

THE SHARD OF ANATHEMA

CHBLWN1en

An Advanced Fighting Fantasy adventure
for 3-5 novice adventurers in the Blackmoor Living World

For Directors' eyes only!



GALFIERO RISALITI AND STUART LLOYD



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The Shard of Anathema (CHBLWN1en) – 1st Edition – Mexico City, 1st October 2018

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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 Dustin Clingman.

This adventure is designed for the Blackmoor Living World campaign and is suitable for three to five novice adventurers, i.e. adventurers with 0 XPs. However, it can be adapted easily for low-experience adventurers (i.e. with up to 300 XPs) by adding up to one point of SKILL to all opponents, but above that level of experience it would be probably too petty. This adventure can be used as the first instalment of the story arc *From Anathema to Benediction* or it can be just a one-off.

Typical Blackmoor Living World adventures take a single gaming session of approximately two to four hours to be played and this adventure in particular is on the shorter side of that range, as all adventures for novices should be, to allow extra time at the beginning of the session for learning the rules (if needed) and creating new characters.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

This adventure takes place in Anathema, a small village on the Trade Road, south of Jackport. Anathema is quite an unremarkable farming village, apart from its candy making traditions and the popular Ritual of Bounteous Harvest, a yearly celebration (it is suggested to place it few days after Winter Solstice) to ensure that the crops will grow large and the cattle will grow fat. This ritual is so well-known that it even attracts people from outside the village, as it is said that the faithful can briefly see Sollus blessing the fields and hear his blissful song.

Galan is a young villager and a bit of a coward. His parents consider him a layabout, as he raised a long list of petty excuses to postpone adventuring when he came of age. In the village of Anathema, as in many other places of Blackmoor, this makes him no “marriage material” and brings shame on the family. A few weeks ago, Galan mustered all his courage and finally joined some other adventurers, but he returned in shame to Anathema just a tenday later, covered in cuts and bruises. He locked himself away and barely came out after that. The group went exploring a dungeon and encountered some Orcs. They tried to hide from them, but Galan gave them away due to his clumsiness. In the following combat, Galan got almost killed and his companions had to fight hard to rescue him, then they sent him back to Anathema, telling him never to adventure again. What nobody noticed during his brief adventuring time, is that Galan found a gleamy shard of polished, black stone and didn’t tell anybody about it. There is a definite aura of evil around this Shard: when touched, voices in the head promise limitless power. The Shard is in fact a fragment of the chalice containing the powerful magic disease that aeons ago killed Temrin, once deity of Time.

As Galan’s previous companions came back to Anathema, laden with treasure and exciting stories, they told all villagers about his clumsy and reckless behaviour, making him a laughing stock more than ever. For this reason, Galan decided to yield to the Shard’s requests and dunked it in a cup of his own blood. Luckily, Galan isn’t a very good channel for the raw magic powers of the Shard, so the demonic manifestations that followed, while spoiling the Ritual of Bounteous Harvest, are not as catastrophic as they could have been.

ADVENTURE HOOK

You decided that the best way to start your adventuring times is by assisting to the famous Fair of the Bounteous Harvest, the most important event of the small farming village of Anathema, on the Trade Road, south of Jackport. Staying at the Hullgrim’s Alehouse and Inn, the only inn of Anathema, for the duration of all the celebrations, proves to be fairly inexpensive.

Please have each player deducting six gold coins from what they own to pay for three days at the inn. If they want to spend some more on equipment, please ask them to hold on for the moment, as the time will come soon.

The celebrations last three days, with fairs, entertainment, many traditional sweets, and a strange ritual called the Banish of the Wicked, where the villagers vote for one person to be temporarily banned from the village. That person is dressed as a Bogey man (the Wicked) and chased out of Anathema while the villagers throw stones and yell mocks and insults. The impersonator of the Wicked will be allowed back to the village only after some time. After all, it turns out to be a fun occasion for the villagers and the visitors, like you. At the very end of the celebrations is the most famous part of them all: the Ritual of the Bounteous Harvest, that is performed just outside the village, in the farmland.

