

BALDUR'S GATE: DESCENT INTO AVERNUS

A TALE OF TWO CITIES



DM's Resources for Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus
Chapter 1: A Tale of Two Cities

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Chapter 1: A Tale of Two Cities serves as the starting point for the newest official campaign: **Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus**. It's an introductory chapter packed with action, where the adventurers get a feel for the seedy streets of Baldur's Gate, discover background information and dark secrets that sets them up

for their journey into Avernus, as well as where they meet some of the allies that will follow them on their adventures.

This document seeks to provide you, the Dungeon Master, with tools and thoughts that will help you make Chapter 1 of Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus an exciting experience for your players. It's strongly recommended that you read through Chapter 1 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:

Additional Hooks. Several ideas on how to get the characters probably hooked and motivated to fight devils and journey into Avernus!

Changing Campaigns. Advice on how to transfer your characters from either Ghosts of Saltmarsh or Waterdeep: Dragon Heist to Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus.

Running Chapter 1. Ideas on how to run each location in Chapter 1, extra content and advice on scaling difficulty.

Monster Stat Blocks. 20+ pages of monster stat blocks covering every foe in the chapter, neatly arranged together on pages, so you don't have to flip through several books.

Thavius Kreeg's Contract. A handout showing Thavius Kreeg's contract with the Duke of Avernus.

Maps. Five full-scale digital battlemaps covering every location in Chapter 1, primed for virtual tabletops!

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STARTING CHAPTER 1

The main purpose of Chapter 1: A Tale of Two Cities is to establish the background for the adventure, as well as introduce certain themes (corruption and redemption in particular). In this way, the Chapter is pretty self-contained, meaning that you have a lot of freedom to change/remove content without worrying about messing up anything later in the campaign. As long as the party discovers that Elturel has been transported to Avernus because of Thavius Kreeg's deal with Zariel, and that to save the city, they must go to Avernus, then Chapter 1 has served its purpose. Oh, yeah – it's of course also where we hook the characters in, making them actually *care* about the story, which we'll delve deeper into below.

ADDITIONAL HOOKS

BG:DiA assumes that your characters start out working for the Flaming Fist. Furthermore, the adventure 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 hell!

While there's some opportunity to expand upon the initial hook along the way – using NPC's such as Reya Mantlemorn and Lulu the Hollyphant – you may want to start the adventure 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' (see *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's of course many variations of how you can set this up – what's the secret, who knows, how do they use it against the players – 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 in 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 Eturel disappeared. Suggest that their character can either be from Eturel – avoiding its 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 Eturel as soon as they're presented with it, and you can use their ties to Eturel to add some drama during Chapter 2.

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 book (p. 32), the young Hellrider has heard that Thavius Kreeg have been spotted in the city, surrounded by Vanthampur-guards. As she's on the run from the Flaming Fist, there's no way she'll 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 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 the party actually meets Reya Mantlemorn. Second, it works just as well if you choose to skip the Dead Three cultists-plotline (see 'Restructuring Chapter 1' on page 4 of this document), or if you're bringing in characters from another adventure, such as *Ghosts of Saltmarsh* or *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* (see page 4 of this document).

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 Dead Three Dungeon).

After the party has demonstrated their usefulness, the cultists ask them to eradicate the Dead Three Cult and its backers entirely, sending them after the Vanthampurs. Finally, the cultists pays the party handsomely for going to Avernus to thwart Zariel's evil plans with Eturel – 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 runs into cultists of the Dragon Queen. It also requires a party that is 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 Dispater, who fears Zariel is mustering forces to challenge him for dominion of the Second Layer of Hell.

FACTION HOOKS

There's also the option to hook individual characters or even the whole party in through the factions they're affiliated with (see *Dungeon Master's Guide* p. 21). Most factions will have an interest in Eturel's disappearance, although their reasons and goals might differ, as suggested below.

The Harpers. "With the disappearance of Eturel, Faerun 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 is, 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 Eturel, we need to find it."

