

THE STRANGLER OF BLACKMOOR CASTLE

An Advanced Fighting Fantasy adventure for 3-5 mid-experienced adventurers in the Blackmoor Living World with the social status at least at level 4

For Directors' eyes only!



GALFIERO RISALTI



CHIMERA E

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Contents

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND	4
ADVENTURE HOOK	4
CHAPTER 1: GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER	5
CHAPTER 2: THE CORPSE SHOUTED AT MIDNIGHT	5
CHAPTER 3: PUBLIC INVESTIGATIONS	6
CHAPTER 4: THE MAJORDOMO'S BOW	7
CHAPTER 5: NEVER TWO WITHOUT THREE	8
CHAPTER 6: REVELATIONS	8
CONCLUSIONS	9
Conclusion A	9
Conclusion B	9
Conclusion C	9
Conclusion D	9
CHARACTER SHEET NOTES	9
Sense of Guilt	9
Nightmares Investigator	9
Gullible by Darkness	9
Handout 1: Castle Blackmoor	10
Handout 2: the symbol on the forehead	11
Appendix 1: Non Playing Characters	12
Appendix 2: Description of Castle Blackmoor	16

We welcome your feedback about your Advanced Fighting Fantasy adventures in the Blackmoor Living World and about this humble publication. That is the main thing that pushes us to publish more and, if we can, better. Please contact us at: chimeraehobbygroup@yahoo.it

This adventure is dedicated to Harald Reinl and Edgar Wallace.

This adventure is designed for the Blackmoor Living World campaign and is suitable for three to five mid-experience adventurers, i.e. adventurers with 301-1,000 XPs.

Typical Blackmoor Living World adventures take a single gaming session of approximately two to four hours to be played and this adventure is not an exception.

The Director is invited to review carefully all notes on the character sheets before initiating the game, as some may be relevant for this specific adventure, such as, for example, the note: *Bested by the Yellow Flower*. At least one character must have played The Shard of Anathema and must have following note in the character sheet: *Gratitude of Anathema*. The characters also need to have a social status of at least level 4.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

In the first part of this story arc (The Shard of Anathema), Henrick, the Wiseman of Anathema, recovered, with the help of at least one character, a gleamy Shard of polished, black stone. There is a definite aura of evil around this cursed Shard: when touched, voices in the head promise limitless power and it causes diseases and demonic possession. The Shard is in fact a fragment of the chalice that once contained the powerful magic disease made by Thanatos, deity of Death and Disease, that killed Temrin, once deity of Time and brother of Sollus, deity of Fertility.

Henrick realized immediately that it was a very powerful, evil artifact, so he kept it safe and duly searched for ways to destroy it, unsuccessfully. Eventually, Henrick decided to take the cursed Shard to his old friend Lucious of Kralc, a priest of Sollus like him, a well-known sage and expert in countering curses. Lucious was born in the Duchy of the Peaks but relocated to Blackmoor in his youth. Henrick meets Lucious at Blackmoor Castle, on a very auspicious occasion: Lucious is in fact celebrating the news that the King will soon elevate him to the ranks of nobility, for his high services to Blackmoor. What nobody knows is that inside Lucious' body there is a hidden, parasitic twin and getting in contact with the cursed Shard "activated" the twin, turning him into a malevolent Chaos Mage under Thanatos' influence. The hidden twin hates Lucious because, in their mother's womb, Lucious "swallowed" him, preventing him to see the light of the world outside.

Batts the Barkeep informed Henrick that the characters were in Blackmoor City, so Henrick sent them an invitation to Lucious' reception at Castle Blackmoor.

The evil, secret twin will use all his newly discovered powers to wreak havoc by taking control of various characters (perhaps even playing characters!) and going into a killing spree by strangling various victims and carving a strange mark on their foreheads: a big "Θ", that is a symbol of Thanathos used in the Duchy of the Peaks.

Lucious was allowed to have his private reception at Castle Blackmoor, the symbol of power of the Kingdom, because King Uther, as often happens, is away, in Vestfold, for a meeting with the Regency Council.

ADVENTURE HOOK

Read the following to the character(s) that took part to The Shard of Anathema.

You are passing some time at the ComeBack Inn, between your last adventure and the next, when Batts the barkeep, with his best smile, passes you a note from your old acquaintance Henrick, the Wiseman of Anathema.

Dear Friends,

Batts kindly let me know that you are at the Comeback Inn, so I would like to invite you to the formal reception that my dear friend Lucious of Kralc is having tonight at Blackmoor Castle. I spoke to him about you and our little adventure in Anathema and he's very keen on meeting you in person! This is a very auspicious night for Lucious and he will make a very exciting announcement. As the reception will last until very late after dinner, you are of course also invited, with your companions, to stay at Blackmoor Castle for the night. Just show this invitation to the Guards.

Yours

Henrick Dwart of Anathema

Exciting news! You didn't hear about good old Henrick after that time in Anathema and the opportunity to join a formal reception at such a high level of the society, at Blackmoor Castle, is not something that can be refused!

Of course, the characters can always refuse the hook and mind their businesses. In this case they will head straight for Conclusion A. Otherwise, let them do their preparations for such a formal occasion, then go to Chapter 1.

CHAPTER 1: GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

Castle Road goes from the ComeBack Inn to the rocky peninsula of Castle Blackmoor, but there is a barricade to pass. It was built by the Elves after the last destruction of the Castle, using the same black stone. Soon the characters will learn that there are quite a few rules for entering Castle Blackmoor.

You show your invitation to the guards at the Elf Barricade, the first layer of fortification going from the ComeBack Inn to the Castle, and the guards nod. They explain that you will have to leave all your weapons with them: this is a formal reception and nobody, apart from castle guards, can carry weapons inside the walls. Secondly, they offer you a glass of water to drink. You drink, a bit surprised by the strange offer, then they tell you that it was Holy Water: a test to ensure no undead could sneak in the Castle. Finally, you are taken to the Castle, where a majordomo explains you all that is allowed and not allowed inside the Castle.

At the Entrance (Room 9, Appendix 2) the characters can learn a lot of things forbidden in the Castle:

- You can only stay in floor one, where are the dining room and some of the bedrooms, or in floor two, where are the rest of the bedrooms.
- Floor three is entirely restricted to Royals and unauthorized entry is considered high treason.
- Access to levels above three, the Basement and the Dungeon are strictly forbidden for security reasons.
- Access to the Fair (i.e. the esplanade between the building and the external walls) from evening until morning is strictly allowed only escorted by Castle Guards.

The characters are also examined by an Inquisitor (see Appendix 1): all magic items considered potentially dangerous or inappropriate will be temporarily stored in Room 7, Appendix 2, to be returned when the character will leave. After all due briefings and checks, the majordomo will show the characters their rooms (time to pass on Handout 1 to the Players and describe the rooms they progressively visit, as per Appendix 2), where they can leave some stuff and give the final touches to their outfits, then they will meet again to their old friend Henrick.