If the characters didn’t come from the same village, this could be a good opportunity for introductions, as they seem to be the only adventurers, although inexperienced, in the middle of many farmers and this alone should be a good reason to shake hands. They remember that they saw each other at the Hullgrim’s Alehouse and Inn, where they all stayed, as it is the only one in the village.

Henrick the Wiseman has been setting up the ritual for hours, laying out runed stones and dancing around with his staff. You guess that a lot of it is show, but the finale to the ritual is real magic. You have been told that, when Henrick completes his final chant, there is a bright light, Sollus appears and blesses the village before singing a beautiful song to inspire the plants and animals to grow. This song will hopefully inspire also the start of your adventuring time.

The atmosphere is palpable as Henrick finishes his chant with a dramatic gesture. However, this time, there is a sudden flash of red light in the sky and a cold feeling of dread creeps over the villagers, leaving them all confused and fearful. The party is definitely spoilt, and the rest of the events are quiet and barely attended.

Any character with 1 point in Second Sight will sense magic at work. A hero with 2 or more points will be able to momentarily sense an evil presence. Any character with 1 point in the Magic Lore Special Skill will notice something magical. Anyone with 2 or more points in the Magic Lore Special Skill will know that there is something demonic going on.

The characters, before going back to sleep, can talk to the villagers and Henrick, who has no idea of what went wrong and is extremely worried. Later on, he will remember the characters' presence at the ritual.

HENRICK DVART, THE WISEMAN

SKILL 4, STAMINA 18, MAGIC 7, 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 of his life. He is well known, respected and loved by everyone in the village and commands an authority as high as anyone who isn't royalty is able to (social status: 7). 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. 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 critical source of income for the village.

The next day, a middle-aged High Thonian in semi-noble dress and foppish hat, finds you in Hullgrim's Alehouse during breakfast: "Good morning, I am Adjutant Judge Farlon Hightower, the noble born benefactor of Anathema. Something has happened to the farm where the Ritual was performed last night! The milkmaids ran back to the village screaming of demons and dark magic and now no one will go near it for fear of their very souls. However, the owners of that farm: Jorund, Aicia and their son Galan are still in there. The militia have enough to do, keeping people calm and half of them won't face whatever's there anyway. We need brave heroes to rescue our farmers... would you help us, by chance? We would appreciate it immensely."

Looks like this may be the beginning of your adventuring career.

The players might need a little nudging with promises of eternal gratitude or a guilt trip about innocents. Maybe Farlon will need some help from Henrick the Wiseman that may provide a vial of Holy Water or ONE free Bless Weapon as per Appendix 1 (if, despite everything, they refuse, go to Conclusion A), but if they accept, they do not need to go to the place of the demonic manifestations straight away. Instead, they can look around Anathema in search of help and equipment first (see Appendix 1), as Farlon himself advises.

"Many thanks, my friends. We will reward you as richly as we can for your efforts. As you don't know what you will face, I advise you to buy some equipment and maybe visit Granis, the militia captain. He might be able to help or at least advise."

GRANIS

SKILL 7, STAMINA 18, LUCK 8

Talents: Dark Seeing, Strongarm

Skills: Axes (3), Armor (2), Con (2)

Weapon: Battle Axe

Armor: Chainmail Cuirass

Granis leads the militia in Anathema (just four young men on top of him, but for such a small village it is usually enough). His father and his mother were exiled from some Dwarven kingdom for some reason that Granis doesn't know and, right before dying adventuring, as sometimes happens, his father asked his best friend, a human companion, to take care of his family. When the human adventurer reached his companion's wife, she was dying of childbirth. The adventurer nevertheless kept his word, adopted the newborn Dwarf and grew him up in his village, Anathema. Granis used his natural toughness to fight his way to the top of the pile when he was a child, making sure that no one made fun of his height. He has become the captain of the militia in Anathema and runs a tight ship. He is very grumpy about the failed ritual and the subsequent disappearance of Jorund, Aicia and Galan.

If you think the heroes might need some more muscle, Granis is perfect to tag along.

CHAPTER 1: THE CURSE OF ANATHEMA

At this point you can give the players the Handout (see below) with the positions of the various buildings around the place of the failed ritual of the night before. The characters start their adventure by crossing the small farming canal on the lower left corner of the map.

