


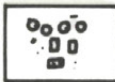
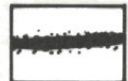







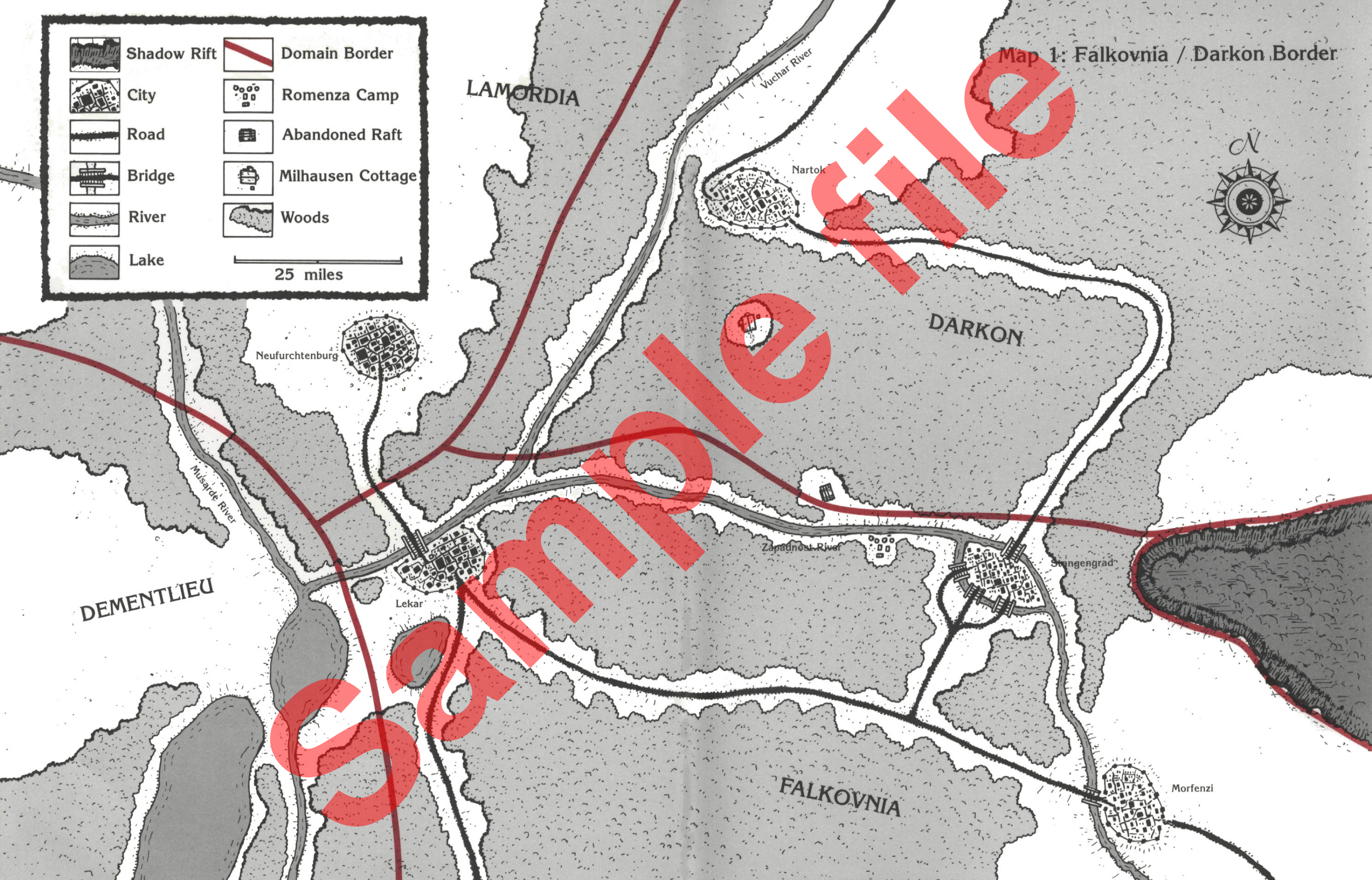


Map 1: Falkovnia / Darkon Border

	Shadow Rift		Domain Border
	City		Romenza Camp
	Road		Abandoned Raft
	Bridge		Milhausen Cottage
	River		Woods
	Lake	 25 miles	



# Death Ascendant

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## Introduction



**T**

he glories of our blood  
and state

Are shadows, not  
substantial things

There is no armor  
against fate

Death lays his icy hand on kings  
Sceptre and crown  
Must tumble down

J. Shirley

There are many different ways to cheat death. Magical potions that prolong life, spells that reincarnate or resurrect the dead, and artifacts that can protect a body indefinitely from the ravages of natural decay, all are well known to those who follow the adventurer's path. At times, the gods themselves may even intervene, sparing the life of a loyal and worthy servant and temporarily holding death at bay.

