

THE IMMINENT LIGHT

By Mark Price

Coming from a background in film, I've long been a complete sucker for the deleted scenes in any given movie. I always find them an interesting window into the structure of a narrative. The following scenario has become just that. It started as a side quest I'd designed for Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus, but was subsequently cut for length. However, I soon got the chance to bring it back to life (with the help of my cowriter, David Roomes) as the short story "[Kallinor's Charge](#)," featured in Dragon+ 28.

This side quest is set during the Candlekeep section of the adventure, where the characters make their preparations to journey to the hellish plane of Avernus and save the town of Elturel. Through resources at Candlekeep, the heroes learn of a powerful artifact that might help them on their quest. What follows is a foreshadowing of many of the thematic turns of the storyline: tough moral decisions, the cost of dark deals, and the reality that the choice between good and evil is never as simple as it seems.

Please enjoy this exclusive deleted scene, "The Imminent Light," as a potential side quest for your own descent into Avernus.

— Mark Price

OVERVIEW

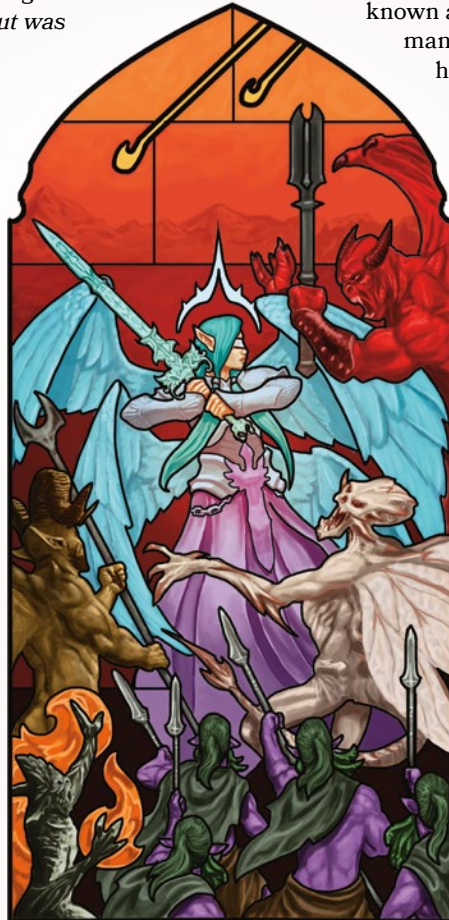
Dispatched from Candlekeep to retrieve a weapon that might prove invaluable for their imminent journey to Avernus, the heroes discover through the weapon's wielder that every boon carries a cost. The tragedy that has befallen the legendary Hellrider Lord Kallinor prophesies the fate that might befall the characters if they stray too far from the righteous path, even with the most honorable or pragmatic intentions.

This adventure is for characters of 5th level, and can be played as part of the "Candlekeep" section of chapter 1 of *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus*.

BACKGROUND

Lord Kallinor was a paladin, a Hellrider, and a member of the elite Order of the Companion, charged with protecting the city of Elturel and its citizens. A prolific fighter of fiends, he is regarded in Elturel as a legendary and courageous leader, and tales of his valor are as actively retold by members of the nobility as they are by tavern bards.

In his younger days, one of Kallinor's adventures in the service of Elturel brought a magic relic into his possession, seemingly by chance—a staff known as the *Imminent Light*. During a crucial battle defending the city against demons, the young paladin used the power of the staff to turn the tide—an event that quickly became known as Kallinor's Charge. But although he managed to save the city and all those under his command that day, Kallinor would learn of the full consequences of his actions only in the years that followed.



LEGACY OF LIGHT AND DARKNESS

Although exceedingly powerful and channeling beneficial power, the *Imminent Light* carries a curse that binds its wielder's soul to an eternity of service to the arch-devil Zariel. Once a defender of Elturel herself, that fallen angel and ruler of Avernus delights now in finding new ways to unleash her vengeance on the city and its protectors.

The curse becomes more pronounced over time, slowly eating away at the soul and sanity of whoever possesses the staff. As Kallinor discovered not long after the events of his legendary charge, the curse cannot be set aside by abandoning the staff, nor can it be removed by spell or cured by prayer. Rather, the curse spreads insidiously to whoever subsequently claims the staff and its power. But if the wielder of the *Imminent Light* dies with the staff

in their possession, the curse dies with them.