Henrick, the Wiseman of Anathema, looks great: his formal outfit is impeccable, and his hair and beard have been meticulously trimmed. He seems very satisfied with the situation and he welcomes you very warmly.

"I am here for my dear friend Lucious of Kralc, a priest of Sollus like me, but of a much higher status, of course! Lucious is well-known for dispelling difficult curses and I contacted him to deal with that... that complicate issue we came across in Anathema. I am sure that he will point me in the right direction to get rid of it! This is indeed a very auspicious time for Lucious and this evening... well, I don't want to spoil your surprise: you will hear the announcement directly from him! When I spoke about you to Lucious, he insisted for inviting you... well, enjoy the reception!"

Henrick first of all talks to the characters about Lucious: *"He was born in the Duchy of the Peaks, but moved to Blackmoor when he was young and soon he became a priest of Sollus."* Henrick explains you *"He started adventuring as it is customary in Blackmoor and in time he defeated numerous curses, providing great services for the Kingdom of Blackmoor."*

Then he progressively introduces them to all other guests (see Appendix 1 for an overview of all the guests and other personnel staying in the Castle tonight). This introduction should be quite a social occasion, but also an opportunity to create initial sympathies and rivalries, that will develop later on, for good or for bad.

During this time, the characters can take their time and explore the two floors of the Castle that are open to them (detail in Appendix 2), or they can leave this for later. Potential access to other levels is not allowed and should be discouraged.

The Director is free to manage people coming and going between the dining room and their rooms, polite discussion during the very abundant banquet and describe the high-class food and service as preferred, before finally moving to Lucious announcement in the next Chapter. Please note that, during the announcement, Henrick is momentarily out of the room, but don't reveal this detail to the characters, unless they explicitly look for Henrick.

CHAPTER 2: THE CORPSE SHOUTED AT MIDNIGHT

After the great banquet, Lucious stands up and pronounces one more toast, this time with even more solemnity: "My good friends, it's with joy and sincere humility that I announce the happy news that reached me only recently. This year I shall be elevated to the ranks of the nobility." After an applause, he continues: "I shall kneel before his Majesty, he will touch my shoulder with the blade of his sword, and pronounce the traditional words: Arise, Sir Lucious!" After another applause, he continues: "I have no words to express my gratitude, as a

foreigner that has spent long years in the service of His Majesty, to receive this accolated reward. Uther once and always!" He lifts his chalice while everybody cheers.

Allow the characters to take part to this joyful toast as they prefer.

Suddenly, a man dressed in black, with a black balaclava covering his face, breaks in, pointing his finger at Lucious and shouting: "I shall make your life a hell on earth, until you give me what is rightfully mine!" Then he turns around and runs away.

If the characters follow him, they will find a body, looking exactly like the man in black, just around the corner. However, the body is already cold and rigid in death, while it was running and talking (with a voice that wasn't Henrick's) just seconds before. Taking away the black balaclava, everybody is surprised to see that the dead body is Henrick's and on the forehead it bears a strange symbol (show the characters Handout 2) carved in his very skin. If the characters do examine the body, they will clearly find signs of strangling around the neck. Whoever touches the corpse with bare hands needs to pass a test of LUCK or feel cold shivers: it is a fever that reduces STAMINA by one point every 2 hours. This fever can be cured only with magical means, although the loss of STAMINA can be countered as normal.

"This is a curse!" Lucious maintains his steel nerves and calls for the Seneschal, asking him to initiate an investigation. The Seneschal seems a bit confused.

CHAPTER 3: PUBLIC INVESTIGATIONS

After a moment of confusion, the Seneschal invites: "All guests please go to their bedrooms and stay there as much as possible during the night, while I will investigate the issue with the guards." He will politely take questions from the guests, if they ask.

During this phase, it can be useful referring to Handout 1 for the rooms layout (description, usual occupiers and common lore are in Appendix 2), while in Appendix 1 can be found the descriptions of all Non-Playing Characters.

Please note that this Chapter should be completed approximately in one hour and half, maximum two hours after starting the adventure. After this real-life time, the characters will definitely feel too tired and will go to bed. Then the action will progress with Chapter 4, when they will be wakened up.

Here are some likely questions and answers from various characters (all had a bit too much food and drink, and Lucious more than most others, apparently):

Do you know what the man in black meant when he said: "...give me what is rightfully mine"? (to Lucious)

"I have no idea whatsoever."

Did anything like this happen before in the Castle? (to the Seneschal)

"A lot of weird things happened in the Castle in time, even weirder than this, but nothing exactly like this."

Do you know of any curses that followed a similar course of action? (to Lucious)

"Off the top of my head, no. But I will think about this during the night."

What does the symbol on his forehead mean? (General)

Nobody knows, but perhaps it could be encountered in a book from the small collection the sitting room (18). Otherwise, the Seneschal can go and check in the royal library, in a floor that is strictly not allowed for guests (but he's not that good at dealing with books).

Can we go away from the Castle? It is creepy! (to the Seneschal)

"No. In this moment every single one of you is a potential suspect and I expect your full collaboration. Don't force me to turn you from guests to prisoners, please. There is no need for something like this."

Can we help the investigation? (to the Seneschal)

"Of course, we look at volunteers with favour. You can ask questions or look around on the floors and rooms you are allowed to access, but only escorted by guards all the time. Don't forget that you are all potential suspects as well, so it is necessary to exercise caution."

Can we see Henrick's room? (to the Seneschal)

See above answer.

Can we go to other floors during the investigation? Maybe there are interesting leads, there. (to the Seneschal)

"No, this permission must be granted by the King himself and I can't allow that. If you have very clear and defined suspicions, I can go to other floors and some Guards can do it too, on my special permission that needs to be every time clearly circumstantiated."

Which guests were out of the Dining Room when the man in black came in? (General)

Apart from Henrick, Lady Fant and one of the adventurers of the Company of the Yellow Flower were outside. However, various Guards and waiters or cooks were outside as well.

Do you have the cursed Shard of Anathema? (to Lucious)

"I don't know what you are talking about."

Did you see Henrick particularly nervous or worried, recently? (General)

All the opposite: he seemed serene, smiling and confident.

Once there are no more questions, as the Guards try moving all guests towards their rooms, there are heated exchanges and accusations between characters and non-playing characters. The Director will have to manage this, reviewing Appendix 1 and managing the main rivalries between the various groups, depending on their character sheet notes (for example *Bested by the Yellow Flower*), backstories and on the polite but perhaps poisonous conversation happened during dinner. At least one playing character should be involved (and accused!), better them all.

During the whole investigation, Lucious will constantly deny any involvement and will not give up the Shard to anybody, as he's (righteously) convinced that this could risk a far worse tragedy. If the evidence will show clearly that he received the Shard from Henrick, he will state that he promised Henrick not to tell anybody about it and to keep the Shard hidden and secret.

