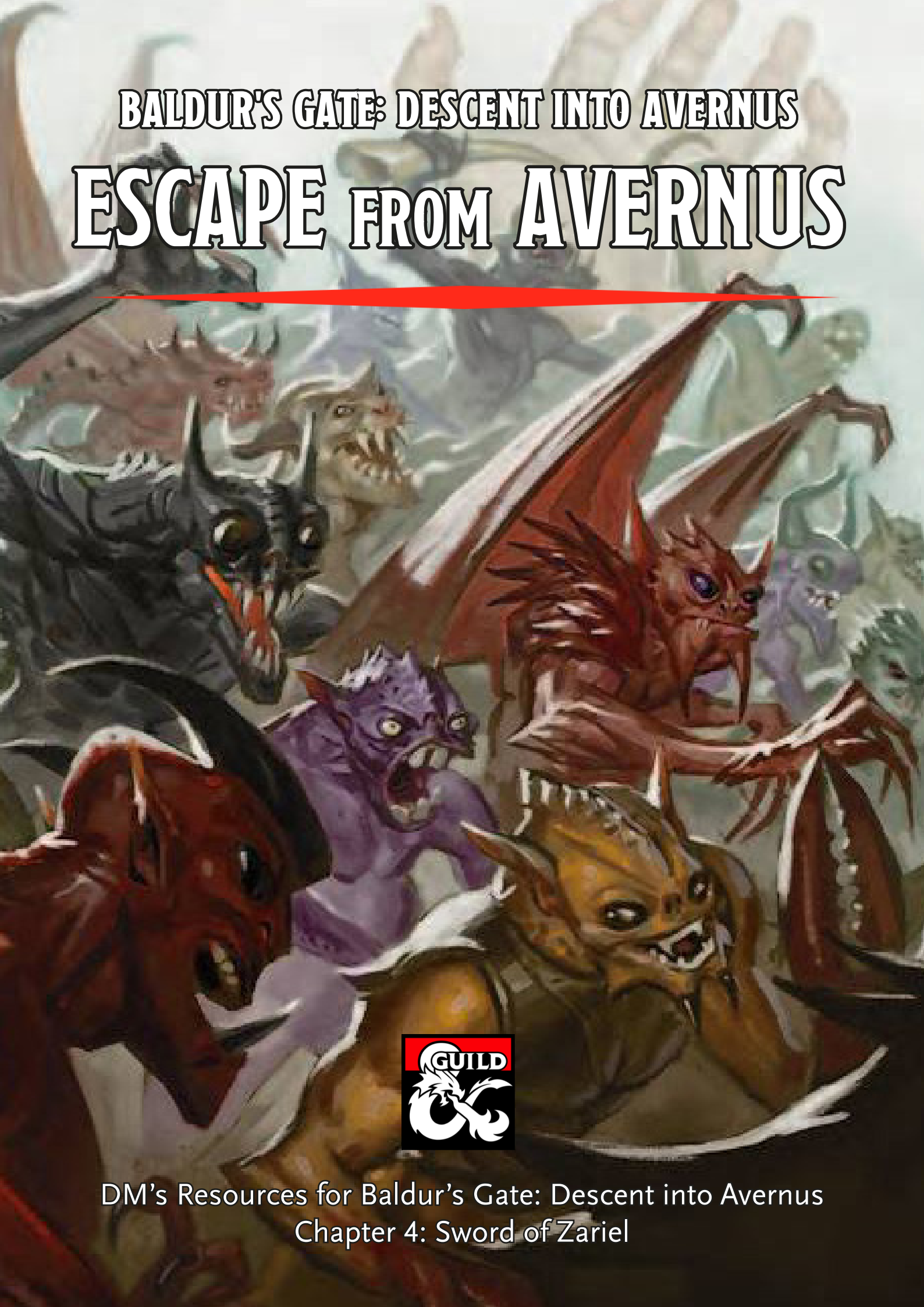


BALDUR'S GATE: DESCENT INTO AVERNUS

ESCAPE FROM AVERNUS



DM's Resources for Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus
Chapter 4: Sword of Zariel

BALDUR'S GATE: DESCENT INTO AVERNUS

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CREDITS

Writing: J. A. Valeur

Layout: J. A. Valeur

Interior Art: J. A. Valeur and art provided by the Dungeon Masters Guild and used with permission under the Community Content Agreement for the DMs Guild.



