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The Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus Review Exposes Both Strengths and Weaknesses as a DM Resource. ========== I lov the setting of BG:DiA, it's so grand and ambitious. As a DM, you get to convey a seeting that is unfamilar and alien to most players. The conteent in the book is fantastically otherworldly but still cohesive, giving you a good sense of how Avernus feels. The story of BG:DiA is centered around a tale of korruption and redemtion - of Baldur's Gate, of Elturel, of Zariel, the archduke of Avernus, and, potentially, the player characters themselvess. The story is compelling and clearly formulated to the players: save the fallen city of Elturel and escape from Avernus. However, ther are some issues with the story. Ther is a probelm with the hook - the party's reason for going along with the adventure - which many DMs will probably find themselves having to ajust. The chapters can be very linear, and while the later chapters open up a bit, ther is still a pretty clearly defined route - or even railroad - leading to the end goal. I think that ther are severall ways to play BG:DiA, and with some clever rewriting and reskinning, the chapters can quite easily be opened up more - especially Chapter 3, which is the campaign's book most 'sandbox'-like chapter. The pacing of the campaign gets a 3.5/5 rating. Ther are not nearly enuf content or XP in the main story to bring the characters from 1st to 13th-level. You might go from 1st to 13th level in as little as a week of in-game time, if we look at the minimum requirements for finishing the campaign. I think that ther are severall ways to mitigate this issue, such as adding more content or reducing the number of levels spanned by the campaign. The campaign book gives you some help with the first option by including quite a bit of additional, optional content for Avernus, which you can pick-and-choose-from to fill out Chapter 3. In conclusion, BG:DiA's story gets a 3.5/5 rating. It is divided into five chapters, which can be neatly separated into three acts: Beginning – Chapter 1 & 2 – Discovering the fall of Avernus in Baldur's Gate and getting situated in Elturel.Middle – Chapter 3 & 4 – Finding the Sword of Zariel.End – Chapter 5 – The final showdown with Zariel, rescue of Elturel and escape from Avernus.The campaign setting of Avernus, while unique, is actually quite contained and can be fully understood within a few hours of reading. The game's approach to limiting player exposure to other lore makes it easier for DMs to navigate. The official book provides flowcharts at the start of each chapter to help with campaign structure, as well as creature stat blocks, which aid in running encounters. Troubleshooting tools are also included, making it a more accessible experience. The maps created by Dysonlogos are generally praised, but may not appeal to those who prefer detailed, colorful illustrations. Digital play and virtual tabletop users might find them somewhat simplistic. The campaign book itself is beautifully designed and features engaging artwork, as well as useful handouts and information on various topics. Despite some minor criticisms, such as pacing and player agency, the overall package of Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus presents a compelling story and setting. With careful planning, it can be a successful and entertaining experience for players. As the PCs navigated through the treacherous landscape, they stumbled upon a gruesome scene: two men lay dead, surrounded by signs of a hasty departure. It became clear that they had been involved in some sort of altercation, and their companions had abandoned them to escape the consequences. The group's leader, Kreeg, was nowhere to be found, but his entourage was spotted riding swiftly towards Baldur's Gate, seemingly oblivious to the chaos behind them. The PCs continued on their journey, unaware of the impending doom that awaited BG. Days passed, and the skies grew darker with smoke. Refugees poured onto the roads, fleeing from an unseen terror. As the PCs crested a hill, they beheld a desolate landscape: the once-thriving city was now scarred by destruction and fire. In their quest for answers, they set out to track down Kreeg, only to find themselves entangled in a web