

BALDUR'S GATE: DESCENT INTO AVERNUS

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Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus

BALDUR'S GATE: DESCENT INTO AVERNUS

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INTRODUCTION



ALDUR'S GATE: DESCENT INTO AVERNUS IS an infernal campaign that will take your characters from 1st to beyond 10th level, as they face fiendish foes, heroic allies, and write their names into the history books – and perhaps in blood on devils' contracts – where they'll remain for all eternity.

This campaign is ambitious, exciting, and challenging. It has a compelling story and an amazing setting – everything you need to create a memorable experience for the players.

However, as great as *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus* is, it isn't entirely without issues. While sprawling and vast in scope, it can also sometimes feel narrow and "railroaded." And even though its story is great at the core, the party's role in it – and their reason for going along – isn't always clear or logical. Of course, there are also the less specific (but always present) details and minor flaws: an encounter that is too challenging, a scene that isn't compelling, or events that don't quite make sense.

This document, which contains five different DM's Guild publications, seeks to provide you, the Dungeon Master, with the tools and thoughts that will help you make *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus* an exciting experience for your players. It is strongly recommended that you read through the campaign book before using these resources. And always remember, the advice and ideas given here are options – you know best what works at your table. This product contains:

Introduction. Suggestions on how to craft meaningful hooks for your players, as well as advice on how to handle various important NPCs throughout the campaign.

Running Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus. Five chapters matching the chapters in the campaign book, packed to the brim with thoughts and advice that will help make running *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus* a fun and enjoyable experience for everyone.

Magical Items, Monsters, and Handouts. Outfit your players with the greatsword *Redemption*, pit them against a Hellwasp Queen, or let them read Thavis Kreeg's infernal contract for themselves.

Monster Stat Blocks. Nearly a hundred pages of monster stat blocks covering chapters 1–4, neatly arranged together on pages, so you don't have to flip through several books.

DM's Cheatsheets. Neatly condensed notes of everything in chapters 2 and 4 for easy use at the table. Also included is an Avernus Cheatsheet, summing up the entire Nine Hells on a single page!

25+ Encounter Maps. More than two dozen battlemaps in both DM's and player versions primed for virtual tabletops. Features both colorized and detailed versions of the official maps, as well as entirely new maps showing locations in Avernus.

We really hope you enjoy this content, and that it can bring something extra to your table, or at the very least make your preparation go faster and smoother. If you have any comments, critiques, suggestions, or just want to share your experiences, visit us at eventygames.com. And, if you want to stay up to date about new products, special promotions and other cool stuff, [you can sign up to our mailing list here](#).

Thanks for the support – and have fun in Hell!

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ADDITIONAL HOOKS

Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus assumes that your characters start out working for the Flaming Fist. Furthermore, the campaign also assumes that this relationship will take the party from trying to root out evil cultists to going up against one of Baldur's Gate's leaders – and, eventually, all the way to the Nine Hells!

While there's some opportunity to expand upon the initial hook along the way – using NPCs such as Reya Mantlemorn and Lulu the Hollyphant – you may want to start the campaign off with a stronger hook. A little extra motivation can't hurt when you're trying to convince people to – quite literally – go to Hell. Below you'll find some thoughts and ideas on how to do that, which you can alter to fit your game.

DARK SECRETS

If your players are making new characters for this campaign, it certainly pays to consider giving them a shared "Dark Secret" (*BG:DiA*, p. 208). We're presented with some different options and interesting roll tables, though there's not much advice on how you tie the secret to the campaign, which is what we'll briefly expand on here.

Dark Secret as a Hook. Initially, the party's dark secret can serve as the reason why the characters are even doing what Captain Zodge says. They're forced to help him root out the cultists, because he knows what they did – a fact he continually rubs in their faces. Later, as the party stands before Sylvira and are faced with the prospect of going into Hell, you can have the archmage (or Liara Portyr) also be aware of the characters' misdeeds, promising them forgiveness if they undertake the dangerous mission into Avernus. There are of course many variations of how you can set this up – what the secret is, who knows it, how can they use it against the players, and so on – but as long as the deed was bad enough, the prospect of absolution can certainly act as a motivation for the players.

Takes One to Know One. The party's dark secret might also serve as something the demons and devils can use in their dealings with the party when they're in Avernus. Their misdeed might feature as they travel in Mad Maggie's dreamscape, an archdevil might smell the evil on them, or they'll stand face-to-face with the damned soul of someone who died as a result of their wrongdoing. Bringing the dark secret into the game this way gives the background some meaning even beyond Baldur's Gate and can create rewarding opportunities for roleplay.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

If your players are creating characters specifically for this campaign, you can let them know that the campaign starts shortly after the city of Elturel disappeared. Suggest that their character can either be from Elturel – avoiding it is disappearance because they live on the outskirts, were away on travel, or through sheer coincidence – or that they have some sort of bond with the city, such as relatives, a friend, an item they're looking for, or something along those lines. This ensures that they'll be motivated to figure out what happened to Elturel as soon as they're presented with it, and you can use their ties to Elturel to add some drama during chapter 2.

As a note here, in the adventure *Baldur's Gate: The Fall of Elturel*, writers Anthony Joyce and Justice Arman do a very good job of tying the characters to the fall of Elturel. This adventure can be used as an introduction to the events of *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus*.

A NOBLE QUEST

Instead of starting the adventure as the party negotiates with Captain Zodge, you can have Reya Mantlemorn set the party on their quest. As described in the campaign book (p. 32), the young Hellrider has heard that Thavius Kreeg has been spotted in the city, surrounded by Vanthampur guards. You can elaborate on this: on the run from the Flaming Fist, there's no way Reya will be able to gain entrance to the Upper City to look for him. Thus, she wants the party to gain favor with the Flaming Fist so that they'll be allowed into the Upper City. She offers the party 500 gp if they will help her find Thavius Kreeg, and suggests that the Flaming Fist will probably also reward them for any help the party provides them along the way.

This hook has some advantages. First off, it starts the narrative early and ensures that the party actually meets Reya. Second, it works just as well if you choose to skip the Cult of the Dead Three-plotline (see **Restructuring Chapter 1**), or if you're bringing in characters from another adventure, such as *Ghosts of Saltmarsh* or *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* (see **From Other Campaigns**).

A DEAL WITH THE DEVIL

For the more cynical characters, it might take more than a pleading paladin or a few missing relatives to get them involved. Here you can choose to draw on the campaign's unique flavor to pull characters in: devils and the Nine Hells.

An obvious choice for this is Tiamat, the Dragon Queen. You can have agents of Tiamat approach characters, perhaps masking their evil disposition, attempting to enlist the party to aid the Dragon Queen in overthrowing Zariel. Starting small, they first offer a few hundred gold pieces for aid in recovering stolen treasure from the Dead Three cultists (thus pushing the party towards Captain Zodge, the Elfsong Tavern, or directly to the Dungeon of the Dead Three).

After the party has demonstrated their usefulness, the cultists ask them to eradicate the Cult of the Dead Three and its backers entirely, sending them after the Vanthamps. Finally, the cultists pay the party handsomely for going to Avernus to thwart Zariel's evil plans with Elturel – perhaps not believing the party capable, but figuring that anything the adventurers can do to hinder Zariel will benefit Tiamat.

Of course, involving the players with Tiamat requires you to make some changes later, as the party will run into cultists of the Dragon Queen. It also requires either a party whose members are willing to work for evil, or that the cultists present their tasks as benevolent and altruistic, hiding their true motives. You can easily replace Tiamat with any powerful devil, since the Lords of the Nine are always trying to undercut each other: it might be agents of Bel, who wants to overthrow the Duke of Avernus, or perhaps the paranoid archdevil Dispater, who fears that Zariel is mustering forces to challenge him for dominion of the Second Layer of Hell.

FACTION HOOKS

There is also the option to hook individual characters or even the whole party in through the factions they're affiliated with (*DMG*, chapter 1). Most factions will have an interest in Elturel's disappearance, although their reasons and goals might differ, as suggested below.

Harpers. "With the disappearance of Elturel, Faerûn has lost an invaluable beacon of hope and light, not to mention the thousands of innocents who disappeared with it. Most of those who survived fled to Baldur's Gate, including, rumor has it, High Overseer Thavius Kreeg. Go to Baldur's Gate, get friendly with the Flaming Fist, and learn what you can. If there's a way to save Elturel, we need to find it."

Order of the Gauntlet. “The crater of Elturel stands as a mockery to the holy city that once stood there. We need you to investigate what happened to Elturel and, most importantly, is there anything we can do to restore it? We’ve secured you an assignment with the Flaming Fist in Baldur’s Gate – start there and learn what you can, but take care not to let the mercenaries corrupt you.”

Lords’ Alliance. “As you probably know, Elturel was a member of the Lords’ Alliance. We need to find out what happened to it, and if there’s a risk to other cities in the North. Go to Baldur’s Gate and see what you can learn. Unfortunately, Grand Duke Ulcer Ravengard, whom we usually deal with, has disappeared as well. Without him, Baldur’s Gate’s loyalty to the Alliance is tentative at best, so you’ll need to be careful. We’ve gotten you in with the Flaming Fist, but won’t be able help you beyond that.”

Emerald Enclave. “The disappearance of Elturel is not just evil, it’s an abomination. It threatens the Balance, not just on our plane, but in the Cosmos itself. We must learn what happened to Elturel and find a way to undo it – or, at the very least, undo the harm caused by its disappearance. Go to Baldur’s Gate, where the survivors of Elturel have fled: sign up with the Flaming Fist, and find out what you can.”

Zhentarim. “The disappearance of Elturel, Grand Duke Ulcer Ravengard, and Thavius Kreeg creates an opportunity for us. Baldur’s Gate is in disarray and Elturel is gone, but maybe not forever. The Black Network needs to insert itself – that means you – into the situation. Pal up with the Flaming Fist and find out how this chaos will best aid us. Whoever can save Elturel, or whatever is left of it, is most likely to end up with the power. That needs to be us!”



HEAVENSFALL

Weapon (mace), rare (requires attunement)

While you carry this magic mace and contemplate or undertake a malevolent act, Heavensfall enhances pangs of conscience.

Sacred. When you hit a fiend or undead creature with an attack using this mace, the creature takes an extra 1d4 radiant damage.

Heavens. While you carry this mace, you can use an action to cast *guiding bolt*. Once used, this property can’t be used again until the next dawn.

KEEPING THEM HOOKED

Getting the players hooked initially might not be as hard as keeping them hooked, once they realize their quest will take them into the Nine Hells! For a campaign that seems to invite morally ambiguous and somewhat selfish characters, there’s not much of a reward for going into Hell – a risky endeavor by any measure. It’s simply assumed that the characters will happily volunteer to go on the quest to bring back Elturel from Avernus, at great personal peril. While your players might choose to be accommodating and just go along with it (they’re here to play a campaign, after all) regardless of their characters’ misgivings, there are ways to make their descent into Avernus a bit more appealing.

WEALTH AND MONEY

The only monetary reward mentioned before the characters descend into Avernus – beyond Captain Zodge’s initial reward of 200 gp per character – is Falaster Fisk’s (Sylvira’s agent in Baldur’s Gate) assertion that the tiefling archmage will pay for the delivery of Thavius Kreeg’s *infernal puzzle box*. This reward isn’t mentioned later under the “Candlekeep” section later in chapter 1, but it seems that a tangible reward, such as 500 gp, an uncommon magic item (an example could be *Heavensfall*, the magical mace described on this page), or some valuable spell scrolls and potions, might work to at least make the journey to Candlekeep worthwhile.

As for the journey into Hell, you can have the archmage offer to pay handsomely for the party’s services, offering 5,000 gp and Candlekeep’s gratitude if the party travels to the First Layer of Hell and saves the city. Alternatively, Sylvira can ask the party to stay for a few days while she informs other interested parties about the deal gleaned from Thavius’ puzzle box. This allows you to have relevant factions, such as the Lords’ Alliance or Liara Portyr on behalf of the Flaming Fist, offer the party a monetary reward for making the journey into Hell and attempting to save Elturel.

FAME AND POWER

For some characters, the strongest motivation might not be gold and wealth, but the prospect of fame and power. You can have NPCs – Sylvira, Liara, even Reya Mantlemorn – appeal to the character’s innermost desires. “Only a true adventurer would dare go into the Nine Hells – such a hero would hear their name sung in every tavern from Calimport to Luskan!” or “Consider this: right now, Elturel is leaderless, lost, abandoned. Whoever saves that city will not only have done Faerûn a great service, they’ll also have made a strong argument for who should hold power in a restored Elturel!”

REDEMPTION AND FORGIVENESS

If you’ve used the “Dark Secret” background to tie your characters together and to Baldur’s Gate, you can use the dark secret to motivate the party to undertake the journey to Avernus. Sylvira (or another NPC of your choosing) knows of the dark secret and offers complete absolution (spiritually and legally) if the party attempts to free Elturel from Zariel’s grasp. After all, isn’t Hell where sinners go anyway?

EXPANDING ON A PREVIOUS HOOK

You can also bring back a previous hook to motivate the characters to travel beyond Candlekeep. A faction agent reappears to offer more rewards and renown, Reya Mantlemorn promises Elturel’s eternal gratitude if the party helps, or the agents of an archdevil make lofty claims about the adventures and treasures that await ahead.

FROM OTHER CAMPAIGNS

Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus might not be your players' first campaign. Below is some advice on how to start this infernal campaign if you're coming from *Ghosts of Saltmarsh* or *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*.

FROM SALTMARSH TO AVERNUS

So you've played through some *Ghosts of Saltmarsh* and now want to make the jump into the newest official campaign. But how do you make the transition from maritime mysteries to Hellish excursions? Below are some ideas to inspire you on how to go from one campaign to the other.

A TRAITOR IN OUR MIDST

Skerrin Wavechaser (or some other important NPC in the Saltmarsh campaign) is actually a devotee of Zariel, set on the same mission as Thavius Kreeg and the Vanthampurs: procure souls for Zariel by condemning Saltmarsh to the Nine Hells. The traitor has been spurring on pirates, lizardfolk, and sahuagin to bloody conflict, hoping for enough bloodshed to fuel the ritual that will transport Saltmarsh to the First Layer of Hell. As the party unravels the treachery, they'll find proof (such as an *infernal puzzle box* and secret communications) that ties the traitor to Thavius Kreeg and the Vanthampurs in Baldur's Gate, as well as the disappearance of Elturel. The Saltmarsh Council offers a hefty reward for getting to the root of this problem, sending the party to Baldur's Gate if they are low level, or directly to Candlekeep if the party is already 5th level or higher.

DEVILS OF THE SEA

The sahuagin are the main threat in the three Saltmarsh adventures, and specifically in "The Final Enemy", although their presence is felt as early as in Danger at Dunwater. You can tie the events of *BG:DiA* to the sahuagin by having the fall of Elturel be the reason for their increased aggression. Perhaps the influence of their shark-deity, Sekolah, who inhabits the River Styx (which flows through the Nine Hells), is spilling over to the material plane since the fall of Elturel. Or perhaps Zariel has petitioned Sekolah and its worshipers for a partnership, urging them to commit bloodshed that will aid her plan to condemn more Faerûnian cities to the First Layer of Hell. The characters can discover this connection between the sahuagin threat and the fall of Elturel either through intermediaries such as an emissary from Candlekeep aboard the Emperor of the Waves (in the adventure "Salvage Operation"), crazed devil-worshipers on an abandoned isle (in the adventure "Isle of the Abbey"), or they might find proof with the sahuagin as they investigate the stronghold in "The Final Enemy".

TAMMERAUT'S FATE AND THE STYES

The last two adventures in the *Ghosts of Saltmarsh* anthology feature higher level threats: the Drowned Ones of the sinister sunken ship, Tammeraut, and a juvenile kraken festering in the Styges. Both adventures can serve nicely as a starting-off point for a delve into Avernus.

The Pit of Hatred in "Tammeraut's Fate" might be a rift to the Hells instead of the Abyss (and Syrgaul's crew sworn to Zariel instead of Orcus), meant to eventually swallow up a nearby coastal city, such as Saltmarsh. To end the threat for good, the characters must travel to Avernus, stop Zariel's evil plans and – perhaps – save Elturel. Likewise, the crazed aboleth grooming a kraken in "The Styges" isn't doing the work of Tarizdun, but instead works for Zariel, preparing the Styges (or Baldur's Gate?) for its descent into Avernus.

FROM WATERDEEP TO AVERNUS

If you're playing through *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* and want to make the jump to *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus*, there is a wide array of options available to you. The assumption is that the characters are around 5th level, having just secured (or lost!) the dragon's cache. Because of your party's higher level – and because the characters have already played through five levels worth of urban adventure – you may want to skip or streamline some of the content in chapter 1, regardless of how you transition the party. See **Restructuring Chapter 1** for more advice on how to do that.

JUST ANOTHER MISSION

It's likely that at least some of the characters have signed up with the various factions in Waterdeep, thus making the **Faction Hooks** an easy way to switch campaigns. If characters have joined Bregan D'aerthe, Jarlaxle's reasons for exploring Elturel's disappearance will look much like the Zhentarim's: exploit the chaos to claim as much power and wealth as possible.

AN HONORABLE HEIST

Having lived through a season of high crime and intrigue in Waterdeep, the characters have built a strong reputation. Having heard of the resourceful adventurers, Reya Mantlemorn reaches out to the party, either making the long trip to Waterdeep herself, or sending a letter asking them to meet her in Baldur's Gate, and asks for their aid. She feels certain that Thavius Kreeg has been captured by the Vanthampurs, but she's a warrior, not an infiltrator – and, surely, breaking out Elturel's former leader is a heist worthy of Waterdeep's most famed heisters!

CHANGING LOCALES

At the moment, we don't know if there's a deeper reason *BG:DiA* starts in Baldur's Gate, but the content described in chapter 1 can quite easily be reskinned to fit Waterdeep instead. If you want to include all the content of chapter 1, a faction might hire the adventurers to deal with dangerous cultists, taking them all the way to a prominent noble Waterdhavian family's estate, where they'll find the shield of the hidden lord and Thavius Kreeg, the High Overseer of Elturel ("Oh, yeah, that city we heard of, that disappeared suddenly a few weeks ago"). All you need to do then is replace the disappeared Grand Duke Ulder Ravengard with a notable Waterdhavian such as Mirt, Volothamp Gedarm, Renaer Neverember, or the monk Hlam. You can even spare the party the trip to Candlekeep, having Vajra Safahr replace Sylvira when it comes to opening the *infernal puzzle box*, introducing the party to Lulu the Hollyphant, and whisking them off to the First Layer of Hell.

Alternatively, if you are still playing through *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*, you can make sure to set the Cassalanters up as the campaign's villains, and have them shelter the treacherous Thavius Kreeg and his *infernal puzzle box* in their villa. It will take a bit of rewriting to pull off, but could make for a seamless transition from one campaign to the next.

HANDLING NPCs

When reading through *BG:DiA*, you'll notice that the campaign seems to rely heavily on a few key NPCs: Reya Mantlemorn, Gargauth (the *Shield of the Hidden Lord*) and Lulu the Hollyphant. We write "seems" because it is actually quite doable (and perhaps, depending on your table, more enjoyable) to play the campaign without one or more of them. Below we'll give suggestions on how to handle – or entirely remove – these important NPCs.

REYA MANTLEMORN

Reya Mantlemorn is the runaway Hellrider who steers the party towards the Vanthampur Villa, Candlekeep, and eventually Elturel. She brings some drama to the story with her personal involvement, and relays some of the Hellriders' backstory to the party. However, if you'd rather not have her tag along, or if she and the party take a dislike to each other, you can easily write her out of the story. You can have Sylvira provide the exact same information about the Hellriders as she does, and any NPC the party meets in Elturel can point the party towards the High Hall when they get there. The only thing you'll really be missing if you minimize Reya's role is the emotional weight her reactions give to certain situations – Thavius Kreeg's corruption, the fallen Elturel, and so on.

SHIELD OF THE HIDDEN LORD

Gargauth, the pit fiend inside the *Shield of the Hidden Lord*, serves two purposes: it is the instrument with which Thavius and the Vanthamps plan to cause Baldur's Gate's descent into Avernus, and it serves as a companion/guide for the characters on their travels in Hell. Giving the party an evil, sentient shield as a companion can make for some interesting situations, but it is not without issues.

First, the shield is a +2 shield that can cast several powerful spells, and the characters get it very early. Bounded accuracy is a thing in fifth edition, and you might find the shield more than a little frustrating. Second, the plan to use the shield to bring down Baldur's Gate is a bit vague. Additionally, while the *Shield of the Hidden Lord* might seem important to the plot, the shield is barely mentioned again until chapter 5, where the pit fiend may – or may not – help the party against Zariel. Thus, you can quite easily write it out of the adventure if you'd rather not bother with it.

Instead of using the shield, you can have Thavius and the Vanthamps' plan be to smuggle *Hellfire weapons* into Baldur's Gate and give them to the cultists of the Dead Three. This way they can both bolster the ranks of devils in Avernus while also causing chaos and destruction in Baldur's Gate, hopefully bringing about its downfall. Simply place a few *Hellfire weapons* with the Dead Three cultists – you can give one to Flennis (D13), Mortlock (D29), and Vaaz (D33). This has the added benefit of giving the party some magical weapons before traveling into Avernus, saving them the trouble of scrambling to get silvered weapons made!

Alternatively, you can keep the *Shield of the Hidden Lord* in the campaign, but dial down its powers – perhaps entirely removing the +2 bonus to AC that comes with it. You can even give Gargauth a more prominent role, having it take Lulu the Hollyphant's place as the party's guide to important locations in Avernus.

LULU THE HOLYPHANT

Possibly the most important NPC in the campaign is Lulu the Hollyphant. She's both plot-engine and infernal guide, as she keeps the party moving from location to location in Avernus – and is apparently so important that she will be magically resurrected in chapter 4 if she should die along the way. In some ways, she can come to feel like the story's main protagonist, a role that you would traditionally reserve for the party.

Luckily, you don't have to bring along a flying elephant if you don't want to. There are various different ways to replace her, but before we get to that, let's first look at her role in the campaign. Lulu is vital to the story at four points:

- She points the party towards Fort Knucklebone after Ulder Ravengard has been saved (p. 72)
- She's the conduit for Mad Maggie's ritual in Fort Knucklebone, after which she points the party toward Haruman's Hill (p. 86)
- She points the party toward either the Spawning Trees or the Demon Zapper after Haruman's Hill is found to be a dead-end (p. 93)
- She's the conduit for the party's travel to Idyllglen just before the party can claim the Sword of Zariel (p. 140)

When reading through the sections where Lulu makes an appearance, it is clear that while she has important functions, they are not tied to who or what she is. You can easily replace Lulu with any other creature or even an inanimate object, if you want to. You can even do this in ways that seem a bit more credible than the party just happening upon exactly the flying elephant they need to save Elturel. Here is an example of how you can replace Lulu with a small shard from the *Sword of Zariel*.

REPLACING LULU IN CHAPTER 1

In the first chapter, the only change you need to make is to skip the part where the characters are introduced to Lulu the Hollyphant.

REPLACING LULU IN CHAPTER 2

- One of Lulu's functions in chapter 2 is as a friendly combatant who can offer great aid during the many combat encounters presented in this chapter. If you write her out of the adventure, you may want to scale down the challenges a bit. Luckily, no one encounter in the book is too hard, so you can simply exclude encounters as you see fit, making sure that the characters aren't overwhelmed.
- When the party finds Ulder Ravengard in the Grand Cemetery, the Grand Duke isn't just wearing the *Helm of Torm's Sight*, he's also clutching a small object in his gauntleted fist. However much the characters try, they can't open the Grand Duke's clenched fist.
- As Ulder Ravengard describes his visions (or a character sees the vision for themselves), remove any mention of Lulu and instead highlight how the sword was missing a piece before the woman plunged it into the ground (the sword was damaged during Zariel's final battle). This is when Ulder opens his fist and shows the shard in his hand, which he professes that Torm must have placed there.
- Ulder (or a character who holds the shard) can feel its urge to be reunited with the rest of the sword. Pherria (or a character's Arcana check) recognizes that the shard has a small sliver of sentience, and that strong divination magic might be able to unlock its memories and lead the characters to the *Sword of Zariel*. As described on the previous page, Gargauth, a Warlord of the Avernian Wastelands, or the two kenku, can then point the party toward Mad Maggie and Fort Knucklebone.

REPLACING LULU IN CHAPTER 3

- Mad Maggie performs the ritual on the shard, putting the party through the same dream sequence (but without Lulu making an appearance), although Dream 5: Revelation is replaced with a vision of demons being spawned and slain by Zariel wielding the *Sword of Zariel*. Mad Maggie interprets this as “the path leading to the sword starts where demons are either made or destroyed”. You can skip the Haruman’s Hill encounter or simply have it be a random encounter on the way to one of these destinations (which you can once again have Gargauth or any other interesting NPC they meet on their way direct the party to!).
- At Haruman’s Hill, you can have the Hellwasps steal an important item from the characters – such as the *Shield of the Hidden Lord* or the shard from the *Sword of Zariel* instead of Lulu.
- At other points during the chapter where Lulu might feasibly play a role, such as in encounters with the Wandering Emporium or when facing Olanthius, you can either just ignore this aspect, or have NPCs recognize the shard instead.

REPLACING LULU IN CHAPTER 4

- Describe the *Sword of Zariel* as missing the shard, when the party first sees it.
- The shard functions as the conduit for the characters’ spirit journey into Idyllglen.
- After the party has helped save Idyllglen, the shard floats up to the sword and reattaches itself in a burst of gleaming light, completing the restoration of the sword, and granting hope that Zariel can still be redeemed – or defeated.

REMOVE ONLY IF NECESSARY

This example of how you can write Lulu out of your campaign is by no means the only way to handle Lulu. Whether you should even do so – and exactly what you replace her with – depends on your campaign and your players. If you feel like your players will appreciate having Lulu around and you don’t mind playing her (or having one of your players control her), then there’s no reason to change anything – she can be a lot of fun for the right table. You can also choose to minimize her role and actions at some points, while still keeping her around as a conduit for background information and to keep the characters on track.