Potential attempts to Commune during this investigation will give strange outcomes: if the question is direct and may somehow highlight the role of Thanatos or explain the background story of the cursed Shard, the priest, while meditating during Commune, will scream very loudly in fear, meditation will break, and the power will be lost. However, if the question is not as direct, the priestly power will work as normal, just giving more obscure and puzzling answers than usual.

Only a truly amazing breakthrough idea by the characters may convince the Director to go directly to Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 4: THE MAJORDOMO'S BOW

Approximately one and half or two hours (real time) after the beginning of the adventure, all characters should be sleeping in their beds, apart from the Guards on shift.

It is late night, when a loud scream awakes everybody, followed by the alarm bell. Another person was found strangled and with the strange symbol "Θ" (see Handout 2) carved on his forehead. This time it is the turn of a majordomo, the one that introduced the characters to the Castle; a waiter found the body in a corridor (29) by chance. Whoever touches the corpse with bare hands needs to pass a test of LUCK or feel cold shivers: it is a fever that reduces STAMINA by one point every 2 hours. It can be cured only with magical means.

Ask all characters to take a test of LUCK and who will fail the test by the largest margin (if there are ex-aequo, select the character randomly between them) will wake up with the hands bloodied and, in the hands, a silver knife from the banquet table, similarly bloodied! The Shard took control of this character and turned her or him into the majordomo's killer, leaving no memories behind, but just the blood and the knife!

The Director is free to manage the situation as preferred (sending the character to jail, for example, or carrying on with the war of rivalries and accusations, or even with physical assaults), but then, again, the characters will feel terribly exhausted and will want to go to bed. As a passing comment, don't forget to mention that Lucious appears to be fuller of food and drink than everybody else. If interrogated, he will deny any involvement and say he wants to go back to his room and meditate about the present case.

If all characters turned out to be lucky and are not involved with murdering the majordomo, the non-playing character that turned into a killer will be Lady Fant (while the Guards were asleep and using the potions of invisibility that she managed to smuggle in the Castle: one empty bottle will be found near the corpse and another identical empty bottle in her room). In panic, she will try hiding the fact that she woke up in the middle of the night with her hands and clothes stained with blood and a bloody knife from the dining room (the knife and some bloodied clothes are on top of her four-paned bed, and a close inspection of her nails will reveal tiny bloodstains).

Only a truly amazing breakthrough idea by the characters may convince the Director to go directly to Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5: NEVER TWO WITHOUT THREE

Approximately two and half hours (real time) after the beginning of the adventure, all characters should be sleeping in their beds, apart from the Guards on shift. Once again, loud screams followed by the alarm bell wake up everybody in the middle of the night, as another person was found strangled and with the strange symbol “Θ” (see Handout 2) carved on his forehead. This time the victim is Lex Walcrest, that was found dead in the sitting room (15) by a Guard doing a routine check. There are a couple of books on the floor: Histories of the Duchies of Ten, Culture and religion of the Duchy of the Peaks. Whoever touches the corpse with bare hands needs to pass a test of LUCK or feel cold shivers: it is a fever that reduces STAMINA by one point every 2 hours. It can be cured only with magical means.

If no playing character was involved in murdering the majordomo on previous chapter, ask again all of them to take a test of LUCK and who will fail the test by the largest margin (if there are ex-aequo, select the character randomly between them) will wake up with the hands bloodied and, in her or his hands, a silver knife from the banquet table, similarly bloodied! If nobody failed the test of LUCK, the killer will be anyway the playing character that passed the test by the smallest margin (select randomly in case of ex-aequo).

If a player character was actually involved in the murder of the majordomo early on, on this occasion the killer will be Lady Fant in the same way mentioned on the previous chapter (the Fant family seems to be easier to be influenced by Thanatos).

Perhaps this time the characters will bring more pressure on Lucious (the only person involved that was in the Duchy of the Peaks in his life, unless the characters passed by that land as well), but maybe they will be chasing red herrings or will be involved in the cross-accusations of all survivors and complaining about the Seneschal's inefficiency.

If the pressure on Lucious is too high, move directly to next chapter (without sleeping again), otherwise the characters once more will feel overwhelmingly tired and will go to bed, hoping that dawn will bring clarity.

CHAPTER 6: REVELATIONS

Approximately three hours (real time) after the beginning of this adventure, all characters should be sleeping in their beds, apart from the Guards on shift.

The characters are awakened once more by the alarm bell (but no scary screams, this time). Lucious of Kralc claims he solved the mystery and he asks everybody to go to the Fair, the open area between the Castle and the walls, where he will make a revelation. The Seneschal agrees and allows all guests outside, escorted by guards.

At this point, take your time and ask individually the players what they think is the solution of the mystery. Take a detailed note of what they understood insofar, as, depending on their replies, they will be awarded more or less Experience Points at the end.

Lucious, still visibly bloated after the huge banquet, waits until you are all around him under the moonlight, then he starts talking: “When Henrick was possessed and threatened me if I didn't return what was rightfully his, I thought he wanted this.” Lucious shows an open silver case with a polished Shard in it, emanating a distinct aura of evil. “But I was wrong. The person that wanted something from me had something to do with this cursed Shard, but this thing wasn't at the top of his... or her... desires. This... person... decided to put more pressure on me indirectly, by taking possession of people in the Castle and murdering others, then carving a strange symbol on their foreheads. Well... the physical murderers killed while possessed and didn't know what they were doing... but it was really difficult for me to understand the reason behind this. There was something in my past about that symbol, something that I didn't remember anymore, something linked to the Duchy of the Peaks: that symbol in the Peaks is in fact the symbol of Thanatos, the deity that is probably most opposing Sollux, my patron. This was strange, as I am the only person coming from the Duchy of the Peaks in the castle tonight. So... how can I be my enemy and threaten myself this way? It's impossible, isn't it? And why did my enemy not choose to control myself instead of other companions and get this way whatever desires? Well, I have my magical protections against this, otherwise I wouldn't be alive after fighting so many curses... perhaps this forced my enemy to attack other people to hit me... or perhaps my enemy just wanted to weaken my mind resistance until... Lucious, transfigured by a terrible tension, suddenly takes the Shard as a kind of knife, bares his chest and uses the Shard against his bloated body. The deep injury quickly opens up, while Lucious' eyes lose their spark and, from his broken body, comes out the small, underdeveloped body of his hidden twin. His expression is of twisted evil. You can hear his voice full of hatred directly in your minds: “After so many years in the darkness I finally take back what is rightfully mine! I can see the Outside with my own eyes!” The twisted creature suddenly spreads its wings as

a kind of Imp, grabs the Shard and flies away in the night sky, disappearing in direction north west, with the speed and the brightness of a comet.

