

While the crowd is incensed and looking for a fight, no one wants to kill anyone (or be killed for that matter!), so the fight may end before anyone is even beaten. Defeating six villagers on either side in non-lethal combat (no Shock damage dealt) convinces the others to retreat. The villagers flee greatly disliking the party (and the nuns) but will not come after them looking for revenge.

If the party deals two or more points of Shock to two or more of the villagers, all of the combatants flee, but this action unites the feuding locals against the strangers. That night a mob of twenty or more villagers come looking for the party if they are still within five miles of the place.

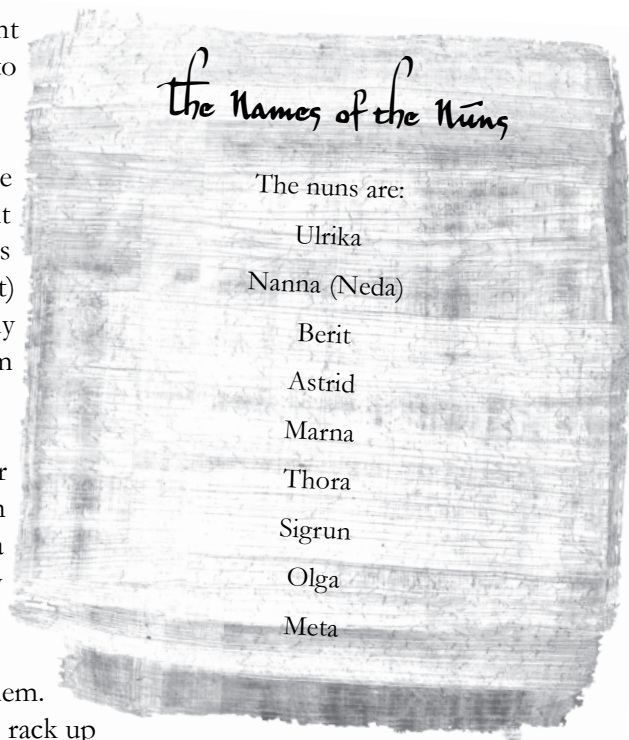
If the players just sit back and watch, run the fight without them.

Between Ulrika's axe and Neda's seax they should be able to rack up the 2+ points of shock on two or more toughs needed to disperse the crowd. This cowardly inaction does earn them Neda's eternal scorn.

A solution that disperses the crowd without dealing any Shock damage earns each of the characters an extra Character Point.

However they are dealt with, the PCs meet the final member of their party, Ulrika (the nun with the axe) and introduction can be made once more. After spending last night in the cold wilderness, the nuns would greatly prefer a roof over their head tonight, but do not object if they are pressed forward.

Whether they stay in the village or make camp, they are still a half-day's walk from St. Ascelin's. The new day dawns with dark, threatening clouds but soon brightens up and is merely overcast by the time they arrive at the monastery.



Sample file

Helm Absorb <input type="checkbox"/> Deflect <input type="checkbox"/> Bruise <input type="checkbox"/> Convert: _____		Combat 5 Courage 6
Primary Weapon: <i>club</i>	Hits (7) Shock (5) Fatigue (6)	Bruises: Dodge: // Parry: Shield:
Damage: Hits: 2 Shock: 0 Bruises: 1 Parry Adj: 0	Running: 3 Move Pen: -	Number of Actions: 3
Absorb Deflect (Internal Injuries) <input type="checkbox"/> Cushion (Broken Bones) <input type="checkbox"/> Convert: _____		Armor

Villager Stats

Section III:

The Monastery of St. Ascelin's of the Prophecy

Monastery Quest List

See Charles sworn in as abbot	3 CP
Meet three monks	1 CP
Meet any other guests	1 CP

plus Listen to the Mass of the Prophecy is still on the list.
Increase the value of this one to 2 CP.

Description of the Abbey

The small track you are following southwest along the Farille brings you around a gentle bend revealing a wide, flat section of the valley. The village of Carasse squats in the mud on the northwest side of the river oozing out a thin white smoke that wisps up from the place. A small wooden stockade overlooks the village from a hillside a few miles to the north.

The path you are following leads there and continues past. Coming out of the village is another road that crosses the river at a shallow ford. Hand-ropes have been set up across the river and as your eyes follow the trail eastward and upward into the hills, you see a cluster of buildings and activity that can only be one place – The Monastery of St. Ascelin's of the Prophecy.

The characters are welcome to spend time in the village if they want but there is little of interest. If they seem to be wasting too much time there, have Charles express his impatience to get to his new home.

The road up the hillside has seen much travel and there are deep wagon-ruts in the dirt. While most monasteries are supposed to be places of peace and quiet, you can hear St. Ascelin's long before you see it. The chopping of



wood, the chiseling of stone, the creak of ropes – all of these sounds trumpet down the side of the hillside, visibly disturbing several of the nuns.

