

TERRA INCOGNITA

Abbey XXIII

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On Yrth (see [GURPS Fantasy](#)), in the foothills east of Quartedec, near the Emperor's Wall, lies a curious abbey. From the outside, it appears mostly unremarkable. It has all the buildings normal for monastic operations, chapels, libraries, stables, storehouses, etc.) The Thomasite order runs the establishment.

However, there are some important differences. First, like many Celtic-style monasteries, there are a number of beehive-like, monastic cells, where individual monks sleep. Unlike those monasteries, however, these cells are arranged in a mostly circular pattern about a quarter-mile distant from the main abbey proper. The placement of the monastery is also questionable. It lies at the base of a hill, on land with poor drainage. Within eyesight are a half dozen better sites to build the abbey.

The second anomaly is magical. Mages passing the outer ring of cells have a chance to detect the change in mana (Magery 1, 8 or less, Magery 2, 11 or less; Magery 3 13 or less). Spell casting will also reveal the truth. A successful detection roll will reveal this is a no-mana area. Please remember that any magic items brought into this area are now normal (including armor and weapons) and that powerstones will not recharge (an interesting optional rule is to have the powerstones drain upon entering the area). As all of the monks of the Order of St. Thomas are mages, this makes the location of the abbey that much more unusual. Within a few yards of the cells, a Detect Magic spell will detect that a residue of magic surrounds the no mana zone. Further analysis reveals that it is from a magic draining spell.

Lastly, this isolated monastery gets a lot of odd traffic and has unexpected inhabitants. Besides the usual wagons of grain, hay, and other foodstuffs from the local farmers, there are at least monthly visits by monks leading donkeys with iron

bound chests on their backs. In addition, a hospice of sorts lies very near the monastery, containing a variety of men and women. While there seems to be no common denominator, there is a higher percentage of nobles, and the women seem to be more attractive than average.

The Secret

The abbey is used to house cursed magic items. A few centuries ago, an archivist determined exactly how many lives were lost because such items were at large, causing ruin and destruction. In addition, he noted that such items, when disposed of in a mundane fashion (dropped into a deep hole, thrown into an ocean etc.), had a nasty tendency to reappear. He went to the current head of the order and proposed that a place be built where such articles could be safely destroyed or stored and kept out of the wrong hands. After a short debate, the Order agreed.

A no-mana site was discovered, and a facility was built. As such locations are rare in Megalos, the Abbey had to be built in a less-than-ideal location. All abbots and abbesses of the Thomasites know of its existence (if not its location). Other orders and some of the nobility know that the Thomasites will handle the disposal of any cursed or incredibly dangerous magic items they have. At a few centralized locations, select monks collect these items and bring them by circuitous route to the Abbey for disposal.

Problems

Most magic items brought to the Abbey are broken, burned, consecrated, and ground to fine ash. The ash is then stored in large cold iron barrels. However, some of the most odious and powerful items cannot be destroyed! This has given rise to much consternation and several theories, none of which are wholly adequate. In addition, several items and many spell books are kept for study. These books commonly hold "forbidden" spells (whichever spells the GM has determined illegal or unknown). The magic items not destroyed also contain spells which are unknown. At some future time, the Order wishes to study them "for knowledge's sake."

However, this practice has caused unforeseen problems. A century ago, it was discovered that the mana level of the abbey was gradually rising again! It is theorized that the destruction of all the magic items is releasing the magic into the surroundings. Thus the Abbey has a maintenance program. These are the monks who live in the small cells surrounding the Abbey proper. They gather in a ceremonial magic circle to dispel the mana from the area one section at a time, gradually working their way around the whole abbey in the course of a month.

Around this same time, the first of the Afflicted came to the Abbey. He was a man cursed to murder one person a month. Instead, a kind-hearted abbot from another Thomasite location sent him to the abbey to become a monk. It was felt that this could be useful to others similarly cursed. Thus a very low key invitation was extended by the Thomasites through their abbots.