Lucious is dead and touching his corpse with bare hands causes cold shivers: it is a fever that reduces STAMINA by one point every 2 hours. It can be cured only by magic. The characters that guessed closely the above revelation, will go to Conclusion B, at the end of the adventure. The characters that guessed at least part of the truth, will go instead to Conclusion C. If they didn't understand anything, they will go to Conclusion D.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion A

You decide that you are not interested in attending a formal reception at Castle Blackmoor and rather spend your night at The ComeBack Inn. The day after, you learn that a horrible and unexpected demonic manifestation took place in the castle, causing the death your old friend Henrick... and you weren't there to prevent it.

The characters get 0 Experience Points from this adventure and the note: *Sense of Guilt* on their character sheets.

Conclusion B

You had the right feeling about what was going on and next time you won't be fooled again.

The character gets 75 Experience Points from this adventure and the note: *Nightmares Investigator* on the character sheet.

Conclusion C

The situation you found was extremely uncommon and unexpected, but you still managed to understand a fair amount of what was going on. Keep your intellect sharp, to avoid future surprises, as dark forces can be very unpredictable!

The character gets 50 Experience Points from this adventure.

Conclusion D

You feel completely lost and confused by what happened during the night. You didn't expect it at all and you feel scared, as, in the future, demonic forces may completely fool you again.

The character gets 25 Experience Points from this adventure and the certificate: *Gullible by Darkness* on the character sheet.

All surviving characters, whatever conclusion they reached, can restore their LUCK, STAMINA, MAGIC and MAGIC POINTS scores to their initial levels before taking on new adventures.

CHARACTER SHEET NOTES

Here are the consequences of each note added to the character sheets.

Sense of Guilt

You ignored an invitation to a reception from your friend Henrick the Wiseman of Anathema and on that very occasion there was a demonic manifestation, that killed him. You can't refuse next invitation.

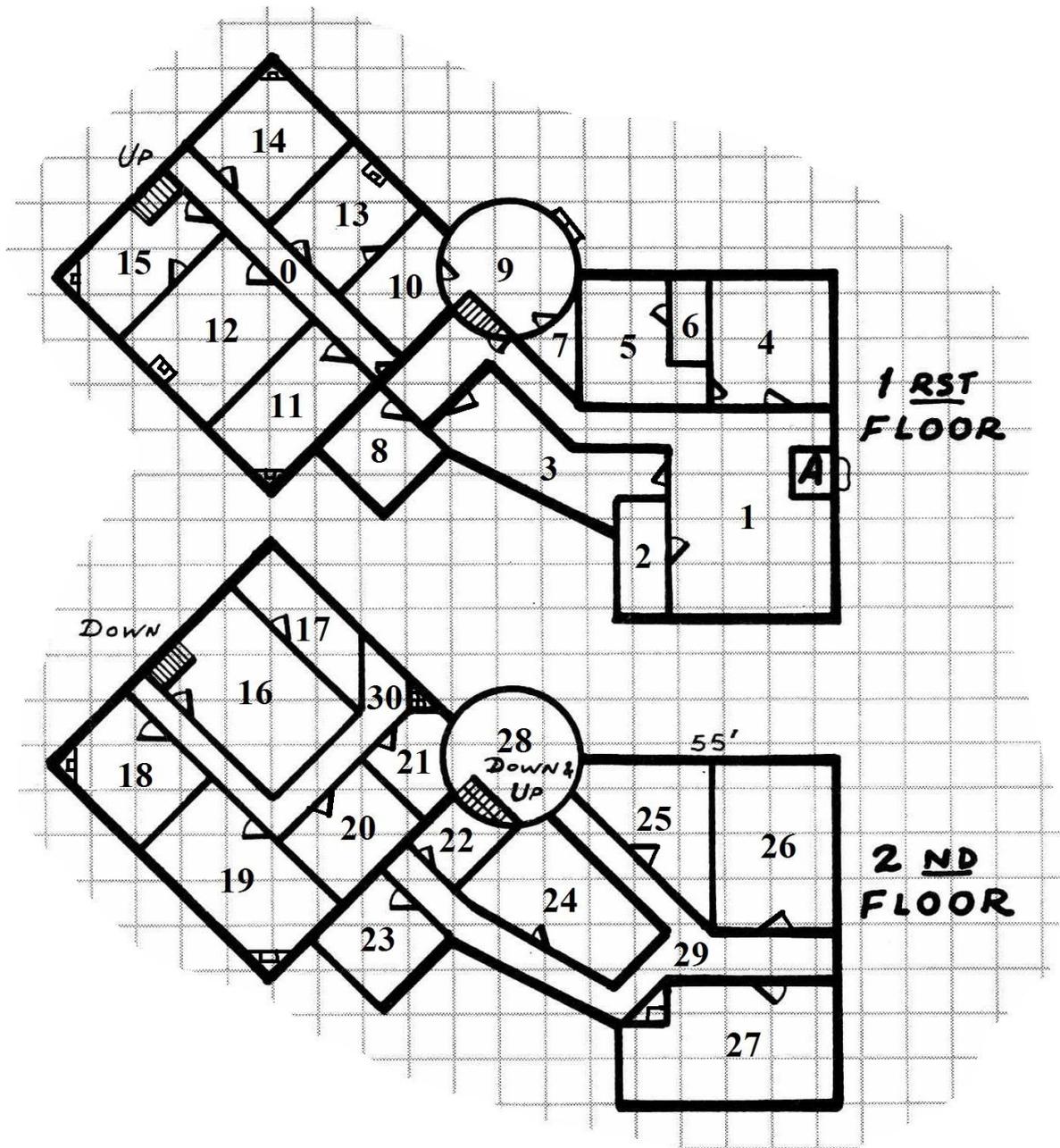
Nightmares Investigator

You are getting harder to be fooled by dark forces. Next time you will investigate a dark plot you will have one point of bonus to all rolls related to that investigation.

Gullible by Darkness

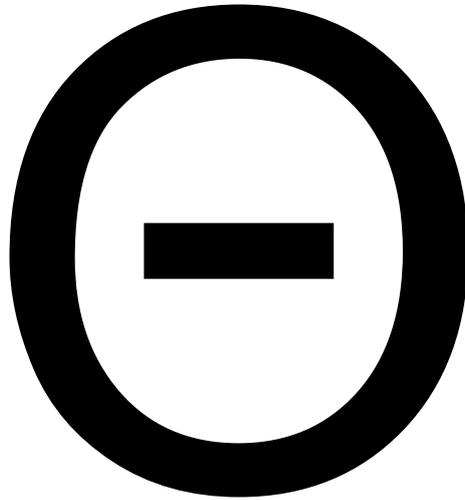
When you face dark forces' plots you get easily fooled. Next time you will investigate a dark plot you will have one point of penalty to all rolls related to that investigation.

