

Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus

Session Zero Companion

"Everyone's got a secret in the City of Blood. What's yours?"

—Nine Fingers Keene

Two cities built on the River Chionthar couldn't be more different from each other. Crime and opportunity walk hand in hand in Baldur's Gate, a port city bustling with commerce where even hardened adventurers watch their step. Further inland lies the holy city of Elturel, a beacon of hope which radiates with the divine light of its second sun, the Companion. But all light casts shadows, and it is in the darkness that evil whispers of grim tidings for the Sword Coast.

The City of Blood

The adventure begins in Baldur's Gate in **1492 DR**, the Year of Three Ships Sailing, where the Council of Four and the Flaming Fist, a mercenary company tasked with maintaining order, are overwhelmed with a sudden refugee crisis stemming from Elturel.

To make matters worse, Cultists of the Dead Three —the gods Bane, Bhaal, and Myrkul — have taken advantage of the chaos, using it to further their murderous agendas. With law enforcement stretched thin, the Guild, a criminal organization based in the City of Blood, also seizes the opportunity to conduct its crimes outside of the shadows.

Baldur's Gate

Gazetteer

Baldur's Gate lies on the Sword Coast south of Waterdeep. The city plays a critical role in commerce by connecting

major cities along the Sword Coast—Waterdeep, Neverwinter, Luskan, and Silverymoon —with the lands to the south. Exotic goods are shipped in along the River Chionthar from the jungles of Chult, while fine silks, rare herbs, and other expensive luxuries arrive from markets in Calimshan.

Government

Baldur's Gate is governed by a council of four Grand Dukes and a Baldurian parliament known as the Parliament of Peers. The current Council of Four is as follows:

- **Grand Duke Ulder Ravengard**, a career officer within the Flaming Fist
- **Thalamra Vanthampur**, a cunning patriar who built her family's wealth and lifted herself out of poverty
- **Dillard Portyr**, the most senior member and unofficial leader of the Council of Four, who survived the crisis that culminated in the resurrection of Bhaal
- **Belynn Stelmane**, a shrewd businesswoman and fierce politician with a creative mind for commerce and finance

City Districts

A walled city, Baldur's Gate is organized into districts around three geographic landmarks: the Gray harbor, the River Chionthar, and Duskhawk Hill. Nine gates dot the city's inner and outer walls, governing passage into and between districts. They are maintained by the Flaming Fist. There are twenty

neighborhoods in all, split between the three districts.

Upper City

Known as patriars, the elite aristocrats of the city insulate themselves behind the inner gates and the Watch, which disproportionately protects citizens of the Upper City. The Watch Citadel, High Hall, and upscale businesses are isolated from the Lower City behind an inner wall.

The Lower City

This crescent of steeply sloping neighborhoods is rife with smuggling, robbery, and murder. The Flaming Fist acts like a rough-and-tumble occupying force here, leaving local crews to settle their own scores when they're done cracking skulls. Everyone is engaged in some sort of trade, and law is but a suggestion rather than an absolute.

Inns and Taverns. Adventurers can kick their feet up at the iconic Elfsong Tavern, the Low Lantern, the Blade and Stars, and the Blushing Mermaid.

The Outer City

Sprawling shanties, tanneries, and stockyards extend outward beyond the city gates. Refugees, the poor, and any industry that would offend the high-born patriars can be found here. The people of the Outer City aren't citizens, but they do band together when necessary, taking care of their own like extended families.

Notable Sights. Near Duskhawk hill, one can find Danthelon's Dancing Axe armory and weaponsmith, the Church of Last Hope in Twin Songs, Garynmor Stables and Menagerie, and the Wyrms Crossing bridges that extend over the River Chionthar. The Flaming Fist's fortress, Wyrms Rock, divides the bridge, preventing passage into or out of the city at night.

BALDUR'S GATE QUICK FACTS



Population: 125,000 (predominantly humans)

Government: Plutocracy, helmed by the Council of Four and Parliament of Peers

Defense: Flaming Fist mercenaries, the Watch

Commerce: Dyes, fish, imports from Chult, mercenaries, nautical supplies

Organizations: The Guild, neighborhood crews, trade guilds

Religions: Gond, Tymora, Umberlee, any other law-abiding faith, cults of the Dead Three

The Baldur's Gate coat of arms represents the city's role as a hub for river and ocean trade as well as nodding toward its namesake, the explorer Balduran. The symbol originated as a pirate emblem, though, and its components hold a double meaning today.