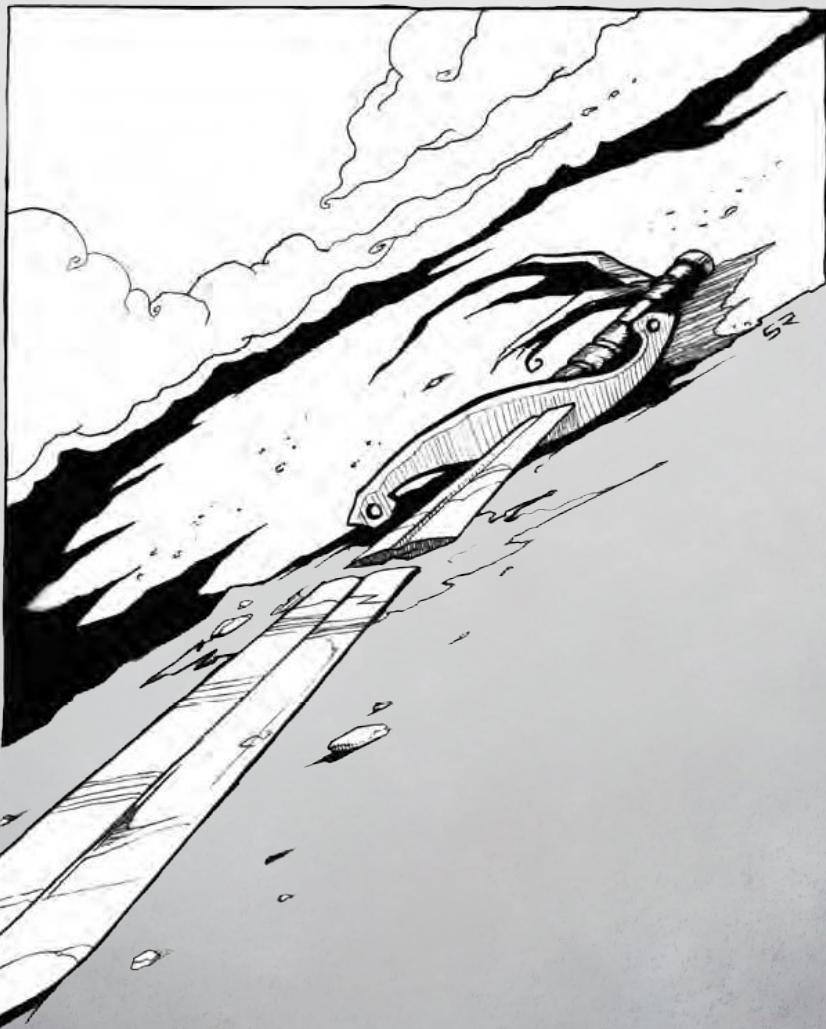
Other Alternatives to Lulu

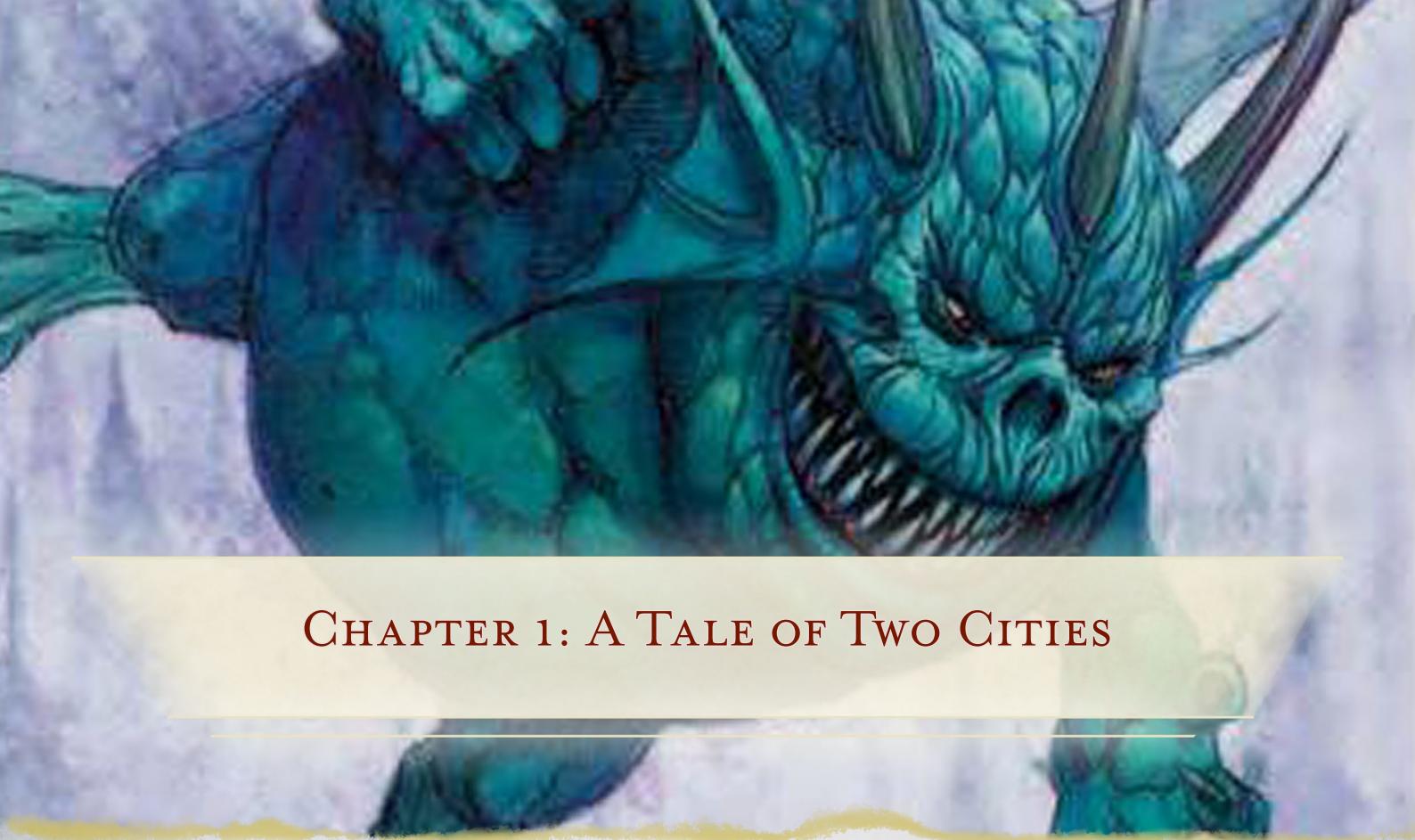
If you don’t like the idea of replacing Lulu with a shard from the *Sword of Zariel*, here are some other ideas:

The Hand of Zariel. You can have the gauntleted hand that Zariel lost during her fall replace Lulu. It fits nicely with Torm, whose holy symbol is a gauntlet, and can be played in much the same way as a shard from the sword.

Helm of Torm’s Sight. Perhaps Ulder or Pherria senses that more information can be wrought from the Helm of Torm’s Sight, but that doing so requires that the helm be repaired first. And who better to repair a broken artifact than a mad witch living in a dystopian junkyard?

Nothing at All. Nothing seems like a poor replacement, but it should be doable. If the characters only know that they have to find the *Sword of Zariel*, the plot suddenly becomes much more open as they leave Elturel. NPCs they meet may still point them toward the mystical Mad Maggie, who’ll send the party into a weird dreamworld to investigate Zariel’s fall. She doesn’t need a conduit for the ritual, only fools willing to risk their lives and souls in pursuit of the delicious memories.





CHAPTER 1: A TALE OF TWO CITIES



HAPTER 1: A TALE OF TWO CITIES SERVES AS the starting point for *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus*. It's an introductory chapter packed with action, where the party gets a feel for the seedy streets of Baldur's Gate and discovers background information, dark secrets, and new allies, setting them up for their descent into

RUNNING CHAPTER 1

Once you've set up for Chapter 1: A Tale of Two Cities, it's time to run the chapter for your players. It's a long chapter with a lot of content, most of which is very entertaining. Below we'll go over each of the major sections of the chapter – Elfsong Tavern, Dungeon of the Dead Three, Low Lantern, and Vanthampur Villa – offering advice and inspiration on how to run the content. First, however, we'll look at how you can restructure chapter 1 to fit your needs.

RESTRUCTURING CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 is, in essence, an investigation. Initially, it is a mission to discover – and eliminate – cultists of the Dead Three, which later evolves into an investigation into the Vanthampurs and their involvement in the disappearance of Elturel. This is a neat – and very fast – way of taking the party from 1st-level adventurers to seasoned 5th-level heroes before their descent into Avernus. However, if you want to get to the point (Avernus, in this case) faster, or if you have a party starting at a higher level, here's some advice on how you can restructure chapter 1 to better suit your needs.

The appendix "Finding the Dead Three" is included with this download. It contains two additional encounters in Baldur's Gate that you can use to make the chapter a bit less linear.

SKIPPING THE PIRATE ENCOUNTER

The most expendable block of content is probably the pirate encounter in Elfsong Tavern, which takes your party from level 1 to 2. While it's a good starting point for newer players, this bar fight with unnamed bandits is unrelated to the larger story and isn't integral to the campaign. If you want, you can simply start the adventure at 2nd level, skip the scuffle with the spurned pirates, and have Tarina insist on a few games of Baldur's Bones before she divulges any information about the cultists.

SKIPPING THE DEAD THREE CULTISTS

While the cultists of the Dead Three might feature more prominently in a future campaign, they play only a very minor part in this campaign. Their function is more-or-less just to get the party leveled up and to serve as a segue to the Vanthampurs. You can use Reya Mantlemorn (or any faction of your choice) as the hook instead (see Additional Hooks). Reya can inform the party that she thinks the Vanthampurs have Thavius Kreeg, as she hopes to learn more about Thavius and perhaps gain access to the Upper City; this will lead the party straight to Amrik in the Low Lantern.

STRAIGHT TO THE VANTHAMPURS

Most everything the party actually needs to know before going to Avernus can be found in the Vanthampur Villa: Thavius Kreeg and his *infernal puzzle box*, the *Shield of the Hidden Lord*, and Falaster Fisk. If you have Reya Mantlemorn give the party the mission, you could have the infiltration of the Vanthampur Villa act as the start of the adventure. This works especially well for a party that's around 4th or 5th level or has just played through *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*.

If your party is starting at 5th level (as opposed to 4th level), you can increase the difficulty of the Vanthampur Villa by placing Mortlock Vanthampur and a few bandits or cultists in the villa's Foyer (V3), and putting Amrik and his bodyguards in the Dining Room under the villa (V24).

ELFSONG TAVERN

The characters' first mission in Baldur's Gate takes them to Elfsong Tavern, where the following is meant to happen:

- **Find Tarina.** The party finds Tarina, who wants the party to help her kill a band of pirates who are coming to kill her.
- **Hear the Elfsong.** While waiting for the pirates, the party hears an elf spirit singing about Elturel. (They can also play tavern games and hear rumors!)
- **Kill the Pirates.** The characters fight Captain Dead-Eye and his crew of pirates.
- **Get Pointed to the Bathhouse.** Tarina tells the party that the cultists frequent a bathhouse several blocks away.

All told, the party's visit to Elfsong Tavern should make for some entertaining play, featuring roleplay, tavern games, an eerie elfsong, and a good ol' fashioned bar fight. Below is some advice on how to run Elfsong Tavern.

SETTING THE SCENE

You can set the scene by using the description below:

As you enter the Elfsong Tavern, you find yourselves immediately enveloped by the heat and noise of a busy taproom. On one side of the entrance stands a hulk of a woman, who clearly has orc or even ogre in her bloodline. On the other side of the door is an empty suit of armor – not just ordinary armor, you realize, as the empty helmet moves to glance at you for a moment before returning its eyeless gaze to the taproom. The room itself is filled with a wide variety of patrons, all of whom carry at least one weapon – and, in some cases, several – who are either discussing and laughing loudly, or engaging in hushed conversations in private booths. None seem to take particular interest in you. Two young men serve the tables, while the middle-aged man standing behind the bar gives a slight nod as you enter.

If the party is unsure where to start or how to find Tarina, you can describe the following scene:

Suddenly, a loud crash followed by intense shouting from above silences the taproom. A few seconds later, a disheveled, elderly woman stumbles down the stairs. At the bottom, she turns back and shouts back up the stairs:
"A fine lot you are, pushing an old woman down the stairs!
Fools too – I wasn't asking The All-Seeing to help me cheat, I asked him to help me uncover the real cheater. Yes, I said it – should be Tarina kicked off the table, not me!"

The woman is Rahima Sahiressa (*BG:DIA*, p. 16), an acolyte and astrologer who worships Savras, the All-Seeing God of divination and fate. She might come into play again in a minute (see "Killing Time – and Pirates!").

Cheating at Tavern Games

A cheating character makes a Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check against the passive Perception of all onlookers. On a success, they can reroll one of the game's skill checks or one of the dice they've rolled, if playing a dice game. On a failure, well, that depends upon who notices...

KILLING TIME – AND PIRATES!

When the party speaks to Tarina, she insists that they stay to help her against her old crew, which she thinks have found her. The book leaves it up to you to decide how long it'll take before the pirates show up to accost Tarina. The characters might wonder – and rightly so – if they're meant to stay in the tavern for days, as they wait for the pirates to eventually show up. Additionally, it's quite the coincidence that the party arrives just in time to help Tarina against her old crew.

By making just a few simple changes, we can make this scenario both more plausible and prevent the party from concluding that simply beating the information out of Tarina is the easiest way to gain the information they're after.

Instead of Tarina asking the party to help her against the pirates, you can have her insist that they instead play a few rounds of Baldur's Bones (or another tavern game) with her, before she tells them what she knows. Tarina sees this as an opportunity to cheat the party out of some coin (see "Cheating at Tavern Games") before handing over information.

You can have the party play a round or two of Baldur's Bones, with an ante of 2 gold pieces. Then present an interlude in the form of the "Elfsong" sounding throughout the tavern. You can then resume the game of Baldur's Bones, until the characters seem bored, confront Tarina with her cheating, or simply demand to get the information. This is when Lekard "Dead-Eye" Cadavrus and his bandits arrive downstairs, and a worried look comes across Tarina's face.

In a hushed voice, Tarina quickly fills the party in on her falling out with the pirates and offers her final bargain: "They's going to kill me and ain't a soul in here who'll dare do nothin'. 'Cept ye lot, that is. Ye'll have to, if ye want to learn what I knows 'bout dem cultists ye're lookin' fer."

Meanwhile, the pirates are making their way up the stairs, 'Dead-Eye' shouting at the top of his lungs: "I knows ye're here, Rhonda – or Tarina is it? That old bird said as much, swore it on her All-Hearing or All-Knowing or All-Something-god! We even pricked her a little to make sure she wasn't tellin' no tales!"

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER

A **bandit captain** and seven **bandits** is a hefty challenge for a party of 1st level adventurers. As a **bandit** herself, Tarina isn't going to provide much aid, and the book specifically says that other patrons won't intervene unless bribed. Here are some ways you can increase the party's chances:

- Allow the party to ambush the pirates as they come up the stairs, gaining a surprise round and funneling their enemies, as they block each other on the narrow staircase.
- Make Tarina a **spy** instead of a **bandit** and have the pirates focus their attacks on her instead of the party.
- If Tarina is killed, Dead-Eye offers a truce. If the party protests that they needed information from Tarina, Dead-Eye suggests they find a priest and speak to the corpse.
- If Dead-Eye is killed, any remaining bandits flee.

WHAT TARINA KNOWS

After helping Tarina, she tells what she knows about the bathhouse. If the characters fared badly in the fight with the pirates, you can also have her suggest that they get a good, long rest before going there – allowing them to get to 2nd level and prepare themselves for the hard challenges that await in the Dungeon of the Dead Three.

If you want to make the road to the bathhouse a bit less linear, you can also have Tarina instead supply the characters with information that can help them find out where the cultists hide, instead of sending them directly there. See the appendix "Finding the Dead Three" for more information.

DUNGEON OF THE DEAD THREE

The Dungeon of the Dead Three, underneath a public bathhouse run by the Vanthampurs, presents itself as a classic dungeon crawl, where the characters must fight – and kill – cultists of the gods Bane, Bhaal, and Myrkul.

JABAZ AND QURMILAH

We're told that the two masseuses who work in the bathhouse during the day (areas D3 and D4) know about the secret entrance but won't tell the party about it. This seems a bit counterproductive. Instead, if your party arrives at the bathhouse during open hours to question the masseuses but don't know where to go from there, you can have either Jabaz or Qurmilah seek them out as they leave through the bathhouse's garden. The masseuse explains their suspicions: "I think Mortlock is running some shady business on the side, but I'm too afraid to say anything. He's told me I can't hang around after hours, and there's a hidden door leading down to some dark, stinky place in the northern massage room!"

D7. BHAAL'S ALTAR

It seems a wasted opportunity not to give this altar a function of some sort. Consider having the words "*Present your work to the Lord of Murder*" be scratched into the wall underneath the steel mask. If a character places a body or body parts on the altar (either from the corpse in D6 or one of the cultists above) they gain a +2 bonus to Strength and Dexterity that lasts 1 hour, during which they feel an increased urge to spill blood and murder. If a character instead desecrates the altar (breaking it, pouring holy water on it, or something similar), they will feel as if they've rectified a great evil, which grants them 5 temporary hit points that last 1 hour.

D12. BANE'S ALTAR

As with Bhaal's Altar in D7, you can give this altar an inscription and function as well. Above the altar is written: "*Submit your servant to the Lord of Darkness.*"

A character who forces an unwilling creature to kneel by the altar (such as Klim, the noble already shackled in the room) can use the **iron consul**'s Voice of Command feature once as a bonus action within the next hour. Similar to Bhaal's altar, a character that instead desecrates Bane's altar gains 5 temporary hit points.

D13. MORGUE

Against characters of 2nd level, the **master of souls'** fireball is potentially campaign-ending. Consider replacing it with *fear* or *stinking cloud*, both of which work well thematically.

D17. MYRKUL'S ALTAR

Here we don't need to make any alterations, except granting a character that desecrates the altar 5 temporary hit points.

D18. GAS BUILDUP

This room threads a fine line between a non-issue and a total party kill. With an initial explosion dealing up to 4d6 fire damage, followed by a 25% chance of the roof collapsing for another 4d10 bludgeoning damage, this room could very well end the campaign if the characters are very unlucky.

Consider either ignoring the possibility of a roof collapse, or allowing the most likely character (such as a dwarf or a creature with a background in construction) to realize the structural damage with a DC 10 Intelligence check, giving them time to warn the other characters before the collapse.

D29. MORTLOCK VANTHAMPUR

The scene in this room is quite cinematic, but you can add even more drama, if you want to. As the party enters, Vaaz is standing over **Mortlock**, ready to finish him off. Seeing the party, Vaz hisses: "So you've brought friends, eh, Mortlock? A little late to the party, aren't they?" before stabbing Mortlock in the stomach and retreating towards area D33.

If the party starts to chase after Vaaz, Mortlock begs in a gravelly voice: "Hold up...My pouch...A potion...I'll tell you everything...I'll help you..." while fumbling with his pouch, clearly bleeding out. The potion is a *greater potion of healing*, which the party can either administer to Mortlock, or take for themselves.

Mortlock will then tell his story, either in an effort to get the party to heal him, or after they've given him the potion. He'll also warn them that Vaaz is very dangerous, and informs the characters that there are no other exits ahead. He suggests they replenish their strength (take a short rest) before facing the murderous cultist.

SCALING THE ENCOUNTER WITH VAAZ

A 2nd-level character usually has somewhere between 10–20 hit points, and deals an average of 5–10 damage in a round. Vaaz, a **death's head of Bhaal**, has 76 hit points (not counting his ability to shrug off three attacks) and deals upwards of 20–30 damage in a round with his two dagger attacks because of his Aura of Murder. Furthermore, he's resistant to magic and can stun a target each round.

In other words, Vaaz is a big mouthful for a party of 2nd-level adventurers, especially if they're low on hit points and resources. Depending on their strength and numbers, you may want to adjust the difficulty of this encounter:

- As mentioned above, you can have Mortlock suggest the party takes a short rest before facing Vaaz.
- If Mortlock has been healed, he'll aid the party against Vaaz, who in turn focuses his attacks on Mortlock.
- During combat, Mortlock will suggest to the party that they shove Vaaz toward the statue of Bane, hoping that the cultist will succumb to its magic.
- Describe Vaaz as wounded, having suffered a few hits from Mortlock's greatclub earlier, and reduce the cultist's hit points to a more appropriate number, depending on the party's strength.



LOW LANTERN

The characters' visit to Low Lantern is a social encounter bound to become a combat encounter. It presents itself as a fun scenario that should be pretty straightforward to run, and not too dangerous. By themselves, Amrik and his two bodyguards shouldn't be too much of an issue for a party of 3rd-level adventurers, especially if they've brought Mortlock. But, there's a wildcard in this scenario that should be handled with some care.

POISONED DRINKS

Amrik can signal the tavern staff to spike hostile characters' drinks with *torpor poison* – something he will probably do immediately when he realizes the characters suspect his involvement with the Dead Three cultists. It's a fun little gimmick, but since torpor poison has a DC of 15 and renders a character both poisoned and unconscious for 4d6 hours, it might end the encounter before it begins, or cause one or more players to sit out the entirety of the encounter (and the rest of the adventuring day!), which isn't very much fun.

NOTICING THE POISON

Instead of removing the poisoning from the encounter (which would be a shame), you can give the characters a fighting chance, allowing each character who is given a poisoned cup to make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check to realize that the drink smells or tastes weirdly before swallowing the poison. This allows them an extra chance to avoid being poisoned, although they won't realize in time to prevent other characters from drinking the poison.

ADDING MORE SAVING THROWS

Additionally, you can have a character who drinks the poison make three saving throws instead of one. The first one is made immediately, the second after three rounds, and the third after one minute. On the first failure they become poisoned and on the second failure they become incapacitated for the duration (4d6 hours). This gives them at least a chance to participate in the fight that inevitably breaks out when they realize Amrik is trying to poison them!

HANDLING METAGAMING

Finally, poisoning is always a bit hard to handle, since players might insist that their character wouldn't have drunk anything, once you inform them that they've been poisoned. On the other hand, you can't very well ask the players if their characters drink what they're offered without making it painfully obvious that the drinks have been poisoned.

To get around this, you can have Amrik toast the characters (for their cunning or some other perceived accomplishment), the city of Baldur's Gate, or the missing Archduke Ulder Ravengard, prompting the players to declare whether their characters participate in the toast or not. Alternatively, you can have players who argue that their characters wouldn't have drunk anything make a DC 13 Intelligence check, allowing them to have abstained on a success.

VANTHAMPUR VILLA

The Vanthampur Villa is where the party will finally unravel the conspiracy, face off with Duke Vanthampur and, most importantly, High Overseer Thavius Kreeg. Once again this looks much like a straightforward dungeon crawl, but there are a few things it pays to be aware of.

V13. THURSTWELL VANTHAMPUR

Thurstwell has important information, as well as the *infernal puzzle box*, which is vital to the story. There's no guarantee, however, that the party will go up before they head down into the sewer complex. Returning to fight Thurstwell after clearing out the sewers will seem a bit flat, so you may want to make it more likely that they confront Thurstwell first.

If Mortlock or Amrik is with the party, you can have them direct the party to Thurstwell – Amrik because he sees a chance to escape while the party kills his brother, and Mortlock because he wants vengeance. Alternatively, you can have the characters hear sounds of shrill shrieking and frustration, as Thurstwell is working on the puzzle box, hopefully drawing the party upstairs.

V26. TEMPLE OF ZARIEL

There is a magical mace hidden in this statue's head and neck, which a character can find by breaking the statue. That seems slightly unlikely – besides, +1 weapons are a bit bland. You can substitute *Heavensfall* (see page 3 of this document) for this mace, and as the party fights the barbed devil in this chamber, have one or more characters with a "righteous disposition" sense something calling to them from within the statue. This will increase the chances that they'll find it.

V36. VANTHAMPUR VAULT

In the book, there's not much advice on what to do with Thavius Kreeg if the party doesn't kill him. Indeed, it seems that Thavius Kreeg is meant to die, so that the party has a chance to face him later in Hell. But Thavius is also described as a cowardly liar, so it's unlikely he'd provoke the party into killing him.

If you want to make Thavius' death a bit more likely, you can have the former High Overseer break down in a fit of guilt and self-pity, as the party levels accusations against him. Moaning stuff like "Oh, what have I done, what have I done?" and "Why me? Why? Oh gods, why?" before finally collapsing in a sobbing heap on the floor, face-down. As the party – or Reya – turns him over, they see black foam on his lips and a small vial in his hand. Dying from the self-administered assassin's blood-poison (a very concentrated dose!), Thavius only has the time to mutter: "Fools...there's no sense fighting it...the Duke of Avernus will get her way. She always does..."

Alternatively, you can have Reya Mantlemorn – if she's with the party – kill the infernal High Overseer in a fit of righteous rage, once she realizes his treachery. This rash and foul misdeed might become a source of regret for the young woman, and serve as her motivation for traveling into the Nine Hells, where she hopes to find atonement. You can even have the Flaming Fist accuse the party of being co-conspirators to the murder, using it as leverage to press the party into going to Avernus to save Elturel.



CHAPTER 2: ELTUREL HAS FALLEN

CHAPTER 2: ELTUREL HAS FALLEN CRANKS UP the heat and kicks things into gear as the characters are sent straight to Hell! The heroes get their first taste of Hell as they face a steady stream of bloodthirsty devils, demons and undead while scrambling to make sense of what has befallen Elturel – and how to undo it!

RUNNING CHAPTER 2

The second chapter of *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus* presents an exciting and tumultuous scenario as the characters arrive in the fallen – or risen, depending on your perspective – city of Elturel, as it hovers precariously above the River Styx in the First Layer of Hell. On the following pages, you will find advice on how to run various sections of the chapter, but first, let's take a broader look at the chapter and discuss how to handle its pacing.

OVERVIEW AND PACING

Chapter 2 has four major plot points, also outlined in the book (*BG:DiA*, p. 53): arrive in Elturel, get to the High Hall, save Ulder at the Grand Cemetery, and escape from Elturel.

It's important to emphasize that chapter 2 is a very dense chapter, where a lot happens in a very short span of (in-game) time. All told, the characters are only meant to be in Elturel for two days, with only a single long rest after clearing the High Hall to keep them going through the many encounters in the chapter. Prescribing 6–8 combat encounters on both of these adventuring days, the chapter adheres closely to the official guidelines for an adventuring day (*DMG*, p. 84) – something we don't actually see very often.

However, dense adventuring days like these only work if the characters rest as prescribed, which doesn't always happen. The characters might feel like they could use a long rest before braving the dangers of the High Hall, or may choose to skip the long rest before going to the Grand Cemetery, because they feel they have to hurry.

PREVENTING PREMATURE RESTING

You can keep the party from trying to rest prematurely during their trek towards the High Hall by describing how their characters know that the combination of fiendish attacks, lightning strikes, and quakes make it impossible to take a long rest in any of the ruined houses. This forces the characters to continue on towards High Hall, even if they start to feel like they're getting low on resources. Only when they're deep in the catacombs and have ensured that no fiends are inside, will they be able to take a long rest successfully.

