



# DEATH ASCENDANT THE GOTHIC CONVERSION

**REQUIRES THE AD&D RAVENLOFT  
ADVENTURE DEATH ASCENDANT, TO PLAY**

BY IGOR COMUNALE



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# INTRODUCTION



This conversion updates to the fifth edition of *Dungeons & Dragons* the *AD&D* Second Edition *Death Ascendant* adventure set in *Ravenloft*.

This adventure is suitable for characters from 6<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> level. This conversion assumes a four 7<sup>th</sup> level characters party, but can be easily adapted for lower or higher level characters.

## 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, lichlike 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.

## RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

To manage the adventure using this conversion, you need

### Using the Tarokka reading

*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.

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 card.

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 finish a long rest before consulting the Tarokka again.

Since the publication of *Forbidden Lore*, the first official product containing a Tarokka deck, an the deck's reprint in *Ravenloft Campaign Setting*, the Tarokka had a recent evolution for use in *Curse of Strahd*. Some cards have changed name, so the cards named in the original adventure need some adaptation.

The **Tempress**, the **Hangman** and, the **Esper** cards present in the old version of the deck are now named respectively the **Tempter**, the **Executioner**, and the **Seer**.

the main rules of *Dungeons & Dragons* fifth edition (*Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and *Monster Manual*). Non-player characters and monsters that are not present in these sources are presented at the end of this conversion.

## CHARACTERS' PROGRESSION

If the characters are at 7<sup>th</sup> level, they level up during the adventure with an event-based progression as follows:

- Characters obtain 8<sup>th</sup> level at the end of the adventure.

### Contracting Lycanthropy

*Death Ascendant* pits the heroes against mid-level operatives of the Kargat, four of whom are lycanthropes. It is possible that one or more characters will contract lycanthropy as explained in the *Monstrous Manual*.

If a character is hit by an attack that carries the curse of lycanthropy then it must make a Constitution saving throw equal to **DC 8 + the lycanthrope's proficiency bonus + the lycanthrope's Constitution modifier**. On a failure, the character is afflicted but the same strain of lycanthropy of the creature who wounded it.

Curing lycanthropy is possible if the creature is subject to a *remove curse* spell, but only if the character contracted this condition from injuries. A born lycanthrope can't heal in this way. If you want to make lycanthropy more difficult to get rid of, you can ask the character to succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw, or the *remove curse* will not remove the lycanthropy.

# CONVERSION

This section describes the necessary updates to play the adventure with the rules of *Dungeons & Dragons* 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. The updates follow the same order and have the same title as the parts in the original adventure. If a reference to a part of the adventure is absent, then it means that it does not require any modification and can be used in its original form.

The text appearing in this way is intended to be read or paraphrased to the characters when they arrive at a certain place or certain events occur, as described in the text.

The text that appears in these boxes contains additions to the adventure and game recommendations for the DM.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE CONTINUING ADVENTURE

*Death 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.

#### Horror Opportunity: Of Man and Beast

*Death Ascendant* brings in the theme of lycanthropy in a preponderant way. This horror theme is an intriguing opportunity to add an element of body horror.

You can let the player maintain its alignment and full control of its action in humanoid form, but in some circumstances, the character risks to loose control of its animal instincts and to transform into hybrid form.

Whenever the character affected with lycanthropy is wounded, or its overwhelmed by rage or fear, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, or transforms into hybrid form for 1 hour and be controlled by the DM. While transformed, it has all the traits of a lycanthrope of its strain, including alignment.



# A TRAIL OF BLOOD

**T**his adventure begins outside the city of Stangengrad, in the domain of Falkovnia. If the heroes have just experienced the events of *Death Unchained*, they should be headed for Stangengrad already. Any surviving members of the Ebon Fold (the secret society the heroes confronted in *Death Unchained*) fled in that direction at the end of the previous adventure, and the heroes are likely to be hot on their heels. Alternatively, the heroes may be travelling to Stangengrad to seek out a friend and ally, the wizard Mircea, who fled here with his students after the Talons raided his magic school in Lekar.

Unfortunately, the city is under martial law, due to the fact that a "spy" from a neighbouring domain has recently been captured within its walls. The gates to the city have been temporarily closed, preventing the heroes from entering.

## Magic Item: Blood Blade

*Weapon (dagger), very rare*

You gain a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

The hilts of these daggers are made of normal metal, but the blades are made of clear crystal. They are shaped much like stilettos, with a long, thin blade that is round in cross section. Although the blade appears to be made of a breakable material, it is impervious to normal damage.

A *blood blade* deals necrotic damage as it drains life force from its victim. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or its hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the damage taken. This reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. All skin, tissue, and internal organs turn to a substance that resembles gelatinous blood. As soon as the corpse is touched, this slides from the bones.

Each time a *blood blade* drains life force, its crystal blade fills with half an ounce of bright red blood in which the stolen life force has been concentrated. This liquid remains inside the hollow blade until the dagger can be inserted into one of the five skull-shaped repositories currently inside the Temple of the Eternal Order in Nartok. If *dispel magic* is cast upon a *death shard*, the dagger becomes non-magical.

Each *blood blade* can hold up to three ounces of blood. If a character whose life force was stolen drinks this blood, its hit point maximum is restored.

If you are using the *Van Richten's Guide to Ravenloft*, drinking this blood may, at your discretion, bestow on a character a **Dark Gift**. The most appropriate dark gifts in this instance are *echoing soul*, *living shadow*, and *touch of death*.

## A BLOODSTAINED INVITATION

This section is intended to provide a jumping in point for the *Grim Harvest* series. It is intended to draw player character heroes who have not been through the events of *Death Unchained* (the first adventure in this series) into *Ravenloft*, as well as into the campaign's storyline.