Today, some optimistic souls try to recast the seal, claiming its calm waters represent the city's desire to remain a peaceful power and the clear skies symbolize a prosperous future. But those who know the city's history see the cunning and violence underpinning the emblem. For many, the contradictory interpretations make the city's coat of arms all the more fitting.

Baldur's Gate Backgrounds

This section provides an overview of new background options available to you in this campaign. Whether you're a native Baldurian, a visitor from the neighboring lands of Elturgard, or you just ended a long voyage from the jungles of Chult, you can tie your character to the City of Blood with these new and altered character backgrounds.

You may be an **acolyte** tightly connected with the religious community of Baldur's Gate. Prominent religious communities are dedicated to *Gond*, god of innovation and invention; *Helm*, god of vigilance and protection; *Ilmater*, a god of compassion, sacrifice, suffering; *Siamorphe*, a goddess of nobility and divine right; *Tymora*, a goddess of good fortune; and *Umberlee*, the bitch queen.

You may be a **charlatan** with a purported long-lost heir in the patriars, conning the Watch and bluffing your way among the aristocracy.

You may be a **criminal** who's part of the Guild or a local Lower or Outer City crew. You have underworld connections. Even some of the most high-ranking Baldurians have criminal ties.

You may be an **entertainer** at the Low Lantern or the Blushing Mermaid, able to make a measure of the audience and interact with your fans.

You may be the last person ever expected to be the hero. But here you are, a **faceless** vigilante in a costume fighting for those that can't fend for themselves. Your persona could take many forms, but the real mystery is which personality is truly the mask.

You may be a **folk hero** able to rouse the residents of the Lower or Outer City on your behalf to inconvenience the

Watch, the Flaming Fist, or a double dealing patriar.

You may be a **guild artisan** from Little Calimshan, able to navigate crew territories and businesses in the Outer City or another district.

You may be an urban **hermit**, anonymous among the crowds, navigating the growing slums and encampments without drawing attention.

You may be a **patriar (noble)**, attuned to commercial interests half a world away but blind to the poverty and violence rampant throughout your city.

You may be an **outlander**, an immigrant to Baldur's Gate familiar with the communities of the Outer City and able to obtain information on foreign lands, peoples, and traditions.

You may be a **sage**, studying at the High Hall, conversing with scholars preparing for a pilgrimage to Candlekeep or cozied in the nook of a wizard's study, all the while discerning the truth in the gossip and rumors spread by your arcane peers and the local papers.

You may be a **sailor** with a smuggler's sense for moving cargo and coin under the noses of inspectors, tax collectors, and the Flaming Fist harbor guards.

You might be a **soldier** or a **Flaming Fist** (see appendix A), spending your time protecting others for a day's wages.

You may be an **urchin**, perhaps an orphan or runaway pressed into the service of the Guild. You've learned the torch-based code of the Gateguides Crew.

BALDUR'S GATE BACKGROUNDS

These backgrounds differ from those in the *Player's Handbook*. Each background contains new features and roll tables. Ask the Man of Many Faces for more information.

Elturgard

Elturgard, the Kingdom of Two Suns, was a petty power until half a century ago, when the High Rider of Elturel was revealed to be a vampire who painted the lands with an undead plague. The Hellriders, who were caught by surprise, won some daily gains, but the vampire inflicted cruel losses under the cover of night. Each night the good people of Elturel prayed to the gods that dawn might come more quickly.

Then, on one particularly disastrous night when all seemed lost, dawn did come. A second sun appeared above Elturel, suffusing the city and its surrounding lands with bright, golden light. Having no reason to expect daylight would arrive so suddenly, the High Rider and his vampire spawn were burned to dust, and the other undead quailed in its illumination.

The Companion

The light above Elturel persisted when the true dawn came. Some called it Amaunator's Gift, but none knew where this radiant mercy came from. Most saw the glowing light as a companion to the sun and to themselves, and so it became known as **the Companion**. This holy wonder brought people of all kinds to Elturel to bathe in its warmth and wonder at its divine light. Paladins, priests, and scholars made pilgrimages to see the blessed Companion light shimmer in the dead of night. The best among the holy knights, **Thavius Kreeg**, was named High Observer to rule in the High Rider's place and restore order to the Kingdom of Two Suns.

The Order of the Companion

To maintain order among the many faiths of the paladins who arrived in Elturgard, a special knighthood was created, named after the Companion sun. These paladins swore to unyieldingly uphold the Creed Resolute, an oath of service to Elturgard and all good people. These knights and paladins defend the Kingdom of Two Suns alongside the grizzled Hellriders.