MAKING SURE THEY'RE RESTED

If the characters don't want to rest at High Hall – even though you know they will sorely need that rest later – you can have Pherria insist that they take the rest: "You're no good to us or Ulder if you're dead. You need to rest before you go." If they still refuse, you can have her use the altar of Torm's (area H3) healing ability to at least replenish their hit points, and then dial down some of the coming encounters.

ADJUSTING THE PACE

Even if you do the above, you'll probably still have to adjust things as you go. Don't be afraid to skip the last encounter of the day if the party has already been pushed to their limit – or make it a bit tougher if they haven't been pushed enough!

You can also change the pace completely. If you pile on with random encounters or beef existing encounters up, it's probably not an issue if the characters take several long rests. On the other hand, reducing the amount of encounters – of which there are plenty – can allow the party to complete the entire chapter in a single day of adventuring, if you want that.

ENCOUNTERS IN ELTUREL

The campaign book provides you with 10 different encounters that you can place in the streets of Elturel. The intention is that whenever the party moves from one named location to another, there's a 50% chance of an encounter.

As is always the case with random encounters, they should never feel like something the party has to slog through, but instead something that's entertaining and which contributes to the story. Below we'll go over the random encounters, offering thoughts on which encounters to run and how to run them, finishing with advice on how to plan the encounters.

COLLAPSED BUILDING

This encounter is a "skill challenge" in all but name, something that fourth edition formalized, and which it's awesome to see in an official fifth edition campaign. The premise is simple: perform six DC 10 skill checks before failing three in order to save three NPCs. You can increase the stakes – or make them obvious to the players – by having each failure result in the death of one of the NPCs (a misstep causes a beam to fall and crush a dwarf, etc.) and describing the panicked reactions of the remaining trapped NPCs.

You can also do as the book suggests and combine the encounter with the "Hateful Patrol" encounter, having the devils show up after either the first failed skill check, or after three successful checks, whichever comes first. Describe to the players how the building looks like will collapse in a matter of seconds if they don't do anything. During the encounter, it counts as a failed check if a round passes without at least one character spending their action trying to save the dwarves. This puts the party in a dilemma they will have to face many times in Avernus: protect themselves or save others? Cynicism or altruism? If the party manages to save any of the NPCs while fighting off devils, have Velkora be among the survivors and reward the party by having her cast *cure wounds* up to three times on injured characters.

CRY FOR HELP

This encounter is interesting because it introduces an **incubus** in the guise of a noncombatant to the party, although the description in the campaign book doesn't elaborate on how to handle the incubus and develop the situation. That is a shame, because the encounter is most fun if the party discovers Orin's true identity – or at least suspects him.

If you run the "Cry for Help"-encounter, you can develop the situation by doing one or more of the following:

- Faltrax takes a particular interest in the *Shield of the Hidden Lord* if the party has it, asking about its origin and make. If the party never becomes suspicious of Orin, you can have him attempt to steal the shield during a rest.
- If the characters aren't suspicious, Reya or even Harkina (see "Unwelcome Party") asks about Orin's smithy ("What street did you say your shop was on?"). Unable to provide a satisfying answer, Orin stealthily uses his Charm-ability in an attempt to put the woman under his sway. If he succeeds, he instructs her telepathically to lower suspicions: "Oh, yes, of course, now I remember your smithy..." This should serve to rouse the party's suspicions, while also giving Faltrax something to bargain with (a charmed NPC) if discovered.

GHASTLY MEAL

The party sees four suspicious figures sneaking into a residence, where they can find them eating the remains of the family that used to live there. After the ordeal, the party finds a young girl crying in a cupboard.

In itself, "Ghastly Meal" isn't a particularly interesting encounter, although it does give you a chance to underscore the gruesome reality of Elturel's fall. You can make the encounter more meaningful and interesting by tying Shorah and the **ghasts** more to the story.

The ghosts can be used to foreshadow Gideon Lightward and the Grand Cemetery, explaining how they were baptized by the crazed zealot of Zariel (whom they of course describe as an unparalleled genius and infernal savior!) and brought back to life after they perished during Elturel's fall, if the characters question them. They can be as vague as you want them to be, muttering and shrieking pieces of information in erratic bursts, such as: "Gideon Lightward! Zariel's redeemer, baptizer, savior!" or "The cemetery! Reboorn, ah-ha-ha! From life to death to life again, now feast, yes, we must feast on their flesh!"

Similarly, you can have the young girl Shorah Hevrn be the niece of Seltern Obranch (area H4) or Pherria Jynks (area H16). In this manner, she can serve to spur the party on towards the High Hall, where she's sure her relative is. Upon reunion, the relative showers the party with gratitude and you can give them inspiration as prescribed in the encounter.

GHOUL PACK

The party encounters seven **ghouls** in the streets; one is a rogue who wears a *+1 studded leather armor* and has a *potion of invisibility*. Beyond the treasure provided by this encounter – which is something that is always popular with players – there's little else going on here. There are a few ways you can enhance the encounter, however.

First, you can ramp up the intensity of the scene by increasing the number of ghouls to two dozen. Describe how the slobbering ghouls come howling down the street, looking into alleys in search of prey. If the party has some sense, they'll probably try to hide. As long as their group Dexterity (Stealth) check isn't completely horrendous (more than half of the group beats a DC of 10), have them successfully hide from most of the pack. However, they're spotted by the ghoul rogue at the rear of the mob, who directs a handful of other ghouls toward the party. This should give the encounter a bit more of a cinematic feel. If the party chooses to attack the two dozen ghouls, they should be able to handle them with some well-placed spells (*fireball* comes to mind), or if they decide to flee, you can turn the encounter into a chase instead (DMG p. 252). Additionally, as suggested under "Ghastly Meal", you can have the rogue ghoul foreshadow Gideon Lightward by blurting out orders like: "Yess! More food for the Savior! You can eats two, but we bring the rest to the cemetery for baptissm! Yess!"

Second, there's the magical treasure. A *potion of invisibility* is awesome, but a *+1 studded leather armor* may not be the most interesting treasure. A *glamoured studded leather* (you can include or exclude the +1 bonus to AC at your preference) has far more utility without being much more powerful.

Using Elturel's Hazards

Several hazards face the characters as they travel through Elturel (BG:DiA, p. 55). You can use these to spice up combat a bit. During combat, roll a d20 on Initiative count 20 each round. On a 1, a quake hits the city, forcing standing creatures to make a DC 10 Dexterity save or fall prone. On a 20, lightning strikes nearby, forcing everyone to make a DC 10 Constitution save or be blinded until Initiative 20 of the next round.

HATEFUL PATROL

A **merregon** and three **spined devils** are looking for demons and survivors in the streets of Elturel. This encounter doesn't offer too much on its own, especially when considering that the party will already be fighting spined devils on Torm's Bridges and merregons inside the High Hall Cathedral. As previously suggested, you can liven this encounter up by combining it with the "Collapsed Building"-encounter. Otherwise, you're probably best served by simply running a different encounter – and there are plenty to choose from.

IMP SALES PITCH

An **imp** offering an infernal bargain to a hungry halfling – this encounter should be both fun and fast. A social encounter is a good change of pace, while also introducing the characters to the ruthless economy of the Nine Hells. Just make sure you get your players to interact with the encounter – allow them to overhear the imp reading the terms of the contract back to the halfling, as they spot the pair speaking in an alley: "So, we're agreed: for the low price of your immortal soul – as defined in section 13c – you'll receive a month's worth of food, to be delivered immediately. It's the best bargain you'll get here."

NARZUGON CAVALIER

This encounter serves as a stark reminder of the powers in play and the dangers ahead. If you don't want to spend more time on encounters before the characters reach their destination, this encounter is a good one to use. It only takes a few minutes to serve its purpose: warn the party that they shouldn't try to fight every fiend they come across.

SPOUTS OF HELLFIRE

This encounter should also be resolved quickly. Note: It's not immediately clear from the description, but it seems the party gets both the *silvered longsword* and the *potion of giant strength (frost)* – a nice reward for a single Dexterity save.

VROCK PHILOSOPHY

This encounter has a fun premise, but needs to be handled with some care. If you run this encounter, make sure you present the **vrock** in a way that makes it likely the party will interact with it. You can describe how the players hear a rasping voice from just above, before they see the dejected vrock sitting on a rooftop near them. Use phrases like:

- "It just seems so pointless. I slaughter until I am slaughtered. Then I am given life again, only to do the same again?"
- "Can a being born to murder and slaughter change? What would I even do instead?"
- "What is the meaning of it all? Is there any? Perhaps it would feel more fulfilling to take a life, if I knew what value it held?"

If the characters speak with the vrock and succeed on their Persuasion check, you can also have the vrock aid the characters in their next combat encounter (such as with the devils on Torm's Bridges or the Hell hounds in front of the High Hall Cathedral). However, even though it is more philosophical than the typical demon, it is still a spawn of chaos. Thus, while readily throwing itself into battle against devils, it continues the fight after its initial prey has been destroyed, instead turning its attention to the characters with murderous fury. If a character takes an action to calm the vrock and succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, they can get the vrock to calm back down, upon which it immediately takes off, shrieking philosophical musings as it flies away to discover the true meaning of its existence.

ZOMBIE HORDE

This isn't the most inspired encounter, and **zombies** – even a dozen of them – will probably prove an easy challenge for the party. Since zombies can't talk, they can't really give the party much information either. You're probably better off running "Ghastly Meal" or "Ghoul Pack" if you want to challenge your party with some undead foes.

PLANNING ENCOUNTERS

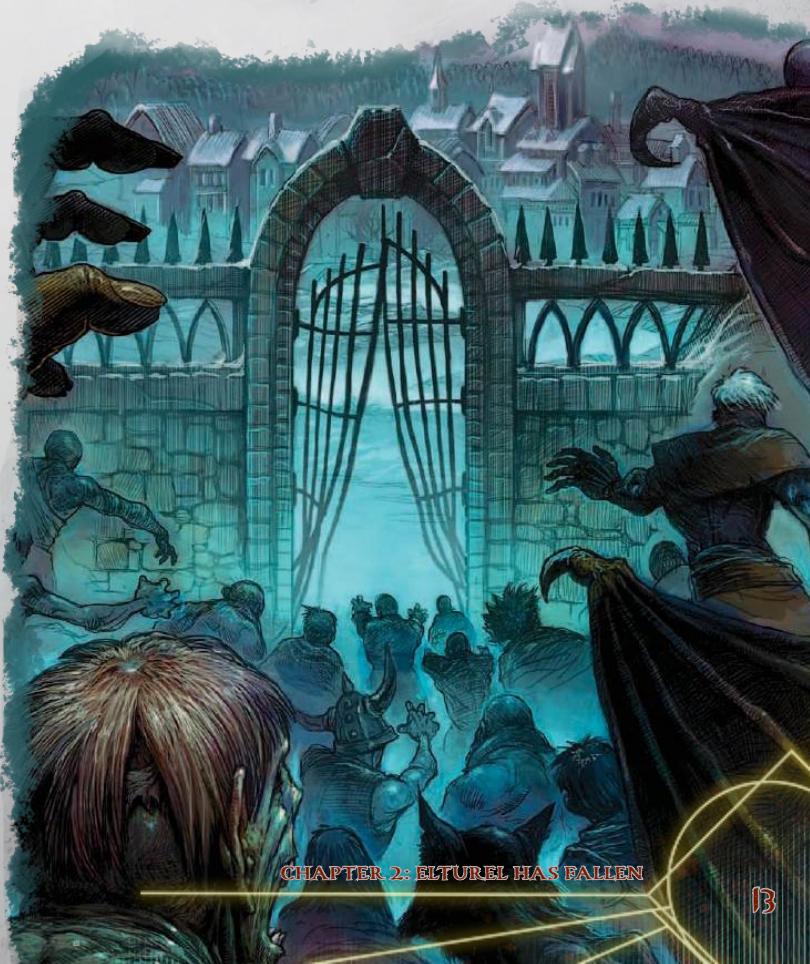
Just because they're called random encounters, they don't have to actually be random. You may find that planning which encounters to use and when to use them is preferable to simply rolling on the table as the party travels around.

Since there are plenty of combat encounters during chapter 2 – nearly a dozen, not counting any of the random encounters – you'd be perfectly fine not running any extra encounters at all. However, there are some fun options here, many of which don't necessarily involve combat, so you can certainly also get away with including several encounters as the party travels through Elturel. As long as you space them out properly and choose encounters that offer more than just combat – interesting roleplay scenarios, background information, fun challenges, etc. – you can easily place an encounter between each major location in Elturel. Here's an example of how the party's time in Elturel could look:

- **Arrival in Elturel: Unwelcome Party**
- *Random Encounter: Vrock Philosophy*
- **Torm's Bridges: Bridge Guardians**
- *Random Encounter: Imp Sales Pitch*
- **High Hall Cathedral: Hell Hounds + 4 devil groups**

— LONG REST —

- *Random Encounter: Collapsed Building*
- **Grand Cemetery: Undead and Demon Encounters**
- *Random Encounter: Narzugon Cavalier*
- **High Hall Cathedral: Ritual of Returning**



TORM'S BRIDGES

The idea is that the party must cross one of Torm's two bridges on the way from their arrival point to the High Hall. Guarding the bridge are two **bearded devils** and four **spined devils** – a moderate encounter for 5th level adventurers. The encounter is made easier both because characters will likely get the jump on the devils, and also because the party can activate holy runes on the bridge, dealing a bunch of radiant damage to the bearded devils.

While the encounter should be easy enough to run, your party might choose an alternate route, which the book doesn't prepare you for. We'll briefly cover these options below.

DECEPTION OR DIPLOMACY

The characters may think to talk their way past the devils instead of fighting them. Perhaps they can disguise themselves as devils bringing prisoners across, or maybe they'll even attempt to bargain with the devils.

You can spice up a social encounter with the bridge crew by giving the two bearded devils a little personality. Argash is a cunning and ambitious devil, while Yerrok won his spurs through sheer prowess in battle. The two devils are both vying for ascension and are interested in only three things: following orders (guarding the bridge), enriching themselves (slaves, loot, magical items), or pressing innocent souls into their service.

When approached, Argash introduces itself and its group in Infernal: "Argash of the 12th Infantry Legion, "Lucille's Whip". Who's you?"

DECEPTION

If the characters have disguised themselves as devils, Argash will ask them which legion they belong to. A character can remember names of real devil legions with a DC 15 Intelligence (History check), or try to make one up on the spot (which should be fun!). Argash and Yerrok don't know the name of every legion in Avernus, so any suitable name and a DC 10 Charisma (Deception) check should be enough to convince them. However, if they are bringing "prisoners" (undisguised characters or NPCs), Yerrok insists on taking one for itself. Unless the party can convince the devil that this would be against Zariel or Lucille's wishes (DC 13 Deception or Persuasion), they'll have to hand over a "prisoner" or fight the devils to get by.

DIPLOMACY

If the characters approach the devils with an offer of a bargain, they'll have to pay a steep price to get Argash and Yerrok to disregard their orders. However, as long as the characters don't outright say they're trying to save Elturel or Ulder Ravengard, a DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion) check and a prisoner, a magical item, or 500gp worth of loot for each of the two bearded devils should be enough to grant them passage across the bridge (although, if nothing else is stipulated in the agreement, the devils may still choose to attack the party once they've crossed!).

STEALTH

The characters may also choose to sneak their way past the devils. There are a few obvious ways to do this.

CRAWLING ACROSS

If the characters want to crawl along or on the underside of the bridge, allow them a DC 13 group Dexterity (Stealth) check to approach the bridge unseen. Once there, they must succeed on a group DC 10 Athletics check (assuming they have rope) to begin climbing along the sides or underside of the bridge. On a failure, they make noise, causing the devils to notice them and each character who failed the check starts combat hanging precariously from the bridge's side or bottom. Halfway across, the party must make the same two checks, with the same consequences of failure. If they succeed, they manage to cross the bridge unnoticed.

CAUSING A DISTRACTION

The characters might be able to cause a distraction, although making the devils completely vacate the bridge is very hard. The bearded devils sends a few spined devils to investigate minor disturbances (a single demon, a few human survivors, a strange sound, etc.) and will only leave their positions if something really calls their attention: a flock of demons, a command from a superior devil (such as a narzugon), or if a character activates the runes on the bridge. Still, even a minor distraction could give the party advantage on their checks to Stealth by the devils, or allow them to start combat in an advantageous position.



HIGH HALL

The High Hall is where the characters will link up with a large portion of the city's frightened survivors and will be pointed toward the Grand Cemetery and Ulder Ravengard. The High Hall is basically a dungeon crawl, but is written in an unusual manner; it's left entirely up to you to place the various encounters inside the High Hall as you see fit.

Since the encounters aren't tied to specific locations, you can decide exactly when you want to spring an encounter on the party. Take this opportunity to assess the strength and resources of the characters. They'll most likely take a long rest after clearing out the High Hall – the campaign book expects as much – so try to push them to the edge, but not beyond. If you can see they're getting down to their last resources, consider skipping one or two of the encounters.

Below we'll go over some the locations in the High Hall, as well as make some suggestions for placing encounters.

H3. CENTRAL ALTAR

This area is the heart of the Cathedral and also serves two important purposes. First, characters might be able to regain all(!) their hit points here. Second, they need to find a secret door here to get down to the catacombs.

As for the first purpose, you may want to either remove this feature or advertise it strongly, depending on the party's state. If they're already going pretty strong, there's no reason to top them off. However, if they're getting dangerously low, you can have a pious or knowledgeable character sense the altar's ability even without examining it – and, if you're feeling really friendly, remove the required DC 15 Charisma (Religion) check to acquire the healing.

As for the second part, considering that the characters need to get down to the catacombs to advance the story, it's hidden by a pretty steep DC that also requires a character to actively look for it. Consider allowing any character who spends a reasonable amount of time – five minutes or so – searching the altar to automatically find the secret door. To make sure the party realizes there's a secret door to look for at all, you can have Seltern Obranch, the druid in area H4, tell the party about the secret entrance, or allow a character to find humanoid and devil tracks leading to the altar with a DC 10 Wisdom (Survival or Perception) check.

You can also kill two birds with one stone by placing one of the encounters here, since the area has a lot of space for a good encounter. You can have the party surprise a group of devils here, who are examining the altar to find the secret door. You can make it even more obvious by having a devil exclaim: "Demon's blood! I swear on my soul, I saw them go down here, there has to be a way to open it!" If you place your encounter here, make the battle more interesting by having a clever devil make its last stand by Zariel's altar in area H6 (which gives non-worshipers of Zariel vulnerability to all damage).

H7. PIPE ORGAN

The choir level offers a cool opportunity for the party to interact with their environment by playing the pipe organs. Additionally, it's also a good location for an encounter, where devils can surround and attack the party from around the pipe organ. The party might find devils here already, or attract them if they sit down to play.

H15. UNKNOWN HERO

This place has an interesting story, but doesn't provide much information on how the party would learn it. You can allow a player to remember the story with a DC 15 Intelligence (History) check, or perhaps even replace the Unknown Hero with someone bonded to one of your player's characters (such as a friend, mentor, or relative), giving the burial place even greater impact. At your discretion, you can also replace the hero's nonmagical greatsword with the greatsword *Redemption* shown below.

Since this area is painful to fiends, it's also a cool place to put an encounter. Fiends might ambush the party as they are looking at the tomb, but be held at bay by the discomfort they feel if they come closer. They'll try to bait the characters out of the holy zone, or be forced to fight through the discomfort, if the characters are clever.

H16. MAIN CRYPTS

It seems suitably dramatic to have the characters arrive just in time to save the survivors from a host of devils. You can have a clever devil – such as the **white abishai**, Victuusa, or the **barbed devil**, Dreb – stand over the corpses of the last few knights, who died defending the terrified survivors. The devil is negotiating a contract with Pherria Jynks, who's about to sign over her soul to the devil in return for the safety of the other survivors. The contract stipulates only that the devil offering the contract won't harm them, not that any other devil or creature won't – a fact that Pherria Jynks has not noticed, but that a character might realize with a DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check. Interference in the negotiations will very likely cause combat to break out.

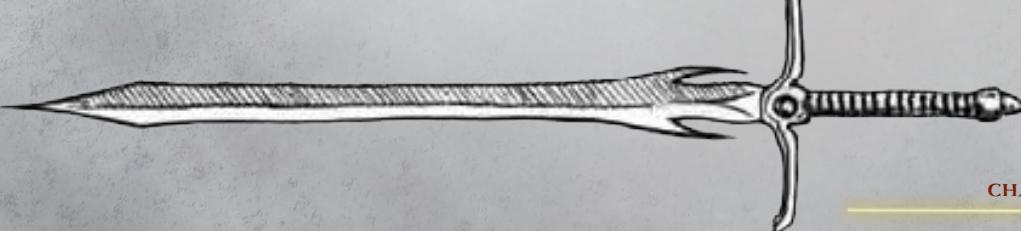
An important point here! Remember to underscore the fact that Pherria is an expert in possession and exorcism, so the characters will realize that she can help them with Ravengard, after they rescue him from the Grand Cemetery.

REDEMPTION

Weapon (greatsword), very rare (requires attunement)

Once per turn, when you reduce a fiend or undead to 0 hit points with this magical weapon, you can have that creature instantly evaporate in a radiant burst. All fiends and undead within 30 feet of that creature take 2d8 radiant damage and must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be blinded until the end of their next turn.

Undying. While you are holding this magic weapon and damage reduces you to 0 hit points, you can choose to remain conscious instead. You still must make death saving throws, and you suffer the normal effects of taking damage while at 0 hit points. However, if you would die due to failing death saving throws, you don't die until the end of your next turn, and you die only if you still have 0 hit points. This effect ends if you regain hit points. Once used, this property can't be used again until the next dawn.



GRAND CEMETERY

The Grand Cemetery is another cool location, where the characters get to interact with both fiends and undead. Below we'll go over some of the locations within the cemetery's chapel, offering advice on how to run them.

G1. WALK OF BRAVERY

This is an exciting encounter, with shadows and specters coming out of pillars carved to resemble old heroes. Make sure to let the characters remember the names with a History check and discover the pillars' ability to harm undead before combat with the undead begins. You can also consider allowing a pillar to be activated with a bonus action, making it more likely that the characters will use this fun feature.

One of the specters moves away to warn Gideon that the characters are coming, prompting Gideon to move to G4. It isn't described in the book, but we can assume that he'll approach the chapel from behind, entering through G3. Still, any character who's come around the corner will notice Gideon slip out of his living quarters.

G3. CHAPEL OF MOURNING

A +2 weapon is hidden here, but to get it, a character has to kneel before the window and say a prayer – which isn't very likely without some prompting. If you want to make this a bit more likely, you can describe that Lathander's morning prayer is written on the stained glass window, and allow a character (or any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Religion check) to know that followers of Lathander would usually pray before this window. If you think a +2 weapon is a bit bland – or skews bounded accuracy too much – consider giving a lucky character *Redemption* instead, if you haven't done so already.

G4. VESTMENT CHAMBER

The encounter in this area has some complexity. Two **mezzoloths** are here, which appear to serve **Gideon Lightward**, although the book doesn't explicitly say so, and are soon attacked by a fiendish **giant scorpion** and five **dretches**. Gideon is either present already – because a specter warned him – or arrives during the encounter.

Now, what happens here both depends on your characters and on how you play Gideon Lightward. The most interesting and fun scenario is if the characters make a temporary alliance with Gideon, only to have to deal with him later (see "Leaving the Chapel"). To make this scenario more likely, play Gideon Lightward as the crazed fanatic he is, but have him appeal to the characters by openly offering information and suggesting they aid him in destroying the demons. If the characters profess that they are here to save Ravengard, you can have Gideon seem to accept this and allow the characters to pass, planning to take the matter up with the party when they leave the chapel again (after they've helped him clear the place of demons).

G9. MAIN OSSUARY

A **quasit** spy is here, which we're told will trail the party. To give the characters a chance to spot it, you can roll a Dexterity (Stealth) check with advantage (because it's invisible) for the quasit (it has +5 on Stealth). If the roll is lower than a character's passive Perception, that character hears the quasit – perhaps tiny claws clacking on the ground or the scrape of a tail against the tiles. This allows them a chance to use magic to uncover the source of the noise, or attack (with disadvantage) the square where the quasit is.

G12. VAULT OF ASCENDANCE

At the end of their journey, the party arrives here to find the stunned Ulder Ravengard and a demonic portal. After some seconds, three **minotaurs** are supposed to appear. Since the party has slogged through two encounters with **minotaur skeletons** already, you can spice things up a little and throw a **howler** or two **barlguras** at the party instead, which should be about as dangerous an encounter, while still fitting the theme. Below you'll also find statistics for the *Helm of Torm's Sight*, if you want your characters to be able to use it.

LEAVING THE CHAPEL

We've been told about the multitude of skeletons and undead that haunt the cemetery, and the book says that Gideon will question the party, but otherwise leaves it up to you to decide how to handle the encounter with Gideon.

If the party hasn't dealt with Gideon already, you can assess their strength and try to tailor an encounter that'll give them a perilous challenge, making them spend their last resources of the adventuring day. Have Gideon wait for them as they leave area G2, surrounded by as many zombies, skeletons and shadows as you think will be a suitable challenge for the party in their current situation. Depending on your party, Gideon plus 2–5 of each type of undead is probably about right.

It seems fitting that Gideon will demand that Ulder Ravengard be killed, thinking that the duke is responsible for rousing the demons. He might even promise that the party can keep the *Helm of Torm's Sight* ("We'll cut the demon-lover's head off – what you do with it after is up to you..."). If the party refuses, they'll have to come up with a good lie or explanation (DC 15 Deception or Persuasion, as described in the book) to get by without a fight.

If the party has already dealt with Gideon, or get by him without much of a scratch, and you feel like they could use a final challenge to round the day off, spring one of the random encounters from earlier on them. In either fight, have enemies attack Ulder Ravengard – drawn by the helmet's magic – prompting the party to defend him and making for a more interesting encounter.

HELM OF TORM'S SIGHT

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

While attuned to this helm and wearing it, you have advantage on Wisdom (Insight) checks made to determine a creature's true intentions.

You can also cast the spell *commune* using this helm, without expending a spell slot and requiring no material components. You can only use the spell to commune with the deity Torm, who answers you through cryptic visions and sensations. Once you use this feature, you can't do so again until you've finished a long rest.

Demonic Curse. When you attune to this helm for the first time, you must make a DC 16 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, you're stunned until the helm is removed. As long as you're stunned this way, but still alive, the helm can only be removed with a *wish* spell, or an elaborate ritual performed by a follower of Torm. You can repeat this saving throw every 24 hours, ending the stunned condition on a success.

ESCAPING THE SIEGE

The last part of chapter 2 deals with the revelations granted by the *Helm of Torm's Sight*, as well as how the party can escape the siege of Elturel to go look for the *Sword of Zariel*.