Order of the Gauntlet. "The crater of Eturel stands as a mockery to the holy city that once sat there. We need you to investigate what happened to Eturel 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, Eturel 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 Ulder 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 Eturel 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 Eturel 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 remnants of Eturel has fled, sign up with the Flaming Fist, and find out what you can."

Zhentarim. "The disappearance of Eturel, Grand Duke Ulder Ravengard and Thavius Kreeg has created an opportunity for us. Baldur's Gate is in disarray and Eturel 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 Eturel, or whatever's left of it, is most likely to end up with the power. That needs to be us!"

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 Eturel 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, you may want to make their descent into Avernus a bit more appealing.

WEALTH AND MONEY

The only monetary reward mentioned in Chapter 1 – 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, but it seems that a tangible reward, such as 500 gold pieces, 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 gold pieces 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' puzzlebox. 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 Eturel.

FAME AND POWER

For some characters, the strongest motivation might not be gold and wealth, but the prospect of fame and power. 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, Eturel is leaderless, lost, abandoned. Whoever saves that city will not only have done Faerun a great service, they'll also have made a strong argument for who should hold power in a restored Eturel!"

REDEMPTION AND FORGIVENESS

If you've used the 'Dark Secret'-background to tie your players 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 Eturel 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 character's to travel beyond Candlekeep. A faction agent reappears to offer more rewards and renown, Reya Mantlemorn promises Eturel's eternal gratitude if the party helps, or the agents of an archdevil makes lofty claims about the adventures and treasures that await ahead.

Heavensfall

Weapon (mace), rare

When you hit a fiend of undead with this magic weapon, that creature takes an additional 1d6 radiant damage.

Guiding Bolt. You can cast the spell *guiding bolt* once as a 2nd-level spell without expending a spell slot. You regain the ability to do so when you finish a long rest.



FROM SALTMARSH TO AVERNUS

So you've played some **Ghosts of Saltmarsh**, but now you wanna 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'll 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 worshippers for a partnership, urging them to commit bloodshed that will aid her plan to condemn more Faerunian 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 – an emissary from Candlekeep aboard the Emperor of the Waves (in the adventure *Salvage Operation*), crazed devil-worshippers 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 Styx. 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 Styx isn't doing the work of Tarizdun, but instead works for Zariel, preparing the Styx (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's 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' (see page 2 of this document) an easy way to switch campaign. 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 the characters' 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 adventurer's 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, which disappeared suddenly a few weeks ago"). All you need to do then is replacing the disappeared Grand Duke Ulder Ravengard with a notable Waterdhavian such as Mirt, Volothamp Geddarm, 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.

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 shortly look at how you can restructure Chapter 1 to fit your needs.

RESTRUCTURING CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1 is in essence an investigation. Initially, a mission to discover – and eliminate – cultists of the Dead Three, which later evolves into an investigation into the Vanthampur's and their involvement in the disappearance of Elturel. This is a neat – and very fast – way of getting 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 you have a party starting at a higher level, here's some advice on how you can restructure the content of Chapter 1 to your needs.

SKIPPING THE PIRATE ENCOUNTER

The most expendable block of content is probably the pirate encounter in Elfsong Tavern, that gets your party from level 1 to 2. While a good starting point for very new players, a barfight with some unnamed bandits wholly unrelated to the larger story probably won't excite veteran players very much. 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 segway to the Vanthampurs. You can use Reya Mantlemorn (or any faction of your choice) as the hook instead (see 'Alternative Hooks' on p. 2), informing the party that she thinks the Vanthampur's have Thavius Kreeg, leading the party straight to Amrik in the Low Lantern, as she hopes to learn more about Thavius and perhaps gain access to the Upper City.

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 have 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 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 barfight. Below are some advice on how to run Elfsong Tavern.

SETTING THE SCENE

You can set the scene by reading or paraphrasing the description below:

As you enter the Elfsong Tavern, you find yourself immediately enveloped by the heat and noise of a busy taproom. On one side of the entrance stands a hulk of a woman, who's clearly got some 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 taproom itself is filled with a wide variety of patrons, all of which carry at least one weapon – and, in some cases, multiple – while 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!"