But there are also other, darker paths that one might trod in an effort to avoid the clutches of the grim reaper. Supping on the tainted blood of a vampire, working the strange and arcane magics that lead to lichdom, or accepting a boon from an evil god with a midnight heart all can convey immortality, albeit immortality with a terrible price.

What becomes of those who follow these foul and dangerous paths? Have they truly and forever escaped the chill of the grave, or have they unwittingly signed a pact with Death that merely grants them a temporary reprieve from his clutches? Only the all-seeing fates know the truth, a truth that is spoken in a whisper that few can hear or are willing to heed.

### For the Dungeon Master

**D**eath Ascendant is designed for a group of three to six characters of levels 6–8. It is

designed to be played as a stand alone adventure, but it also continues the adventure started in *Death Unchained*. Because there is so much background material here detailing the events in *Death Unchained*, the Dungeon Master (DM) is encouraged to read this adventure thoroughly before running it.

The Player Characters (PCs) will be pitted against a number of undead creatures, so it would be helpful to have a priest in the party. The spells *atonement*, *cure disease*, and *remove curse* will also come in handy, since the heroes stand a good chance of being infected with lycanthropy.

The adventure is set in Falkovnia and Darkon, two of the core domains of the RAVENLOFT® world. It pits the PC heroes against the Kargat, a secret police force loyal to the lord of Darkon, and their leader Lowellyn Dachine, himself a minion of this darklord.

Although it is not required for this adventure, the DM may find the sourcebook *Van Richten's Guide to the Lich* helpful as it provides background information on the process commonly used to undertake the transformation into a lich. *Van Richten's Guide to Werebeasts*, which provides additional information on running lycanthrope nonplayer characters (NPCs) and on the affliction of lycanthropy, may also be helpful.

In addition, *The Complete Priest's Handbook* rules supplement has a useful section on the god of death, while *Monster Mythology* contains background material on two of the deities whose priests appear in this adventure. *The Waking Dream*, found in the *Forbidden Lore* boxed set, has useful tips for handling fortune telling using the Vistani tarokka deck. (This information can also be found in the second edition of the RAVENLOFT boxed set.)

# Introduction

## Adventure Summary

The heroes are contacted by a young Vistana whose family has been killed by thieves (members of the Ebon Fold who were fleeing from the defeat of their secret society, a result of the events in the adventure, *Death Unchained*). The trail of the killers leads to the city of Nartok in the domain of Darkon. Along the way, the heroes encounter a new type of zombie, a werewolf who is masquerading as a human child, and discover that one of the Ebon Fold members whom they have been following is dead.

In Nartok, members of the Kargat (Darkon's secret police force) have taken over a temple sacred to the Eternal Order (Darkon's state religion). In the temple, their leader, Lowellyn Dachine, has constructed a device, known as the *infernal machine*, that can transform whomever is laid inside it into a powerful, lich-like creature. The life force needed to power this device has been stolen by the Kargat using magical daggers known as *blood blades*. It is stored in crystal skulls inside the temple, and from there will be channelled into a golden coffin at the heart of the religious complex.

The heroes can learn, with relative ease, that the "thieves" they are pursuing have taken refuge inside the temple. Through careful observation, they can uncover the link between the thieves and the Kargat, and can learn about the rivalries that exist between the secret police (most of whom are lycanthropes) and the priesthood whose temple they have taken over. Ultimately, they can learn about the *infernal machine* and its components, and can throw a wrench into Lowellyn's plans.

Despite this partial victory, Lowellyn (or another character) does undergo a transformation, not into a true lich, but into a powerful creature that is every bit as dangerous. To defeat this creature, known only as "Death," the heroes must discover its secret weakness (any of the symbols associated with birth) and use these to drive it away.

## Fear and Horror Checks

At several points during this adventure, the Dungeon Master is instructed to have the players make fear and horror checks. This game mechanic is intended to

foster appropriate reactions, on the part of the characters, to a horrific or terrifying situation.

At the DM's discretion, fear and horror checks may be omitted if the players are already doing an adequate job of role-playing these emotions.

## Running This Adventure

*Death Ascendant* uses fortune telling to give the heroes clues and to foreshadow the events that are to unfold in the temple in Nartok. These prophecies are offered by Vito Romenza, a Vistani seer whom the heroes meet at the beginning of this adventure.