1 – Aicia and Jorund's cottage

This cottage is deserted and there is no sign of the farmers or anything out of place. Greedy heroes who search the house for valuables will find 10gp and 147sp. If they go into the cellar, they will find the farmer and his wife cowering among wooden boxes of cheese and vegetables. They will beg the heroes to kill any "possessed" animals left on the farm. Aicia and Jorund are the owners of Anathema's best farm. They are both born and breed in Anathema and live and breathe farming, managing to produce more beef, chicken and grain than anybody else in the village during the last several years. This makes their son's antipathy to farming even more painful.

2 – Galan's cottage

This cottage seems deserted at first. It is apparent that it is made up of a single ground floor room and a cellar door. Anyone who searches the ground floor will find 2gp and 16sp. If the characters open the cellar door, go to Chapter 2.

3 – Stables

The stable doors have been smashed in from the inside and hoof prints are on the ground heading away from the farm. Something must have spooked the horses. The stables are empty.

4 – Cow barn

The characters hear cows as they approach. Anyone who makes a successful SKILL + Awareness or Second Sight Special Skill roll will notice a faint eerie glow. When they go through the doors, they will see chaos and smell Sulphur. The wood that separated the pens has been smashed or burnt. There are several dismembered corpses of cows lying around. A number of cows equal to the characters are standing on their hind legs, eyes glowing red. The demonic cows will attack immediately.

DEMONIC COW

SKILL 6, STAMINA 10, ATTACKS 2

Weapons: medium claw/hoof, plus fire breath and fire blast (see below).

Armour: medium natural armour.

Fire breath: a Demonic Cow breathes fire (cones 3 m long and 3 m wide at its end, further away from the cow). At the end of every round, roll a die. On the roll of 1-3, the Demonic Cow breathed fire and all characters in the cone of fire must lose 1 STAMINA point, ignoring armour. Characters may take a test of LUCK to ignore this damage.

Fire blast: in any round that a Demonic Cow is not engaged in melee combat, it can summon and fling a spray of flaming liquid at an opponent from its udders. It can be avoided with a SKILL (+ Dodge Special Skill) roll or a test of LUCK. If it hits, it will deal 1d6 fire damages to its target, ignoring armour.

Noxious emissions: Demonic Cows produce sulphurous smoke that distracts and stings anyone fighting them in a melee. Unless the characters have a Breathe spell or similar cast upon them, they fight with a -1 penalty to their melee attacks.

Holy water: if Holy Water is poured or thrown onto a Demonic Cow, it causes 1d6 damages, ignoring armour.

NOTE: if the Demonic Cows aren't killed before entering Galan's cottage, they will attack the characters when (if) they will get out.

5 – Hay barn

There are no creatures here. If the characters search the place and move the hay, they will find runes on the floor, feverishly scribbled by Galan, controlled by the Shard. Anyone with at least 1 point in Magic Lore or Demonic Language will know that they are runes for summoning demons. Destroying them is easy with practical means (like scraping the floor, etc.) and earns 5 XPs to the first character that started this action.

6 – The grazing fields

This is normally where the cows and horses graze. However, the corrupting influence of the Shard has transformed the grass into Tangleweed (Out of the Pit, page 112), that will attempt to suck the blood of the characters. Each square of Tangleweed that the characters cross (brown and green squares on the map) will suck 1 STAMINA point from them.

Characters can identify the Tangleweed with a roll against Plant Lore, Wood Lore, Plains Lore or similar. Anyone who succeeded at the roll will know that fire will hold it at bay and if the characters have a method to produce it, they can avoid the Tangleweed. If the characters don't identify the Tangleweed, they will walk straight in it (they all lose 1 STAMINA point before they know what is happening). If they do, they will need to

work out how to get across a large field of Tangleweed. Anyone who makes a successful Run check (SKILL + Strength + potential escaping modifiers) will take half the damage, round down. For every LUCK point the heroes spend, they can reduce the damage further by 1.