Unable to free himself without damning another soul, Kallinor made the choice to retain and protect the staff at all costs, thus protecting someone else from being bound to Zariel's service.

OLD LEGENDS

When the characters travel to Candlekeep, the scholars there begin the process of gathering lore and equipment for the coming journey to Avernus to save Elturel and its people. Against these preparations, the characters are sought out by Sylvira Savikas, the tiefling expert on the Nine Hells who deciphered the secrets of Thavius Kreeg's puzzle box. Sylvira's research often yields up rumors worthy of examination, and the one she brings to the characters' attention is no exception.



From one of the monks of Candlekeep, word comes that Sylvira Savikas has information you might want to hear. When you visit her laboratory, the tiefling archmage is thoughtful as she bids you enter.

“The plight of Eturel has the city on everyone’s mind,” she says, “and it’s just brought to my mind an old tale. Lord Kallinor, a retired hero of the Hellriders, was said to have possessed a powerful relic years ago—a staff known as the *Imminent Light*. Tales are sketchy regarding what might have happened to it since then. But Kallinor lives close by. If he has the staff still, perhaps he can be persuaded to let others use it to save the city.”

Lord Kallinor is a former Hellrider and an honored protector of Eturel from years past. Though Kallinor is long retired and grown old, Sylvira believes that he might be persuaded to allow the characters to use the staff in service of the greater good.

Sylvira has collected much lore regarding what the staff can do, claiming that the *Imminent Light* can protect its wielder from harm, heal their allies, and—most importantly to the mission at hand—unleash a powerful attack against demons, devils, and undead. The popular legend of Kallinor’s Charge recounts how Lord Kallinor vanquished an entire horde of demons by striking the staff

against the ground to release a great thunderclap and a pulse of holy light.

Kallinor is not far, having settled on a tiny estate a day’s ride from Candlekeep some years before. However, the characters are cautioned that he has grown increasingly reclusive. Rumors have long circulated regarding the former knight’s mental stability. He has no friends or close acquaintances, and the only known member of his family was a beloved niece, Caroline, who died in Candlekeep the previous year.

LORD KALLINOR’S MANOR

The directions you received soon lead you to a small country manor, possibly once quite fine, but now fallen into a ramshackle state. As you draw nearer, you catch clear sight of a roof in a state of extreme disrepair, covered with moss and pitted by holes. Knee-high thatches of weeds have long overtaken what must once have been the manor gardens. The stones of the house are covered in mold and grime, and occluded by an infestation of brittle, rotting ivy that flutters in a rising wind.

The characters can easily gain access to the grounds and approach the house. Any character with a passive Wisdom (Perception) score of 12 or higher hears a

muffled voice call out from inside, but the words can't be made out.

If the characters knock on the heavy wooden front door, the muffled voice calls out as if in sudden alarm. A long pause follows before plodding footfalls lead to the door being unlatched and quickly swung open, revealing the house's occupant.

No matter what the characters' approach regarding what information they initially share with Lord Kallinor (see below), if they are generally courteous, the retired knight warily lets them into his home.

MEETING LORD KALLINOR

Lord Kallinor is a tall, sixty-year-old human male whose clouded blue eyes suggest he hasn't slept in several days. His face is heavily scarred, and shows faint bruises to anyone who looks closely.

Though long retired and at his home, Kallinor still wears the formal plate armor of the Hellriders, its etched symbols faded from lack of upkeep. Moreover, the walking stick he leans on is the very relic that has brought the characters to him: the staff known as the *Imminent Light*. All the characters recognize the staff from a description given them by Sylvira.

Kallinor nods to the characters self-consciously as he offers them an apology. Saying that his delay in answering the door was because he was in his study finishing a letter, he asks how he might be of service. He acts as a gracious host to the best of his ability, keeping the staff with him at all times as he does.

The characters are free to ask Kallinor about the staff immediately, or they can try to get into his good graces first. The paladin has not yet heard of the fate of Elturel, and he reacts with shock to news that the city has been drawn into Avernus. If Kallinor is asked directly about the staff, he seems unable at first to grasp the question, but he eventually engages the characters in conversation about it. See "Negotiations for the Staff" below when this discussion begins in earnest.

GREAT HALL

Lord Kallinor first leads the characters through the front door to the great hall, the central chamber of the manor. A large fireplace is set into the outside wall, but has no wood at hand and shows no evidence of having been used recently. The chamber is decorated with various suits of armor, weapons, shields, statues, and other works of art.