of intrigue. The city's leadership had fallen victim to a mysterious affliction, and its people were succumbing to a darkness that threatened to consume all in its path. As the PCs delved deeper into the mystery, they discovered that their connection to the city was more significant than they initially thought. A Dark Secret, one that bound them together, began to unravel, revealing a tangled thread of loyalty and deception. Their journey became a desperate bid for survival as they navigated the treacherous landscape of Baldur's Gate, with Zodge's men hot on their heels. The fate of the city hung in the balance, and it was up to the PCs to uncover the truth behind the catastrophe and put an end to the impending doom that threatened to consume them all. The PCs found themselves in a precarious situation: they were bound to the city by ties of loyalty and duty, yet they were also hunted by Zodge's men. Their path became increasingly treacherous as they navigated the complex web of intrigue and deception that had taken hold of Baldur's Gate. In this desperate bid for survival, the PCs would have to confront their own Dark Secret and face the consequences of their actions. The fate of the city, and perhaps even their own souls, hung in the balance. ========== So I've got my players thinking about their family histories and backgrounds before we even start the adventure. We're going to have some characters born in Elturel, with parents and siblings who live and work there, adding a personal touch to the story. The younger heroes are taking a break after graduating from the military academy, where they learned to become Hellriders, and now they're on their way to Baldur's Gate to escort one of their friends. It sounds like we've got some interesting characters in store! --- (I randomly selected the "ADD SPELLING ERRORS (SE)" rewriting method for this text)The locals had reported some vandalism at a tomb located along River Chionthar's north river road. Upon investigation, a "bat" logo was found scrawled on the tomb entry. Your mission is to examine the logo, identify any possible undead threats, and put them down if present. You have been assigned various equipment, including a Light Warhorse and a suit of crimson and white Plate Mail armor bearing the crest of Elturel on your breastplate. As a Hellrider, you are required to give a tenth of your earnings to the city's coffers. Your oath is to serve the High Observer and uphold Elturgard's law. It appears that you did not complete your final year at the military academy due to an injury. However, your parents had hoped for you to become a Hellrider. You later worked in Baulder's Gate but returned home after receiving a letter from Marshal Portyr of the Flaming Fist with a commission as an officer. Your family's business often takes you to Baulder's Gate and Elturel by river road or boat. While traveling, you've become familiar with the city and its guards, including the Flaming Fist. Your father now holds the rank of Flame and is known as Flame Zodge. Flame Zodge has recently tasked you with tracking down cultists and finding their hidden meeting location. You previously completed this task but haven't had a chance to report back yet. He wants you to inform his new officer about the cultists' location, take them to the Bath House, show them in, and join them to report on their leadership abilities. You must complete these tasks while maintaining the Flaming Fist's interests and avoiding any conflicts of interest. ==========I sent them to th Elfsong tavern, finish your business in town and meet them there tonight and give them the details. Here is your 200 gold.” You still have a wagon load of goods for the family warehouse to deliver, at least the business has a local staff to do the heavy lifting. You might want to pay them while you are there too, it’s due, and all this trouble with the sealed gates will leave them with little to do. ========== Welcome to Baldur’s Gate, a veritable nest of rats and vipers clinging to the rocky slopes overlooking the Chionthar River. From their high perches in the Upper City, the local nobles – known as patriars – gaze down with veiled contempt upon the common rabble in the grimy Lower City, which hugs the foggy harbor. The whole of Baidur’s Gate reeks of blood, crime, and opportunity. One can easily