ELTURGARD QUICK FACTS



Population: 30,000 (predominantly human, with several small communities of gnomes)

Government: Theocracy, helmed by High Observer Thavius Kreeg

Defense: Hellriders, Order of the Companion

Commerce:

Organizations: Order of the Gauntlet, Order of the Companion

Religions: Amaunator, Helm, Torm, Tyr

The insignia of the Kingdom of Two Suns is a sun with a smaller, blazing companion sun before it in the upper left. This well-known insignia adorns the armor and flags of the Companions and the Hellriders.

The Hellriders

The Hellriders are an elite company of mounted warriors that protects Elturgard, the Kingdom of Two Suns. The Hellriders get their name from the brave cavalry that rode into the Nine Hells alongside the angel Zariel long ago. The survivors were celebrated and took on the title, passing the title of Hellriders to worthy recipients for generations.

Backgrounds of Elturgard

In addition to the backgrounds presented in the Baldur's Gate section, you have two new background options available to you related to Elturgard.

You may be a respected **hellrider** (see appendix A), charged with defending Elturel and its surrounding lands atop your warhorse.

You could belong to the **Order of the Gauntlet** (see appendix A) or Order of the Companion, composed of faithful and vigilant seekers of justice who protect others from the depredations of evildoers.

Dark Secrets

During character creation, once you have developed your own character, you must choose a dark secret shared by the entire party.

Every member of the party is entangled in this dark secret, regardless of their moral fortitude, length of time in the city, or devotion to any "good" deity. They might be a witness to the crime, a criminal in deep denial, or perhaps a complicit onlooker who accepted a pay-off. Regardless, in the eyes of the law, they're all guilty now. Each dark secret

shares a number of elements. Players should work with the DM to customize their dark secret to the group.



Some options include:

- Conspiracy
- Murder
- Theft
- Failed Coup

We'll explore various roles and consequences of these possible dark secrets during Session 0.

Appendix A: Character Backgrounds

During character creation, players can select the following backgrounds for their characters with the Dungeon Master's approval. These backgrounds are appropriate for any character in *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus*, due to their strong associations with the cities of Baldur's Gate and Elturel.

Hellrider

You are one of the Hellriders, an elite company of mounted warriors that protects Elturgard, the Kingdom of Two Suns. These honorable riders fiercely defend Elturel atop mighty destriers and dutifully give ten percent of all earnings to the city's coffers. Hellriders are easily recognizable due to their crimson and white armor and banners bearing the crest of Elturgard: the sun and the smaller, blazing Companion.

Skill Proficiencies: Animal Handling, Persuasion

Languages: Any one of your choice

Tool Proficiencies: Your choice of gaming set or musical instrument

Equipment: One set of traveler's clothes, a signet, a banner or seal with the crest of Elturgard, and a pouch containing 9 gp

Feature: Respected Rider

As a Hellrider, you are well-respected within Elturgard, and your heraldry is recognized throughout Faerûn. While in the Kingdom of Two Suns - encompassing Elturel, Triel, Scornubel, Soubar, and Berdusk - you can commandeer fresh mounts for you and your party. Typically, this occurs at outposts such as Windstream Lodge, but Hellriders and their companions are held in high regard and can resupply in any Elturgard settlement. Use the **warhorse** statistics

for your mount and the **riding horse** statistics for those of your comrades.

Hellriders traditionally operate within Elturgard, but on occasion the High Watcher or High Rider has sent Hellriders to other lands. Outside of the Elturgard, you can purchase non-exotic mounts from merchants sympathetic to the Hellriders at half price.

Advancement

Once they have completed their training, a warrior is inducted into the Hellriders through a special ceremony held by the High Rider and an elected priest of Helm known as the High Observer. Once initiated, a Hellrider can continue to prove themselves by advancing in rank.



Hellrider Ranks

Rank	Name	Role
1	Hoof	Knight
2	Quarter	Standard Bearer
3	Stallion	Under-Marshal
4	Destrier	Marshal
5	High Rider	Commander

Suggested Characteristics

A Hellrider's rigorous training produces an equestrian knight with a reputation for discipline, vigilance, and fury. Though each rider may seem identical when galloping across the hills of Elturgard, these high expectations can have profound effects on an individual Hellrider's outlook.

Personality Traits

d8	Personality Trait
1	I tell other Hellriders' stories as if they were my own.
2	My armor must remain spotless so that it may reflect the light of the Companion.
3	My horse goes wherever I do.
4	Only death frees a Hellrider from their post. Some say I welcome it.
5	I was a hellion growing up. I often take the time to educate (or chastise) children I meet in my adventures.
6	When I'm on the job, I never crack a smile.
7	I reserve eye contact for those I respect.
8	I haven't cut my hair since I joined the Hellriders.