Kallinor appears uneasy, and brushes off initial conversation (including putting off any initial response regarding the staff) to offer the characters wine. After retrieving a dusty bottle from a wine cellar accessed via the adjacent kitchen, he awkwardly pours. Any character can tell that it has clearly been some time since the retired knight had guests.

THE TAPESTRIES' TALES

The great hall is hung with huge tapestries, once bright and decorative but now all muted by a thick layer of dust. Upon each tapestry, a scene of a famous battle plays out. Any character with a background that connects them to Elturel, or who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (History) check, recognizes the battles. Alternatively, if any character's gaze lingers on the tapestries, Kallinor can take that as a cue to describe each scene and his place in it.

The tapestry scenes include a dramatic depiction of the Ride, the infamous Hellrider battle of more than a hundred years ago. The Ride saw Zariel (then a mighty angel, before her fall) lead a great force of Hellriders on an assault of Avernus. The mission was a failure, though, and Zariel has since blamed the Hellriders for that failure and has sworn revenge.

The largest tapestry features a familiar-looking character—the young Lord Kallinor, bravely leading troops into battle. It depicts the knight holding aloft the *Imminent Light*, leading the sortie that would come to be known as Kallinor's Charge.



OTHER AREAS

The rooms adjacent to the great hall each offer evidence of Lord Kallinor's fate and the life he's been living. The characters might explore after a confrontation with Kallinor (see "Negotiations for the Staff" below), or they might follow him or slip away somewhere else while he goes to the cellar to seek more wine.

KITCHEN

This dusty, cramped kitchen area appears oddly unused. Any inspection reveals that the kitchen holds a few bottles of decades-old wine and no food of any kind. As the characters might later discover, the staff enables its wielder to survive without food or water. Though a powerful potential benefit, this feature inevitably distances the wielder from their humanity.

Lurking in the kitchen are six **imps** whose Shapechanger trait allows them to take the form of tiny hellwasps (see *Baldur's Gate: Descent into Avernus*).

They do so to torment Kallinor, reminding him daily of his soul's fate. The disguised imps flit about and slip into cupboards in response to any intruders, and do not attack unless attacked first.

BEDCHAMBER

Lord Kallinor's bedchamber looks as if it was recently ransacked. From the doorway, old clothes can be seen strewn about a room that appears to hold nothing of value. The walls are mottled as if by mold, and there are no blankets upon the straw sleeping pallet.

Any character who enters the room can see that the mottled pattern on the walls is created by thousands of strange symbols drawn in dried blood. A character who understands Infernal, or who succeeds on a DC 13 Intelligence (Religion) check recognizes the symbols as glyphs in that tongue.

Any creature that touches or attempts to study the symbols must succeed on a DC 20 Wisdom saving throw or become entranced. While entranced, the creature takes 3 (1d6) psychic damage at the start of each of its turns, and it cannot cast spells, activate magic items, or communicate with other creatures. An entranced creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

STUDY

This small, cluttered study reeks of rancid lamp oil. A large, once-ornate bookshelf stands against the window, covering it. Its shelves hold various military texts and works of religious theory, including a worn copy of the *Creed Resolute*—the oath that once bound the citizens of Elturel to defend their realm.

An old desk at the center of the room holds a lamp, many feathered quill pens and bottles of ink, and hundreds upon hundreds of sheets of parchment, spread across the desk and spilling over and onto the floor. The first character to pick up any parchment sees that it is a letter, which reads:

Dearest Caroline,

I cannot expect you to forgive me, but I hope one day you will understand. Every use brings us closer to darkness. For the good of the world, it is my curse to bear alone. Let it be dragged to the void with me. Let me end it.

With courage,

Your loving uncle.

The characters will all recall that Caroline is the niece of Lord Kallinor who died the previous year.

Any character who looks at one of the other parchments sees that it is an exact copy of the first letter. A fuller examination leads to the realization that every letter in the room says the exact same thing, word for word.

NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE STAFF

Lord Kallinor becomes increasingly agitated as soon as the characters turn the discussion toward the staff. He is

evasive at first, talking of how the power of the staff carries a great cost, and of his desire to not see anyone else pay that price. If pressed carefully, Kallinor speaks of the curse of the *Imminent Light*, which binds its wielder's soul to the service of Zariel and Avernus. However, his manner as he does so might easily lead the characters to see the retired knight's fear as nothing more than mad rambling.