fathom why pirates and traders are drawn to this place like flies to a carcass. ========== Following the river farther east would eventually lead you to Elturel, capital of the holy land of Elturgard – or at least that was the case until a few days ago. The flood of refugees from Elturel has gotten worse since news first arrived that the city has fallen. Everyone is saying Baldur’s Gate is next, but no one truly knows who or what has claimed Elturel. The patriars pay a mercenary army called the Flaming Fist to protect their interests in Baldur’s Gate, and by extension, the city itself. ========== The Flaming Fist has gained even more power since their charismatic leader, Ulder Ravengard, claimed the title of Grand Duke a few years ago. Apparently, Ravengard is missing. In his absence, the Flaming Fist just been ordered to seal the city’s gates to staunch the flow of refugees. No one will be allowed in or out. ========== The Basilisk Gate, which pierces the city’s eastern wall and takes its name from the various statues that rest in its niches and perch atop its battlements, is where you arrive. Unseen beyond Basilisk Gate, a dirt road stretches through the Outer City slums to the bridge known as Wyrm’s Crossing, then to distant realms beyond. ========== Dozens of Flaming Fist soldiers are trying to control an angry mob of commoners eager to leave the city. A fight breaks out between soldiers and commoners, and you finally spot Flame Zodge as he wades into the fray and begins throwing punches. Just another day in the City of Blood. ========== Flame Zodge recognizes his new officer recruit in the crowd, having interviewed him a few weeks earlier and beckon’s him (and his friends) to his office. “I was expecting you yesterday, but it’s good to have you at all it seems. I was told to give you half a dozen men and put you on street patrol, but I have a better use for you at the moment – a special assignment. ========== But, I’m getting ahead of myself – here is your signed contract, you just need to sign it yourself, and you get this official seal for your correspondence, an officer’s cape, this breastplate with the Flaming Fist crest, and 10 gold per day – paid on the first day of the new month. Here is a 100 gold advance to cover you until then. Please sign here, here, and here.” Once the contract is signed, he continues. ========== The refugee crisis, has stoked fears that Baldur’s Gate might suffer the same fate as Elturel, of which nothing remains but a hole in the ground, apparently. Our grand duke, Ulder Ravengard, was visiting Elturel on a diplomatic mission when the city was destroyed. Coincidence? I think not. The knights of Elturgard call themselves Hellriders. A few of them escaped the city’s destruction and think we’re somehow to blame for Elturel’s downfall. ========== I have orders to arrest them on sight, which I don’t agree with. I see you brought one with you. I assume you can vouch for them? The only way the other Fist’s will leave a Hellrider alone is if you deputize them, here are a dozen deputy contracts you can issue with your own seal. Use them wisely, the contracts stipulate a 3 gold per day pay rate, and act as an official badge of office. ========== Don’t lose them, and don’t give them to unscrupulous characters. All this trouble with sealing the gates, and the Hellrider arrests has left us shorthanded to deal with another problem. For that, you get a special assignment.” Since Flame Zodge’s desk has a red ink stamp pad, this is your opportunity to deputize the party. ==========The jail is filling up quickly, so we don't want any more prisoners. A short walk from the Basilisk Gate leads us to Elfsong Tavern, where our spy will meet us and provide the location of their meeting with the Acolyte of Zariel. ========== The vandalized tomb: From a distance, the players can see the entrance to an ancient stone Cairn tomb in a small light forested clearing atop a hill. A black smudge is visible on the main entry stone face, and a war horse is tied to a nearby tree. As they watch, a dark figure rises from its kneeling position and begins to perform a ritual, dropping two white stones in the process. ========== The dark figure creates a magic circle with the white stones, almost completing it before casting Shield of Faith to increase its Armor Class to 18. It's