Vito tells fortunes using tarokka cards. If the Dungeon Master has a tarokka deck, provided in the *Forbidden Lore* and *RAVENLOFT 2nd Edition* boxed sets, he should use only the 14 cards of the high deck. If the DM does not have a tarokka deck, a deck of regular playing cards can be used. Use the cards of one suit, ace through ten, Jack, Queen, King, plus one Joker to represent the 14 cards of the high deck.

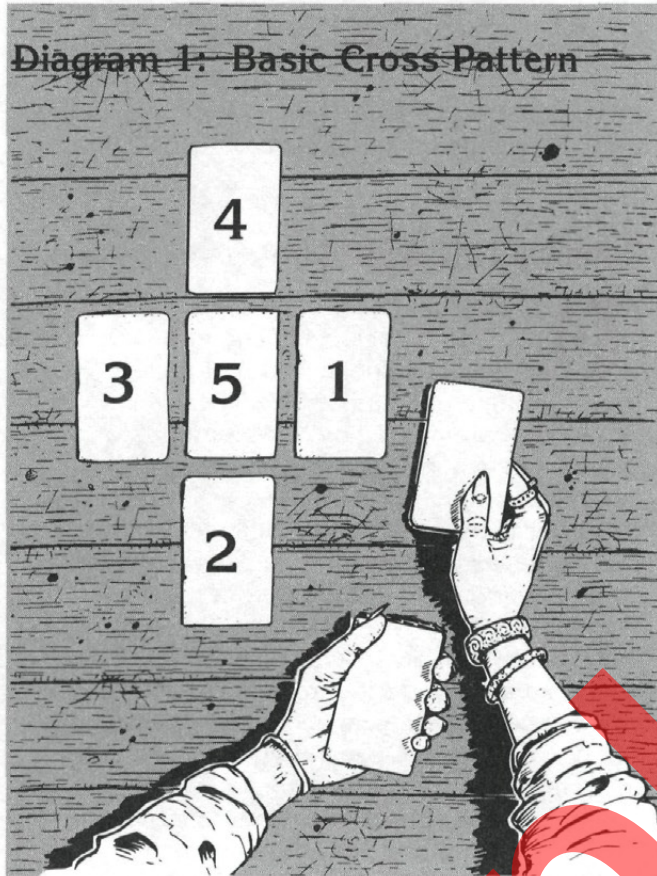
Vito lays the cards out in a variation of the Basic Cross pattern, forming a cross by laying out four cards in an open circle, corners touching, with a fifth card in the center completing the cross (see Diagram 1). For the purposes of this adventure, it is only the card in the middle that determines the clue to be given, and thus this card should be laid with the greatest flourish. The other cards are ignored – although the Dungeon Master is encouraged to make ad-libbed references to them, commenting on how these other cards "influence" the meaning of the central card.

Each time Vito consults the tarokka, a single clue is given to the heroes; the Dungeon Master should read the verse associated with the fifth (central) card. At first, the DM will probably have to initiate these fortune tellings by having Vito offer to do a reading for the heroes. Eventually, however, the heroes will come to realize that valuable clues can be gained in this manner, and may start demanding that Vito continually consult the tarokka deck.

To ensure that this source of information is not abused, limitations have been placed on Vito's fortune telling abilities. After telling a fortune, Vito must refrain from consulting the tarokka until he feels "rested" again (this

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Diagram 1: Basic Cross Pattern



requires 1d4 hours of rest). If he tries to tell a fortune before this time has elapsed, he must make a saving throw vs. paralysis. If the roll succeeds, a second fortune can be told. If the roll fails, Vito lapses into a deep sleep (usually in the middle of telling the fortune) from which he will not awaken for 1d4 hours. When he awakens he is completely rested and may attempt a fortune telling again without penalty.

The Dungeon Master should note that use of the Tarokka deck does not change the outcome of the adventure. The fortune tellings are not the only source of information available to the heroes. Each of the clues which can be gotten from the cards can also be found somewhere else in the adventure, either in the form of a piece of physical evidence that the heroes can examine or as information that can be gleaned from a nonplayer character.

## Tarokka Meanings

### The Darklord (King)

"When mist and bone unite in life, upon the world shall fall much strife."

### The Temptress (Queen)

"Heed not the call of the box of gold, or you will die before you're old."

### The Marionette (Jack)

"The pierced ones who have risen again, are merely the pawns of more powerful men."

### The Artifact (Ten)

"The crystal blades shall cause much strife: to the living, death; and from blood, unlife."

### The Horseman (Nine)

"Beware the view unto the east, for it shall hold both man and beast."

### The Innocent (Eight)

"When Death at last reveals its face, a child shall lead the way to grace."

### The Mists (Seven)

"In Nartok, a great evil done, heralds the coming of a greater one."