RITUAL OF RETURNING

This ritual is an inventive and exciting way to deal with Ulder Ravengard's situation, and also makes for a neat little encounter. If the characters perform the ritual while very worn down, you may want to dial the encounter down by reducing the force damage dealt by the ritual, and maybe remove a single **will-o'-wisp**.

If you want more show and less tell, you can also have the character who's holding the sword during the ritual see what Ulder Ravengard sees, describing a part of the vision for each round they manage to maintain the connection. This could make the characters feel more involved, instead of just receiving a narration from Ulder afterward.

THE PATH FORWARD

This section is where you lay the course for the next chapter – and for the rest of the campaign, really – through the combined efforts of Ravengard and Lulu. You may encounter a few issues here, depending on your characters.

First, just as in chapter 1, it's heavily assumed that the party is already dedicated to saving Elturel, and will do so without question or additional reward. Second, Lulu tells the party that she remembers the kenku and Fort Knucklebone, but doesn't really explain why that would help them find the sword; it's all a bit vague and not entirely logical.

As for the first issue, the **Additional Hooks** described earlier can provide some inspiration, but you may still want to underscore why your party should try to help Elturel at this point. You can play on the party's sense of self-preservation (Pherria: "It's far easier to get into Hell than to get out of it. This sword might be the only way to bring Elturel and everyone in it – including you – back to the Material Plane!") or even their greed (Ulder: "Although I am thankful for the assistance you have provided already, I fear Elturel still needs your aid. Find this sword, save the city, and both I and the treasury of Baldur's Gate will be forever in your debt!").

The second issue underscores something that could bother some DMs throughout the campaign: Lulu's appearing and disappearing memories are used to guide the characters through Avernus, basically telling them (often without much of an explanation) where they must go and why.

By making a few alterations to the scene, we can present a more logical – and perhaps more exciting – way of sending the party toward Fort Knucklebone. Start by leaving out the last part of the vision, instead ending with the winged elephant looking at the bloody scab growing out of the ground. Have Ulder point to Lulu and say "You! You're the winged elephant from the vision. You know where the sword is!" This causes Lulu to emit a sad trumpet sound, as she bemoans the fact that she can't remember anything. The objective now isn't to get to Fort Knucklebone because of the two kenku, but to find someone who can help Lulu remember. If the party doesn't come to this conclusion by themselves, you can have Pherria interject: "Restoring her memory is beyond me. But in a place like this, there has to be someone powerful enough to unlock her memories. You need to get out of the city and find that someone!"

After this, there are several ways the party can eventually find their way to Fort Knucklebone. If they have the *Shield of the Hidden Lord* with them, Gargauth can tell them about Mad Maggie, a night hag seer, who lives in a junkyard nearby. You can also let them wander around the plains of Avernus

for a bit, before they meet one of the other warlords (who is able to point them toward the night hag) or they run into Chukka and Clonk (who may or may not remember Lulu) as the two kenku are having problems with their infernal war machine. Either way, there are plenty of ways you can have the party eventually going toward Fort Knucklebone without having Lulu literally point the way.

If you'd rather run the chapter entirely without Lulu, see **Handling NPCs** earlier in this document.

LEAVING ELTUREL

Before the party can get to Fort Knucklebone, they first have to get out of Elturel – which is no small task. Below we'll go over some of the options provided in the book.

CLIMBING DOWN

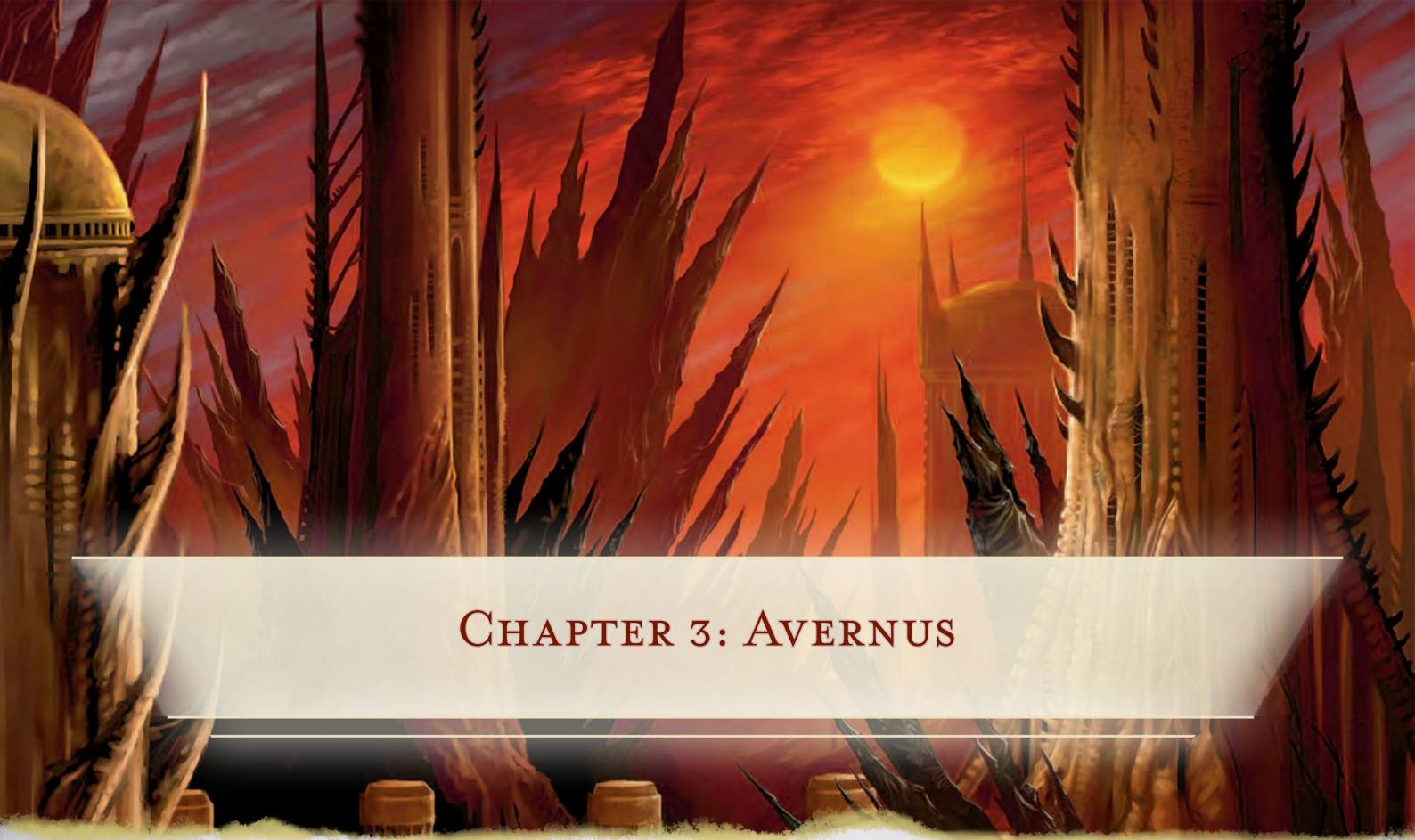
Braving the chains is presented as an option, although a dangerous one. Characters take damage every minute, which may even cause them to fall. This means that how quickly the characters can get down is important, but the section doesn't mention how long the chains are. Earlier in the chapter, however, Elturel is described as hanging 500 ft. above the ground, so we can go with that. This means it'll take the characters roughly 3 minutes to get down, climbing at a normal pace (15 ft./turn). They can double that speed, but must then make a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check each turn or fall. You can make climbing at double speed a bit more enticing by reducing the amount of checks to once per minute (which rounds up to 2 if they hurry the whole way), and allowing the same additional extra measures to prevent falling because of the Athletics check as is afforded a creature that fails their Constitution saving throw while climbing the chain. Even with these precautions and the relatively easy checks, the odds that at least one character will fail miserably and pay the ultimate price are high enough to make this an option best avoided.

FLYING

This is by far the best option, but one you could consider spicing up by throwing an encounter at the party while they're descending. Twelve **spined devils**, as the book suggests, seems like a suitably dangerous encounter for an airborne party, but you could also go with two **vrocks** or a **black abishai** and a couple of **imps**.

PREVENTING DISASTER

If the characters somehow wind up surrounded by the devil army below, it doesn't have to be the end of the campaign. You can have the **pit fiend** Lucille tower over the characters, preparing to order the army of devils to slaughter them, just as **Bel** appears out of thin air (or contacts Lucille telepathically) to intervene. Realizing that the characters have the potential to throw a wrench in Zariel's plans (perhaps recognizing Lulu), the archduke's treacherous advisor orders Lucille to let the characters pass unharmed through the ranks. Having no choice but to obey, Lucille hisses: "The archduke will hear of this, Bel. And I do not think she will be pleased," before turning to the party and admonishing: "You are lucky this time, but luck has a habit of running out quickly in the Nine Hells. We will see each other again soon enough" While it never feels great to save the party with a *deus ex machina*, it beats letting the campaign end just as it is getting started – plus, it underscores the devils' complicated and eternally evolving hierarchy.



CHAPTER 3: AVERNUS

CHAPTER 3: AVERNUS IS WHERE THE characters are finally plunged into the campaign's namesake, as the training wheels are taken off and they're sent into the desolate steppes of Avernus to save Elturel (and themselves)! Chapter 3 is an infernal hotbed of savage demons and scheming devils, greedy warlords and unscrupulous merchants, featuring devilish novelties such as infernal war machines, demon ichor, and *soul coins*.

RUNNING CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3 is the sandbox of *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus*, and also where most of the campaign's story is told, from Zariel's fall from grace and the tension between her generals Olanthus and Haruman, to the treacherous archdevils Bel and Tiamat waiting for the right moment to strike. In many ways, this is the pivotal chapter – the chapter where the players will spend most of their time.

There's a ton of material in the chapter, which also means that we can't cover everything in this guide. On the following pages, we'll go over the "mandatory" content, offering advice on how to run, enhance, and expand upon the various scenarios, locations, and encounters in the "Quest for the Sword." You'll also find advice on how to open the chapter up more, giving your players additional options and making it feel more like a sandbox.

Quick note here: included in this download is also the appendix "Avernus as a Sandbox," a write-up on three blog posts detailing how to make Avernus into a sandbox, which can be used in conjunction with the information in this chapter.

OVERVIEW AND PACING

Chapter 3: Avernus is the bread and butter of *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus*. It's a chapter that's supposed to last a while, allowing the characters to experience Avernus in its full infernal glory. Experience it to such a degree that the characters progress all the way from 7th to 11th level.

There is one issue with the chapter, as it is presented in the book: its pace. Chapter 3 is supposed to cover a lot of ground and heap experience on the party, but it could end up being shorter and feeling faster than you might want.

Below we'll quickly summarize the encounters in the chapter and analyze the chapter's pace when sticking to the encounters required to advance the story. In essence, chapter 3 can be divided into three main sections: Fort Knucklebone, Haruman's Hill, and the Path of Devils or Path of Demons. We'll measure each section in "adventuring days," which simply describes when the party has spent enough resources, e.g., hit points, spell slots, class abilities, etc., to warrant a long rest (a single day of adventuring).

FORT KNUCKLEBONE

Fort Knucklebone features a lot of fun social encounters and skill checks, but is pretty light on actual encounters:

- Potential for a fight with up to 10 or more **redcaps**
- Dream 1 (low potential for a little psychic damage)
- Dream 2 (six **spined devils**)
- Dream 4 (low potential for a lot of psychic damage)

At 7th level, this is barely worthy of an adventuring day, and only if the characters get into a fight with the redcaps. If they encounter Raggadragga and his lycanthropes before having a long rest, though, it can probably make for a day of adventuring.

HARUMAN'S HILL

At Haruman's Hill, the characters are likely to face twenty **stirges**, a **nightmare**, and a **narzugon**. That's a pretty deadly encounter, and more than enough to give a fully-rested party of 7th-level adventurers a run for their money – or simply make them run away (here's hoping they have an infernal war machine)! Assuming they do the latter, but take some damage in the process, the eight **hellwasps** in the Hellwasp Nest should round out the adventuring day – and advance them to 8th level.

PATH OF DEMONS

The Path of Demons features some of the more interesting locations in Avernus, including the flavorful Crypt of the Hellriders, but doesn't have a lot of combat encounters:

- Spawning Trees (maybe five **bearded devils**)
- Tower of Urm (maybe two **nycaloths**)
- Obelisk (5d8 lightning damage + more effects)
- Pit of Shummrath (eight **spined devils**)
- Crypt of the Hellriders (maybe **wraiths**, **ghosts**, and eight **mummies**)
- Kotschtchie's Maw (**chain devil** and four **hell hounds**)

The only two certain encounters here are at the Pit of Shummrath and at Kostchtchie's Maw. Even if we assume that the two nycaloths actually ambush the party (only trying to kidnap a character, not fight to the death), the entire Path of Demons could still feasibly be completed without a long rest.

PATH OF DEVILS

- Bone Brambles (maybe three **banshees**, three **shambling mounds**, and a **thorn trap**, and then two **banshees** and a **treant**)
- Bel's Forge (maybe four **fire giants**)
- Sibriex (maybe two **chain devils** and an **arcanoloth**)
- Wrecked Flying Fortress (six **vrocks**, five **bone whelks**, a **remorhaz**, ten **stirges**, and a warlord)

The Path of Devils offers a bit more in the way of encounters. The combat at the Bone Brambles and Bel's Forge could probably make for a good day of adventuring. The encounter at the Sibriex is pretty deadly, even at 10th level, but isn't mandatory. The Wrecked Flying Fortress comes out to a decent day of adventuring in itself. All told, you're probably looking at 2–3 days worth of encounters.

SO WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

If we add the above together, the characters could quite realistically finish chapter 3 in less than a week of in-game time. This is potentially problematic for two reasons.

Sense of Accomplishment. The characters are supposed to advance from 7th to 11th level. Doing so in a handful of days just doesn't seem realistic, plus you could possibly likely have characters leveling up in the middle of an adventuring day, if you want to fit the book's pace. Big deal, you might say, I'll just insert some travel time between encounters (Avernus allows you to decide for yourself how long travel takes). And while that does solve this problem, it inevitably leads to our second problem...

Challenge and Tension. The best combat encounters are the tense ones – when the characters are nearly spent after a hard day of encounters, but have a last obstacle to overcome. A single encounter of easy or medium difficulty, let's say eight spined devils, is trivial and pointless to a party of 8th level adventurers if it is the only encounter of the day. The challenge then becomes to pace chapter 3 in a way in which you can give your players a sense of true accomplishment over a span of time and still keep the adventuring days tense and challenging.

How Long Should it Take?

A very important question is never answered in the campaign book: How long should the characters' quest for the *Sword of Zariel* take? When will the chains of Avernus pull the unfortunate city of Elturel into the River Styx?

It is up to you to answer that question. The easy way out is to give no answer, allowing the party to take as long as they need, but a solid deadline can often help build tension and keep the party moving forward. It seems like somewhere around 30 days is a pretty good spot, but since you control the travel times between destinations, you could easily put it as high as several months (a flavorful deadline could be 99 days from its arrival in Avernus). Going much higher might make it unrealistic that there would be anything left of Elturel to save!

A solid deadline has another benefit: it makes infernal war machines have a much greater impact. If you can make the party understand that they need the infernal war machines to travel quickly enough, you'll put them in a perpetual dilemma, where their need for *soul coins* to fuel the machines is a constant source of tension.



FINDING THE RIGHT PACE

There are several tools that you can use to better fit the pace of the story to you and your players' preferences, and – luckily – it doesn't have to be either hard or complicated to use them. Below, we'll go over some of the options available to you.

EXTENDING TRAVEL TIME

Avernus comes with a map showing most of the locations described in chapter 3. The map doesn't show true distances however, so it's left up to you to decide how far it is between locations and how long the party travels.

You can obviously use this to make the chapter feel longer by simply extending travel time. However, as mentioned earlier, if you allow the characters long rests between each location, most encounters will end up feeling trivial and without tension. The passage of time also has other ramifications – there's the threat of Elturel being pulled down into the River Styx, as well as the war machines that require *soul coins* to drive (see "How Long Should It Take?" on the previous page for a brief discussion of this).

ADDING MORE ENCOUNTERS

Chapter 3 comes with quite a bit of additional content, from Avernian warlords and the Wandering Emporium to Zariel's Flying Fortress! All of these, plus anything else you can come up with, can be used to fill out the chapter and individual adventuring days. Of course, you run the risk of "encounter-fatigue" – the party going from encounter to encounter without feeling like they're progressing the story – so you'll have to think about how you space out the action. Use combat encounters – such as an angry warlord – to increase tension on adventuring days that would otherwise end early, and use social encounters such as the Wandering Emporium to give your players a much-needed break from combat encounters and a feeling that time is passing.

MAKING ENCOUNTERS TOUGHER

Toughening up encounters doesn't solve the time-related issue with pacing, but can be used to ensure that the pace stays exciting, even if the characters have access to plenty of long rests. When you're about to present the characters with an opportunity for a long rest, beef up the last encounter they'll face to increase tension. On the following pages, you'll find advice on how to make various encounters in chapter 3 more challenging and fulfilling.

CONTROLLING RESTS

Another way to pace the chapter is to control when the party can take long rests. You can easily decide that the hellish conditions make it impossible to take a long rest unless the party can do so in a "safe" location of your choosing: Fort Knucklebone, the Bone Brambles, the Wandering Emporium, and so on. This way, you can prolong the amount of time that passes during travel without allowing the characters to simply take a long rest after every encounter. The Wandering Emporium is amazing for this as well, since you can control when it appears and disappears, and even have Mahadi charge the party *soul coins* for lodging.

The downside to this, however, is that some classes – spellcasters especially – can be severely hampered if you restrict their access to long rests. So use this tool wisely, and together with your ability to extend travel time, to give your players the sense that a lot of time is passing (because they're traveling for days, even if they're not getting any long rests). Additionally, you may want to rule that while the sleep they get while traveling (disturbed, unsafe, fitful) isn't enough to replenish hit points, hit dice, spell slots and abilities, it is still enough to prevent them from racking up levels of exhaustion.

Example: Bringing It Together

That's a lot of words about pacing, but how do you actually put it into practice? Below is an example of how chapter 3 could play out for an adventuring party. You can use this example (which is only that!) as inspiration when planning out the chapter – just be ready to improvise and change plans when the characters inevitably get themselves entangled in some foolish infernal endeavor!

- **Day 1 (Fort Knucklebone).** The party spends the entire day at Fort Knucklebone, taking a long rest after.
- **Day 2 (Plains of Avernus).** Traveling.
- **Day 3 (Plains of Avernus).** Raggadragga attacks, engaging the party in an exciting war machine chase!
- **Day 4 (Haruman's Hill).** The party must face Haruman after a night without a long rest. Lulu is abducted by a Hellwasp during the fight, and the party is badly wounded.
- **Day 5 (Wandering Emporium).** The party happens upon the Wandering Emporium. Here they get their first long rest since Fort Knucklebone. Mahadi tells them where to find the Hellwasp Nest so they can rescue Lulu.
- **Day 6 (Plains of Avernus).** Traveling.
- **Day 7 (Hellwasp Nest).** The party clears the Hellwasp Nest, saves Lulu, and takes a long rest in the empty nest (AND ADVANCES TO LEVEL 8!)
- **Day 8–9 (Plains of Avernus).** The party encounters Smiler the Defiler while traveling but doesn't fight him.
- **Day 10 (Demon Zapper).** The party speaks with the dao at the Demon Zapper and they are sent towards the Bone Brambles.
- **Day 11 (Plains of Avernus).** Traveling.
- **Day 12 (Bone Brambles).** The party faces a string of combat encounters at the Bone Brambles before finally being allowed a long rest.
- **Day 13–14 (Plains of Avernus).** Traveling; then they have an encounter with Bitter Breath, who's looking for Smiler the Defiler, and end up fighting the Warlord.
- **Day 15 (Uldrak's Grave).** The party arrives at Uldrak's Grave. Here they have an encounter with demons trying to capture the spined devil.
- **Day 16 (Wandering Emporium).** A happy reunion with Mahadi and his Wandering Emporium. The party gets a long rest (AND ADVANCES TO LEVEL 9!).
- **Day 17 (Plains of Avernus).** Traveling; they see some "sundered chains" but little else.
- **Day 18 (Arkhan's Tower).** The party arrives at the tower and has a cordial discussion with Krull.
- **Day 19 (Plains of Avernus).** Krull has purposefully led the party on a route that goes past the camp of Princeps Kovik and the Eighth Remnant, because the devils have stolen some of Tiamat's treasure. A fight ensues.
- **Day 20 (Monument to Tiamat).** The characters trade.
- **Day 21 (Plains of Avernus).** Traveling.
- **Day 22 (Uldrak's Grave).** Delivery and get blood.
- **Day 23 (Demon Zapper).** Delivery and get letter – but in her lust after the *Shield of the Hidden Lord*, Ralzala betrays the party after fulfilling her promise, and attacks!
- **Day 24 (Plains of Avernus).** Traveling.
- **Day 25 (Bel's Forge).** Bel tests the party with his fire giants, but allows them to take a long rest after.
- **Day 26 (Sibriex).** The party gets the location of the Wrecked Flying Fortress.
- **Day 27 (Wrecked Flying Fortress).** The party clears out the fortress, getting the control rods and securing themselves a spot to take a well-earned rest.
- **Day 28 (Bel's Forge).** The party gains the location of the Bleeding Citadel and can head out toward it, with only a few days left until Elturel's destruction!

FORT KNUCKLEBONE

The junkyard known as Fort Knucklebone is an exciting location that should give your party at least a session or two worth of entertainment. In addition to the pivotal Dream Quest that takes place here, there are some flavorful minor tasks the party can undertake to pass the time. Below we'll give you some recommendations on how to run Fort Knucklebone, enhancing and building upon the information in the book.

ENTERING THE FORT

The party's entrance to Fort Knucklebone is pretty well described, but here's a brief summary:

- The characters are tormented by the redcaps at the gatehouse, who make them do foolish things to get in ("Jump on one leg! Pockets full of sand or no entry! The little one slaps the tall one, or the gate won't open!").
- After entering, Chukka and Clonk recognize Lulu and fetch Mad Maggie.
- Mad Maggie appears and quickly offers to unlock Lulu's memories, but it will take a while to prepare the ritual.

From here, the party is on their own for a while, giving them time to help various NPCs around Fort Knucklebone before the ritual with Mad Maggie begins. To get the party started, you can describe one or more of the following scenes to the party after Mad Maggie disappears back into her hut:

- As the large creature that follows the hag moves to follow her, but it moans and does a bit of a hopping dance. A few redcaps walking by point and laugh, mimicking the dance.
- You notice that one of the ravens on the witch's shoulders is sending you a long stare, while seemingly whispering something to the other raven, which nods solemnly.
- The two kenku, Chukka and Clonk, are swearing profusely in their high-pitched squawks, while angrily hammering on one of the big, infernal vehicles.
- Across the junkyard, a flying skull enveloped in green flames seems to be looking for something, peering into huts and blasting away pieces of scraps.

Additionally, it might help the characters understand that helping around Fort Knucklebone can earn them awesome rewards (like an infernal war machine!) from Mad Maggie. To ensure this, have any NPC requesting aid from the party say as much ("Help me and I'll put in a good word for you with Mad Maggie – she can be generous when she wants to be!").

HELPING CHUKKA AND CLONK

Chukka and Clonk have a simple problem: A spiky gear within a Demon Grinder isn't working properly. In the book, the issue is resolved by identifying it with a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana or Investigation) check and magic similar to *dispel magic* or *protection from good or evil*. There's nothing wrong with that solution, but you can expand upon it by running "Hezrou Hunt" as described below.

HEZROU HUNT

When the issue has been identified, Chukka says in Mad Maggie's voice, "By Beshaba, whatever did an innocent woman like me do to deserve this!" before continuing in a deep and rumbling voice (Chukka and Clonk's old duergar mentor), "'Tis the hezrou-gear. Can't be repaired. Ain't nothin' else to do but catch a new one." Looking at the redcaps running around, Chukka blurts out in one of their shrill voices, "Blood! Haha, kill! Kill it faster, faster!" and shakes its head. Looking up at the party, Chukka says in the duergar's voice, "Gimme a hand with this, I'll owe ye. Whaddaya say?"

Chukka and Clonk need to catch a hezrou to fix the Demon Grinder. They can't ask the redcaps and madcaps, because they'll just kill the demon – and since demons that die outside the Abyss have a habit of bursting into black ichor instead of leaving a corpse, Chukka and Clonk need to catch one alive to harvest the spikes they need.

FINDING A HEZROU

Chukka and Klunk plan to catch a hezrou by using a Scavenger, and they want the party's help. If the characters agree, the kenku run to Mad Maggie and get her to send Pins or Needles out to locate a hezrou. At this point, you can either have the imps find the hezrou quickly, or have the two imps ask the party to do a favor for them (see "Helping Pins and Needles") while they're out looking for the hezrou. Regardless, the imps return in an hour or so with news that they've found a pair of hezrou not too far away.

Chukka and Clonk load up the Scavenger and two Devil's Rides for the party and set out to catch a hezrou. Driving the swift war machines, reaching the pair of hezrou doesn't take long. On the way, Chukka lays out a plan:

- "Sneak up on 'em fiends, get their 'tentation and separate 'em. Taunt 'em, lure 'em, fool 'em, don't matter, long as they're separated." (gruff duergar)
- "Grab it by the feet, raise it up, and pluck, pluck, pluck its feathers. Personally, I love the squealing, but if you don't, you can always bash its head in first." (Mad Maggie)
- "Soon as you have it, get out. Don't try to be a hero out here – heroes die quick in the Nine." (unknown male)

Put simply: Chukka proposes that they separate the two hezrou, catch one in the Scavenger's Grappling Claw, cut off three spikes and release it again. During the encounter with the hezrou, the kenku take the Scavenger's Helm, allowing the characters to handle the Grappling Claw, Harpoon Flingers, and the Devil's Rides. If the characters have other ideas, Chukka is happy to accommodate them.

SEPARATING THE HEZROU

The two hezrou are traveling close together, looking for something to destroy or someone to slaughter. To separate them, the characters must draw the hezrou in different directions. Two characters riding Devil's Rides can separate the hezrou by taunting or luring a hezrou each, and both succeeding on a DC 13 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check. Other strategies might also work, at your discretion.



CATCHING A HEZROU

When the hezrou have been separated, or the characters have failed twice, causing the kenku to lose their patience, Chukka and Clonk drive the Scavenger toward the hezrou, trying to run one of them over and grab it with the hook after. Start initiative when they're 30 feet out. Unable to catch the fast machines, the hezrou prepare their actions to attack anything that comes close, striking smaller war machines, jumping onto the Scavenger, or pulling characters off (remember that the demons also get opportunity attacks against war machines that drive by). When the Scavenger is in range, the kenku expects the character operating the Grappling Claw to attempt to grab one of the hezrou.