A chorus of shouts sounds from the room upstairs, and the woman waves dismissively at the stairs, before picking up an assortment of charms, cards and coins from the floor. She leaves in a huff, grumbling to herself.

The woman is Rahima Sahiressa (see 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!')

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' below, giving Tarina +3 bonus to her Sleight of Hand checks) before handing over information.

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 offer her final bargain: "They's going to kill me and ain't a soul in here who'll dare do nottin'. '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.

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 who notices...

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 opening 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 following text be scratched into the wall underneath the steel mask:

Present your work to the Lord of Murder

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 feel like they've rectified a great evil, granting them 5 temporary hit points that lasts 1 hour.

D12. BANE'S ALTAR

As with Bhaal's Altar in D7, you can give this altar an inscription and function as well. The following is written above the altar:

Submit your servant to the Lord of Darkness

A character that 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.

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. As Vaaz sees the party, he 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 with them.

Mortlock will 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 inform the characters that there's 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 turns focuses his attacks against the brute.
- 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 of Mortlock's greatclub earlier, reducing the cultist's hit points to a more appropriate number.



LOW LANTERN

The characters' visit to Low Lantern is a social encounter that is bound to become a combat encounter. It presents itself as a fun scenario, that should be pretty straight-forward 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 not 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 fun.

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.

Additionally, you can have a character that drinks the poison make three saving throws instead of one. The first immediately, the second after three rounds, and the third after a 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!

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 disappeared 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.

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

V36. VANTHAMPUR VAULT

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, 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.

IMPORTANT NPCs

When reading through BG:DiA, you'll notice that the campaign seems to rely heavily on a few key NPCs that are introduced in Chapter 1: Reya Mantlemorn, Gargauth (the *Shield of the Hidden Lord*) and Lulu the Hollyphant. We write 'seems' because it's 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 play the campaign without these three NPCs, if for some reason you don't want to bother with them.

REYA MANTLEMORN

Reya Mantlemorn is the runaway Hellrider that steers the party towards the Vanthampur Villa, Candlekeep and eventually Eturel. She brings some drama to the story with her personal involvement, and relays some of the Hellrider's backstory to the party. However, if you'd rather not have her tag along, or she and your 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 Eturel can point the party towards the High Hall when they get there.

THE 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 Vanthampurs plan to cause Baldur's Gate's descent into Avernus, and it's 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 party gets it very early. Bounded accuracy is a thing in 5E, and you might find the shield more than a little frustrating. Second, the plan to use the shield to bring down Baldur's Gate seems a bit vague and unlikely.

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 Vanthampurs' plan be to smuggle *Hellfire Weapons* into Baldur's Gate and giving them to the Dead Three Cultists. 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 it's 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 (see more under 'Lulu the Hollyphant').

LULU THE HOLLYPHANT

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 she's 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, golden elephant, if you don't want to. There's 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's 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 Eturel.

You can replace Lulu with an inanimate object with ties to Zariel, such as a small shard from the *Sword of Zariel* or even Zariel's severed hand encased in an iron gauntlet (a symbol of Torm!), by making only minor modifications to the story:

- Ulder Ravengard is mindlessly clutching the item when the party finds him in Chapter 2 – it was given to him by Torm during his spirit journey (which no longer includes a flying mammoth). He senses that the object contains important memories, that can help the party save Eturel. You can have Gargauth, the *Shield of the Hidden Lord*, take on the role of guide, suggesting that the hag Mad Maggie may be able to unlock the memories.
- Mad Maggie performs the ritual on the item, 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*, which Mad Maggie interprets 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!).
- Have the object be the conduit of the party's spirit journey to Idyllglen in Chapter 4.

The above is only an example of how you can write Lulu out of the campaign. Whether you should 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. If not, we'll elaborate more on how to run the campaign without Lulu in our DM's resources for the remaining chapters.

A VALEUR RPG DM'S RESOURCE

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A big thank you to everyone who purchased this product on the [DM's Guild](#). You are helping adventures become real and dreams come true. Stay tuned for more products covering Descent into Avernus, including more DM's resources!

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