Handout 1: Castle Blackmoor



Graphic elaboration of part of a map shared by Dave Arneson's daughter on the Facebook page dedicated to Dave Arneson's memory on 4th December 2013: <https://www.facebook.com/DaveLArneson/>

Handout 2: the symbol on the forehead



Appendix 1: Non Playing Characters

CASTLE GUARD (typical)

Elf or Human, Thonian

SKILL 8, STAMINA 16

MAGIC 0 (Humans) or 1 (Elves), LUCK 10 (Humans) or 9 (Elves)

Talents: Hawkeye, Strongarm

Special Skills: Polearms (3), Swords (3), Armor (3)

INQUISITOR (typical)

Human, Thonian or High Thonian

SKILL 7, STAMINA 20

MAGIC 6, LUCK 10

Talents: Hawkeye, Attuned

Priestly powers: see Gantanka's (AFF2, page 93)

Special Skills: Magic – Priestly (Pacuun) (2), Religion (Pacuun) Lore (2), Staff (3), Armor (3), Magic Lore (3), Second Sight (3), Awareness (3), Sleight of Hand (1), World Lore (2), Etiquette (2), Con (3)

MAJORDOMO (typical)

Human, Thonian

SKILL 6, STAMINA 7

MAGIC 0, LUCK 8

Talents: Silvertongue

Special Skills: Etiquette (3), World Lore (2), Con (2), Awareness (2)

COOKS (typical)

Human, Thonian

SKILL 5, STAMINA 6

MAGIC 0, LUCK 8

Talents: N/A

Special Skills: Knowledge (Cooking) (3)

MAID / WAITER (typical)

Human, Thonian or other

SKILL 5, STAMINA 6

MAGIC 0, LUCK 8

Talents: N/A

Special Skills: Etiquette (2), Awareness (2)

HENRICK DVART, THE WISEMAN OF ANATHEMA

Human, Thonian

SKILL 4, STAMINA 12

MAGIC 9, LUCK 10

Talents: Blessed, Attuned, Holy

Special Skills: Magic – Priestly (Sollus) (3), Magic Lore (1), Polearms (Scythe) (2), Con (2), Religion (Sollus) Lore (3), Farmland Lore (3)

Priestly powers: see Galana's (AFF2, pages 92-93)

Henrick the Wiseman has lived in Anathema all his life. He is known, respected and loved by everyone in the village and commands an authority as high as anyone who isn't royalty is able to. Henrick has helped everyone at some point with something, but his biggest moment of the year is when he casts the Ritual of Bounteous Harvest, which makes the plants and animals grow fat and tasty. During the year, many villagers and a few hired adventurers are sent out to find the components for the ritual, as the sale of the delicious food harvested is a big source of income for the village.

LUCIOUS OF KRALC

Human, High Thonian

SKILL 9, STAMINA 18

MAGIC 10, LUCK 10

Talents: Attuned, Holy, Hawkeye

Special Skills: Magic – Priestly (Sollus) (4), Magic Lore (4), Polearms (Scythe) (3), Con (2), Religion (Sollus) Lore (4), Stealth (3), Sleight of hand (3)

Priestly powers: see Galana's (AFF2, pages 92-93)

Lucious of Kralc is a grey-haired man (his hair kept by a headband), with a kind smile, gentle manners and sharp, steely eyes. He is dressed very formally and looks happy to shake hands with everybody. He obviously passed his prime several years ago, but his moves are still well measured, well-coordinated and possess an uncommon grace and power. Nothing seems to escape his penetrating gaze. He is clearly a very expert adventurer and fighter of evil.

Lucious was born in the Duchy of the Peaks and moved to Blackmoor in his youth. He became a priest of Sollus and specialized in removing curses, becoming a major nuisance of the priests of Thanatos, attracting some attention from Thanatos himself!

Henrick passed on to Lucious the cursed Shard of Anathema (that is associated to Thanatos) hoping he could help destroying it, but this "woke up" a parasitic twin (unknown to everybody) that was quickly taken under control of Thanatos, that hopes this way to get revenge on Lucious by giving the bad twin strange arcane powers.

The events in this adventure should shake him deeply, but he keeps his steel nerve until almost the end and resolutely pushes back on all questions, as he thinks the best way for him is to stay out of the issue and figure it out by himself.

Objects: Holy Water (2), Garlic, Potion of Trueseeing, Blue Candle (he may well use it at some point during the investigation), Headband of Concentration, Bone Medallion, Storage Magic Scroll.

The Storage Magic Scroll bears the drawing of a temple of Sollus with an oversized door and, if any colored liquid (such as ink, etc.) is poured on it, it passes smoothly through the scroll and drips out without leaving any sign on the scroll or any other effect. Only blood can trigger the magic of the scroll (it is in fact absorbed slowly, rather than being repelled and it doesn't leave traces after one turn). The application of blood of a specific person, plus appropriate prayers (test vs. Sollus Religion Lore Special Skill), opens for one turn the doors of the drawn temple of Sollus to another "pocket" dimension, that is accessible to hands and where a small object can be safely stored. The blood of one specific person allows access to a specific small storage location ("pocket dimension") and different persons will have access to different storage locations from the same magic scroll.

Lucious used this precious Storage Magic Scroll to store safely the Shard of Anathema.

It should be extremely difficult if not plain impossible for the characters to access the Shard of Anathema during this adventure, but there is a definite aura of evil around it: when touched, voices in the head promise limitless power and you have to take both a LUCK and a 3d6 roll of SKILL + STAMINA. Failing just one of the rolls causes an instant feverish disease. On top of this, 2 damages are dealt if the Shard is in contact with the skin or 1 damage if the Shard is immediately dropped. Each diseased character in every subsequent round needs to accept the domination of the Shard (in this case, no extra damage is received) or oppose it. If a character opposes to the domination of the Shard (this can be done also after accepting it for a while), roll 3d6 vs. SKILL + STAMINA and,

if the roll fails, the character will be dominated but there will be no damage. If the roll is successful, the character can oppose being dominated, but the disease will deal 2 damages if the Shard is in contact with the skin or 1 damage if the Shard is not in contact.

SIR TRISTAN DARIAN, SENESCHAL OF CASTLE BLACKMOOR

Human, High Thonian

SKILL 10, STAMINA 20

MAGIC 0, LUCK 11

Talents: Templar (Khoronus), Familiar

Special Skills: Military Tactics (4), Religion Lore (Khoronus) (2), Swords (2), Armour (3), Leadership (3), Stewardship (3)

Priestly powers: see Telak's (AFF2, pages 92) – only Specific Power

Objects: Bone Medallion, Scroll of Peace, Scroll of Holy Proclamation, Scroll of Swords, Plate Armor of Protection, Sword of Skill - Undead slayer

The Seneschal is a loyal and trusted citizen of Blackmoor and he has solved countless situations threatening Castle Blackmoor, a place that the King himself doesn't seem to like a lot. However, he nurtures some grudge, as in the past the noblemen put in charge of the Castle were also awarded with the title of Baron, a title that he never received, and, after a long service, he is now thinking he will never receive it. This is probably due to Baron Fant, that was responsible for the Castle way before Sir Tristan started his service and allowed himself to be corrupted by evil, becoming a Vampire.