7 – The farmyard

A number of chickens strut about the farmyard as normal (2 for each character). When they see the characters, they will stop and make a formation, then they will charge at them. Only then the characters will notice that their eyes glow red. The characters have 1 round to do something (make a ranged attack, cast a spell etc.), then the chickens flap up into their faces and start pecking at them. The heroes can hit one Demonic Chicken per round, killing it instantly (since each chicken has one point of STAMINA and no Armour). Each Demonic Chicken that survives will inflict automatically 1 STAMINA point of damage on one character (ignoring Armour as it will find the chinks). If the characters throw food at the chickens, then their chicken nature will take over and they will not be able to resist eating it. Each meal of provisions will distract 2 chickens for long enough that, when the encounter is over, the characters can kill them with no problem.

CHAPTER 2: IN THE CELLAR

You open the cellar door and your noses are badly hit by a very strong Sulphur stink. Downstairs, in the middle of piled wooden boxes, there is a very young-looking man with long, curly ginger hair and fair incarnate, feverish and cowering, besides a clay cup filled with what looks like boiling blood, although there is no fire under it. He seems confused and mumbles apologies. His clothes are stained with blood.

The young man with fair physical features in the cellar is of course Galan. He is very sorry for what he did, but he won't come out and he won't touch the cup of blood, that is full of his blood. He dipped the cursed Shard there to "re-activate" it. The conscious part of him is very sorry about what he did, but he is only half conscious and half under control of the Shard.

GALAN

SKILL 4, STAMINA 4, LUCK 5

Special Skills and Talents: nothing worth mentioning...

Galan is Jorund and Aicia's only son. He grew up dreaming to travel and live a life of adventure away from stinky farms and stables where his parents made him grow up. Eventually, he proved to be neither hero material, nor farmer material: nothing materialized,

turning him into a resentful and angry young man. Fate gave him the cursed Shard and, unfortunately, he took his chance tinkering with it, hoping this would make his dreams come true.

If the characters eventually go downstairs and come close to him, Galan kicks the cup of boiling blood in their direction (the Shard is no more there). All the characters that are downstairs need to pass a LUCK roll or the unholy liquid will contact their skin, causing a sudden fever and weakness: at every round, all feverish characters must pass a 3d6 roll vs. SKILL + STAMINA to avoid deducting one point of STAMINA. At zero STAMINA, the characters will drop (but they don't die, they will just not respond anymore). At the end of the adventure, Henrick will cure all affected characters with his priestly powers together with Galan, that is sick as well. Diseased characters in need of cure (including unconscious ones) will need one extra tenday at the end of this adventure, due to the extra time required for healing.

After this surprise attack, Galan cowers again and explains, mumbling, that it wasn't his fault, but the Shard was controlling him. He tells briefly the story of how he found the Shard and how he was induced to "reactivate" it by dipping it in his own blood. He wasn't strong enough to resist. Finally, he says that a Demonic Ram took the Shard and ran away towards the Redwood. If the characters chase this red herring (despite the Sulphur stink in the cellar), go to Conclusion B. If the characters instead don't believe Galan and search the cellar, go to Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: THE SLEEPLESS RAM

As you start searching the cellar, a pile of wooden boxes collapses: it was hiding the entrance to another room and a Demonic Ram comes raging out of it on his hind legs, with terrible eyes glowing red. Stuck between his horns, there is a long, black shard of gleaming black stone, dripping blood on its forehead.

DEMONIC RAM

SKILL 8, STAMINA 14, ATTACKS 2

Weapon: Large claw/hoof/horn, plus fire breath (see below)

Armour: Medium

Fire breath: The demonic ram breathes fire (cones 3 m long and 3 m wide at the end) every round and all

characters in the cone of fire lose 1 STAMINA point, ignoring armor. Character can avoid this damage with a SKILL (+ Dodge Special Skill) roll or a test of LUCK.

Noxious emissions: The Demonic Ram produces sulphurous smoke that distracts and stings anyone fighting him in a melee. Unless the characters have a Breathe spell or similar cast upon them, they fight with a -1 penalty to their melee attacks.

Holy water: If holy water is poured or thrown onto the Ram, it will cause 1d3 STAMINA damage, ignoring armor.

The Demonic Ram can be defeated with normal means or characters can try knocking the Shard off his head with ranged weapons (successful to hit roll with -3 penalty AND successful LUCK roll) or by recklessly facing the head-on attack, trying to snatch the shard (successful Sleight of Hand roll, taking full damage from the Ram). This trick effectively takes all the steam off the Demonic Ram, leaving it stunned on the ground.