Ideals

d6	Ideal
1	Kindness. The light of the Companion burns bright within my soul. (Good)
2	Justice. By upholding the law, we defend the rights of all. (Lawful)
3	Fury. I am relentless in the pursuit and destruction of my enemies. (Evil)
4	Freedom. Everyone should be free to pursue their livelihood. (Chaotic)
5	Loyalty. When I make an ally, it's for life. (Any)
6	Nation. My city, kingdom, and its people are all that matter. (Any)

Bond

d6	Bond
1	So long as the Companion burns over Elturel, there is still hope for Faerûn.
2	My name and deeds will be immortalized in the songs of the Hellriders.
3	I idolize the High Rider and dutifully follow their commands.
4	I have a mighty steed that I prize above all others.
5	I'm not the first Hellrider in my family, and I won't be the last.
6	I have sworn the strict oaths of the Creed Resolute. I vow to uphold the laws of Elturgard, protect its citizens, and serve the greater good.

Flaw

d6	Flaw
1	I am always honest with those of higher authority.
2	When I'm off duty, I am somewhat inattentive.
3	Though I have sworn to vanquish evil, I secretly fear it.
4	I trained for years to be a Hellrider. I have little patience for those who are privileged by birth.
5	I am suspicious of those who extend offers to me.
6	I was never supposed to be a Hellrider. I worry that one day I'll be discovered as a fraud.



Flaming Fist

You have joined the Flaming Fist, a powerful mercenary company headquartered in Baldur's Gate, where it serves as the city's primary law enforcement and military. Lower-ranking fists patrol the Lower City or are assigned to missions elsewhere, while senior officers may act as commanders in battle or intimidating bodyguards for high-profile negotiations.

If you've relinquished your ties to the Flaming Fist, you can reenlist at any time. However, so long as you collect wages, you must serve the Flaming Fist dutifully

or be held accountable to the Grand Dukes of Baldur's Gate.

Skill Proficiencies: Athletics, Intimidation

Languages: None

Tool Proficiencies: One type of gaming set, Vehicles (land)

Equipment: A Flaming Fist uniform, an insignia of your rank, a gaming set of your choice, and a pouch containing the remainder of your last wages (10 gp).

Feature: Tighten the Grip

As a member of the Flaming Fist, you can enact justice on behalf of the organization or the city of Baldur's Gate. If you compel a creature to surrender or knock it unconscious (see chapter 9, "Combat," of the *Player's Handbook*) you may choose to place it under arrest. Additionally, you may confiscate any of an arrested creature's possessions or contraband on behalf of the Flaming Fist. At your DM's discretion, your commanding officer may allow you to keep a portion of these items as payment.

Advancement

The Flaming Fist maintains a military hierarchy with six ranks, not including the Grand Dukes of Baldur's Gate. As your character furthers the goals of the Flaming Fist, they may gain renown (see chapter 1, "A World of Your Own," of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* for more information on renown) and advance in rank.

Flaming Fist Ranks

Rank	Name	Role
1	Fist	Private
2	Gauntlet	Corporal
3	Manip	Sergeant
4	Flame	Lieutenant
5	Blaze	Major
6	Marshal	General

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Suggested Characteristics

As a mercenary company, the Flaming Fist enlists a multitude of individuals throughout Faerûn. While the majority of Flaming Fist agents are based in Baldur's Gate, the organization - and by extension, the city - has extensive reach, with active forces as far south as Chult. As an agent of the Flaming Fist, your identity may have been shaped by other members, the area in which you operate, or a particularly treacherous mission.

Personality Traits

d8	Personality Trait
1	I like to make an example of those who step out of line.
2	As long as I'm compensated fairly, I'll carry out any task without question.
3	I love a good flogging.
4	I use my ties to the Flaming Fist to influence others and get what I want.
5	I have a hot temper and a short fuse. I'm working on it.
6	I go out of my way to prove I'm not like the other members of the Flaming Fist.
7	The fists are underpaid, and I'm trying to start a union.
8	Actions speak louder than words.