Though he takes effort to hide a state of great emotional turmoil, Kallinor is acutely aware he is nearing the end of his life, with his full transition to eternal damnation nearly complete. If the characters persist, he becomes increasingly direct about the curse and what it does, and adamantly warns them away from the staff.

As the characters converse with him—and especially if they attempt to flatter him with talk of his great deeds of the past—Kallinor quickly turns paranoid, becoming convinced that they intend to steal the staff and let its curse spread. If the exchange hits a point of no return, Kallinor is driven to attack the party, justifying his actions in his own mind by telling himself that he is saving another innocent life from the infernal wrath of Zariel.

FIGHT FOR THE STAFF

Despite his age and mental deterioration, Lord Kallinor remains a skilled and powerful warrior. Over the long years that he has held it, the staff and its infernal power have gradually eroded Kallinor's connection to the divine. This leaves him unable to call upon any spells or special abilities normally available to a paladin.

INFERNAL AUDIENCE

If a fight with Lord Kallinor erupts in the great hall, have each character make a DC 15 Intelligence saving throw at the end of the first round. Then read the following:

As you engage the furious knight, movement around the room suddenly catches your eye. The knights and demons in the dusty tapestries have seemingly come to life, pushing forward to the front of the image and stoically staring out into the real world, as if to see how the fight plays out.

All the characters notice the figures in the tapestries moving, but any character who failed the saving throw is startled by their unexpected appearance, and has disadvantage on the first attack roll they make on their next turn.

This is an illusion effect created by the infernal energy bound into the *Imminent Light*. The figures do not respond to or interact with the characters, and the tapestries return to normal when the fight is done.

CONCLUSION

Even with the advantage of numbers, the characters will face a tough fight against Lord Kallinor if this side quest comes down to combat. Whether they obtain the *Imminent Light* by combat or negotiation in the end, what they then do with the relic is up to them.

LORD KALLINOR

Medium humanoid (human), lawful good

Armor Class 18 (plate)

Hit Points 150 (20d8 + 60)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +6, Cha +8

Skills Athletics +9, History +5, Insight +6, Intimidation +8, Persuasion +8

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Infernal

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP) [+4]

Special Equipment. Kallinor carries the *Imminent Light*.

ACTIONS:

Multiattack. Kallinor makes one attack with his longsword and one attack with *Imminent Light*.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage.

Imminent Light. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d6 + 7) bludgeoning damage plus 4 (1d8) radiant damage.

IMMINENT LIGHT

Staff, legendary (requires attunement)

This staff is finely crafted of silvered oak and adorned with a headpiece centered around a large amethyst. It can be wielded as a magic quarterstaff that grants a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with it. While you hold it, you gain a +2 bonus to AC and have the benefit of a *protection from evil and good* spell. While attuned to the staff, you do not need to eat or drink.

This staff has 25 charges for the following properties. It regains 4d6 + 2 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 20, the staff regains 1d12 + 1 charges.

Spells. While holding the staff, you can use an action to expend some of its charges to cast one of the following spells from it: *cure wounds* (1 charge per spell slot level, up to 4th), *lesser restoration* (2 charges), or *mass cure wounds* (5 charges).

Radiant Wave. By expending 10 charges from the staff, you cause a wave of radiant energy to sweep out from you in a radius of 50 feet. Any undead or fiend in the area takes 2d8 radiant damage and suffers the effect of a *divine word* spell.

Curse. This staff is cursed and possessed by the will of Zariel. Becoming attuned to it extends the curse to you. While you are cursed, any effect that restores hit points (whether magical or mundane) restores only half the normal number of hit points to you. Your scars and bruises remain visible for some time even after you are at full hit points.

If you are a paladin or cleric, you gradually lose your connection to your god or source of divine inspiration. For each month that you possess the staff, any paladin or cleric class features that are divinely granted (including spellcasting) function at one level lower than normal. A paladin or cleric who remains cursed by the staff long enough eventually loses all their spellcasting and divine class features.

Eternal Damnation. The routine effects of the curse can be ended simply by ending your attunement to the staff. However, a creature cursed by the staff has its soul bonded to Zariel until another creature attunes to the staff and gains the curse. Upon the bonded creature's death, its soul travels to Avernus and becomes the property of Zariel, with results determined by the DM.

If a creature willingly retains the curse by maintaining attunement to the staff, then dies with the staff still attuned and in hand, the curse is permanently removed from the staff.