The significance of this medallion is not immediately known by the heroes, but a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check or a brief consultation with a sage (costing 10 gp) will reveal the item as a holy symbol of an obscure god named Nerull (or of another evil death deity of your setting).

The characters can easily find the cult's temple, which is known to be in an abandoned mansion outside of town. As they approach, it becomes clear that some manner of service is in progress; the sound of dirge-like chants can be heard faintly on the wind.

The mansion is guarded by a single sentry (**guard**) who can easily be avoided or dispatched, depending on the mood of the heroes. They then move unopposed through the debris-scattered hallways and quickly reach the decaying grand ballroom that serves as the cult's main worshiping area.

8 **cultists** attack the characters. Each member of the party who is visible is attacked by two cultists. They are armed with *blood blades*.

The avatar has AC 20, 100 hit points, is immune to non-magical weapons and can't be affected by any spell. If attacked, it will not fight back anyway.

## IN THE MISTS

As the characters attempt to get their bearings, the heroes are confronted by someone who appears to be the skeletal adversary from the house. In fact, they have encountered a **mist ferryman**.

The monster use its Call the Pack ability in its first round. The mist ferryman's howl summons six other **mist ferrymen**. They reach the scene of the conflict in the next round. As the heroes battle it, the DM should say that they can hear hollow voices moaning in the fog: "Trespassers... trespassers...".

## SPY SCARE

A character can try to ask the Talons squad leader some information on a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Failing this check by 10 or more means that the

## MIST FERRYMAN

Medium undead, neutral evil

**Armor Class** 14 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 39 (6d8 + 12)

**Speed** 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	7 (-2)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

**Skills** Perception +6

**Damage Resistances** bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

**Condition Immunities** charmed, poisoned

**Senses** blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

**Languages** Common

**Challenge** 2 (450 XP)

**Mist Travel.** The Mist Ferryman can instantly travel through the Mists to any place or plane. This ability works as the *teleport* and *planar shift* spells, requiring no material components.

**Turn Resistance.** The Mist Ferryman has advantage on saving throws against any effect that turns undead.

**Unusual Nature.** A Mist Ferryman doesn't require air, food, drink, or sleep.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The Mist Ferryman makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws.

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or contract a debilitating disease. The target can't regain hit points, and its hit point maximum decreases by 10 (3d6) for every 24 hours that elapse. If the disease reduces the target's hit point maximum to 0, the target dies. The creature can check once every day to get rid of the disease on a successful DC 12 Constitution saving throw. Otherwise the disease lasts until removed by the *lesser restoration* spell or other magic.

**Claws.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or contract a debilitating disease. The target can't regain hit points, and its hit point maximum decreases by 10 (3d6) for every 24 hours that elapse. If the disease reduces the target's hit point maximum to 0, the target dies. The creature can check once every day to get rid of the disease on a successful DC 12 Constitution saving throw. Otherwise the disease lasts until removed by the *lesser restoration* spell or other magic.

## BONUS ACTIONS

**Call the Pack (1/Day).** When one of these creatures needs help to defeat an invader it issues a strange, ululating howl. This attracts other 1d8 mist ferryman. They arrive the following round, traveling through the Mists with preternatural speed.

soldier gets suspicious and arrest the characters.

A Talons squad is composed by 8 **Talons guards**, 1 **Talons squad leader**, and 1 **war dog**.

## TALONS SQUAD LEADER

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

**Armor Class** 17 (scale mail, shield)

**Hit Points** 71 (11d8 + 22)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

**Skills** Athletics +6, Insight +3, Intimidation +6, Perception +3

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Common, Falkovnian

**Challenge** 4 (1,100 XP)

**Special Equipment.** The squad leader wears a pair of *bracers of the falcon*.

**Reactive.** The squad leader can take one reaction on every turn in combat.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The squad leader makes two longsword attacks. If it has a shortsword drawn, it can also make a shortsword attack.

**Longsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

**Shortsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

**Leadership (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest).** For 1 minute, the squad leader can utter a special command or warning whenever a nonhostile creature that it can see within 30 ft. of it makes an attack roll or a saving throw. The creature can add a d4 to its roll provided it can hear and understand the squad leader. A creature can benefit from only one Leadership die at a time. This effect ends if the squad leader is incapacitated.

## REACTIONS

**Parry.** The squad leader adds 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the squad leader must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

## Magic Item: Bracers of the Falcon

*Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)*

These iron bracers function as a pair of *gloves of missile snaring*. These bracers are magically sealed and can be opened only by a *dispel magic* spell (DC 20 check).

## TALONS GUARD

Medium humanoid (human), lawful evil

**Armor Class** 17 (scale mail, shield)

**Hit Points** 32 (5d8 + 10)

**Speed** 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)

**Skills** Athletics +4, Intimidation +3, Perception +3

**Condition Immunities** frightened

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** Common, Falkovnian

**Challenge** 1 (200 XP)

**Reactive.** The guard can take one reaction on every turn in combat.

### ACTIONS

**Longsword.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage, or 7 (1d10 + 2) slashing damage if used with two hands.

**Pike.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d10 + 2) piercing damage.

## WAR DOG

Medium beast, unaligned

**Armor Class** 12 (natural armor)

**Hit Points** 26 (4d8 + 8)

**Speed** 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	4 (-3)	12 (+1)	6 (-2)

**Skills** Perception +3, Stealth +3

**Senses** passive Perception 13

**Languages** —

**Challenge** 1/2 (100 XP)

**Keen Hearing and Smell.** The war dog has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

**Pack Tactics.** The war dog has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the war dog's allies is within 5 ft. of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

### ACTIONS

**Bite.** *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 11 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