GETTING THE SPIKES

To replace the damaged cog, Chukka and Clonk need three hezrou spikes. A character can attempt to remove a spike from a restrained demon as an action by making a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check with a slashing weapon (remember the hezrou's Stench feature). On a success, they get a single spike. If the check fails by 5 or more, the demon gets an opportunity attack against the character. On its turn, a captured hezrou tries to free itself (using its +4 Athletics check against the escape DC of 12). If the demon succeeds, it begins attacking whoever is closest, while Chukka and Clonk bring the Scavenger back around to recapture it.

DEVELOPMENTS

As soon as the characters have secured three spikes, Chukka and Clonk tell them to release the demon and head back to Fort Knucklebone. Once here, they can handle the repairs without the characters' help (unless a character really wants to participate), but thank them profusely and tell Mad Maggie of the successful hunt (+1 Good Will). If the characters somehow botched the mission – killing the hezrou before getting the spikes, for example – Chukka and Clonk bemoan the waste of time and resources and let Mad Maggie know about their failings as well (-1 Good Will).

HELPING MICKEY

Mickey's predicament is pretty simple: he has a piece of bone devil lodged in his foot. A DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check and a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check is enough to get the bone out, make Mickey happy, and earn Mad Maggie's gratitude.

UNWILLING PATIENT

There's no need to make this task much more complicated than that, but you could throw another check in there by requiring a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check to get Mickey to lift its foot and let a character inspect the wound.

Additionally, you can up the stakes a bit by having the **fiendish flesh golem** make a single reactionary Slam attack against the character trying to remove the bone fragment if they fail the Medicine check. If they fail twice, you can even have Mickey go Berserk (see Mickey's stat block); Mad Maggie arrives after two rounds and begins attempting to calm the golem down before it or the characters are killed.

DEVELOPMENTS

If the characters remove the bone fragment without getting into a fight with Mickey, Mad Maggie is grateful (+1 Good Will). If they remove the spike, but hurt Mickey in the process (failing one Medicine check), the **fiendish flesh golem** is still hopping about, and their good deed goes unnoticed. If they fail twice and never get the fragment removed, they have managed only to annoy Mad Maggie (-1 Good Will).

HELPING PINS AND NEEDLES

Pins and Needles want the party's help killing a **madcap**, Wazzik. While a simple enough task, there are some gaps in the description you'll have to fill in yourself – like, what the prank was, where the characters can find Wazzik, and how to handle the assassination attempt.

You can have Pins tell the party that, "Wazzik is a vain one, yes, always looking at himself. After he's done playin' bones with the others, he'll sit alone behind that scruput over there, lookin' into the blank metals and shining his cap." Needles interjects, "Yes, teehee, 'twas where we poured the demon sludge on him, didn't much like that, no, no, no!"

The party can sneak up on Wazzik (approaching from a small alley and the roofs of nearby huts) with a DC 13 group Dexterity (Stealth) check (at least half of the party must succeed). This will allow the characters a surprise round against the madcap. If they can kill Wazzik before he gets a turn, they can get away with the murder without issue. If Wazzik gets a turn, he'll start hollering for aid, upon which 1d4 redcaps and 1d4 madcaps arrive to join the fight. Mad Maggie arrives to stop the fight 3 rounds later.

DEVELOPMENTS

If the characters kill Wazzik without attracting attention, Pins and Needles sing their praises to Mad Maggie (+1 Good Will). If they kill Wazzik, but attract attention, Pins and Needles' gratitude is evened out by Mad Maggie's annoyance. If they attract attention, and Wazzik survives, they're left with only Mad Maggie's displeasure (-1 Good Will).

HELPING BARNABAS

Barnabas the flameskull wants his tooth back from the **redcaps**, but doesn't know for sure which one has it. Characters can question redcaps (with a 50 percent chance of enraging the redcaps in the process), and use a DC 11 Wisdom (Perception) check to spot who has it and a DC 14 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to steal the tooth back.

KEEPING IT SIMPLE

We can simplify this task a bit by evening out checks and DCs. Simply have it be DC 14 checks for everything:

- DC 14 Charisma (Any) check to get a redcap to say who has the tooth (attacked by 1 + 1d4 redcaps on a failure).
- DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) check to see which redcap obtains the pouch with the tooth (attacked by 1 + 1d4 redcaps on a failure: "What's ye lookin' at?")
- DC 14 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check to steal the pouch from a redcap (attacked by 1 + 1d4 redcaps on a failure)

And, as mentioned in the book, if the characters straight up demand to get the pouch from a redcap, they'll be attacked by a dozen redcaps until Mad Maggie arrives to break up the fight.

DEVELOPMENTS

If the characters obtain the tooth without angering any of the redcaps, Barnabas speaks warmly about them to Mad Maggie (+1 Good Will). If they get the tooth, but had a scuffle with the redcaps, Mad Maggie will know about it, canceling out Barnabas' praises. If they start a fight and don't even get the tooth, they will have earned nothing but Mad Maggie's annoyance (-1 Good Will).

LULU'S DREAM QUEST

Lulu's Dream Quest runs in five stages, where the characters are pulled through Lulu's real or imagined memories, facing obstacles in the process. Below are some suggestions on how to run Lulu's Dream Quest.

DREAM 1: RAINBOW ANGELS

The party takes 2d10 psychic damage if ALL of them fail a DC 10 Intelligence saving throw. This seems very easy. You can make this part a bit harder by waiving the requirement that ALL characters must fail, and instead have each character who fails the saving throw take the damage and have them repeat the saving throw until they succeed.

DREAM 4: DESOLATION

This is the pivotal dream in the sequence. Restrained by black sludge, each character must try to escape with a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check, possibly gaining help from the **spined devils**. If they fail repeatedly, they'll take 4d10 psychic damage for each fail after the first.

You can make this part of the dream a bit more exciting by including more skill checks and saving throws:

- The characters must first succeed on DC 15 Wisdom saving throws to shake off the despair that grips them.
- They must then make DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks to get free from the sludge.
- They must then succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw to expunge the sludge they've swallowed.

For each failure, the characters take 2d10 psychic damage. The imps can give advantage on each check. As before, characters who've freed themselves and succeeded on all checks can aid comrades still stuck in the sludge. Only when all characters have succeeded on all three checks is the dream complete.

DREAM 5: DESOLATION

This dream is merely a vision of Lulu looking through a spyglass and seeing what she believes is the Bleeding Citadel. It seems weird that the characters can help each other make it through Dream 4, when it doesn't matter how many characters make it through. You can make this count more by having each character that makes it to this point gain the "Charm of Dreamwalking" described on this page.

Additionally, you may want to change this dream to allow for different starting points to the "Quest for the Sword." We'll touch more on this at later points in this document (starting with "Where to Place Haruman's Hill?" on the following page).

DEVELOPMENTS

If the characters complete Lulu's Dream Quest, they earn Mad Maggie's gratitude (+1 Good Will). If the characters don't complete the quest, and refuse to go again, they'll instead earn her displeasure (-1 Good Will).

Charm of Dreamwalking

While you have this charm, you have advantage on Wisdom saving throws. You can also use this charm to cast the *blink* spell as an action. Once you do, you must finish a long rest before you can do so again.

This charm vanishes nine days, nine hours, and nine minutes after you've received it.

FAREWELL

As the party says their farewells, Mad Maggie might deign to bestow gifts upon them, depending on their success at the various tasks. This is a really nice touch – and it's highly likely that your players will be salivating at the thought of owning their own infernal war machine!

You can certainly decide on the spot what Mad Maggie gives them, but if you want a more formalized approach, the "Mad Maggie's Rewards Table" shows the amount of good will required for the various rewards listed in the book. Start at 0, and simply add or subtract "Good Will" points whenever the characters do something to please or annoy Mad Maggie (we've included a mention of when to add or subtract points under each task on the previous pages).

Mad Maggie's Rewards

Good Will	New Form
-3	Mad Maggie and everyone in Fort Knucklebone attacks the party
-1	2d4 madcaps and 2d4 redcaps attack the party as they leave the fort; Maggie doesn't intervene
0	Nothing
1	A Tormentor
2	3 soul coins and two weeks of rations/character
3	Information about the other warlords and Smiler the Defiler
4	A Devil's Ride
5	A silvered weapon



QUEST FOR THE SWORD

The party's quest for the *Sword of Zariel* starts in earnest after the characters undertake a Dream Quest into Lulu's mind under Mad Maggie's supervision. After the ritual, the book has Lulu point the way to Haruman's Hill, and then from there toward either the "Spawning Trees" or the "Demon Zapper," where the characters can start on the Path of Demons or Path of Devils, respectively.

Like chapters 1 and 2, the events of chapter 3 can feel quite linear, if you run them by the book. Once a path has been chosen, the encounters are strung together neatly, not inviting much deviation. It makes it pretty easy to run – and you can always throw any random encounters you want at the players along the way – but comes at the cost of the players' sense of agency and self-determination. Additionally, the linear approach also creates issues when you suddenly have to dump a new lead on the players if they mess up an encounter on the chain and fail to progress further.

Below we will take a look at how you can make the path to the Bleeding Citadel less linear by rearranging the encounters described in chapter 3, so that the characters have more choices available to them.

THE BASIC STRUCTURE

Looking at the two encounter chains – the Path of Demons and the Path of Devils – they both follow about the same structure:

- **Starting Point.** Find someone (person A), who can point to someone (person B), who knows where the citadel is.
- **Fetch Quest.** Do something for person A, so they'll point you to person B.
- **The Informer.** Meet with person B, who can show them to the Bleeding Citadel.
- **Final Task.** Complete a final task to get the information from person B.

In between, there are some filler encounters and additional links, such as the Tower of Urm, Arches of Ulloch, etc., but the essential structure is the same.

CREATING A NEW STRUCTURE

Below we'll quickly give an example of how you can create a new structure for Quest for the Sword by simply giving your party more options. This is only an example meant to inspire – you can always give your characters even more options for where to go next, include various random encounters and locations as part of the paths to the sword, or even create entirely new encounters of your own. In addition, if you want something a bit more elaborate and even more open, check out the appendix "Avernus as a Sandbox," which is a part of this download.

STARTING POINT: ENCOUNTERS 1 & 2

When the party arrives at the Spawning Trees, you can have the devils there point to two people who might know where to find the Bleeding Citadel: a powerful **mage** in a wizard's tower (Tower of Urm) and a **night hag** named Red Ruth (Bone Brambles). Coincidentally, these are also the two people which the **dao** at the Demon Zapper thinks know how to free it from its pact, if that's where the party starts.

At the second location, Mordenkainen/Red Ruth tells the party that "there are two entities who've been imprisoned on Avernus for so long, they know more about the plane than nearly anyone else," or that "the dao must drink the blood of someone even less free than itself." Either way, the characters can choose between the empyrean (Uldrak's Grave) or an imprisoned wizard (Obelisk) next.

Where to Place Haruman's Hill?

In the book, Lulu takes the party directly to Haruman's Hill and then presents the choice between the Spawning Trees and the Demon Zapper (after suddenly regaining her memories!). It's not really clear why the book has the party go to Haruman's Hill first – the background information here is not pivotal, and the encounter with Haruman is quite tough for a party of 7th level adventurers.

Instead, you can have the Dream Quest end with visions of Zariel slaying demons with her sword nearly as quickly as they're popping into existence. Whether it's Lulu, Mad Maggie, Gargauth, or someone else who interprets this and points the party towards the Spawning Trees or the Demon Zapper, is up to you.

If you remove "Haruman's Hill" from the start of "Quest for the Sword," you can either have the party run into it randomly on their journey, or use it as a final encounter, where the party can learn the location of the Bleeding Citadel (see "Haruman's Hill" on the following page for more advice on how to do this).

FETCH QUEST: ENCOUNTERS 3, 4, & 5

At the third location, you can run the next string of encounters as the book prescribes (Obelisk — Mirror of Mephistar — Pit of Shummrath, or Uldrak's Grave — Arkhan's Tower — Monument to Tiamat). These encounters are strung pretty tightly together, and your players have already made two decisions on their own, so they're probably not feeling too railroaded at this point.

THE INFORMER: ENCOUNTER 6

As the party returns to either Ralzala or Ubbalux, the freed creature gives the party the names and locations of two entities who might be able to aid them: Zariel's fallen general, Olanthius (Crypt of the Hellriders), or Bel, the former archduke of Avernus (Bel's Forge). This once again gives them a meaningful choice – and one that might severely impact how their adventure in Avernus ends in chapter 5.

THE FINAL TASK: ENCOUNTERS 7 & 8

The final task – either releasing Kostchtchie, or retrieving the adamantine rods from the Wrecked Flying Fortress – can be altered to work as a choice as well. Bel might simply want the party to do something that will indirectly aid him against Zariel – either releasing the fearsome demon lord or retrieving the adamantine rods so that they can be used against her. With Olanthius, you can have the death knight suggest releasing either Kostchtchie or the Sibriex to distract Zariel, and simply have the party happen on the Wrecked Flying Fortress on the way to either encounter, if you'd like to run that encounter as well.

You can also choose to end with Haruman's Hill instead, if you didn't start with it. Having either Olanthius or Bel suggest that the party take out a hated rival and Zariel's most loyal follower before going up against her certainly seems plausible. We'll touch upon this again when going through the Path of Demons and Path of Devils, respectively.

HARUMAN'S HILL

Immediately after Fort Knucklebone, the campaign book has Lulu guiding the party to Haruman's Hill, because she thinks that's where the Sword of Zariel is. Haruman's Hill features some background story, as well as the potential for a tough encounter with the fallen paladin of Helm, Haruman.

HARUMAN'S ARRIVAL

Up until Haruman's arrival, the scene at Haruman's Hill is pretty straightforward: the party will find a grotesque scene of traitorous Hellriders spiked on metal trees, then speak to the deserter vampire Jander Sunstar, and – with some likelihood – free him. And this is where things get a bit more intense.

At 7th level, 20 **stirges** should be easy enough to deal with. The bigger problem is the **narzugon** Haruman and his **nightmare** steed. In combination, the party could very well find themselves in over their heads. Be aware, however, that the difficulty of this encounter depends very much on the characters' tactics and equipment. If they have a quick area-of-effect spell to get rid of the stirges and are equipped with magic weapons that can pierce Haruman's resistances, Haruman and his steed are definitely beatable.

Encounters like these – that teeter on the edge of beatable – are often the most dangerous, because the party might not know that they're in over their heads before it's too late. If you want to decrease chances of a catastrophic total party kill, you can have Jander Sunstar survive being freed instead of crumbling into dust. Make him a **vampire spawn** instead of a vampire, and have him aid the characters against Haruman. This not only increases their chance of victory, but also allows you to stop the encounter if the characters are getting beaten badly. At any time, you can have Jander insist that, "You cannot defeat him. Run away! Flee! I'll hold him off. It's what Lathander would want – it's how I can redeem my soul!" and sacrifice himself to cover the party's retreat.

Whether the party wins against Haruman or has to flee, Jander eventually disappears in a mist of radiant dust, his soul accepted into Celestia by the God of Light.

HELLWASP NEST

The premise of Hellwasp Nest is quite simple: during the battle with Haruman, a **hellwasp** appears and abducts Lulu the Hollyphant. If Lulu isn't around, but you still want to use the Hellwasp Nest, you can have a squadron of hellwasps appear and steal something else valuable to the players – the *Shield of the Hidden Lord*, for example.

HELLWASP QUEEN

Fighting a bunch of the same creatures can quickly lose its flavor. To help you enhance the Hellwasp Nest, you can find the statistics for a **Hellwasp Queen** on this page, as well as in appendix C3 – Monster Stat Blocks. You can replace one of the hellwasps in area N4. Larder with the Hellwasp Queen.

HELLWASP QUEEN

Large fiend, lawful evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 105 (14d10 + 28)

Speed 10 ft., fly 40 ft. hover.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	15 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +5, Wis +5

Damage Vulnerabilities cold

Damage Immunities fire

Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 60 ft., passive perception 12

Languages Infernal, telepathy 300 ft. (with other Hellwasps only)

Challenge 7 (5,000 XP)

Magic Weapons. The Hellwasp's weapon attacks are magical.

Hive Queen. Whenever a spell or weapon attack deals damage to the Hellwasp queen, all Hellwasps within 30 ft. of it who can see it can make an attack against a target within reach as a reaction.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The Hellwasp queen makes two attacks: one with its sting and one with its sword talons.

Sting. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. **Hit:** 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) fire damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned in this way, the target is also paralyzed. The target can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Sword Talons. Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. **Hit:** 14 (2d8 + 5) piercing damage.

Incendiary Cloud (1/day). The Hellwasp queen creates a cloud of hot smoke in a 10 ft. radius around it. The cloud spreads around corners and is heavily obscured. It lasts for 1 minute or until a wind of moderate or greater speed disperses it.

When the cloud appears, each creature in it must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 22 (5d8) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. A creature must also make this saving throw when it enters the spell's area for the first time on a turn or ends its turn there.

PATH OF DEMONS

The Path of Demons is one of two options presented to you as a means of taking the party from Haruman's Hill to the Bleeding Citadel. Below, we'll go over each of the encounter locations in the Path of Demons, offering suggestions and advice on how to run them.

SPAWNING TREES

The Path of Demons starts with an encounter by a lake of demon ichor, from which **abyssal chickens** are spawned. Five **bearded devils** are raising a pyre, with four of them teasing the fifth, which has suffered a brain injury that has turned him chaotic good – he also has an abyssal chicken named Earwax!

KRIKENDOLT THE BEARDED DEVIL

As a whole, the Spawning Trees is a pretty entertaining encounter – it's a cool location, abyssal chickens are a fun gimmick, and Krikendolt – a devil turned chaotic good – is an amusing concept. When playing through this encounter, you may want to play up Krikendolt's affliction, since having the **bearded devil** tagging along for a while might provide the players with some laughs.

You can do this by making it very clear to the players, as they approach the Spawning Trees, how the four bearded devils are mercilessly bullying the fifth (who clutches an abyssal chicken) in an attempt to get him to throw the poor creature on the pyre! By showing Krikendolt as a pitiable (and likable!) devil, you make it more likely that the party will come to his defense.

If the characters approach peacefully, you can have Krikendolt pipe in that he knows someone who might be able to help, but have his four “friends” quickly shush him, demanding a *soul coin* for the information. Once again, this might prompt the party to intervene on behalf of Krikendolt.

In combat, Krikendolt won't attack either side, but stays back, clutching Earwax and half-heartedly shouting for the party not to “hurt my friends!” If the party stops the fight on account of his shouting, Krikendolt quickly offers to show them the way, if only they'll stop killing his friends – a gesture that earns him only cold derision from the other bearded devils. If the party kills all the other devils, Krikendolt still accompanies them, reluctantly agreeing that “they probably deserved it a little bit.”



CHAPTER 3: AVERNUS

TOWER OF URM

The second encounter in the chain takes the party to the Tower of Urm, where the wizard Mordenkainen resides during his visits to Avernus. The party must compete with fierce yugoloths for the archmage's attention, upon which the archmage can direct the party towards the next encounter.

PLACING THE TOWER OF URM

Tower of Urm is a pretty isolated encounter, in the sense that Mordenkainen doesn't ask the party to do anything, and only offers the party a tip to the next location. Thus, you can quite easily move this encounter around, use it at a later point, or even skip it entirely, having the bearded devils simply show the party to the Obelisk straight away.

RUNNING THE TOWER OF URM

While this encounter is interesting, it's also left pretty vague – you have to decide when the Tower of Urm appears (or if it's already there), how the party can get an audience with Mordenkainen, and what to do with the two murderous **nycaloths** who want to assassinate Mordenkainen and/or kidnap one of the characters.

If you want to make it appear less coincidental that the archmage appears shortly after the party arrives at the site, you can have the bearded devils at the Spawning Trees explain how the tower appears and disappears at intervals, usually staying for nine days – and the characters are in luck, because the tower arrived just yesterday!

TALKING TO MORDENKAINEN

At the tower, you can have the yugoloths wait for Mordenkainen's daily address, where he lets them know what services he needs that day. While the characters wait with the yugoloths, you can have the two nycaloths sent by Zariel question the party about why they're here – having them determine to kidnap the characters if the Bleeding Citadel or the *Sword of Zariel* is mentioned.

When Mordenkainen appears on the balcony, he raises an eyebrow at seeing humanoids petitioning for his attention. He'll speak with the characters from the balcony (allowing all the other fiends to overhear), unless they insist on privacy, in which case he'll snap his fingers and magically open a single door at the base of the tower. Inside, the party finds a large hall filled with devils and demons that have been destroyed, imprisoned, or transformed by Mordenkainen's arcane experiments. Here, they can speak to the archmage in private, without being overheard by Zariel's nycaloths.

If the party brought along Krikendolt and Earwax, you can spice things up a bit by having Mordenkainen demand the abyssal chicken as payment for the information (“I could use this pitiful creature in my experiments. A meager price for the information I will give you.”). Krikendolt is horrified, but offers no resistance except a sorrowful squeal if the characters tear Earwax from his arms. If the party refuses Mordenkainen on account of Krikendolt, you can have the wizard sigh in disgust and cast a spell on the devil (could be *mind blank* or a high-level casting of *dispel magic*), restoring Krikendolt to his natural alignment. Suddenly disgusted by the abyssal chicken, Krikendolt freely gives up Earwax.

YUGOLOTH AMBUSH

If the characters attract the nycaloths' attention, you will have to decide when they act and try to kidnap a character. You can have the two nycaloths attack while the party travels to the obelisk, or perhaps wait for a more opportune moment (such as right after the characters trigger the standing stones by the obelisk).

OBELISK

At the obelisk, the characters find a trapped demon disguised as a wizard, fail an arcane ritual, and are ultimately sent along to negotiate with the archdevil Mephistopheles.

PLACING THE OBELISK

Like the encounter at the Tower of Urm, this encounter is somewhat isolated. While Ubbalux does have a task he needs done – thus connecting this encounter to the Mirror of Mephistar and the Pit of Shummrath – you could easily remove the Obelisk from the Path, and simply have Mordenkainen point to the mirror of Mephistar, and instead of Ubbalux, have the cambion at the Mirror of Mephistar point the way to the Crypt of the Hellriders.

A MORE POWERFUL DEMON

If you do use the Obelisk, you may want to change Ubbalux to another type of demon. While a **barlgura** does have *disguise self*, which allows it to take on the form of a wizard (even though, if we're being pedantic, *disguise self* doesn't allow a Large creature to appear Medium), it's not a very powerful or intelligent demon. Using a **borl** makes it seem more plausible that Bel would even have bothered with the creature, and that Mephistopheles would care about acquiring the demon's allegiance. If you want to tie it more to the story, you can even have Ubbalux be the demon that managed to sever Zariel's hand in her final battle – an offense that Zariel has punished with eternal imprisonment. This would also better explain why Ubbalux can point the party to someone who knows the Bleeding Citadel's location.

A WIZARD'S THEORY

In an attempt to escape, Ubbalux tries to convince the party to participate in a ritual. However, we're never really told exactly how Ubbalux expects the ritual to work and ultimately aid his escape. This could potentially make it hard for you to convince the party to even make the attempt.

To give the ritual a bit more direction, you can have Ubbalux ask the characters to each touch the standing stone representing the school of magic "most in tune with their nature," suggesting that the ritual will thus enhance their powers (and secretly hoping it will be easier to draw on their innate energy during the ritual).

If the characters join the ritual, they're each hit with an arcane effect depending on the stone they touched. While most of these have instant damage effects or long-term (24 hours) effects, some have more immediate or benign effects that can feel a bit pointless. As mentioned earlier, you can have the two **nycaloths** from the Tower of Urm launch their ambush at this point, to make some of the magical effects more meaningful, but you may also want to alter some of the effects entirely:

- **Conjuration.** The monodrone is not entirely indifferent; it will perform tasks for the character.
- **Divination.** Keep this as it is, but remember to allow the character to see through Ubbalux's disguise (and potentially spot the invisible nycaloths, if they have followed the party!).
- **Enchantment.** If the nycaloths attack after the ritual, you can keep this as it is; otherwise consider giving the character the effects of *bless* for 24 hours.
- **Illusion.** You can have the character be affected by the *phantasmal killer* spell instead.
- **Transmutation.** Blue skin is fun, but 24 hours of *enlarge/reduce* (either way works) could also create some fun scenarios, as well as have a bigger impact on other encounters.

MIRROR OF MEPHISTAR

The encounter at Mirror of Mephistar is pretty cool (pun intended!) and flavorful, and shouldn't be too difficult to run – in essence, it's a negotiation where the party has a lot to gain by completing a simple (but difficult) task. One tip: an imp made of ice really should have a name – "Snowball" or "Frosty" seems like a good fit.

PIT OF SHUMMRATH

The Pit of Shummrath is interesting: the characters can free a yugoloth, dam the River Styx, and free an imprisoned **pit fiend**. There are a few things you may want to change, however.

IMPRISONED ULTROLOTH

The characters can free Baazit, gaining the ability to form **homunculi** and a pair of *dimensional shackles* if they do so. Freeing Baazit is pretty simple – perhaps even too simple. If you want to make the process a bit more exciting, you can present it as a skill challenge: the party must succeed on three DC 17 skill checks before they fail three checks in order to free Baazit. Which skill checks they use is up to them – they may use Intelligence (Investigation) to devise a way to stop the crane from dunking into the river, Strength (Athletics) to jam the crane's winch, Dexterity (using thieves' tools) to unlock the cage door, and so on. If they fail three checks, Baazit's cage drops from the crane and disappears into the River Styx.

DAMMING THE STYX

The encounter here is pretty fun, even if the characters will likely make short work of eight **spined devils**. You may want to change Shummrath's story, however. Since the party has already met one creature imprisoned by Bel (Ubbalux at the Obelisk), having another creature prisoner of Bel in the same string of encounters isn't very imaginative. Instead, you can have Shummrath be one of Mephistopheles's lieutenants who was caught in this predicament while fetching water from the River Styx for the archdevil's arcane rituals.

CRYPT OF THE HELLRIDERS

At the Crypt of the Hellriders, the party must comb through catacombs to find the **death knight** Olanthius, who can point them toward the Bleeding Citadel. It runs pretty well, but be aware that since the book dictates that the party has no chance of parlay with Olanthius unless they've read his journal, you should probably delay Olanthius's return until the party has had a chance to do so.

ARCHES OF ULLOCH

At the Arches of Ulloch, the party can find transportation to their next destination. This location is a bit odd. Since time and distance is fluid in Avernus, the fast travel that the Arches provide isn't truly necessary. Additionally, the lack of any sort of encounter makes the location seem a bit superfluous. Below you'll find an elaborate take on how you can make the Arches of Ulloch a bit more interesting.