After three rounds, if the cellar door was left open and unguarded, the Demonic Ram will take the chance and run away. Only characters with Fleet Footed Talent can keep the pace and continue the fight, otherwise they will have just one opportunity to launch a ranged attack before losing contact. Then they can only try tracking the Demonic Ram in the countryside (go to Conclusion B).

Transporting the Shard

Once the Demonic Ram is defeated, the characters may want to take the Shard outside Galan's cottage, although it would be OK just to leave it there and call in Henrick. There is a definite aura of evil around this Shard: 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 player 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 her skin or 1 damage if the Shard is not in contact.

If the Shard takes possession of one or more characters, it will order them to hide somewhere underground and dip the Shard in blood, to "re-activate" it. If a character re-activates the Shard, she will become permanently

controlled by the Shard, with no chance of opposing, and will be an NPC under Director's control until the end of the Episode. Characters controlled by the Shard will be cured by Henrick, but will need one extra tenday to heal properly and go adventuring again. If all characters become permanently controlled by the Shard, go to Conclusion C.

If the characters manage to keep things under control, it will take 1d6+1 rounds before Henrick the Wiseman catches up with them. In this case, if everything goes right, go to Conclusion D.

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion A

You decide that the strange happenings in Anathema are none of your business and hit the road. You hear later on that a demonic "invasion" in Anathema was successfully managed by a group of adventurers known as the Company of the Yellow Flower. Maybe in the future your roads will cross again with them, but you realize that you lost the first round.

The characters get 0 Experience Points from this game and add the following notes to their character sheets: *Laughing stock of Anathema* and *Bested by the Yellow Flower*. See below what this means.

Conclusion B

You look for tracks for days, but you can't find any. Eventually, you give up: you couldn't retrieve the cursed Shard. You hear later on that it was successfully recovered by a group of adventurers known as the Company of the Yellow Flower. Maybe in the future your roads will cross again with them, but you lost the first round.

The characters get 10 Experience Points from this game and add the following notes to their character sheets: *Bested by the Yellow Flower*. See below what this means.

Conclusion C

What a nightmare! You fell under the control of the Shard! You have confused memories until you saw Henrick the Wiseman face trying to reassure you. You hear later on that you have been saved by a group of adventurers known as the Company of the Yellow Flower. Maybe in the future your roads will cross again with them, but you lost the first round.

The characters get 15 Experience Points from this game and the following notes to their character sheets: *Bested by the Yellow Flower* and *Demonic thrall*. See below what this means.

Conclusion D

Henrick the Wiseman of Anathema flinches as he touches the cursed Shard and puts it straight away in a silver box engraved with holy symbols on all sides. "I must thank you, my friends for ridding our village of its demonic threat and saving the farmers. I will lock this cursed Shard away and search for ways to destroy it once and forever. The necessary research must be done and items accumulated to try destroying it safely, although my first impression is that this object may be linked to the Egg of Coot, an enigmatic presence that commands an army of ungodly creatures on the north side of the Black Sea and a network of agents in Blackmoor, grows powerful by devouring magic and in the past caused lots of trouble in Blackmoor. I also have to find the right components to perform another Ritual of Bounteous Harvest or people may starve next winter. However, for now, we can celebrate. Many thanks!"

The characters get 25 (+10 more if they killed all demonic animals) Experience Points from this game and the following notes to their character sheets: *Gratitude of Anathema* (see below for more detail about this). If you were really impressed by their roleplay, you can add up to 10 extra Experience Points.

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.

The Gratitude of Anathema

All the characters that receive the Gratitude of Anathema get 50 gold pieces as well, as a tangible sign of gratitude. They can also stay for free in Anathema for three tendays (or part of tendays) before the people get bored of them (as long as they don't do anything egregious during their stay, of course).

Bested by the Yellow Flower

On a well-known, public occasion, a group of adventurers known as "the Company of the Yellow Flower" did so much better than you, causing a public humiliation.