Topping the rise, the sight is worse than the sounds – dirty, smelly men carrying or dragging heavy loads through the muddy ground, masons chipping away at stone blocks sending dust and marble chips flying, oxen stamping about in their own filth, braying and struggling against their harnesses.

The scene is chaotic with no obvious path through the construction but some things do stand out. The foundations of several buildings close to you, little more than just begun. Further away, a large, inviting hall that has the look of a guest hall. A great church, towering skyward covered in scaffolding, with men scrambling over its unfinished walls thirty or forty feet in the air. Beyond all that, an older looking wall, about eight feet tall, encircling a cluster of more modest buildings. There, in the wall near the half-finished church, a pair of gates.

The workmen eye you suspiciously and make way for you as you approach, clearing a path to the main gate. None will meet your gaze and turn away if you try to engage them. You see no monks among them. In front of the gate there is a post topped with a bell.

The usual etiquette is to ring the bell and let the gate warder greet any guests. When they do, they are welcomed by Carlon, one of the younger monks.

You hear the slide of a bolt being drawn and the gate opens a crack. The head of a young man pokes out, with large dimples and ruddy cheeks, tousled sandy-brown hair framing the shaven dome of his head. He sees you with obvious surprise and opens the gate wider.

“Good day, gracious lords. How can I, a humble monk, be of service?”

Charles pushes to the front. “I am Charles, formerly Dean of Allevard, now chosen to serve God here.”

The boy drops to one knee and bows his head, the gate falling open behind him. “My lord, forgive me for not recognizing you. We did not expect you for some few days. My name is Carlon and I am at your service.”

“Rise Father and see to my guests. Your sisters here have seen many trials upon the road.”

“Entrance into the nunnery is through the cloister, this way,” he says, inviting you in. He leads you to the stables first, and leaves your horses in the charge of some poorly dressed but clean brothers.

“I apologize that the guestmaster or the Claustal Proir are not here to greet you. They . . . he is . . . they are in a meeting at the moment with the all the higher members of the abbey . . . Oh! Including the abbess. We may have to wait until they are done to gain access to the nunnery. Can I give you a tour of St. Ascelin’s.”

Carlon seems nervous and a little star struck. He certainly did not expect to be the first one to meet and have to entertain the new abbot upon his arrival! Despite his nervousness, he does his best and tries to be helpful.

If the PCs are slow to respond to the offer of a tour, Charles accepts, wishing to see his new home. If the PCs insist on skipping the tour, jump ahead to A Deadly Meeting, page 29.



The Tour Before the Storm

This section is both a full description of the abbey *and* the narrated tour of the abbey given by Carlon. Carlon's text is in grey and also surrounded by a box to make it stand out and easy to find. That way you can easily skip over unnecessary detail about a particular stop on the tour if you don't need it and get to the next location where Carlon is talking.

"Well, I guess we start the tour here at the stable. That little house over there is where the herdsmen live. They also tend the horses. And there are the pens where the goats and sheep are kept during the day. They're out to pasture now. And then further down, at the end there's that long narrow building along the wall. That's a row of tiny cells where many of the monks sleep. It cold, but it's very quiet and gives you a chance get away from all of the construction. And closer to Halek."

Stables

The stable building is wood and plaster built along the corner of the monastery wall. The wide double doors face the front gate and give access to twenty stalls for horses. There are several decent-quality rounceys in here as well as a spirited courser. There is a loft above filled with hay and fodder.

The courser is very high-strung and stamps nervously as your horses are led in by the groom.

The rounceys belong to the monastery but aren't often used. The courser belongs to Harsten. After Blanche arrives, the stables are over-crowded and some of their horses wind up getting tied up in the field between the dormitory and the hermitage.

The loft is large and even though it is sprung, still has a lot of tied bundles of hay in it. Someone could easily hide up here and find cracks in the wall to spy on the front gate or look out at the construction site.

The Animal Pens

Adjacent to the stables and running along the south wall of the abbey are two animal pens, one for sheep and another for goats. Both animals are milked in the morning and then grazed in the surrounding hills during the day before being driven back at sunset. In front of the pens is a small house, where the herdsmen live. These herdsmen also manage the stable. At the end of the pens is a covered area set aside for slaughtering the animals, but it doesn't look like it has been used for some time.

The area is the dirtiest in the monastery. Besides that there is little of note here. The knives used during the slaughtering are not kept here – they are in the herdsmen's house. There is, in a small gap behind the slaughterhouse, beneath some stacked lumber, a gap in the wall known to very few people.

The Cells

Beyond the animal pens is a long, narrow structure built up against the outer walls of the abbey. Small wooden doors at intervals of less than six feet line the side of the building, doubtlessly opening into tiny cells where many of the monks live in quiet solitude and isolation.

The small cells measure about six feet by five feet and contain little more than a chamber pot and a blanket or two. The rooms have no windows and the doors do bolt from the inside.



Touring...