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CHAPTER 5: ESCAPE FROM AVERNUS

CHAPTER 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!

This document seeks to provide you, the Dungeon Master, with tools and thoughts that will help you make Chapter 5 of Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus an exciting experience for your players. It's strongly recommended that you read through Chapter 5 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:

Running Chapter 5. A convenient overview of the events in Chapter 5, as well as some suggestions on how to start Chapter 5 and example endings that might inspire you.

Dealing With Zariel. An in-depth view on how to run and enhance the party's inevitable last confrontation with Zariel, whether it involves redeeming, making a deal with, or fighting the Archduke of Avernus.

2 Avernus Encounter Maps. Created to fit with the description of 'Endgame in Elturel', these huge 50x50 maps are fully colorized and primed for digital tabletops.

CONTENTS

Chapter 5: Escape from Avernus.....	1
Running Chapter 5.....	1
Starting the Ending.....	3
Dealing with Zariel.....	4
Endgame in Elturel.....	8

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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 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 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 Eturel 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 Eturel 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 Eturel 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 Eturel 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 Eturel.

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 ETUREL

Lastly, the party must ensure that Eturel 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 Eturel 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's 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 – 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 steppe 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' 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 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 that 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's 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 ft. of Zariel and make a hard Charisma (Persuasion) check.
- On a success, Zariel takes the sword and returns to her angelic form, and the party receives 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's 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 page 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 underneath 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 Olanthus is present, or 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?") to use Intelligence or Wisdom in place of Charisma, when making the Persuasion check. A character that 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's 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 Avernum. Below we'll go over three likely prospects.

Kostchtchi. If freed, Kostchtchie is described at the end of 'Endgame in Elturel' as trying to take his hammer back 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 Olanthus 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 have 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 – besides some less-than-worthwhile 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, Jubilex, 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 both 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*, pg. 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 Eturel' (*BG:DiA*, pg. 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 Eturel' 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 Eturel does seem more dramatic. If the party does decide to go to Zariel's fortress, you can have it guarded by two erinyes and 12 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 revived, 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 Eturel, on the streets of Eturel, or in the air near Eturel. 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 Eturel	In Eturel	Over Eturel
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, KOSTCHTCHIE 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 Conscriptio* (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.

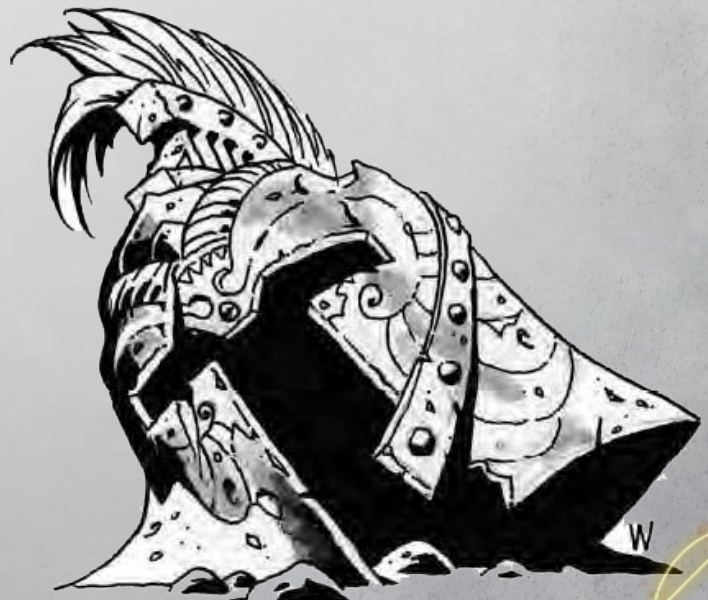
ELTUREL'S SURVIVORS

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*, pg. 149), or ask a cleric or paladin to make 'The Ultimate Sacrifice' (*BG:DiA*, pg. 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 hezrous 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 chasmes, 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.

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