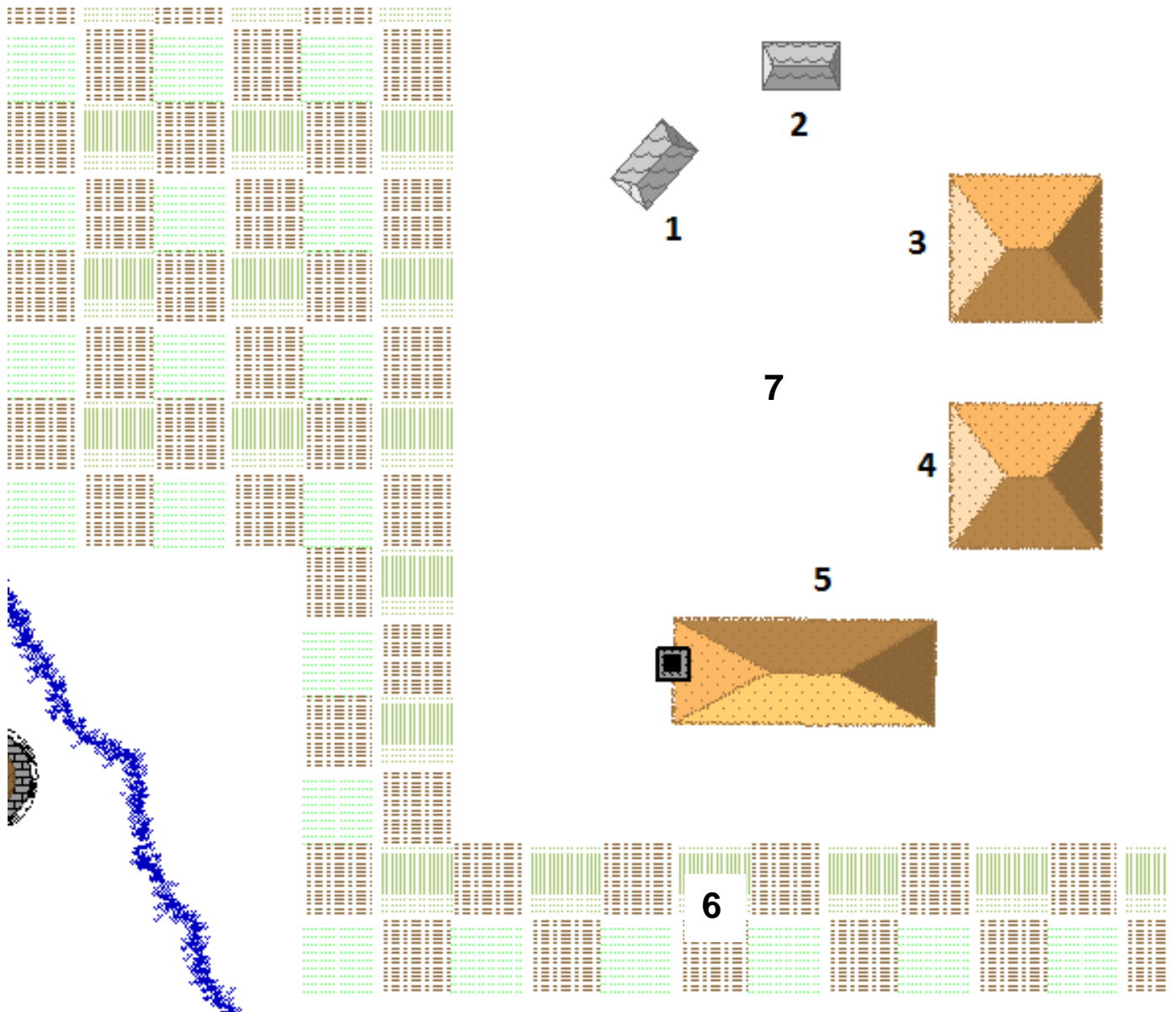
Demonic Thrall

You once became controlled by a demonic power and were eventually saved from this curse. However, this experience has deeply shaken your soul and future demonic attempts to control you will have one point of bonus.

Laughing Stock of Anathema

The residents of Anathema are convinced that you are a layabout and they laugh at you. All your social actions in this village have a penalty of 2 points.