PLACING THE ARCHES

If you want to, you can place the Arches of Ulloch at the end of the encounter chain instead. Perhaps the Arches are necessary to find the Bleeding Citadel, which Zariel has obscured with powerful enchantments. This also explains why so few creatures in Avernus know about the citadel.

GUARDIAN OF THE ARCHES

You may want to introduce a guardian to spice things up, such as an **ultroloth** demanding a *soul coin* for each creature that wants passage, a **young red shadow dragon** demanding the sacrifice of an innocent, or even an **androsphinx** posing a complex and dangerous riddle spanning all the Nine Hells. Below, we'll explore this last premise, creating an elaborate encounter that should sufficiently test the characters' knowledge and mettle!

ULLOCH THE SPHINX

Tasked by Asmodeus himself to guard the twin arches, Ulloch the Sphinx ensures that only creatures with great knowledge of the Nine Hells can use the powerful Arches of Ulloch.

When the characters approach the arches, the lawful evil **androsphinx** comes flying down from the cliffs. With matted fur, rotting teeth, and skeletal wings, Ulloch's long stay in the Nine Hells has clearly taken a toll on it. After landing 60 feet away, it says: "Only the worthy may approach the Arches of Ulloch. Great strength and vast knowledge is required – if you possess neither, your doom is all but certain. Dare you subject yourself to my scrutiny, mortals?"

If the characters agree, the androsphinx nods solemnly and says: "So be it. To pass my test, you must answer the same question nine times over. Take warning: To hesitate will cost you dearly, but to answer wrongly even more so. Only thrice will I suffer ignorance." It then asks the first question: "Which Hell are you in?" When the party answers Avernus, it nods and begins the test in earnest, which goes like this:

1. Everyone rolls initiative (except Ulloch, who has a 0).
2. Ulloch uses its lair action to shift itself and the characters to one of the Nine Hells and asks: "Which Hell are you in?"
3. While assailed by fiends or environmental hazards, a character can use a bonus action to give an answer.
4. On its turn, Ulloch shifts the party back to its lair on Avernus if a character correctly identified which of the Nine Layers the party was taken to. If a character gives a wrong answer, Ulloch instead uses its Roar ability, affecting only the characters. If more than one character answered, it asks "Which answer will it be?" forcing the characters to suffer a round more wherever they are, before deciding on one (and only one) final answer.
5. Steps 2–4 are repeated for each layer, until the characters either pass the test by correctly identifying all the Nine Layers of Hell, or answer incorrectly more than three times. Between each layer, the characters have a single round on Avernus, which they can use to heal or prepare themselves for the next layer of Hell they're taken to.
6. If the characters succeed, Ulloch grants them eternal access to the Arches of Ulloch. If the characters fail, Ulloch stops the test, and refuses the party access to the Arches of Ulloch for perpetuity. If that happens, the characters will not be able to pass unless they kill the sphinx.

FIGURING OUT THE ANSWER

On each layer of the Nine Hells, the characters will likely want to come up with an answer quickly, given the uncomfortable situations they're put in. Luckily, there are several ways to figure out which of the Nine Hells they've ended up in.

Each time the characters arrive on a new layer, up to two characters may make a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana, History, or Religion), correctly identifying the layer on a success. Additionally, any character with access to Infernal lore, such as a book or text containing information about the Nine Hells, can spend an action and make a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check to find the name of the layer.

At your discretion, Gargauth (in the *Shield of the Hidden Lord*) or another fiend accompanying the party can aid the party, although this aid likely comes at a cost (Gargauth could demand that the party swear to free it before leaving Avernus, in order to give its aid). The party can also use divination magic to find answers, or even get the answer from a fiend they're fighting with a good Charisma check. Award the players for their creativity and roll with their ideas – the puzzle should be tense and challenging, but solvable.

THE NINE LAYERS OF HELL

As described above, the party will travel to each layer of the Nine Hells for brief periods of time, spending as little as a single round on each layer. You can have Ulloch go through the layers in succession, or in any random order, as you see fit. After Avernus, each layer is filled with a specific danger, as shown on the "Ulloch's Nine Hells" table below. Hostile creatures roll initiative and act with immediate aggression, pressuring the party to come up with an answer quickly or suffer dearly.

Ulloch's Nine Hells

d8	Layer	Encounter
—	Avernus	—
1	Dis	The characters arrive outside a smoke-spewing mine and are immediately attacked by three chain devil overseers.
2	Minauros	The characters arrive neck-deep in a fetid swamp. DC 15 Constitution save each turn; 2d8 poison damage and poisoned for 1 minute on a failure (repeat at end of each turn to stop being poisoned).
3	Phlegethos	The characters arrive in a fighting pit, with hundreds of fiends and interplanar beings shouting bets from the stands. They are attacked by two glabrezu pit fighters.
4	Stygia	The characters arrive on a sea of churning ice and are attacked by a remorhaz .
5	Malbolge	The characters arrive on a steep-sloped mountainside in the middle of an avalanche. DC 15 Dexterity save each turn; 3d8 bludgeoning damage on a failure.
6	Maladomini	The characters arrive in a vast, underground archive and are immediately attacked by an amnizu librarian.
7	Cania	The characters arrive in a frozen wasteland during a terrible magical icestorm. DC 15 Dexterity save each turn; 2d8 bludgeoning and 2d8 cold damage on a failure, half as much on a success.
8	Nessus	The characters arrive on a barren, rocky steppe. DC 15 Wisdom save each turn against the terrible sensation of emptiness, suffering 3d8 psychic damage on a failure.

KOSTCHTCHIE'S MAW

There's nothing inherently wrong with this encounter, where the party must free a demon lord to distract Zariel. However, if you haven't run Haruman's Hill yet, you may want to use this as the final encounter instead. Olanthus insists that the party must defeat his old companion Haruman (Zariel's sway over him prevents him from doing it himself) before showing them the way to the Bleeding Citadel. This also wraps up the storyline with the generals pretty nicely, if the characters have been following along with the story.

PATH OF DEVILS

The Path of Devils is one of two options presented to you as a means of taking the party from Haruman's Hill to the Bleeding Citadel. Below we'll go over each of the encounter locations in the Path of Devils, offering suggestions and advice on how to run them.

DEMON ZAPPER

The Path of Devils starts with an encounter by a Demon Zapper – a trapped unicorn which lures in demons and zaps them with radiant beams – where the party meets a disgruntled **dao** who wants release from an infernal deal in return for directions to Bel's Forge and a letter of introduction.

ZAP!

If you want to spice up this encounter, you can have a powerful demon (such as a **goristro**) show up to charge the demon zapper while the party is there. Reduced to 50 or so hit points by the massive damage, such a demon could provide a fun encounter for the party while not being overly challenging.

BETRAYAL

When the party eventually manages to free Ralzala, you can have the **dao** initially fulfill her part of the bargain, giving them directions and a letter of introduction, but then betray the party. Either spurred on by Gargauth or simply desiring their riches, the dao attacks the characters, fleeing only when reduced to fewer than 50 hit points.

BONE BRAMBLES

The Bone Brambles presents a more daunting task for the players, with several minor combat encounters spread out over an entire day – or even several days – before the **night hag** Red Ruth can send the party along to Uldrak's Grave.

HOLD THE FORT

The bargain here – look after the Bone Brambles while Red Ruth visits the Wandering Emporium for a bath – is a fun little excursion. It also offers you the perfect opportunity to acquaint your party with the Wandering Emporium, although if they have already done so, you can simply have the night hag leave for her appointment without them setting it up.

ULDRAK'S GRAVE

At Uldrak's Grave, the party finds an **empyrean** transformed into a **spined devil**, who they'll need to help back into his true form in order to get titan's blood for Ralzala. There's no real encounter here, except for a conversation with Uldrak.

PLACING THE ENCOUNTER

The Path of Devils can quickly feel like a series of fetch quests: Ulzala sends the party to get information from Red Ruth, Red Ruth sends the party to get blood from Uldrak, Uldrak sends the party to get blood from Arkhan, and so on. If you want, you can very easily skip the encounter with Uldrak and instead have Red Ruth tell the party that they need blood of Tiamat to free Ulzala, sending them towards Arkhan's Tower. Without the *orb of dragonkind*, the party will have to either fulfill Arkhan's request of an innocent life or defeat him in battle (both of which we'll elaborate upon under "Monument to Tiamat" on the following page).

GET THE TITAN!

If you want to spice this location up a little, you can introduce a third party also looking for the empyrean. A celestial titan could have value to many denizens of Avernus, from warlords such as Bitter Breath or Princeps Kovik, or powerful demons such as a **glabrezu** and a handful of **tanarukks** or **vrocks**. You can have the fiendish assailants arrive shortly after the party, hoping to score themselves a nice catch, or already be chasing the spined devil when the party arrives (shouting Uldrak's name, so the party realizes the truth of the empyrean's predicament).

ARKHAN'S TOWER

At Arkhan's Tower, the party meets with the tortle priest Krull, who can show them the way to Arkhan. This location is brimming with dangerous foes, but is meant to be handled as a social encounter.

DRAGON ATTACK!

There are so many fun foes here, it's a shame the party doesn't get to fight any of them. If you want, you can challenge the party a little with an impromptu encounter. As the characters approach the tower, the young and wyrmling dragons living in the tower come swooping down to attack them – which should present a pretty interesting challenge for the party!

As soon as the party reduces a dragon to 0 hit points, or if the dragons are getting the upper hand, Krull arrives on the back of Obatala, the adult white dragon. The tortle calmly asks the party to cease fighting, while also admonishing the dragons to fall back (which they reluctantly do, growling threats all the while). He then dismounts and uses spells such as *cure wounds* or *regeneration* to heal any badly wounded dragons or even party members who've come close to dying. If a dragon or party member has died, Krull tsk-tisks, but offers that his master, Arkhan the Cruel, can remedy the situation and bring the deceased back to life.

This creates a properly dramatic entry for Krull, and also shows the party that they are sorely outmatched in a fight against the tower's defenders.



CHAPTER 3: AVERNUS

MONUMENT TO TIAMAT

At the Monument to Tiamat, the characters can meet **Arkhan the Cruel**, Tiamat's most devoted champion, who has the blood they need to reverse Ultradak's transformation.

SACRIFICE OF AN INNOCENT

The book has Arkhan demanding the sacrifice of an innocent in return for a vial of the dragon queen's blood. This is an interesting proposition, but the party might be stumped for likely offerings. Have Arkhan (or Gargauth!) suggest Lulu if she's with the party, or inform the party that there's a unicorn in the Demon Zapper. If Krikendolt is with the party, he's also a good candidate for the sacrifice.

FIGHTING ARKHAN THE CRUEL

An encounter here is brutal, especially as it is written in the book, where a dozen **abishai** and a **chimera** can be compelled to also fight for Arkhan. For instance, if Arkhan demands a sacrifice and the party won't do it, the creatures might be required to fight alongside the powerful paladin.

To even the odds, you can remove the abishai (either entirely, or just have them watch the battle from the dragon skull, choosing not to intervene), and omit the mention of the **chimera**. A fight against **Arkhan the Cruel**, **Torogar Steelfist**, a **manticore**, and **Krull** will still be difficult, but at least the party has a small chance.

You can increase their chances by having Arkhan fight conservatively, teleporting himself and his allies away as soon as he's below half hit points or one of his minions are destroyed. This is a good option if the characters have managed to get their hands on the vial of dragon blood already, perhaps by snatching it off his neck during or before the fight.

You can also have an ambitious Krull turn against Arkhan at an opportune moment, using a debilitating spell such as *contagion* to greatly hamper the evil dragonborn. If you choose this option, Krull's motivation is his desire to become Tiamat's foremost champion in place of Arkhan. If you don't want the party to actually defeat Arkhan and Torogar (their magical gear could probably break the balance of your campaign), you can have a shocked and weakened Arkhan shout "Treachery!" before turning to the party and saying, "There is my sacrifice. Unlike him, I uphold the decrees of my Queen, and will not harm another of her servants. Bring his corpse to me at my tower, and you shall have what you seek," before using *teleport* to take him, Torogar, and the manticore away, leaving the party to face off with Krull.

BEL'S FORGE

At Bel's Forge, the party must convince the former archduke to help them find the Bleeding Citadel. This is surprisingly easy, since **Bel** hates Zariel and supports any move against the new Archduke of Avernus.

A BARGAIN WITH BEL

This location and Bel's dealings with the characters is well-described, and should be easy enough to handle. The encounter with the four **fire giants** is a nice little test of the characters, presented by Bel to determine if they are even worth his trouble (he might choose to intervene before any of the giants are actually killed).

You can also open up Bel's task by having him suggest that they seek out either the **sibriex** or the Arches of Ulloch in their search for the adamantine rods, the latter allowing them to teleport directly to the Wrecked Flying Fortress.

SIBRIEX

Here, the party must question the demon to discover where they can find Bel's adamantine rods. This location features some interesting creatures, but is meant to be played as a social encounter.

INTERROGATING THE SIBRIEX

The conversation with the **sibriex** is a bit convoluted, as presented, but basically the party has two options:

- Succeed on a DC 17 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check to convince the sibriex to tell them where the nine adamantine rods are, if they promise to free it afterward.
- Magically compel the creature to tell them, although its magic resistance and high saving throws might make this a difficult task.

You can give the party additional options – as well as create the opportunity for a combat encounter – by having the sibriex suggest that they betray Bel and instead free it, upon which it will tell them where to find the Bleeding Citadel. If the party agrees, they'll end up in a tough fight with the sibriex's captors. Should they succeed and free the sibriex, it will admit to having lied, but will either offer up the location of the adamantine rods (Wrecked Flying Fortress) or send the party to the Arches of Ulloch, from which they should be able to get anywhere they want.

WRECKED FLYING FORTRESS

This wreck is a fun location and mini-dungeon crawl that presents fun challenges to the party as they search for Bel's adamantine rods so they can get the location of the Bleeding Citadel.

FIRE STORM

This is a pretty intense encounter. A group DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check is difficult, and failure is likely to be fatal. Remember that only characters on foot (i.e. not in an infernal war machine) are affected, and that characters can evade the fire storm using various spells, such as *dispel magic*, *fly*, or *levitation*. If you know that the characters have no means of evading the fire storm, you may want to reduce the damage to 1d8 fire damage per turn or something else more manageable.

ARRIVAL AT THE WRECK

There are two ways that the party can enter the wreck: by climbing the outside, or moving through the lower decks. Either way, they're likely to be attacked by six **vrocks** before getting close. If they choose to climb, they must make DC 15 Strength (Athletics) checks or fall off (5d8 bludgeoning damage seems fair if a character falls) or if they climb through the lower decks, they will encounter five **bone whelks**.

There's also a necromantic **remorhaz** hidden in a Soul Intake pipe, which the party might arouse as they ascend the interior of the Wrecked Flying Fortress. Exactly how, when, and where they get the creature's attention is left mostly up to you. However, instead of having a fight with a strong creature off-map, you can have the remorhaz appear as the party is rummaging through one of the areas above – perhaps if they make noise while playing with the fortress's infernal machinery or trigger the alarm in W5. Foreshadow the remorhaz a few times by describing how the fortress groans and shifts as if something large and heavy is moving through it. This should ramp up tension and prepare the party for the inevitable encounter with the infernal monstrosity.

W1. BRIDGE

The book has Mad Maggie's crew show up while the party is investigating this part of the fortress. While this is a fun idea, it may seem a bit too coincidental when yet another warlord shows up as the party leaves the fortress. You can choose to leave Mad Maggie's crew out if you don't think it would result in anything fun. If the party is on friendly terms with Maggie and the kenku, you can have the crew show up as described, but seem very anxious to quickly pillage the wreck. When asked about this, or when a hostile warlord appears later, you can have Chukka inform the party that they "may have aroused some attention getting here, hehe" (the crew drove right through another warlord's territory). This can put some extra tension on the situation, or at the very least give a plausible explanation to why multiple warlords show up in short succession.

W4. RECORDS ROOM

Okay, so this is a fun encounter – a shapechanged **death slaad** that has been dunked in the River Styx. However, it's only fun if the party discovers the truth. If they just ignore or kill the "gnoll," it's no fun at all. You can increase the chances of the party using magic to heal the hapless creature by having good-aligned NPCs such as Lulu take pity on it ("I think what happened to me has also happened to it. Can we do nothing to help it?") or NPCs such as Gargauth suggest that it might know where the rods are ("Perhaps this cretin can tell us where to find the rods if we restore its mind!").

W5. ADAMANTINE RODS

This is where the rods are, secured in a safe that uses a three-digit combination of 6–6–6. Puzzles are always great, but puzzles without any hints or clues can quickly end up being more frustrating than fun. You can help the party out a little by describing a riddle written in Infernal above the control dials:

*"Three numbers the same, but double in sum,
A Hell of a prison, a roll of the die, a handful and one!"*

This riddle suggests that all three numbers are the same, and that the number is two times three. Additionally, a Hell of a prison refers to Malbolge (the sixth layer of Hell), a roll of the die refers to the six sides of a standard die, and a handful and one means simply 5 + 1. With these clues, the party stands a better chance of figuring out the correct combination.

As mentioned previously, triggering the alarm by failing to open the safe in three tries could cause the remorhaz to awaken and make its way to the Command Deck. If Mad Maggie's crew are hanging around the Command Deck, you can have the screams of dying redcaps offer a last omen of the dangerous foe heading towards the party.

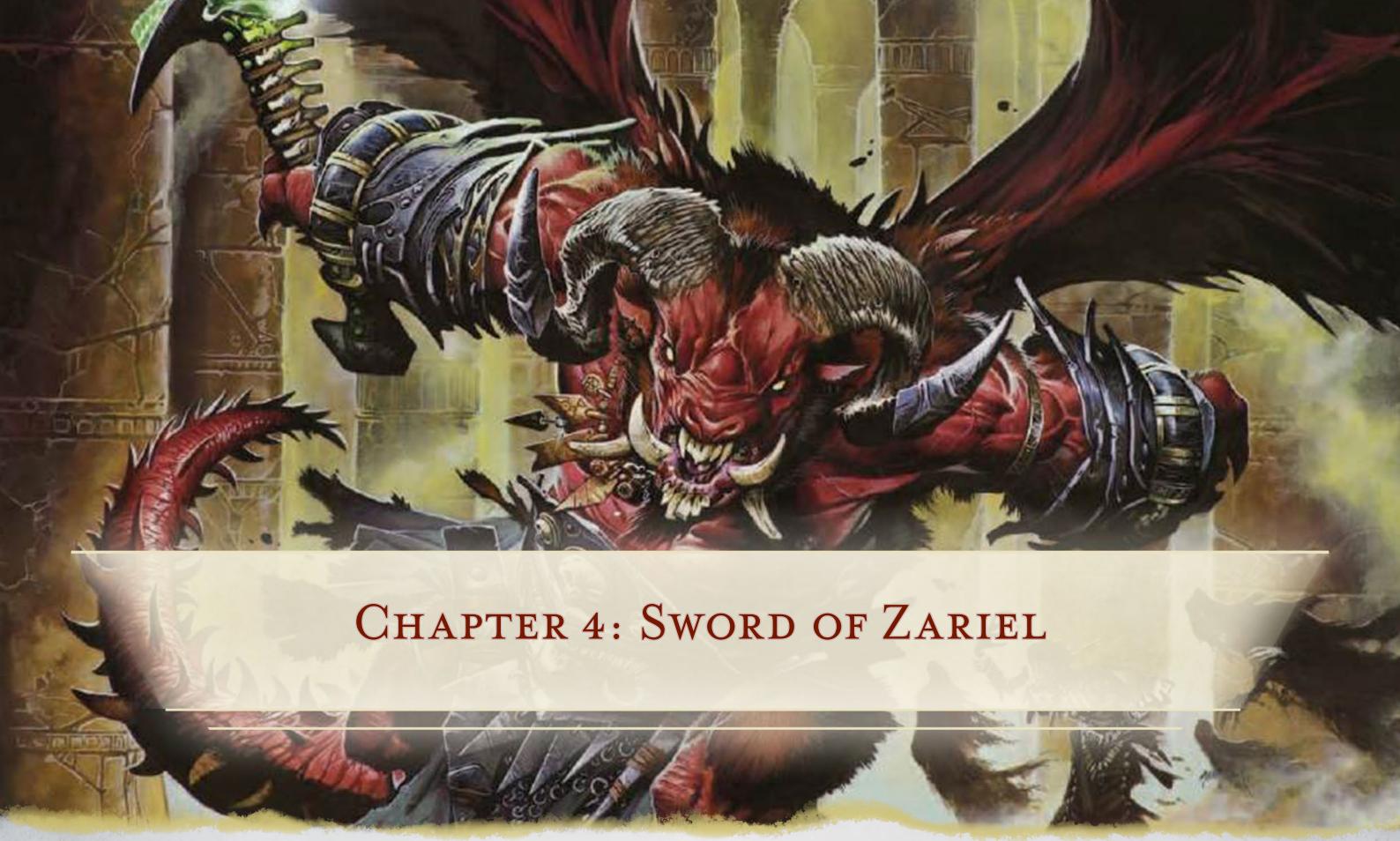
ARRIVAL OF A WAR BAND

Having a war band arrive to confront the party is a fun scenario. Remember to consider the party's current situation as well as any allies they have with them before they appear. If aided by Mad Maggie's crew and at full health, they'll make short work of any war band that opposes them, while a heavily taxed party without allies could find themselves in a very dire situation indeed.

The book describes different motivations for the various warlords, but Princeps Kovik's motivation – the adamantine rods – seems the most plausible. This could result in a tense stand-off between the characters and the warlord, where clever characters might be able to convince Princeps Kovik with a successful DC 17 Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, or Persuasion) check that taking the rods will earn him Bel's wrath! If you want, you can have whichever warlord you choose to show up have the same motivation, instead of what is described in the book.

If you want to make the situation even more tense, and put more pressure on the party, you can have the arriving warlord demand that the party hand over Mad Maggie's crew, even if they are talked out of taking the adamantine rods. This will force the party to decide how much they really like the kenku!





CHAPTER 4: SWORD OF ZARIEL



HAPTER 4: SWORD OF ZARIEL IS THE culmination of the party's search for Zariel's sword, and has the characters battling fearsome demons as they unravel the final layers of the Archduke of Avernum's tragic tale. It's gory, frightful, splendid, fantastical, and engrossing DUNGEONS & DRAGONS from start to finish!

RUNNING CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 is dense and jam-packed with action. From crawling through the Scab to defending the dreamlike past of Idyllglen, the party will face dangerous foes and tough challenges before eventually claiming the Sword of Zariel.

Coming from the vastness of chapter 3, this chapter is much more narrow in scope. It's linear in the sense that multiple options aren't provided, but, as the end of the campaign is drawing closer, this seems very natural. It's also a very well-paced chapter that is actually meant to be handled in a single day of adventuring, albeit with an artificial "long rest" in the middle of the chapter.

With no further ado, let's take a closer look at running each section of Chapter 4: Sword of Zariel.

THE SCAB

In this section of chapter 4, the characters must make their way through gory tunnels of the Scab. Infested with murderous demons, the Scab presents a grotesque dungeon crawl ending at the gates to the Bleeding Citadel. Below, we'll go over some of the areas in the scab, offering suggestions on how to approach them.

HANDLING THE SCAB

The Scab is a weird and impressive location – made of living tissue, the Scab's irregular tunnels are filled with dangers and challenges. One of the biggest challenges, however, is the DM's: how to handle the party's trek through the Scab?

Map 4.1. Side view of the Scab (*BG:D&A*, p. 137) offers a cross-section of the Scab. While interesting and well-crafted, it doesn't offer much help to groups who prefer maps for their encounters. With this download, you can find a map of the Scab (split into three levels), that can help you remedy this. This map is based on the cross-section of the Scab, as well as the information presented in the chapter, with some minor modifications.

ENTERING THE SCAB

According to the book, a successful DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check is required to reach the hole near the top of the scab, but skill checks without consequences are no fun. Instead, you can ask for two checks, having failure on the first result in a 50-foot fall (a successful DC 13 Dexterity saving throw allows a character to hang on), and failure on the second results in a hand or foot plunging through soft tissue, infecting the character with the Scab's blood (which means succeeding on a DC 13 Wisdom saving or throw or becoming cruel and uncaring for 8 hours). Alternatively, you can also completely forgo the check.

S2. ANGELIC WINDOW

Having a window showing up in the middle of this dungeon is fun, and you can probably expect the characters to try and get through it somehow. While touching the glass grants 20 temporary hit points – a nice touch, pun intended – you can put a quick stop to any shenanigans by having forceful attempts to break the glass result in a character taking 2d8 force damage and a strong push away from the glass.

S3. DROWNED HAG

Why Yiggleblight didn't use her Ethereallness to avoid being drowned by the **bulezaus** is never explained. If you want to make this scenario seem a bit more plausible, you can have the hag be shackled with a pair of *dimensional shackles*.

S5. FOOD FIGHT

To make it more likely that the party intervenes in this fight, make sure to describe the magic glaive to anyone who looks in. On that note, a *vicious glaive* seems more fun than a simple +1 glaive.

S11. STATUE OF YEENOGHU

This location is fun – with the statue around, even the gnolls might get more than a single round against the party. If Lulu isn't around to point out the statue's power (or you don't want her to), Gargauth in the *Shield of the Hidden Lord* can fill in, or you can describe to the party how dark energy seeps from the statue towards the fiends, closing their wounds.

S13. CACKLING GNOLLS

As written, this encounter is pretty crowded, as the party faces more than a dozen gnolls in a tight corridor. On the map for the Scab included with this download, we've expanded the corridor at this point to make better room for so many combatants. If you want to do more to avoid claustrophobia, you can convert the 15 mundane **gnolls** to 5 **gnoll pack lords** instead.

S14. ENTRANCE TO THE CITADEL

The way this location is written, the party will either face an ambush here (if Vatilan escaped from area S9 to warn Trantolox) or be able to get the drop on the demons from a high vantage point (remember, though, that the nalfeshnee has truesight out to 120 ft.). Either way, giving the party a chance to negotiate with the treacherous Trantolox is a nice touch, so you may want to have Trantolox pause the fight to speak with the party if things start off on the wrong foot.

When fighting inevitably breaks out, remember that this is likely the party's last fight before they're replenished inside the Citadel, so don't be afraid to pressure them a little. Although carrying a CR 13, the **nalfeshnee** in itself isn't a very frightening creature. It has relatively low damage output, and isn't even very durable if the party has magical weapons.

If you have foreshadowed **Crokek'toeck** properly, this isn't a bad time to have the demon break free from its prison. Perhaps Trantolox has a *wand of disintegration* it can point at the ceiling to release Crokek'toeck, or the noise of heavy battle awakens the sleeping monster. If you don't want to introduce a gargantuan demon to the mix, you can also simply have more demonic allies show up – shadow demons are particularly nasty when arriving unexpectedly.