Ideals

d6	Ideal
1	Redemption. Everyone deserves a second chance. (Good)
2	Order. Respect the badge, or you'll respect the club. (Lawful)
3	Punishment. Violence is the solution to preventing recidivism and copycats. (Evil)
4	Greed. My services are for sale to the highest bidder. When there's treasure involved, that bidder is me. (Chaotic)
5	People. I'm committed to the people of Baldur's Gate, not the Grand Dukes who pay my wages. (Neutral)
6	Aspiration. Only by climbing the ladder can I bring about lasting change. (Any)

Bond

d6	Bond
1	I joined the Flaming Fist to find a criminal who wronged me long ago. Every mission is a potential new lead.
2	I signed a contract stamped by the Council of Four to accomplish a special task. They own me until my deed is done.
3	I have a friend or family member within the organization. I joined to make sure they don't get in over their head.
4	I have a different vision for the Flaming Fist. Rising in rank is the only way I'll ever make a difference.
5	I've seen my share of problems in Baldur's Gate. It's my job to make the city a better place
6	My reputation is spotless, and I intend to keep it that way.

Flaw

d6	Flaw
1	I always have to have the last word.
2	I sometimes get carried away when administering punishment to those who violate the law.
3	I got where I am by backstabbing someone else. I'm paranoid that I'll meet the same fate.
4	On occasion, I'll turn a blind eye in exchange for a bribe.
5	I go easy on those I deem weak.
6	I judge anyone with a criminal record.

Order of the Gauntlet

You are a member of the Order of the Gauntlet, an organization devoted to crushing evil when it rears its ugly head.

The order is composed of righteous warriors - paladins and clerics of Tyr, Helm, Torm, and Hoar - united by faith, ideals, and a powerful camaraderie. Unlike the Harpers, the Order of the Gauntlet



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conducts its operations in the open and refuses to strike preemptively.

Skill Proficiencies: Insight, Religion

Languages: Two of your choice

Equipment: A heraldic pendant, a scroll containing the tenets of the order, and a pouch containing 15 gp

Feature: Constant Vigilance

The Order of the Gauntlet must be poised to retaliate should evil misbehave. To stay prepared, the organization works openly with local groups to identify and monitor evil threats such as cults, crime syndicates, or inherently evil creatures. When you enter a new settlement, you can request an audience on behalf of the order with faction agents, law enforcement, or clergy sympathetic to your cause.

Advancement

Every member of the Order of the Gauntlet begins as a Chevall. As they complete missions and additional training, members of the order may serve as mentors or take on influential leadership positions within the faction.

Order of the Gauntlet Ranks

Rank	Name	Role
1	Chevall	Initiate
2	Marcheon	Agent
3	Whitehawk	Stalwart
4	Vindicator	Mentor
5	Righteous Hand	Exemplar

Suggested Characteristics

The Order of the Gauntlet is typically composed of good-natured individuals united under tenets of honor, duty, and justice. These virtues and the tight-knit bond between members mold these holy warriors for their never-ending battle against the forces of evil.



Personality Traits

d8	Personality Trait
1	I clutch my pendant for strength when threatened with fear or temptation.
2	I see omens in every event and action. The gods are speaking to us, we just need to listen.
3	I don't like to go into situations unprepared.
4	I impart my earnings and possessions to those in need during my travels.
5	I never throw the first punch, but I always throw the last.
6	I am always honest in my intentions. Only evil works in the shadows.
7	There's never a bad time to teach someone a lesson through a religious fable.
8	I'm a reformed criminal. Sometimes I slip into old habits.

Ideals

d6	Ideal
1	Integrity. To stand against evil, I must be righteous. (Good)
2	Mercy. Repentance begets forgiveness. Forgiveness begets righteousness. (Good)
3	Retribution. When evil strikes, I administer a swift and just penalty. (Lawful)
4	Honor. Punishing an evil act is just. Punishing an evil thought is not. (Lawful)
5	Bravery. I face my fears head-on. (Any)
6	Faith. The greatest weapon against adversity is devotion to my god. (Any)

Bond

d6	Bond
1	My town was razed by a vicious cult. I won't rest until they pay for their crimes.
2	An evil prophecy has begun, and I will do everything in my power to stop it.
3	I protect those who cannot protect themselves.
4	My mentor's approval means everything to me.
5	I never leave a comrade behind.
6	The Order of the Gauntlet saved me when I was a child. I owe them my life.

Flaw

d6	Flaw
1	I am always willing to grant someone a second chance.
2	I never strike a creature when it's down.
3	The burdens of others are mine to bear.
4	My ancestors committed horrible atrocities. My name carries their shame.
5	I am trusting of clerics and other overtly religious figures.
6	I'm still grieving the loss of one of my comrades. Reminders of their death shake me to my core.

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