Handout: The farm



1 – Aicia and Jorund's cottage.

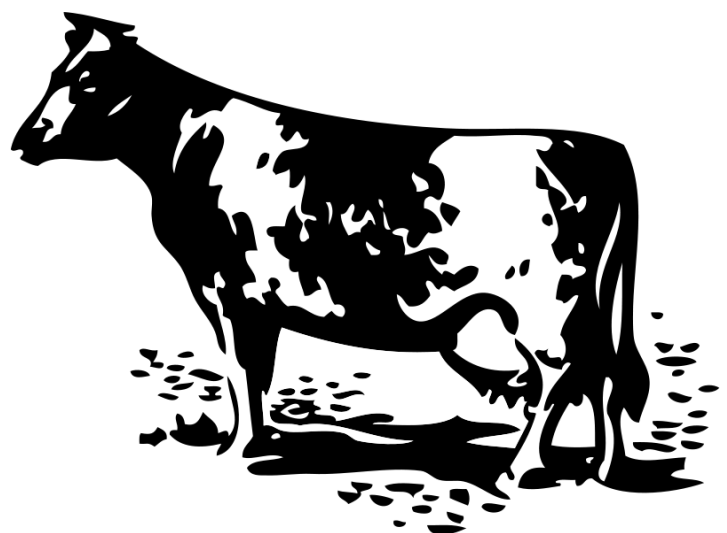
2 – Galan's cottage

3 – Stables

4 – Cow barn

5 – Hay barn

6 – Grazing fields.



Appendix 1: Useful items and services on sale in Anathema

Item	Cost	Stock	Effect
Potion of Stamina	40gp	1	Restores STAMINA to its initial level
Potion of Luck	40gp	1	Restores LUCK to its initial level
Potion of Magic	60gp	1	Restores MAGIC & MAGIC POINTS to initial levels
Band of Strength	50gp	1	+1 SKILL, +1 damage rolls, +2 Strength for 30 min
Lucky Rabbit's Foot	12gp	1	Restores 1 LUCK point (one off).
Four Leafed Clover	12gp	1	Restores 1 LUCK point (one off).
Quartz prism	18gp	2	Restores 1 MAGIC POINT (one off).
Holy Water	30gp	3	also a Sorcery component
Medicinal potion	3gp	6	also a Sorcery component / Restores 2 STAMINA
Elvish Waybread	10gp	6	Counts as meal. Restores 4 STAMINA
Provisions, Meal	14sp	100+	1 provision
Tinderbox	4gp	100+	Starts fires
Torch	7sp	100+	Light source
Sword	Free	4	Borrowed from the militia for this adventure
Spear	Free	4	Borrowed from the militia for this adventure
Dagger	Free	4	Borrowed from the militia for this adventure
Leather cuirass	Free	4	Borrowed from the militia for this adventure
Leather hauberk	Free	4	Borrowed from the militia for this adventure
Small shield	Free	4	Borrowed from the militia for this adventure
Large shield	Free	4	Borrowed from the militia for this adventure
Club	Free	4	Borrowed from the militia for this adventure
Quarterstaff	Free	4	Borrowed from the militia for this adventure
Battle Axe	75gp	2	
Long Bow	25gp	4	
Short Bow	22gp	5	
War Hammer	75gp	2	
Morning Star	80gp	2	
Handaxe	40gp	5	
Polearm	90gp	1	
Arrows (20)	5gp	100	
Bolts (20)	15gp	20	
Sling	2gp	10	
Javelin	10gp	5	
Mace	70gp	2	
Bless Weapon	10gp	N/A	+1 damage rolls for the next 3 combats or one day (whatever comes first) – this blessing is performed by a very old, wandering priestess of Dealth.



The small village of Anathema celebrates yearly the traditional Ritual of Bounteous Harvest, to ensure that the crops will grow large and the cattle will grow fat. This is the biggest event of the village and it even attracts visitors from outside. The good luck that this Ritual is said to bring to all participants is the reason why you decided to start your careers as adventurers by attending it.

Unfortunately, this year the celebrations risk to be spoilt by a bad omen.

Part one of From Anathema to Benediction adventure arc.