This thought is particularly heavy for Sir Tristan to bear, as people from the Fant family are often forced on him as guests of the Castle, like this evening. Sir Tristan is a grim person, strictly bound to his duty, but he is also keen on showing off himself and wouldn't miss a chance of casting a bad light on Fant family.

Sir Tristan is also very pleased that the very old Mayor of Blackmoor, Velenader Formash, another potential rival for him, is too old to go out to dinner during the night, Sir Tristan in fact insisted to have this function during the night.

LADY KATRINA FANT

Human, Thonian

SKILL 6, STAMINA 15

MAGIC 0, LUCK 10

Talents: Status, Light Slipper

Special Skills: Con (3), Awareness (2), World Lore (3), Etiquette (3)

Objects: two potions of invisibility, slips of silence

Lady Katrina is a tall and slim lady with grey-blue eyes and straight blonde hair that is beginning to turn grey. Lady Katrina is a distant relative of Baron Fant, once in charge of Castle Blackmoor and now a Vampire haunting the deepest levels of the dungeon. She is ashamed of the evil deeds of Baron Fant, that disgraced the family, but she also craves getting in the same position, that is now held by the Seneschal. She is happy he never got the title of Baron and she wants that title for somebody from her family or, even better, herself. She will take any chance to score some point over the Seneschal and his "inability to manage the situation" and will try to impose herself giving orders to everybody, often in contradiction to the Seneschal's.

She is furious because the Seneschal had the Guest room adjacent to the jail assigned to her, just to drive her mad.

SIR LEX WALCREST

Human High Thonian

SKILL 6, STAMINA 15

MAGIC 0, LUCK 10

Talents: Status, Silvertongued

Special Skills: Bargain (2), Con (1), Etiquette (2), Evaluate (2), Swords (1)

The young and inexperienced Sir Lex participates to the banquet as a representative of the important Newgate Barony, that is the fief of the Great Svenny, as the Walcrest are vassals to him, taking care mostly of commerce to and from Newgate, while the Great Svenny is a well-known battlemaster.

Sir Lex doesn't really care about Lucious of Kralc and is here only out of social duty. Once he will realize that the situation is potentially dangerous for his life, will do all his best to keep people at distance and stay out of any trouble until the morning after.

There are some frictions between house Walcrest and house Fant (after they fell into disgrace and lost the title of Barons, they moved from Blackmoor to Newgate) and, if the occasion will arise, Sir Lex will oppose Lady Katrina Fant, but... without taking risks.

One thing that Sir Lex just discovered and is keeping well hidden is that he can hear some dark whispering in the Hall of Heroes (room 1) that nobody else seems to hear.

MELISSA STARWATCHER

Human High Thonian

SKILL 5, STAMINA 15

MAGIC 9, LUCK 10

Talents: Natural Mage, Hawkeye

Special Skills: Thrown (2), Staves (2), Awareness (2), Con (1), Magic – Wizardry (3), Etiquette (1)

Melissa is beautiful woman in a fancy silk dress and she represents the Scroll and Dagger society in this banquet, as Lucious of Kralc collaborated with them various times. She likes hearing the high-pitched sound of her voice quite a lot, but her eyes can be very inquisitive.

She is perfect for sending the characters hunting for red herrings.

PESHWAH NA KINTARA

Human Peshwah

SKILL 5, STAMINA 15

MAGIC 9, LUCK 10

Talents: Learned, Arcane, Clear sight

Special Skills: Magic – Wizardry (3), Second Sight (2), Magic Lore (3), Ride (2), Smoke Signals (2), Staves (1)

Kintara came from Vestfold to be the representative of the Wizards Cabal on this occasion. She doesn't like the Scroll and Dagger, as in the past she was humiliated by some of them. She will take all opportunities to contradict vehemently Melissa.

THE COMPANY OF THE YELLOW FLOWER

This group of adventurers has to be built by the Director in such a way to be a potential nemesis for the characters. Their number and abilities should be broadly aligned to the characters' but just a bit stronger and with more "social" Special Skill to give them an edge in public exchanges.

Their mission in this adventure is to be a constant challenge for the characters and distract them from their objectives, creating diversions and red herrings' hunts.

They should be also a constant reminder that there is competition amongst the adventurers and the characters are not the only ones on the market.

Appendix 2: Description of Castle Blackmoor

General description: Castle Blackmoor is built over a black rock outcrop on a small peninsula in the middle of Blackmoor Bay. The Castle is built with the same black stones of its foundation and it is an iconic building and symbol of power for the Kingdom, even if, historically, its masters usually preferred staying in Vestfold or other places. This is perhaps because the Castle is quite a grim place, its structures are simple and made for defense more than for comfort or pleasure (for example, there is no real window, but just arrow slits) and was often at the center of controversies. First of all, it is haunted, as apparently its own stones provide some protection to ghosts and other undeads when subjected to exorcisms, secondly, it was taken over by enemies various times and it was recaptured with great effort. It is considered as a kind of "lid" over a very deep dungeon where nasty creatures live and, on an occasion, a tribe of Orcs coming from a deep dungeon level even managed to capture the Castle!

The following room descriptions are related to the rooms in the Handout 1. A majordomo introducing the characters to the Castle may indulge talking about the various legends and rumors mentioned.

First Floor:

A) This little room has a door going outside the castle and a staircase going down to the Basement. No connections to other first floor rooms.

0) Guestroom corridor. The door connecting corridor (0) with corridor (1) is small, thick and heavily reinforced with bronze and iron, easy to defend in case of attack. On both sides of the door leading to the Seneschal's room (13) there are always two guards.

1) The Hall of Heroes, also known as the Black Hall (used sometimes as a reception room or throne room on formal occasions): this room is decorated with marble heads of deceased heroes and rulers, such as Ra-All the Wise, Pissaic, Bakula, Uhlmar, the Wizard of the Woods, Marcellius of Tangor, Brundaire, Jenkins, Skelfer Ard and more. Some have a small urn with their ashes walled behind their marble heads and rumors say that occasionally they can appear as ghosts. There is also a legend about the so-called 10th Abomination, an emissary from the Egg of Coot that was never found after a battle that happened in this room and it is thought to be still hiding somewhere in the room, aided by some foul magic.

2) The Lair, a room where Baron Balfred the Bald kept a Jungle Beast as a personal guard, but eventually the Beast went out of control and killed the Baron. Now the room is used as a storage room for decorations, tapestries and a wooden throne for the Hall of Heroes (1). Rumors persist that anyone attempting to betray Blackmoor that enters the room will be haunted by the Beast.