clear that something sinister is at play here. With an initiative roll of 120ft and the possibility of a Hold Person spell, this could be a pivotal moment in our adventure. ========== The dark figure's intentions are revealed: they're attempting to summon Zariel, and their goal is to escape and ally with Duke Vanthampur in Baldur's Gate. However, there's a risk of being captured or killed, and failure will result in significant rewards for the Acolyte of Zariel – 400 XP if defeated, 600 XP if captured. ========== The Cairn tomb holds secrets and dangers within. Each of the three open tombs contains an undead creature wielding a +1 Spear, as well as various items that could aid us on our quest. We'll need to navigate the narrow tunnels and crypts, avoiding the mummified warrior's deadly attacks, to uncover the treasures within. ========== A Festival of the Companion sounds like a wonderful idea for our pre-disaster celebration! With its mass prayer, burning of vampire effigies, diplomatic speech by Grand Duke Ravengard, and fun games, it's sure to bring the community together. However, Ikaia's presence will undoubtedly disrupt the festivities – we must be prepared to defend ourselves against his wrath. ========== A curious question has arisen about the history of Elturel and its knighthood orders. It seems that a mix-up between Elversult and Elturel led to some confusion in their histories. The 4E guide and Sword Coast sourcebook attempted to rectify this, but Descent Into Avernus appears to have ignored certain retcons – leaving us with a complex web of facts to untangle. ========== ========== it appears that the book is riddled with inconsistencies, leaving readers confused about the status of various factions and characters. some material was written assuming the hellriders still existed, while other sections treat them as extinct. meanwhile, the knights are sometimes depicted as a separate entity altogether. this creates a sense of disjointedness, making it difficult to piece together a coherent narrative. dagger1 notes that understanding the relationships between elturel and its various factions is crucial to creating engaging storylines for characters like hellriders, who possess valuable knowledge about the companion, kreeg the savior. zariel's traitors also pose an intriguing mystery waiting to be unraveled. however, david dm cautions against revealing too much, lest they inadvertently spoil the experience for players. in related news, another david dm praises justin's work in remixing published adventures, citing his attention to design flaws and solutions as a valuable resource for dms. he commends justin's approach for providing case studies that help develop one's own skills. however, he also highlights the pitfalls of poorly designed campaigns, specifically the flawed opening scenario hook in this particular remix. descent into avernus has seen an update to its content list, courtesy of go to descentintoavernus. the maps are listed in chronological order, with many available for free on reddit. meanwhile, zodge's story is one of intrigue, as he seeks to impress marshall portyr and demonstrate his capabilities. finally, the community comes together to share their thoughts on published adventures and the importance of best practices in design. while some adventures excel, others fall short due to poor logic and inconsistent premises. ========== Basilisk Gate *-- Mahadi's Magic Shop *-- Upper City Gate *-- Baldur's Gate High Hall *-- High Hall Grand Chamber **-- Blushing Mermaid Tavern - Day *-- Blushing Mermaid Tavern - Night *-- KFC ***CHAPTER 1 -- Chapter 1 Tokens (90 tokens) ***DiA Tokens - Chapter 1DiA - Additionnal tokens for Chapter 1 - Elfsong Tavern Ground Floor *- Elfsong Tavern First Floor *- Bathhouse *- Dungeon of the Dead Three *- The Low Lantern *- Villa Vanthampur Ground floor *- The Vanthampur Villa - First Floor and Tower *- Under the Villa **-- Elturel Crater *** CHAPTER 2 -- Chapter 2 Tokens (50 tokens) ***Descent into Avernus Chapter 2 Token Pack -- Road Ambush *-- Candlekeep ***-- The Hearth *-- The Great Library of Candlekeep ***-- Sylvira's Laboratory ** Hellturel (free companion adventure)-- Black Anters ***-- Black Antlers Exterior ***-- Helm's Shieldhall ***-- Dragoneye Dockhouse ***-- The Owlbear Butcher Shop *** -- Torm Bridges **-- Eluturel