"Behind us, where we came in, is the front of the monastery. The villagers are allowed to come up and attend mass anytime, but few do anytime but on Thronesday. Other days we may get one or two, and many of the the workmen. They are allowed in at Prime after the bell rings. You can see the bell tower there. The cobbles here are new since I've been at the monastery and they work very well to keep the mud out of the church.

"The church is there, of course, you'll see the inside soon enough. It was built in the third century and is in the classic design by St. Elban using the sacred number thirty-six. So the nave and each of the transepts are thirty-six feet across. It has a new stained glass window in the north transept that is just beautiful in the morning when the sun shines through it."

As Carlon is talking about the minster, a monk with a broom comes out of the front door and makes as if to start sweeping the stairs, but then he looks at your group, looks again, and ducks quickly back inside.

"That other building on the cobbles is the almonry, where we give out food to the poor. Mostly to the poorer folk from Carasse, but every once in a while there's some poor traveler, leper or something. And if you'll all follow me down the path, we'll pass the Refectory on the left. That's where we monks eat, and probably you too, being guests of the abbot. And under that is the Cellar, where most of the supplies of the monastery are kept. On the right is the kitchen, where all of that food is cooked.

"Past that is the guesthouse, where you'll be staying. Father Hervé was trying to have the new guesthouse, you past it coming in, ready for the Countess, but there have been . . . uhhh . . . difficulties."

Carlon is happy to answer any questions the PCs might have, though any questions about problems, the meeting or the Guestmaster are either ignored or he replies, "You'd have to take that up with Prior Hervé."

The Old Church

"Here is the main church of St. Ascelin's. The shrine to him is the over there on the left. The shrine to King Heinrich's miracle is over there to the left. Be sure to anoint yourself with the holy water there before coming all the way in."

The Minster of St. Ascelin is made of grey stone in the old style – with few windows or architectural ornamentation. It rises three stories to a steep-peaked, slate roof and is in the shape of a Cordovan Cross. The windows that it has are tall, narrow, arched and filled with stained glass depicting the lives of a saint (or King Heinrich).

Three wide marble steps lead up to large double doors that open outward. The nave is uncluttered – there are no pews or candlesticks, just a large font to the right of the door. The floor is done in a white and black checkerboard pattern.

The North Transept is a shrine to St. Ascelin and features a gold plated offering table and a statue of the saint. Candles often burn here and can be purchased for 2¢. The South Transept is dedicated to King Heinrich and features a new stained glass window that together with two large tapestries tell the story of his divine visitation. There are two younger monks, each sweeping one of the transepts. They each stare at you as you enter and forget their chore, as they try to nonchalantly retreat to the doors closest to each of them.



There are two younger monks, each sweeping one of the transepts. They each stare at you as you enter and forget their chore, as they try to nonchalantly retreat to the doors closest to each of them.

The altar is just behind (east of) the very center of the church and sits upon the line known as the Barrier, which is a line of grey-streaked marble running south-to-north along the back walls of the transepts across the center aisle. The altar is made of polished olivewood and has a very old copy of 'The Songs of Battle' resting atop it and chained to a ring in the floor. Behind the altar is a wooden white-washed screen with colorful depictions from the Life of St. Ascelin.

This is where the monks meet eight times a day to pray and call upon the blessings of Halek. The church is under the direct charge of the Sacristan, Nathan the Demaran. He has ten monks under him and it is their duty to sweep the floors before and after every service, clean the altars and shrines and to have the ritual implements on the ready. He and the abbot are the only ones with keys to Sacristy and he has a large budget to keep the monastery supplied with ritual wine, a little cider and other necessities. The bakers are also under his charge.

Besides the front double doors of the minster there are several other entrances and exits. In the North Transept there is a locked door to the Sacristy. Behind the altar there is a door to the bell tower. In the South Transept there is a door onto the cloister as well as a narrow stairway going down to a locked, metal gate. This is the entrance to the catacombs and is only opened during a funeral or on the 35th of Dortide, during the festival of St. Ascelin.

There are two large, circular chandeliers hanging over the aisle. These are lit with beeswax candles for the nighttime services.

The Almonry

"We could just go through that door over there by the stairs to the catacombs to get into the Cloister, but since I'm showing you around why don't we go back out into the front and over to the guesthouse. You might want to drop your things off there. Oh! There's another fellow staying there. A holy knight. I think he's gone out though. I'm not sure which room he's in, so you'll want to be careful of that. Nice enough fellow, if a bit dour. He does like to wander about the countryside . . .

"That building there by the front gate is the almonry, where we give out food to the poor and to travelers. Behind it there is the kitchen and behind that is the guesthouse. On the left, that's the refectory, where the meals are served."

This small, stout building is made of brick and looks more like a craftsman's shop in a town than anything in a monastery. The front has a wooden porch with an overhanging roof protecting an open window from which the almoner and his assistants can give out their charity. There is only one door to the building and it is in the back, across from the kitchen.

The Almoner is Jacobo le Gros, and the almonry is his refuge. He can often be found here escaping duties elsewhere. He gets along well with the cooks mostly due to his willingness to help out when asked.