3) Main Guard Room (called also the Grey Room, where Lord Calvin suicided): in this room there are always six Guards and an Inquisitor fully armed and ready to react to any alarm. In the room there are 12 loaded bunderbusses, 12 halberds and 12 short swords hanging from the wall. There are also some useful magic objects, such as a Scroll of Peace, a Pocket Myriad, a Scroll of Swords, a Potion of Trueseeing, Powder of Mind Protection, 12 Blue Candles and Dehydrated Mist from the Bleakwood (as Dehydrated Mist from Mithrir Forest, AFF, page 143). Behind a curtain there are bunk beds for six more guards, sleeping with their weapons always at hand. They are supposed to be ready in two minutes after any alarm.

4) Dining Room: this is where Lucious' formal dinner takes place. There is a long table, fit for all the guests, with silver chandeliers, elegant dishes, silver cutlery, flowery decoration, etc. On the walls, there are old coats of arms and hunting trophies, such as antlers, horns and the like. Andahar coat of arms, in a prominent position, bears a crowned, silver hawk on a black background.

5) Kitchen: this is where the cooks are preparing the food for tonight banquet. There are all the trappings of a kitchen fit for a king: ovens, fireplaces with spits, knives, cutlery, tables, etc. There are four cooks, one head chef, six waiters and two majordomos.

6) Food Storage: this little room is chock full of food and drinks: quarters of butchered animals, sausages, wheels of cheese, crates of ale, bottles of wine, etc.

7) Guard Room: this little room next to the main entrance is where the Guards keep their spare weapons and other magic objects that they use as part of their duties (six halberds, two short swords, six large shields, a Scroll of

Holy Proclamation, four bottles of Holy Water, a Spriggans Lamp, a Wand of Magic Detection), manacles and other objects sequestered at entrance (Ring of Invisibility, Enchanted Throwing Dagger, Rod of Lightning Bolts, Ring of Confusion) and never reclaimed.

8) Jail: this little jail room is a creepy place; now it is empty, but the Guards will not hesitate to put characters in it, if the slightest (almost reasonable) doubt is cast on anybody. According to many rumors, the room is haunted by the many prisoners tortured and murdered by the Blood Duke, centuries ago. However, the Blood Duke actually kept his prisoners in lower levels of the Castle and this room was built many years after him. Unknown to everybody, there is actually a relic from the times of the Blood Duke in this room, stuck in its floor by chance as it was considered just an old stone and reutilized when the Castle was re-built: one of the stones in the floor, carved with strange runes that become visible when the stone is wetted with blood, is actually the legendary "Prisoners' Stone" and holding onto it protects from stone creatures. It could be found with magic fit for finding magic objects, but a positive test of LUCK would be needed as well, as almost all the stones of the Castle respond mildly to magic searches. The Blood Duke, for his own twisted sense of fun, had his prisoners fight against each other for its possession and then he released his "Stone Guards" to maim and kill them, so that only the prisoner with the Stone could save himself. There are still some Stone Guards in the fourth level of the dungeon.

9) Entrance: this round room at the ground floor of a small, round tower is the main entrance to the Castle. There are always four guards (night and day) fully armed and there are three bell ropes that can be used for raising the alarm and summoning more guards. The central rope, thicker, is connected to the top of this tower, covered by a cone shaped rooftop, where a big alarm bell can very quickly call to arms all the Castle and the City. The right rope rings a small bell in the Seneschal's room (11), while the left rope rings a small bell in the Guard Room (7). The main entrance to the Castle for a normal person (i.e. not the Seneschal, for example) from this room is straight to corridor (1) and the Hall of Heroes.

10) Clockwork room: in this room, connected to the entrance (9) on one side and to the Seneschal's Room (13) on the other side, there are many levers, cogs, chains, etc. that control tricks, traps and portcullises of Castle Blackmoor. In the center of the room there is a big crossbow pointing to the entrance door (9). Along the walls there are levers to lower a heavy portcullis on the entrance (9), on the door between room (9) and room (10) and on the door between the two first floors corridors (0 and 1). There are also levers that make crumble and fall into the basement the floors of the Entrance (9), the Jail (8) and the part of the corridor (1) closer to the main tower (all of this in case enemies take the lower wing of the Castle, protecting the main tower). A trap thrusting pointed metal bars in room (A) can be triggered from here as well. There are also several false levers made of wax and hiding a blade inside them: pulling them will cause nasty hand injuries (as per critical hits with swords, automatic damage) to any saboteur that tries pulling random levers without knowing their exact use. The door going to the Entrance Guard Room (9) is kept locked and the key is on the ring hanging from the Seneschal's neck.

11) Guest room: Lady Fant stays here, as the Seneschal put here next to the jail room (8). The room is bright and elegant, with an impressive four poster bed, but its most striking features are huge mirrors everywhere and silver decoration. A faint but distinct garlic smell is in the air. Of course, all these things are greatly infuriating Lady Fant, as they are clearly a reminder by the Seneschal of the curse of Vampirism present in her family.

12) Guest room: this is where Lucious of Kralc is staying. Unless during his dinner or on formal duties, Lucious can be found here. The room is lavishly decorated, with a marble fireplace, grand tapestries, a desk, a table and a massive four poster bed. The door going from this room to the Sitting Room (15) has been locked for ages and nobody thinks about it as a passage anymore. In front of both doors there is a very thin silk thread that will reveal if anybody entered the room (it works like a trap, but doesn't cause harm). On the table there are various scrolls, a quill and an inkwell: they are Lucious' notes about his experience with the cursed Shard. They reveal that Lucious received the Shard from Henrick the day before the dinner and, if somebody asks him why he previously declared he didn't know anything about it, he will reply that he promised Henrick not to reveal anything about the Shard to keep it safe and he won't reveal anymore. According to the notes, the Shard causes a disease that can be successfully cured by Sollus's Cure disease priestly power, when touched it tries controlling the mind, it can't be broken with mundane items, such as hammers or the like, withstand the fire of a fireplace, when bathed in Holy Water causes its evaporation, stored in a Holy silver case is a safe and suitable transport. Lucious believes that the Shard is a piece of a bigger evil artifact made with the same black stone, but doesn't know what artifact. The fact that the main effects are mind control and diseases may point towards some specific deities, but several demons

may probably fit the description. He is anyway worried that some evil being may want to collect all Shards. Surprisingly, at some point of his notes, a completely different handwriting scribbled this old saying: "THOSE WHO LIVE IN DARKNESS DESIRE LIGHT" Lucious is terrified of seeing that, but writes that he doesn't know what it means, however it is for sure a bad sign or a curse.