### The Donjon (Six)

"When the Mists are at the temple door, they shall hold the living forevermore."

### The Hangman (Five)

"Those who try to steal Death's due shall have cause this act to rue."

### The Ghost (Four)

"Did you heed my ghostly call? Your greed shall cast a deadly pall."

### The Broken One (Three)

"Beside a tiny, golden light, a mind shall flee into the night."

### The Raven (Two)

"A frowning face that does not speak: this is the source of what you seek."

### The Beast (Ace)

"Beware the friend who is marked by teeth; blood shall reveal what lies beneath."

### The Esper (Joker)

"Believe the heart and not the eyes; tiny foes wear a friendly guise."

## Lycanthropy

**D** *earth Ascendant* pits the heroes against mid-level operatives of the Kargat, four of whom are lycanthropes. Since the heroes are likely to enter into combat with these NPCs and become wounded by them, a brief summary of the lycanthropy affliction is in order.

During any battle with a lycanthrope, the Dungeon Master should take note of how many points of damage each of the heroes suffers as a result of a direct attack by a lycanthrope using its teeth or claws (whether

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it is in human or beast form). There is a 2% chance per point thus inflicted (rolled secretly by the DM) that the wounded character will contract lycanthropy.

This condition manifests itself whenever the afflicted character smells blood. (For example, during a battle in which blood is shed, or even during the gutting and cleaning of a game animal for the cooking pot.) As a general rule, the character must be within five feet of the blood to smell it, unless a lot of it is present or unless the smell of blood is specifically mentioned by the text of this adventure.

Whenever this olfactory trigger is present, a character who has contracted lycanthropy undergoes a transformation into werebeast form. He is overwhelmed with an uncontrollable lust for fresh, bloody meat, and immediately tries to satiate it by hunting, killing, and eating a living creature. Until transforming back into his normal form, this character is run by the Dungeon Master.

Fortunately, as a temporary NPC, the character need not make a powers check for any atrocities that he commits. While in lycanthrope form, the hero's Strength and Dexterity temporarily increase to 19 (and he may have a better than normal chance of breaking any bonds or bending any bars that have been used as a means of confinement). The character's Armor Class, attacks, movement, immunities, and weaknesses are that of the type of lycanthrope that caused the infection. All class-related skills are temporarily forgotten.

The werebeast form is maintained until the required amount of raw flesh has been consumed, anywhere from two pounds for a small lycanthrope, such as a wererat, to 50 pounds for a large lycanthrope, such as a werebear. The character then blacks out upon transformation back into normal form. He remembers nothing of the events that occurred while in werebeast form, but has the horrible feeling that something dreadful has just happened. If the hero is covered in the blood of his prey, or "awakens" beside a carcass which has been terribly mauled, a horror check is in order.

**Note:** This blood does *not* trigger a second transformation.

Upon returning to his usual form, the afflicted character heals anywhere from 10% to 60% (1d6x10) of the wounds suffered since

his transform into werebeast form.

Lycanthropy is not a true disease, and thus cannot be cured by a *cure disease* spell. Before a cure can even be attempted, the true lycanthrope that infected the hero (or that started the chain of infection) must first be sought out and killed.

The next step in the process is to wait until the infected character changes into werebeast form, then cast the spells *atonement*, *cure disease*, and *remove curse* on the character. The character can then attempt a single saving throw vs. death magic. A successful roll means that the affliction has been shaken off; the character immediately returns to his normal form. A failed roll means that the character is a lycanthrope for life and will periodically revert to a state in which he falls under the Dungeon Master's control.

**Note:** All of the werebeast NPCs encountered in *Death Ascendant* are true lycanthropes, and thus can not be cured in this manner.

Any heroes witnessing the transformation of one of their companions into werebeast form must make a horror check. A fear check may also be required if the lycanthropic form is that of a large and powerful animal, such as a bear.

## The Continuing Adventure

**D**eath Ascendant is the second in a trilogy of adventures. It continues the story begun in *Death Unchained*, a 64-page module set in Falkovnia that pits the heroes against members of the Ebon Fold, a group of assassins who were unwittingly working to aid the plans of the Kargat. The saga will be concluded in *Requiem*, a boxed set that will expand upon the transformation undergone by Lowellyn Dachine in this adventure.

Despite the fact that it is part of a trilogy, *Death Ascendant* can be played as a stand-alone adventure. It has its own self-contained goals and villains.

When they have completed *Death Ascendant*, the heroes should feel that they have accomplished their goal by banishing Death into the Mists. That this is merely a prologue to an upcoming battle with a darklord and his minions should come as a complete surprise.