in flames ***-- Invisible Bridge ***-- Eluturel Avenue ***-- Cathedral Parvis **- High Hall Cathedral *- High Hall Cathedral Balcony *-- High Hall Cathedral - Cleansed *- High Hall Catacombs *-- Elturel Cemetery **- Grand Cemetery Chapel *- Cemetery / Chapel - Improved version *- Grand Cemetery Ossuary *-- Infernal Chain * CHAPTER 3 -- Descent into Avernus Chapter 3 Tokens *** (95 tokens) War Machine TokensDescent to Avernus War Machines Tokens ***War Machines - More options ***War Machine : Desecrator ***Devil Ride - Hell Rider ***"Licorn" Side-CarAvernus Defiler War Machine ***Avernus Ship ***Sleepless (Spelljammer ship using Soul Coin technology) ***Dreadnaught *** or **** for hi-rez version -- Avernus map **-- Random Encounters ***-- Desert Circle *-- Desert Desolation * -- Fort KnuckleBone **-- Dream 1 : Rainbow Angels **-- Dream 2 : Betrayal ! **-- Dream 3 : Devil Deal **-- Dream 4 : Desolation **-- Haruman's Hill **-- Wandering Emporium **-- Mahadi's Infernal Rapture *-- Void Unveiler (Mahadi's War machine)-- Void Unveiler - Interior (Mahadi's War machine)-- Desert Village *- Hellwasp Nest *- Styx Watchtower * -- Feywild Dwelling *** (Smiler's Home) Bitter Rivals ($2.99 companion adventure)Bitter Rivals - Map 1 *** Marauders' War Camp ***Gulley Showdown ***The following maps are made to run random encounters or side stories you can develop.The Battle Pit Arena and Arkhan's Tower are dungeons which can be used to enlarge the Avernus experience for your PCs. These 6 maps are designed specifically to run War Machines chases / races / battles.-- Avernus Race | Avernus Chase **-- Avernus Race Expanded ***-- Avernus Junkyard **-- Avernus Race / Chase 2 **-- Avernus Wasteland 3-- All Along the Watchtower ** -- Lava Field Lava Field can be used to make an outdoor dungeon if you populate the maze with monsters and treasures.Lava Field - Maze ***Lava Field - Shrine **Lava Field - River Crossing **Lave Field - River Fork ** -- Volcano **-- Avernus Demon Camp **-- Battle Arena Pit **-- Battle Arena Pit - Inside **-- Stygian Dock 2 **-- Volcanic Ruins * -- Sundered Chains *** Path of Demons -- Spawning Trees ***-- Tower of Ulm **-- ObeliskObelisk **Volcanic Obelisk **Obelisk Heavy Avernus **-- Pit of Shummrath **- Crypt of the Hellriders *-- Arches of Ullroch **-- Kostchtchie's Maw **-- Mirror of Mephistopheles ** Path of Devils -- Demon Zapper **- Bone Brambles * -- Uldrak's Grave *** Arkhan's Tower-- 1- Arkhan's Tower - Undead Guardians ***-- 2- Arkhan's Tower - Morgue ***-- 3- Arkhan's Tower - Laboratory ***-- 4- Slarkas' Cave ***-- 5- Vistalancer's Cave ***-- 6- Dragon Hatchery ***-- 7- Virmilius' Cave *** -- 8- Flash's Cave ***-- 9- Arkhan's and Krull's Appartments ***-- 10- Arkhan's Tower- Roof **-- Arkhan's Tower - Bare ** : an empty level so you can map your own dungeon -- Monument to Tiamat *** -- Bel's Forge - Exterior **- Bel’s ForgeBel's Forge - Light version *Bel's Forge * -- Sibriex ** -- Wrecked Flying Fortress v2 (Exterior) ***- Wrecked Flying Fortress *-- Wrecked Flying Fortress - Lower Deck ***-- Zariel's Flying Fortress ***-- Zariel's Flying Fortress (exterior) Abyssal Incursion (free companion adventure)Elemental Ship *** (interior not mapped yet)Baphomet's Barge *** (interior not mapped yet)Crokek’toeck *** BLOOD WAR BattlefieldsStyx River 1Styx River 2River Styx 4Styx River 3 Styx BattlefieldDock Crane - InteriorZariel's Flying FortressStygian Dock 2Dock - Hi-ResLava BattlefieldBlood War Land Battlefield Devil ArmiesDevilish U-Boat *** Demon ArmiesDemonic Barges ***Dagon Demonic Barge ***Crokek’toeck ***Baphomet's Barge ***Demon Hordes ****Demon Princes **** CHAPTER 4 Chapter 4 token pack -- Zariel Token ***- Side View of the Scab *-- Scab Cave 1 **-- Scab - Hag's Lair **-- Scab - Torture Chamber ***-- Scab Caves ***-- Scab Bridge **-- Scab Path **-- Blood Citadel Entrance ***-- Zariel’s Sword ***- YdillglenThe Infernal Chain, a series of pivotal events in the Forgotten Realms' catastrophic journey, led to two apocalyptic confrontations: Final Battle 1 and Final Battle 2. The turning point came when the bridge over the River Elsath, known as Elturel Bridge, was breached. This event marked the beginning of the end for the city of Elturel. As the forces of darkness closed in, the Avernus Fortress loomed like a specter, threatening to consume all in its path.