Alternatively, should the party suddenly find themselves in a dire situation, you can have a character who makes a successful DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check (or Lulu or another friendly NPC), realize that opening the double doors could turn the fight in the party's favor (the magical light coming from the Bleeding Citadel will likely turn the tide!).

Crokek'toeck

The demon-spewing Crokek'toeck is a fun addition to the Scab, but one that is easily overlooked. The party has no reason to seek out Crokek'toeck, and they're likely to stop the demons from releasing it. So, if you want Crokek'toeck to make an appearance, you may have to prepare a little.

First, you can foreshadow the creature and its story. You can have Alazub (S6) freely tell the party about Yeenoghu's lost pet, and perhaps leave some scribbled notes about Crokek'toeck in Yigglebright's lair (she discovered the demonic beast using her Ethereallness). You can also have the party hear loud snoring and belches seemingly coming from inside the walls, as they make their way through the Scab's tunnels.

Second, you'll need someone to free Crokek'toeck. You can have the digging demons (S9) free the demon if the party somehow leaves them undisturbed (which is unlikely, since the characters have to go through S9 to get to the Entrance to the Citadel), ending with Crokek'toeck catching up to the party right before they enter the citadel. You can also have Trantolox offer to leave the Scab without more fighting, if they help him free Crokek'toeck (which is a naked lie, of course!). If there's no good-aligned creature with the party, Trantolox can entice the party even more by saying that Crokek'toeck will be able to chew through the doors. This is true enough, but if Crokek'toeck is freed and comes crashing into S14, the party must somehow goad the demon into accidentally chewing on the gates.

If you really want to ensure that Crokek'toeck is freed, you can provide the characters with rumors that it has eaten a powerful demonic artifact, prompting them to release it themselves. The information can come from any number of creatures in chapter 3: one of the night hags, Mahadi, a Warlord, Bel, Olanthius, Gargauth in the *Shield of the Hidden Lord*, or even Lulu herself. The item could be a suit of *demon armor* or a *helm of devil command*, or any other item you think would properly entice the characters.

If all else fails, you can also decrease the power of the radiant burst that shatters the Scab at the end of the chapter, and have Crokek'toeck slither around the area when the characters appear from their sojourn to Idyllglen. This also gives any character who's picked up the *Sword of Zariel* a nice way to showcase their newfound powers.



ENTERING THE CITADEL

This small section works as a minor intermission between the horrors of the Scab and the challenge of Idyllglen. There's not much happening here, and the party is quickly shoved onto Idyllglen (after receiving a magical long rest). The scene certainly works fine for what it is, but if you want, you can flesh it out a bit more to give your party a bit more of a break, as well as providing more background on Zariel and her descent.

PROLONGING THE SCENE

In the book, the characters enter the citadel, see the sword, receive a long rest, and are then approached by Yael's ghost, prompting Lulu's memories and sending them to Idyllglen.

Once again, Lulu takes center stage, which might be an issue if you've decided to write her out of the campaign or tone down her importance. Even if she is tagging along, it doesn't really seem necessary. Yael is a compelling enough NPC, especially if the party visited with Olanthus on the way to the Bleeding Citadel. Instead of having the memory spring forth from Lulu (which also requires you to magically bring her back to life, should she have died along the way), you can have Yael give the party a little tour first. As in the book, she appears when the party moves toward the sword, but instead of instantly triggering the vision, the scene plays like this:

The translucent image of a woman in her thirties, wearing plate armor and bearing a thin scar on her cheek, appears beside you, staring solemnly at the sword with sad eyes. "It is beautiful, is it not?" the ghost says softly, her voice barely above a whisper, yet echoing off the citadel's alabaster walls. "I am afraid you cannot wield it. Yet."

Yael readily answers questions about who she is ("Yael, faithful general to the archangel Zariel") and why she's here ("To protect the *Sword of Zariel*"), but answers further questions about Zariel and the sword only with: "Let me show you." Yael's ghost leads the party to one of the stained glass windows in the cathedral's walls.

The woman moves in front of a stained glass window depicting an archdevil offering his hand to a beautiful female angel. "As you probably know by now, Zariel was not always the Archduke of Avernus." As she speaks, the stained glass moves and flows, showing the angel taking the archdevil's hand. The angel rises to her feet, and as she does, her blue-feathered wings wither and blacken, her soft hair dries out and falls off, and her shining halo becomes an arch of Hellfire around her bald pate. "Her fall seemed sudden, but I knew her better than most. It was the natural conclusion of a promise she made long before."

The woman moves on to stand in front of another stained glass window showing Zariel – before her fall – fighting off hordes of demons and devils. Once again, the window begins moving, as humanoid knights on horses appear to fight alongside her, wielding lances and swords. "We followed her into Hell because we believed in her. Because we believed that she was right: we could not win a war if we only defended ourselves. To defeat evil, we had to take the fight to the fiends. We all knew that, for we had seen many times the consequences of passivity and timidity."

The ghost moves on to pause in front of a third stained glass window showing a peaceful hamlet on a sunny day. "Zariel's fall began long before she came to this Hell," she says, her voice sad and filled with regret. The window shifts, showing demonic figures running into the town, setting fires and slaughtering townspeople. The ghost's form begins to glow brighter and brighter, until the light shining from her is blinding. "If you want to wield the *Sword of Zariel*, you must first understand its wielder." The words are the last thing you hear before the world around you is only light.

As your sight returns, the solace of the cathedral is replaced by havoc, screams of panic, and acrid smoke. You stand at the edge of a small town of burning cottages, fields, and trees. A broken sign on the ground reveals the settlement's name: Idyllglen. Shrieking townsfolk run from cackling, snarling demons and gnolls.



IDYLLGLEN

Idyllglen is a dream sequence, albeit one with very real dangers and challenges. In a series of events, the party must fend off demonic invaders, while learning more about Zariel and the events that led to her fall. The location of Idyllglen is hectic, with a lot of things happening.

OVERVIEW

There's a total of seven "events" that take place while the characters are in Idyllglen. Here's a brief overview:

- **Event 1 – Characters' Arrival.** The party is thrown immediately into various smaller encounters with gnolls, beasts, and demons.
- **Event 2 – Yeenoghu's Champion.** The party is attacked by Garoknul, a marilith sworn to Yeenoghu.
- **Event 3 – Madness Reigns.** After defeating Garoknul, five human guards driven mad by demon ichor attack the party, who must try to subdue them without slaughter.
- **Event 4 – Unsettling Calm.** The party can rest and socialize with the inhabitants of Idyllglen during a 1-hour break from fighting.
- **Event 5 – Renewed Assault.** The town is once again attacked by demons and gnolls.
- **Event 6 – Yeenoghu.** The Beast of Butchery, Yeenoghu, arrives and attacks the party with relentless fury.
- **Event 7 – Zariel's Arrival.** Zariel and the Hellriders drive off Yeenoghu and pose the party a difficult question.

Combined, this is a pretty exciting day of adventuring, and the break in the middle is a nice touch, allowing the party to replenish resources during a short rest, while also giving them an opportunity to get a better understanding of what's going on.

EVENT 1: ARRIVAL

This one is fun. The characters must simultaneously handle four different minor encounters, choosing where to intervene and who to save. To make these choices apparent to the characters, you may want to highlight them further. You can use the following description:

As you appear on the road in the small town, you are immediately surrounded by six dog-faced humanoids wielding bloodstained spears. They laugh maniacally as they approach you. Not far away, you can see half a dozen small demons furiously hacking away at an overturned cart with their claws. A woman's shrill screams of terror sound from underneath the cart. Further ahead on the road, near an immense statue of an angel, you can see a giant hyena circling a much smaller mastiff. The dog growls defiantly, although it is clearly outmatched. Behind the fighting canines, a hulking demon is clawing at a large set of doors leading into a two-story, white stone temple. From within the temple, you can hear a cacophony of panicked screams and frantic prayer.

Running four different encounters at once can be difficult. Make things easier for yourself by determining in advance how encounters resolve if the characters don't intervene:

ROUND 1

- The **dretches** deal 15 damage to the cart.
- The **giant hyena** misses, the **mastiff** bites (4 dmg).
- The **hezrou** fails to break down the door.

ROUND 2

- The dretches finish destroying the cart.
- The giant hyena bites the dog, reducing it to 0 hit points, and bites it again (Rampage), causing 2 failed death saves.
- The hezrou fails to break down the door.

ROUND 3

- The dretches tear Ella Deepwell apart.
- The giant hyena leaves the mastiff and attacks the party. The mastiff rolls death saves if not healed or stabilized.
- The hezrou finally breaks down the door.

FURTHER ROUNDS

- The dretches and giant hyena attack the party.
- The mastiff rolls death saves.
- The hezrou kills 3 commoners per turn.
- When only one enemy remains, Garoknul appears.

EVENT 3: MADNESS REIGNS

This event is also fun – the party is attacked by five insane **guards**, whom they must try to subdue without killing them. If you are not using Lulu here, the punishment of exhaustion can come from Yael's mind instead of Lulu's. This is also a good moment for Jhessa Brightstar to make her first appearance, showing up to shout at the party: "Please, don't kill them! By Lathander's light, we will find a way to restore their minds!" If you run the ritual of Lathander (see below), you can have the ritual also cleanse the guards' minds.

EVENT 4: UNSETTLING CALM

This break is a nice touch, allowing the party a short rest and a chance to get some information from Jhessa Brightstar (who can explain Idyllglen's past to the party). If you want, you can have Jhessa warn ominously: "If this is like last time, the worst is yet to come. We must ask Lathander for succor. Will you aid me?" If the party acquiesces, she leads them (and the rest of the surviving townsfolk) to the statue of Zariel. Here she begins a hymn to the Morninglord, asking the party to touch the statue's feet as she does. After a minute or so of prayer, characters who touch the statue gain the benefit of a *protection from evil and good* spell for 1 hour (and any surviving guards from Event 3 are restored to their senses).

Additionally, while we know that Zariel will eventually show up to save the day, the party doesn't necessarily know that. To make the angel's inevitable arrival seem less like *deus ex machina* when it happens, you can have Jhessa Brightstar foreshadow it at this moment: "Lathander's blessing is upon us. The Morninglord has shown me that the night will grow darker still, but that beyond the darkness awaits a glorious dawn. Zariel will come to us, but we must persevere until she does," says the priest, before pointing to a sliver of glowing light that is forming at the top of the statue's head and slowly expanding downwards. "We must protect this beacon of light and hope, and it will protect us in turn – and allow Lathander's dawn to reach us!" This makes Zariel's arrival seem less coincidental and allows the characters to visualize the progress, as you describe how the light slowly expands until the statue is shining brightly from top to toe.

EVENT 6: YEENOGHU

The demon lord **Yeenoghu** is a tough challenge, with up to six flail attacks per round (when counting legendary actions) and an 8th level *spiritual weapon*, bringing him to a damage output of more than 100/round. A dangerous foe, to be sure, but the party isn't without advantages: the characters likely have *protection from evil and good* on them (causing Yeenoghu to attack with disadvantage), and if they fight Yeenoghu near the statue of Zariel, the demon lord takes roughly 10 radiant damage from the statue each round.

This encounter is also tough to balance because you want Zariel to make an appearance and save the characters, so they don't need to destroy the demon lord, but you also want them to feel like what they do in the encounter matters. This is why underlining that the statue must be protected (see "Event 4 – Unsettling Calm" on the previous page) can give them a sense of accomplishment, even when Zariel eventually arrives to save the day. Have Yeenoghu go directly for the statue, only pausing its attacks when the characters approach it in melee combat, or take actions it can't ignore.

DEVELOPMENTS

In the book, Zariel shows up after three rounds or when Yeenoghu is reduced to 100 hit points or fewer. You can play around with this a little – a strong and reasonably rested party should be able to last five rounds with Yeenoghu, even if it means that a few of them are killed in the process. If the statue is glowing as described on the previous page, you can let the characters know roughly how close they are to being relieved by Zariel ("the light continues to expand, now nearly reaching the statue's feet" or "the light seems only seconds away from covering the entire statue, causing Yeenoghu to attack the statue with almost panicked fury!").

EVENT 7: ZARIEL'S ARRIVAL

Zariel's arrival has a suitably dramatic description, with the angel and her Hellriders appearing to quickly sweep Yeenoghu and his demons from Idyllglen. After cleaning up, the book says that "Zariel prepares to lead her forces through the portal into Avernus," although such a portal isn't mentioned anywhere else in the text (you may want to simply not mention this part). Regardless, she asks the party if they would risk it all to save others, bestowing charms on them depending on their answer, and finally ending the dream.

The characters may want to ask questions of Zariel along the way. Since it is a dream or memory, you can certainly have the angel ignore any questions or mentions of her "future" as an archdevil. You can also opt to have her inquire about what happens, seemingly pondering the characters' words. If they tell her the consequences of her choice – to risk it all by heading into Avernus – she may respond with something like: "My path is already chosen. This is but a vision, a distant memory, a faded dream. But what descends can ascend again. That is what Lathander teaches us, when he brings back the sun each dawn."

CLAIMING THE SWORD

When the characters are returned to the Bleeding Citadel, Lulu fills them in completely on Zariel's background, and the characters can take the *Sword of Zariel*, destroying the Bleeding Citadel in the process.

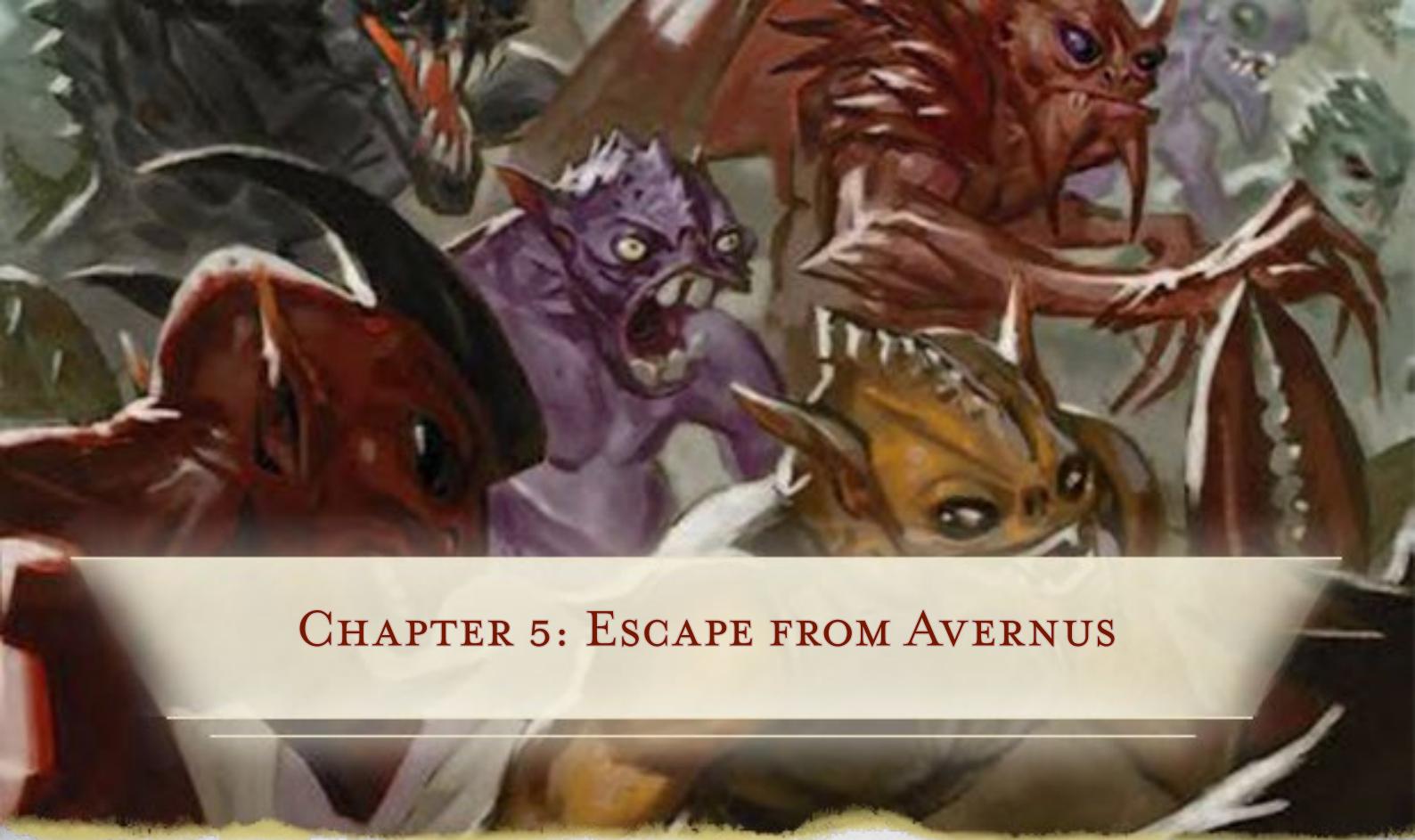
If you had Yael stand in for Lulu during "Entering the Citadel," you can also have her be the one who details the last pieces of Zariel's fall: that Idyllglen was the last straw, that Zariel accepted Asmodeus's deal, and that Yael hid her sword and gave her life to protect it from both devils and demons.

DRAWING THE SWORD

When a character draws the sword from the stone, they will "exist no longer," as Yael puts it. This doesn't mean they die, however, just that they are turned into a "heavenly" version of themselves, which includes a bunch of powerful boons, as well as a set of new personality traits and a lawful good alignment. This is pretty cool, but could also cause problems.

First, there's the expectation from the sentence, "The hero who becomes one with this blade exists no longer." The characters might (understandably) think that this means they'll give up their life – something a player might find alluringly dramatic – and not really be keen on the idea of becoming an angel creature with forced alignment and personality traits. You can alter this sentence to "The hero who becomes one with this blade will never be the same again," to give a more accurate warning of what will happen.

Second, there are the strong powers the sword bestows upon its wielder: 20 Charisma, flying, Truesight, and much more. This isn't too big an issue, since the campaign is ending soon. But it might leave a character reluctant to bring the sword to Zariel in an effort to redeem her (since that would mean giving up the sword). However, since the sword is already imposing upon their free will with a new personality, you can easily have it strongly urge the character to bring the sword to Zariel – either to seek her redemption, or her destruction. If you want the campaign to go on after *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus* and don't want to bestow so much power on one character, you can also take other steps to take the sword away again. When Zariel is redeemed, she'll take the sword (you can have her replace it with a *sun blade* to avoid leaving anyone too disappointed), and if she's destroyed, you can have the sword burst into brilliant shards along with the fallen angel (perhaps blessing its wielder with the ability to take on an angelic shape with Truesight, flying, and 20 charisma for 1 minute each day, or something similar to that).



CHAPTER 5: ESCAPE FROM AVERNUS



HAPTER 5: ESCAPE FROM AVERNUS IS THE final act of the infernal play, where the characters must lay their lives on the line – heck, even their immortal souls – to escape the Hell that is Avernus. In this chapter, the heroes must deal with demons, devils, and fallen angels as they cement their legacies as the saviors of Elturel!

RUNNING CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5 starts right where chapter 4 ends: the characters have claimed the *Sword of Zariel*, and must now figure out how to use it to save Elturel and escape Avernus!

Of all the chapters in *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus*, this chapter is by far the most open-ended chapter. It doesn't prescribe a predetermined plan of action, but instead outlines several different scenarios the players might choose from. This allows you to craft the ending that best fits your campaign, which is certainly the right way to do it, even if it can be more challenging than following a strict script.

Below you'll find a structured overview of chapter 5 to help clearly define the events in the chapter.

OVERVIEW

The campaign book outlines several possible outcomes to the campaign, but in a slightly haphazard way, with the outcomes scattered across multiple pages. Luckily, when we put it all together, the chapter is actually quite simple in its essence. The characters need to accomplish three things before the end:

- Deal with Zariel, Archduke of Avernus
- Break the Chains pulling Elturel down
- Return Elturel to the Material Plane

The characters can decide in which order they attempt these things, but they must successfully do all three to free Elturel and return it to the Material Plane (if that is their goal!).

DEAL WITH ZARIEL

Regardless of whatever else happens in this chapter, the party will eventually have to deal with Zariel. The chapter outlines several scenarios for the characters' interaction with Zariel, which essentially boils down to redeeming, making a deal with, or fighting the fallen angel. Below is a quick overview, which we'll explore in depth in the section **Dealing with Zariel**.

Redeeming Zariel. The party can redeem Zariel by presenting the *Sword of Zariel* to her and succeeding on a Persuasion check. When redeemed, Zariel returns to her angelic form, turns the chains holding Elturel into ash, and shatters the Companion, freeing the planetar who then returns Elturel to the Material Plane.

Making a Deal with Zariel. The party can also bargain with Zariel, offering, for example, to destroy one of the demon lords, give her the *Shield of the Hidden Lord* or sign away one of their brightest souls in exchange for Elturel's release. Alternatively, the party can also choose to serve Zariel, delivering the *Sword of Zariel* to the archdevil. In this scenario, Elturel isn't freed; indeed, Zariel might instead task the party with ensuring Baldur's Gate's fall.

Fighting Zariel. Destroying Zariel (possibly with the aid of various demon lords or archdevils) frees the citizens of Elturel from their infernal bondage and breaks the chains holding Elturel, but doesn't return the city to the Material Plane.

BREAKING THE CHAINS

To free the city of Elturel from imminent destruction by way of drowning in the River Styx, the party must break the chains holding it. The book outlines four ways to do this: by Zariel's hand, with Tiamat or Crokek'toeck's aid, or by breaking the contract between Zariel and Thavius Kreeg. Don't be afraid to add more options to this one – feasibly, any powerful entity or even the characters themselves can break the chains. And, since breaking the chains in itself does little to actually liberate Elturel from its predicament, you don't have to worry about the characters skipping content by dealing with the chains in an unintended, inventive way.

By Zariel's Hand. If the characters either redeemed Zariel, or struck a bargain with the archdevil, Zariel can break the chains holding Elturel and free the city.

Breaking the Contract. If Zariel is killed, or the characters can trick Zariel into presenting the contract and then destroy it, the chains are turned to ash and Elturel is freed.

Ire of Tiamat. The party can strike a bargain with Arkhan the Cruel and his draconic deity, and get the dragon goddess to destroy the chains holding Elturel.

Jaws of Crokek'toeck. If Crokek'toeck was released from the Scab, the party can smear blood from a celestial or a paladin on the chains, luring the demon in to chew through them.

RETURNING ELTUREL

Lastly, the party must ensure that Elturel is returned to the Material Plane. The only way to do this outlined in the chapter is by freeing the planetar trapped inside the Companion. This – freeing the planetar – thus becomes the real objective here. (If the characters are stumped as to how they can return Elturel to the Material plane, you can have Lulu or Gargauth in the *Shield of the Hidden Lord* suggest destroying the Companion). Going by the book, there are three ways to free the planetar: striking the Companion with the *Sword of Zariel*, using Bel's adamantine rods, or acquiring the aid of a powerful demon lord or archdevil.

The Sword of Zariel. A character wielding the *Sword of Zariel* can free the planetar with a single blow. Zariel does this for the party if they redeem her or strike a bargain with her. Otherwise, they can do it themselves, although this may destroy the sword.

Using the Adamantine Rods. If the characters have acquired the nine adamantine rods crafted by Bel, they can insert the rods into the Companion, thus releasing the planetar.

With Evil's Aid. The characters can also get a powerful archdevil or demon lord to shatter the Companion for them. The most likely suspects are Tiamat, Bel, or even Gargauth, if released from the shield.



STARTING THE ENDING

As mentioned earlier, chapter 5 starts in a very open way. The characters are on the open steppes of Avernus, *Sword of Zariel* in hand, ready to take on Zariel and save Elturel. But where do they start? They may have some ideas on their own, but it pays for you to be aware of the options, especially if you want to guide them toward a particular type of ending. The most likely first actions are one of the following:

- Immediately seek out Zariel to destroy or redeem her.
- Go to Elturel to destroy the chains and/or the Companion.
- Try to make an alliance with one or several NPCs.

However, which of these options even occur to them, or how they go about it, depends on the information available to them – which is something you have control over.

YOUR PREFERRED ENDING

The information you provide the party with will inevitably guide their decisions. But choosing what information to give, requires you to think about what ending you think would be most fitting for your campaign. Do you want the party to face Zariel on their own or with cool allies in tow? Do you think redeeming Zariel should be plan A, and a fight to the death plan B – or the other way around? Do you want the party to liberate Elturel on their own by destroying the chains and breaking the Companion?

SETTING THE SCENE

The chapter starts with a nearly blank slate. The descriptions you provide as the characters stand under Avernus's open sky (or have provided earlier) will play a large part in determining the party's actions. If they can see Elturel on the horizon, hovering just barely above the River Styx, they are probably more likely to hurry to its rescue immediately. Alternatively, if they know they have several days to plan and prepare, they are more likely to seek out allies and explore their options. Likewise, if they never see Croek'toeck, they probably won't get the idea to have it chew through the infernal chains, and if they don't know where Zariel resides, they won't be able to confront her in her flying fortress, if that's what you would like to have happen.

USING NPCs

Another tool you can use to guide the characters are any of the NPCs and/or sentient items they have with them. The book suggests that Lulu will try to convince the characters to redeem Zariel, while it would seem fitting that Gargauth in the *Shield of the Hidden Lord* might suggest to the party that they make some allies first – preferably someone who can free him, such as Bel or Tiamat.

You can have any NPC tell the party where to find Zariel – whether you want that to be in her flying fortress or on the battlefield under Elturel – or even have the *Sword of Zariel* impart that knowledge as a weird sensation to any character who has attuned to it. Likewise, NPCs can also provide the characters with pertinent information such as how the party can destroy the infernal chains (suggesting Croek'toeck, if they spot him on the plains!) or the Companion.

If you don't have Lulu or Gargauth available, or prefer not to use them, you can also have Olanthius show up after the citadel's destruction. He mourns the final passing of Yael, but swears fealty to any character attuned to the *Sword of Zariel*. Olanthius can be the one who suggests that the party seek out Zariel to redeem or destroy her, while also providing welcome aid in the challenging fights ahead.

Example Endings

There are a multitude of different ways to end the campaign, and it can be hard to keep track of all the possibilities. Below you'll find three example endings which can help to give a clearer picture of what's possible, and perhaps even inspire the ending you want to create for your campaign.

Example Ending 1

- The party is joined by Olanthius shortly after reclaiming the *Sword of Zariel*. He offers his help in either redeeming or destroying Zariel, and tells the party that she is near Elturel.
- On the way to Zariel, they must deal with some horned devils and barlguras.
- The characters finally get close to Zariel and attempt to redeem her – and succeed!
- Bel chooses this moment to enact his vengeance, attacking the vulnerable Zariel.
- The party and Olanthius fight the powerful pit fiend and manage to send him scurrying away, although the valiant Olanthius is destroyed.
- Zariel thanks the party and liberates Elturel.