However, this soon got out of hand. Over time, many more people than anticipated found their way here, and several decided not to join the clergy. This almost ended the experiment. But the then-current abbot made conditions for the Afflicted. They had to be sincere in their need, as determined by a three-priest panel. They had to come alone, without servants or family. They had to agree not to disturb the monastery. Lastly, if they ever sought to leave, they must agree to a Geas spell,

forbidding them to pass any information about the Abbey to outsiders in thought, word or deed. Guidelines of admission were also made. Any man or woman of Christian faith (the term has grudgingly been stretched to include Huguenots) can request sanctuary. Pagans (including Jews, Muslims, and Wiccans) need not apply. Because of the mixed gender, an Abbot and Abbess are always appointed to run the facility.

The exterior buildings for the Afflicted were built so they could live a semi normal existence, and to avoid the problems of monks interacting with lay persons... However, this is still a relatively disruptive element to the peace of the abbey, and the debate over tranquility versus Christian charity is constant. The current Abbot dreads having someone sneak out (thus the encircling cells also serve as an outer perimeter of watchmen).

Politics

A small minority of monks do not feel that the destruction of knowledge is the work of their Order. Some other orders, notably the Jesuits and Templars, agree, feeling that they should be given control of the abbey. Another argument is that God would not want clergy whom he blessed with magic talent to live and work in a non-magic environment. The head of the Order dismisses this argument, stating God would not then have made no-mana areas, and it falls to all men to use God's gifts in beneficial ways.

Mages in general are politically against the abbey. Many would love to get their hands on the spellbooks and storehouses. There have been several independent attempts over the years to find it, but the monks have kept the location a secret.

Another debate is which magic items to allow entry. What is truly evil? A sword with a +2 to hit and homicidal tendencies may seem merely quirky to a noble, but a monk may feel differently. Any necromantic or remotely demonic item is automatically accepted. Pagan magic items are also taken (this is more a faith issue, and is debated). An item whose primary purpose is to harm the user is also deemed cursed. But the vaults are getting full.

Generally it is left to the judgment of the donating authorities. Some secular and religious authorities are not choosy and confiscate items to send to the abbey, in furtherance of their political aims. This has led to the quite innocuous magic items being sent in, contrary to the abbey's original intent. The Order is considering creating a more stringent selection process.

Lastly, the Ministry of Serendipity early in its existence gave several "high tech" (for the time) items to the Order, and now it wants them back. The Abbey has categorically stated it is not a lending library, while they keep and study the objects themselves. This is a bone of contention between the two entities.

No attempt has been made to detail the Abbey, or the NPCs involved in any aspect of running the facility. Populate it with whatever interesting NPCs you have on hand. Remember that for every narrow minded monk there, there are others who see themselves as ridding the world of the equivalent of anthrax or the ebola virus. The original intention was benign. Additionally, this allows a group of monk PCs to have all types of Clerical adventures, giving the party immediate cohesion and direction (difficult in many parties).

Plot Hooks

Quest for Booty. A local mage guild has quietly hired the adventurers to infiltrate and steal whatever they can from the Abbey, whose location they have somehow discovered. Just to make sure the characters have a good cover story, they also *Curse* the PCs in a significant way. The mages *promise* to remove the curses just as soon as they get the loot . . . Just remember magic is useless, and traps abound guarding the vaults.

Critical Mass. A barbarian raiding party has come into the neighborhood and decided to raid the nearest sources of unguarded wealth (that means monasteries). The abbey has been raided and the maintenance crew killed. This is very bad! The local mana will start rising soon and the interactions of the various remaining (unstolen) magic items could be . . . problematic. The party could be either monks or freelance mages (or their bodyguards) with the requisite spells to save the day, if they can get there in time.

Heavy Metal. Remember those barbarians? Well, they didn't just carry off crosses and candlesticks. Some of the magic items were taken, and chaos starts coming to the local neighborhood. While the PCs may be able to restrain their sympathy for the looters, the barbarians soon die and other people find these items. Can the group recapture these things? Remember "cursed" does not mean "useless."

Do You Have a Receipt? A local noble doesn't like a magic item of some personal significance to the adventurers. He captures the item somehow, and sends it to the abbey. After they break out of the dungeon, the PCs will have to find the abbey, go there, and either convince the monks a mistake has been made, or steal it back!

Quest for a Cure. Perhaps one of the party is cursed. He could go to the Abbey in hopes of a cure. Or an NPC needs to go there before he dies, or does some horrible things. Can the PCs keep him safe before he gets there?

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