13) Seneschal's Room: this soberly decorated bedroom, with a four-poster bed, chests, etc. is where Seneschal Tristan Darian sleeps and passes good part of the day as well. There is a direct door going to the Clockwork room (10), where the Seneschal can trigger some of the mechanical tricks and traps that protect the Castle. Outside his door on the side of the corridor (0) there are always two guards, ready to protect the Seneschal or to take his orders. The door from corridor (0) and room (13) is usually locked and the key is on the keyring hanging from the Seneschal's neck. In the room there are various sets of formal clothes, armours and weapons (including two loaded pistols). In a locked and trapped chest there are various magic objects that the Seneschal may use for defending the Castle: one Scroll of Restoration, three Scrolls of Holy Proclamation, one Scroll of Peace, a magic Silver Mirror, two Potions Anti-Poison, one Potion of Invisibility, one Belladonna Ointment, two Potions of Mind Protection, one Doppleganger Potion, three Potions of Trueseeing, eight Blue Candles, one Headband of Concentration, one Armour of Protection +1, four Arrow-proof Shields, magic Crystal Mirror, twelve Curative Salves, one Potion of Sobriety). In this room there is also the Seneschal's familiar, a black crow called Pissaic, that is a perfect alarm in case of undue intrusion. During the night, the Seneschal will probably come back to his room to take some of the magic objects to help solving the case.

14) Guest room: this is well-known among nobles for being the coldest Guest room of this floor and Lex Walcrest is quite unhappy for being selected to stay here but took it on his chin and asked for a lot of wood to be left in his room, so he can keep the fire always roaring.

15) Sitting room: this room is a passage between the first and the second floor, but has been furnished with comfortable chairs, small tables and a library with 12 books (it takes about two hours to read one book and their titles are: Heraldry of the Kingdom of Blackmoor, Histories of the Duchies of Ten, Culture and religion of the Duchy of the Peaks, Life of Robert I of Geneva, Agricultural Compendium of Blackmoor, The University of Mohacs, The Legend of Skelfer Ard, Afridhian History, Heraldry of the Thonian Empire, Geography of Tangor, Skandaharian Shipbuilding, Fishmen Anathomy – all of them are full of imprecisions and mistakes and the Director is free to whip up some related blurb, but the only one with some real information related to this adventure is Culture and religion of the Duchy of the Peaks, where it can be found that the symbol "Θ" is commonly used to represent Thanatos in the Duchy of the Peaks and nowhere else, although religion is not very highly respected in that country). The fireplace is well fed and keeps the environment warm, so it is not uncommon finding an Inquisitor resting in front of it, when bored after listening for too long the Guards chatting.

Second Floor:

16) Mess room for Guards and retainers: depending on the time of the day, this could be a very lonely place or a very lively one. There are two big bronze braziers and makeshift tables that can be prepared when it is time to eat and then kept against the wall at other times.

17) Loo

18) Retainers room: this is the big room where sleeps Melissa. It used to be divided in smaller cubicles by wooden panels, but they are now lying against a wall, leaving plenty of room. The single bed is not a four-poster bed and the only other piece of furniture is a wooden chest (although there is a nice fireplace), but Melissa doesn't bother too much about it, being a seasoned adventurer used to much worse conditions, however, she's absolutely delighted that her bedroom is just a bit bigger than Kintara's.

19) Retainers room: in this room are sleeping twelve Guards in bunk beds. In front of the beds there are wooden chests with their things and their weapons are hanging from hooks on the walls.

20) Retainers room: in this nice room with a fireplace sleeps Kintara. It used to be divided in smaller cubicles by wooden panels, but they are now lying against a wall, leaving plenty of room. However, the single bed is not a four-poster bed and the only other piece of furniture is a wooden chest (there is not even a proper fireplace, but just a small brazier), all details that are infuriating her.

21) Retainers room: this is Henrick's room. It is relatively small, but there is a nice bed, a desk with a chair and a nice fireplace. The fireplace is actually a secret passage into the corridor (30). There is a very small room that can

be used for spying into the room (or into the corridor), if you are slim enough, but if one or both fireplaces are alight, it is too hot to stay there for a human being. On the desk there are a quill, an inkwell and a few scrolls with Henirck's notes: he describes how the Shard was found, its effects, including associated diseases, how he tried dispelling the curse, first with Holy Water, then with Blessings and finally using the most holy relics of the area nearby Anathema, al unsuccessfully. He explains that safe transport of the Shard can be done by leaving it in a blessed, silver box, a trick well known to many priests of Sollus for transporting cursed items. Eventually, he writes that he handed over the Shard to Lucious of Kralc, a much better curse specialist than him. Henrick writes that he started thinking about the possible evil deity related to the Shard and he has a few suspects, but no decisive proof in any direction, although the connection with diseases seem to be an interesting indication.

22) Guard room: in this little room with a few chairs and a desk there may be a couple of Guards resting. They move to and from room (28), so in total between the two Guard rooms they are always six. On the walls are hanged 12 crossbows, ready for defense. The door is very sturdy and reinforced with iron.

23) Retainers room: this room on top of the Jail is used for storage. There are wooden panels, chairs, beds and the like.

24) Retainers room: in this wide room separated by wooden panels in various, smaller cubicles, each with a bed and a clothes chest, sleep the two majordomos, the four waiters, the chef and the four cooks.

25) Haunted room: the door of this room is locked shut (the key is with the Seneschal) and on the door there is a note saying that the room is out of service for safety reason. The room is in fact haunted by the apparition of a semi naked Lord Alfred and a wench, that were axed to death by Lady Alfred in a fit of jealousy, an old episode from the history of the Castle. The room is also haunted by a Baroness and her 2 children who starved to death in the room after they were walled in by her husband to hide them along with all his wealth from invaders. The Baron was subsequently killed in the invasion and his wealth remained walled in the room until few years ago, when it was re-discovered. These apparitions have been resilient to all efforts by the Inquisitors to remove it and it can cause panic and great stress to unaware people that comes across it.

26) Retainers room: this room is kept warm by a big brazier and it is separated by wooden panels in various cubicles, each with a bed and a chest. This is where the Company of the Yellow Flower sleeps.

27) Retainers room: in this room with a massive, ornate fireplace sleep the characters. Each character has a dedicated cubicle with a bed and a chest. The various cubicles are separated by wooden panels. The fireplace is actually a secret passage to the corridor (2) and a secret room that can be used for spying the occupiers of this room.

28) Guard room: this room is a major asset for defending the entrance of the Castle. There are murder holes pointing to the first floor (9), a big oil cauldron that can be heated in place before pouring its content on assailants and two siege crossbow pointing in front of the main entry door. In this room there are always four to six Guards fully armed and with crossbows.

29) Corridor: at the end of this corridor over room (A), on the lower floor, there are various arrow slits and a murder hole.

30) Corridor: near the end of the corridor there is a fireplace. If investigated, it can be found that it could be a secret passage into a retainers room (21). There is a very small room that can be used for spying into the room (or into the corridor), if you are slim enough, but if one or both fireplaces are alight, it is too hot to stay there for a human being.



Lucious of Kralc, during a reception at Blackmoor Castle, announces that he will soon be knighted, when a masked man comes in, shouting: "I shall make your life a hell on earth, until you give me what is rightfully mine!" Soon after, a man is found strangled, with a strange symbol on his forehead.

Part two of From Anathema to Benediction adventure arc. At least one character MUST have played part one, obtaining the note: Gratitude of Anathema.