Example Ending 2

- The party can see that they still have some days before Elturel descends fully. Gargauth suggests that they find allies against Zariel.
- The party strikes a deal with Bel, who grants them charms and items, and informs them that the adamantine rods they have can be used to destroy the Companion.
- The party flies up to the Companion to use the adamantine rods, but are intercepted by Zariel, who attacks them.
- The party is losing the fight with Zariel, but survivors from Elturel come to their aid, suffering heavy losses but turning the tide.
- Sensing that she might lose, Zariel offers a bargain to the party – destroy a demon lord and she will let Elturel go back.
- Whether by Zariel's destruction or by the party's fulfillment of their bargain, Elturel is freed and returned to the Material Plane.

Example Ending 3

- The party is spurred on by Lulu to quickly get to Elturel and redeem Zariel.
- On the way to Zariel, they must deal with some horned devils and barlguras.
- The characters finally get close to Zariel and attempt to redeem her – and fail!
- Zariel is ready to attack, but Gargauth implores a good-aligned cleric or paladin to offer themselves to Zariel.
- Zariel agrees, but first wants the *Shield of the Hidden Lord* as part of the bargain.
- Gargauth is released and the party must fight the powerful pit fiend.
- When Gargauth has been defeated, the cleric or paladin moves to sacrifice themselves, giving the characters another chance to redeem Zariel.
- Whether by Zariel's redemption or by a character's noble sacrifice, Elturel is freed and returned to the Material Plane.

DEALING WITH ZARIEL

How the characters choose to deal with Zariel is in many ways the pivotal event of chapter 5 – it's where they'll most likely find their greatest challenge and where the campaign's ending will be decided by strength of arms and sharpness of wit. Below we'll go review the options for dealing with Zariel presented in the book and offer advice on how to run them.

REDEEMING ZARIEL

To quickly recap, this is how the campaign book describes the possible redemption of Zariel:

- The characters must bring the *Sword of Zariel* to within 10 feet of Zariel and make a difficult Charisma (Persuasion) check.
- On a success, Zariel takes the sword and returns to her angelic form, and gives the party a *blessing of health*.
- Zariel destroys the Companion and releases the planetar.
- The planetar returns Elturel to the Material Plane.
- Zariel gifts the party a feather to summon her for 1 hour.

This scenario is rewarding in the sense that Zariel's redemption is a fitting end to her story arc, and the scenes described in the book are dramatic. However, having everything come down to a single skill check, and ending with Zariel basically doing everything for the party, can end up feeling a bit anticlimactic. There are several ways you can make the redemption of Zariel not only more climactic, but also more challenging and satisfying. This involves enhancing what happens before, during, and after Zariel's redemption.

BEFORE ZARIEL'S REDEMPTION

On p. 154 of *BG:DiA*, we're given a thorough description of a possible "Endgame in Elturel," which presents the party with some challenges before encountering Zariel in the field of battle below Elturel. You can use this scenario to make sure that there's some action before the characters attempt to redeem the archdevil. You can read more about this under **Endgame in Elturel**.

DURING ZARIEL'S REDEMPTION

In the book, redeeming Zariel requires the characters to present the *Sword of Zariel*, make a good argument for rejoining the celestial host, and a DC 25 Charisma (Persuasion) check (which is reduced by 5 if either Lulu or Olanthius is present, or by 10 if both are with the party).

While this process certainly makes sense, it also puts all the party's eggs in one basket – or on one check, in this case. You can make this challenge more rewarding and include more of the party by turning it into a Group Skill Check.

Instead of asking only for one check from one character, you can have the tempted – but unsure – Zariel ask each of the party members to make an argument for why she should take the sword and rejoin the celestial host, from their unique perspective. To make success more likely, you can lower the collective DC to 15 (if it is not already lowered by present NPCs), and allow characters who make more logical arguments ("Instead of commanding the forces of evil, is your energy not better spent convincing the forces of good to join the war in earnest?") and/or to use Intelligence or Wisdom in place of Charisma, when making the Persuasion check. A character who refuses to answer or can't give an argument fails automatically. If half or more of the checks succeed, Zariel grasps the sword and accepts redemption.

Consequences of Redemption

We're never given the specifics of Zariel's deal with Asmodeus, but it doesn't seem far-fetched to think that there would be consequences to breaking the agreement. This can work in your favor, since you may want the characters to handle themselves against the foes that arrive after her redemption. Immediately after her transformation to a solar, you can have Zariel breathlessly mutter "...the bargain...reversed...back to...how he found me—" before a multitude of gory wounds spout on her body and she falls to her knees. If characters move to heal her, she tells them she can heal herself, and instead asks them to protect her from the foes that seek to take advantage of her weakened state. She recovers after a minute or however long is convenient for the encounter you're running.

AFTER ZARIEL'S REDEMPTION

If the characters fail to redeem Zariel, they'll have an exciting showdown with the archdevil, but if the characters succeed, the book has Zariel taking the reins from there, destroying the Companion and returning Elturel to the Material Plane – basically ending the campaign for the characters. You can make the ending feel more earned by introducing a new foe to replace the redeemed Zariel. There are ample foes to choose from, and which is best for your table will likely depend on who the characters have interacted with during their time in Avernus. Below we'll go over three likely prospects.

Kostchtchie. If freed, Kostchtchie is described at the end of "Endgame in Elturel" as trying to take back his hammer from Zariel. As nearby devils stop to gawk at her angelic transformation, the demon lord slips through their ranks to reclaim his hammer. It is up to the party to defend the weakened Zariel (see "Consequences of Redemption"). In spite of his CR of 25, Kostchtchie has only 16 AC and 243 HP, so it doesn't seem unlikely that a party of 13th level adventurers could beat him.

Bel. If the characters encountered Bel during chapter 3, you can have the cunning pit fiend show up after Zariel's redemption. Arriving via *teleport*, Bel takes advantage of Zariel's weakness to make his move. If Zariel isn't weakened by her redemption, you can have Bel start the fight by using *imprisonment (chaining)* on Zariel, followed immediately by a *meteor swarm* aimed directly at her head, before he moves in for the kill. Even without these high-level spells, Bel's CR of 25 seems appropriate, so if the party is losing badly, you can have Olanthius or another friendly NPC show up to help

Tiamat. Finally, if Arkhan the Cruel or Tiamat have featured heavily in the campaign, you can have the dragon goddess make her move immediately following Zariel's redemption. Still wary of defeat, Tiamat has sent her minions to kill Zariel and the party. Arkhan the Cruel arrives on the back of his chimera, flanked by Torogar Steelfist on a manticore. In combination, this group should present a challenging, but still beatable, encounter. Alternatively, you can have Tiamat show up herself, in which case the party will likely need the aid of Zariel or other powerful NPCs to even stand a chance!

MAKING A DEAL WITH ZARIEL

The various deals the party can make with Zariel are well described in the campaign book. To quickly reiterate, the party has the following things to offer Zariel:

- To destroy a Demon Lord (likely Baphomet, Yeenoghu, or Kostchtchie).
- The *Shield of the Hidden Lord* (including the destruction of the weakened pit fiend inside).
- The Ultimate Sacrifice (the soul of a good-aligned paladin or cleric of 10th level or higher).
- Serving Zariel (signing their souls over to Zariel and serving her eternally).

Making a deal with Zariel is in many ways a very suitable ending to an infernal campaign – escaping Hell by entering into a deal with an archdevil! All deals are not created equal, however. Depending on the characters' alignment and personalities, some bargains may seem more enticing, while others are completely off the table.

TO DESTROY A DEMON LORD

The book suggests that Zariel will trade Elturel for the destruction of either Baphomet, Yeenoghu, or Kostchtchie. Since the party has likely already fought Yeenoghu in Idyllglen, you may be tempted to go with Baphomet instead. The downside to Baphomet is that he isn't a very interesting foe – aside from some less-than-worthy spells and Frightful Presence, Baphomet basically just makes the same attacks each round. If you haven't already foreshadowed Baphomet heavily, you can easily replace him with any of the other demon lords, who can be found in *Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes*. Zuggtmoy, Juiblex, or Graz'zt all present similar challenges while having more interesting combat options.

This bargain works very well as a more impromptu bargain. It's a deal that either the characters or Zariel herself can suggest to save face if they find themselves losing a pitched battle. It's also very suitable if the characters have shown interest in the Blood War during the campaign, and perhaps have grown sympathetic towards the devils, who (according to themselves, at least) defend the planes of existence from the chaotic and savage demons.

THE SHIELD OF THE HIDDEN LORD

This option has Zariel demanding the *Shield of the Hidden Lord*, upon which she releases the pit fiend Gargauth and insists that the party destroy it. The book dictates that Gargauth has 4 levels of exhaustion, which would make the pit fiend a meager challenge for a party of 13th level adventurers. If this is the final encounter of the campaign, you may want to present the party with a fresh and whole Gargauth – even at full power, a pit fiend shouldn't be too hard a challenge for the average level 13 party.

This bargain works particularly well if Gargauth has been pestering the characters to find a way to release him for the last several weeks or even months. To finally be freed, only to be destroyed moments later by the characters is a sweetly ironic ending to the campaign, provided that the characters have developed a meaningful relationship with the pit fiend. Be aware that the book dictates that destroying Gargauth should only buy Elturel's release OR return, not both. Whether you want to stick by this or not is up to you, though it does seem fair that destroying Gargauth isn't a big enough prize to warrant the release of Elturel.

THE ULTIMATE SACRIFICE

This option has a good-aligned cleric or paladin of 10th level or higher offering their soul to Zariel in return for the freedom of Elturel. In addition to being an utilitarian's dream deal to begin with, this selflessness also grants the party an additional chance to redeem Zariel (with advantage!).

The idea that a single character can save thousands by sacrificing themselves is definitely appealing. It feels like this works best if it is the player's own idea – one you can inspire by dropping hints about the value a paladin or cleric's soul might have throughout the campaign, or by having an NPC such as Gargauth or Lulu say as much. You can of course also have Zariel herself bring it up during a fight with the party, if the characters need a way to survive a catastrophic defeat.

SERVING ZARIEL

This option has the characters swearing away their souls and offering to serve Zariel for eternity. In the book, this option is mentioned separately from the other bargains and has Zariel providing nothing in return, but it could feasibly work like "The Ultimate Sacrifice": the characters sign over their souls in return for the freedom of Elturel.

This bargain seems particularly well-suited for evil – or at least morally ambiguous – characters. It's also a bargain that is worth keeping in reserve, ready for use if the characters are losing the epic last battle against Zariel and need an out. This bargain has the added benefit of providing a possible starting point for the next campaign, as the party is sent to carry out Zariel's bidding. Whether that means going up against another archdevil, finding an obscure celestial relic that can be used against the demons, or causing the corruption and ultimate descent of Baldur's Gate, is your call.



FIGHTING ZARIEL

In the section “Zariel’s Wrath” (*BG:DiA*, p. 148), the campaign book describes a fight with Zariel in only a few short sentences. Below, we’ll go over the fight with Zariel in more detail, offering advice on how to run it.

BEFORE FIGHTING ZARIEL

As mentioned before, the “Endgame in Elturel” (*BG:DiA*, p. 154) outlines a nice precursor to a fight with Zariel. Whether the party is seeking the archdevil to redeem her or are hoping for a fight from the start, the challenges described here should get them warmed up before the final battle.

The encounter with Zariel might start differently, however. If the characters have opted to go for the infernal chains or the Companion directly, the book describes how Zariel sends up minions to intercept the party. You can make this scenario match “Endgame in Elturel” by adding some lesser encounters – first two **horned devils** try to stop the party from doing whatever they’re doing, and after they’re defeated, five **vrocks** or **chasmes** show up randomly, attacking the party.

Lastly, the party might also choose to confront Zariel in her flying fortress – provided she’s there at all, which is up to you to decide. The book doesn’t offer much advice on how to run an encounter in Zariel’s flying fortress, and, when looking at it, a final showdown underneath the swiftly descending Elturel does seem more dramatic. If the party does decide to go to Zariel’s fortress, you can have it guarded by two **erinyes** and twelve **bearded devils**, while the rest of the crew has followed Zariel into battle. They can act as the “warm-up encounters,” while also sending the party to the battlefield where they can find Zariel.

ZARIEL’S TACTICS

A fight with an archfiend as powerful as Zariel is pretty exciting on its own, but you can enhance it further by understanding Zariel’s tactics. Zariel is not only a defensive powerhouse, with 21 AC, 580 HP, regeneration, and various useful resistances – she also has a wide array of useful offensive actions available to her.

Attacks. If Zariel goes for pure damage, she can make two flail attacks (53 average damage each) and an attack with Matalotok (55 average damage + 10 AoE cold damage) or use her Horrid Touch (44 necrotic damage + blinded and deafened). When dealing damage is the priority, she should use Matalotok, but if she wants to quickly disable a character, Horrid Touch is the way to go. Regardless of which attack she chooses, Zariel can easily reduce nearly any 13th-level character to 0 hit points in a single turn.

Spells. Zariel also has spells available to her, but in most situations, only *blade barrier* does enough to be better than a round of attacks. She can use that spell to ring in melee combatants while taking care of spellcasters and ranged attackers. Even though *finger of death* is a strong spell, her ordinary attacks deal so much damage that she’d probably only use it if her target of choice has resistance to her ordinary attacks.

Legendary Actions. Zariel’s choices of legendary actions are quite limited. She can either use Teleport three times, or teleport once and use Immolating Gaze. Immolating Gaze can be used to frustrate concentrating spellcasters or target foes with low HP. Teleport is good when she needs to close with a dangerous foe right after their turn, make her own attacks, and Teleport away before her target can return the favor.

Overall Tactics. Equipped with ample hit points and a regeneration feature, Zariel’s main priority should be to quickly take out enemies that can deal radiant damage, or

who have other spells or features that present a real threat. She uses *blade barrier* to control melee combatants, while an early Horrid Touch can be used to weaken one character for a turn or two. This allows Zariel to use her Teleport ability and high move speed to close in on her primary targets, taking dangerous characters out one by one. If she finds that characters are being healed or revivified, she might opt to use *finger of death* to ensure a troublesome character’s demise.

THE ENVIRONMENT

The best encounters are dynamic – not only through the actions of the involved combatants, but also because of the environment’s impact on the battle.

A final battle with Zariel is likely to take place either on the battlefield underneath Elturel, on the streets of Elturel, or in the air near Elturel. In either case, there’s plenty of fiends and environmental hazards nearby. As a means to spice up combat, you can introduce random events. Each round at initiative 20, roll a d20 and consult the ‘Battlefield Events’-table below to see what happens, depending on where the battle is taking place. Note that some events target specific characters, while others affect all creatures involved in the battle. You decide whether creatures that show up only make a single round of attacks before passing on, or stay in the fight until destroyed.

Battlefield Events

Event	Under Elturel	In Elturel	Over Elturel
A vrock or barlgura attacks Zariel	1	1	1
A Hellwasp or barbed devil attacks a character	2	2	2
A cloud of poisonous gas drifts across the battlefield. All combatants must make a DC 15 Con save or be poisoned until next initiative 20	3–4	3–4	3–4
An abyssal warhorn sounds nearby. All combatants must make a DC 15 Wis save or be frightened until next initiative 20	5–6	5–6	5–6
The ground shakes. All combatants must make a DC 15 Dex save or be knocked prone	7	7–8	–
A lightning bolt from the Companion flashes close. All combatants must make a DC 15 Con save or be blinded until next initiative 20	8	9–10	7–8
An errant ballista bolt flies towards the character with most hit points. +10 to attack, 4d8 piercing damage and DC 15 Strength save or shoved 10 ft.	9	–	9–10
A rock falls from the city in a 10 ft. radius where it hits most characters. DC 15 Dex save. 8d10 bludgeoning damage on failure, success halves	10	–	–
Nothing happens	11–20	11–20	11–20

ALLIES AGAINST ZARIEL

The campaign book gives several suggestions on entities that might be able to offer assistance in a showdown with Zariel. Below we'll analyze and expand upon the descriptions in the book, as well as adding some additional options.

BAPHOMET, KOSTCHTCHE OR YEENOGHU

Using one of the demon lords as aid against Zariel is a good option if the party suddenly finds themselves fighting Zariel without any allies – perhaps the characters attempted to redeem her, but failed. Having one of these demon lords interrupt the fight midway to launch a devastating attack against Zariel is a nice way to increase the characters' chances of success, although you should be wary not to make the fight against her too easy. Simply have the demon lord show up and distract Zariel for a few rounds, bringing her hit points down a notch and giving the characters some time to recover, before falling to the archdevil or being pulled away by her legions of devils.

BEL

Unless he can be certain that Zariel has lost Asmodeus' favor, Bel won't make a direct move against Zariel. This is well enough, since Bel would probably firmly tip the fight in the party's favor if he showed up to fight by their side. Bel's aid is better given indirectly, by buffing the party and increasing their own strength. If the party seeks out Bel before going for Zariel, you can have the former archdevil suggest a simple bargain: Swear to destroy Zariel without mentioning his involvement (Bel wants to avoid repercussions, should they fail), and he'll not only give them aid, he'll also allow them to leave Avernus with Elturel. Bel's aid comes in the form of a summoned ice devil (spear variant), and a charm for each of the characters, choosing from this list:

- *Charm of Diabolical Inspiration* (9x advantage on ability checks, attack rolls or saving throws)
- *Charm of Heroism* (10 temporary HP and bless for 1 hour)
- *Charm of Lesser Conscription* (summoning of a barbed devil, two bearded devils or three spined devils)
- *Charm of Restoration* (6 charges, 4 charges to cast greater restoration, 2 charges to cast lesser restoration)
- *Charm of the Adamant* (9 x 30 temporary hit points and can't be charmed or frightened)

If there's more than five party members, or you think the party needs more help, Bel can also provide arms and armor. At your discretion, he might offer items such as *armors of resistance (fire)*, *cloaks of displacement*, or even a *sunblade*.

If the party doesn't seek out Bel before engaging Zariel, you can always have him contact the party telepathically during combat, offering his bargain to one or more characters, delivering his charms and sending the ice devil if they agree.

TIAMAT

In the book, the party can make a deal with Arkhan the Cruel, who'll spend ten days mustering an army of white abishai to take on Zariel. The abishai fight Zariel's legions, while Arkhan, Torogar and their mounts aid the party against Zariel. This option works well if there's still ample time before Elturel's descent, but if you've already established that Elturel's destruction is imminent, you can always waive the preparation time. You can also have Arkhan show up to aid the party without being contacted first, if the characters are fighting Zariel alone (and losing). In that case, Arkhan will attempt to assume the mantle as Archduke of Avernus after Zariel's defeat, unless the party moves to stop him.

OLANTHIUS

If the characters have crossed paths with Zariel's former general during their adventures, you can have the death knight show up during their fight Zariel. Not one for ambushes, Olanthus calmly approaches Zariel, professing in a cold and bitter voice: "If you can break your oath of servitude to the Lord of Light, surely it is only fitting that I break my oath to you as well. I denounce you, Zariel and your evil creed. I shall see you destroyed this day – or ensure my own destruction, and release from this Hell, in the attempt."

While a strong CR of 17 should on paper be enough to turn the tides in the party's favor, many of Olanthus attacks and spells are less effective against Zariel. Olanthus will, however, work to soak up some of the damage that Zariel deals, improving the party's chances of victory even if it comes at the cost of his own miserable existence.

ELTUREL'S SURVIVORS

With Elturel hanging mere feet above the River Styx, aid could also come from the city itself. Even if the party doesn't seek out the survivors in the High Cathedral before engaging Zariel, you can have the valiant survivors show up unannounced during an opportune moment of the fight with Zariel. The survivors either enter the combat by climbing or rappelling down the sides of the city, or on the backs of their appropriate mounts (see the list below), at your discretion. For added drama, you can have the survivors arrive just as Zariel is about to strike a devastating blow, crashing into her from above and dealing a strong blow to the archdevil.

Possible survivors includes:

- **Ulder Ravengard** on the back of a **griffon** made of radiant light given to him by Lathander.
- Seltern Obranch (**druid**) on the back of a **giant eagle** he has befriended.
- Reya Mantlemorn (**veteran**) and Pherria Jynks (**acolyte**) on the back of a **pegasus** summoned by the acolyte.
- Any number of Hellriders (**veterans**) on the back of summoned **pegasi**.

The survivors of Elturel fight fearlessly, recognizing that defeating Zariel is their last chance at saving their souls and the city of Elturel. They'll selflessly give up their lives to aid the characters and ensure Zariel's destruction. You can make combat more manageable for yourself, and more exciting for your players, by giving them control of some or all of these NPCs during the fight with Zariel.



AFTER FIGHTING ZARIEL

The final moments of the party's fight with Zariel could very well be some of the last moments in the entire campaign. As such, they should be exciting and epic. Below we'll quickly discuss how you can make sure that a fight with Zariel comes to as satisfying an end as possible.

IF ZARIEL IS WINNING

Even if the party has acquired aid against Zariel, they may still find themselves in over their heads against the powerful archdevil. However, Zariel's victory doesn't have to mean the death of the characters.

If the characters' defeat is all but sure, and you don't want to give them additional aid, you can have Zariel hold up her hand and say: "You have fought well, but to continue now would be wasteful. Put down your arms and let us talk. There might be ways you can serve me better than by dying."

From this clear position of advantage, Zariel will likely demand either the party's servitude (see 'Serving Zariel' in *BG:DiA*, p. 149), or ask a cleric or paladin to make 'The Ultimate Sacrifice' (*BG:DiA*, p. 152). In return, she'll offer the characters their lives (including the resurrection of any dead characters), but characters who press a hard enough bargain and can come up with a good enough offer, might be able to convince her to free Elturel as well.

While probably not the greatest end to the campaign, striking an uncomfortable bargain probably beats being killed unceremoniously by Zariel – which of course is still a very realistic outcome, should the party refuse her offer.

IF ZARIEL IS LOSING

At the end of 'Endgame in Elturel', the campaign book dictates that Zariel retreats to her flying fortress if reduced to 100 hit points or less. Depending on the situation, this can work well – if the characters are also nearing their limits, this allows them to focus their remaining strength on saving Elturel instead of dealing with the dangerous archdevil.

However, Zariel's retreat could also rob the characters of a suitable climax to the campaign, and one could argue that retreat isn't really in the stubborn and bloodthirsty archdevil's nature. Instead of retreat, you can have Zariel offer the characters another chance at a peaceful resolution. Visibly wounded and weakened, the archdevil seems to falter for a moment, shaking her head in distress: "Why are we dying to kill each other? The real evil is out there, on the field, clawing through flesh and bones with demonic claws. I didn't accept Asmodeus' bargain so I could destroy a band of mortal heroes – I sought power so I could save the multiverse from the Abyss. This fight is futile. Wasteful."

If the characters still possess the *Sword of Zariel*, they can take this chance to present it once more, offering arguments to sway Zariel to redeem herself. Allow the characters to roll any Persuasion checks with advantage this time around. Alternatively, if the characters engage Zariel in conversation, but don't have the sword or aren't interested in redeeming her, they can strike a bargain with the archdevil instead. For example, you can have her point out a demon lord on the battlefield and ask the characters for their aid in destroying the demon lord in return for the release and safe return of Elturel. Or, if the characters are fighting alongside Arkhan the Cruel, or have gained the aid of Bel or a demon lord, she might ask the party to betray their unlikely allies in return for Elturel's freedom.

Of course, the party might still refuse Zariel's overtures, in which case the archdevil's jaw clenches, her eyes narrow in spiteful hatred, and she throws herself back into the fight with renewed vigor, fighting until destroyed.

ENDGAME IN ELTUREL

At the end of Chapter 5, the campaign book details an 'Endgame in Elturel' – a chaotic battle underneath the nearly fallen city of Elturel. Including nice descriptions and a few encounters, this scenario serves very well as the build-up to the characters final showdown with Zariel. Below, we'll do a quick troubleshoot of the three events that comprise 'Endgame in Elturel'.

EVENT 1: RIVER'S EDGE

The characters arrive on the scene, seeing Elturel quickly sinking into the River Styx, and demons and devils fighting in its shadow. Before they can reach Zariel, they are first attacked by two horned devils with 125 hit points each.

This event works well as it is, serving as a nice precursor to real combat. If the characters are flying across the battlefield, the horned devils fly up to accost them. Remember, it's okay if the characters don't stand and duke it out with the horned devils. If they use significant resources to evade them – invisibility, teleport, etc. – they can simply leave the horned devils behind. But, if they don't make a clean enough escape, you can have the horned devils reappear during later events.

EVENT 2: FIELD OF FLAMES

Making their way across the battlefield towards Zariel, the characters must make three group Dexterity (Stealth) or Wisdom (Survival) checks to navigate the battlefield, taking poison and fire damage if they fail. They are then accosted by two hezrou fighting the pit fiend Lucille.

If the characters can fly, this event doesn't really work as it is written. You can probably skip the skill checks and instead beef up the encounter by Lucille, replacing the landlocked hezrou with 5 vrocks or chasms, that fly up to intercept the characters. Alternatively, if the party doesn't have much help with them when facing Zariel, you can skip this encounter in its entirety.

EVENT 3: SHOWDOWN WITH ZARIEL

Arriving by Zariel, they find the archdevil battling a balor, which leaves her at 450 hit points after 4 rounds of combat. If they choose to engage Zariel in combat, she flees when reduced to 100 hit points or less.

The final showdown with Zariel can and should be tweaked to fit the party's current situation. The main purpose of this encounter isn't to follow a predetermined script, but to give the characters their greatest challenge yet – making success difficult, but attainable. This is always a hard balance to strike, so the trick is to give yourself some options to tweak the final encounter as it happens.

If the characters arrive to their showdown with Zariel low on hit points and without allies, you can have her start at even lower than 450 hit points – describing the wounds she's suffered during her battle with the balor. If a fight erupts between the party and Zariel, you can have an impromptu ally show up. Which one probably depends on the party's strength: if they're very outmatched, Tiamat's forces probably offer them the greatest chance, while Bel and his infernal charms should be sufficient aid to a party that just needs that last little push to defeat Zariel.

Likewise, if the characters make a bargain with Zariel, you can have her payment be the challenge that best matches the party's current strength. Baphomet or Yeenoghu (perhaps slightly wounded) are good encounters for a fresh and strong party, while Kostchtchie or Gargauth (weakened from his release) are challenges more suitable for a diminished party.

An Eventyr Games Compendium

We hope you've enjoyed the content in this compendium. If you find any errors, have a good idea, or just want to get in touch, you can reach out to us at jvaleur@eventyrgames.com or eventyrgames.com.

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