

Game Narrative Review

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Overview

Baldur's Gate 3 follows the story of Tav (the player character), who finds themselves trapped on a mindflayer ship called the Nautiloid. Unable to remember anything but their name, they escape the ship alongside other captives.

Yet, just when they think it can't get any worse, Tav finds out that all those on board the ship have a parasite implanted in them. A parasite that will turn its host into a mind-flayer if left in the brain for too long.

Ultimately, Tav finds themselves on a journey to find the cure to remove this parasite and return to their normal lives. Ultimately, this leads them to cooperate with other survivors of the Nautiloid in hopes of ridding themselves of their parasites.

On the other hand, Astarion's story begins after he comes stranded on the Ravaged Beach following the devastating crash of the Nautiloid. Desperate for answers as to how he got here in the first place, Astarion calls out for "help" in an attempt to lure anyone nearby.

Eventually, Tav comes to help, but is found almost immediately threatened at knifepoint. This leaves Tav's first impression of Astarion to be that of an untrustworthy and rather manipulative rogue. Which is exactly what he is—at first glance, that is. Their life threatened, Tav attempts to reason with Astarion and explains that they are both victims of the Nautiloid. They explain the situation, mentioning the mind-flayers and parasites implanted in their brains. Figuring it would be easier to find a cure together, Astarion joins the party.

Characters

Astarion

Known as the "Pale Elf," Astarion is initially seen as manipulative and quite sadistic.

Astarion is a vampire spawn, a lesser form of bloodsucker that is controlled by a full-fledged vampire. This means that they must obey every one of their master's orders while also reaping all the weaknesses and barely any of the strengths of a vampire.

To his master Cazador, Astarion was just a tool used to gather souls. The spawn was forced to seduce and lure those into Cazador's corner against his will. However, by being infected by this parasite, Astarion's powers have been revoked, meaning he can walk in the sun and is no longer under his master's control.

This newfound freedom leaves Astarion with new problems, as Cazador desperately seeks for him to be found and returned to his side at once. By joining Tav's party, Astarion seeks to hide from Cazador's clutches for as long as he can, all while yearning for his revenge.

Tav (Durge)

Tav is what players refer to as their custom player character. They can either be a blank slate or play as the Dark Urge. Playing as the Dark Urge gives the player a backstory—this being a mysterious dark past that Tav seems to completely forget. If they do choose the Durge route, circumstances arise where Tav may act upon their dark desires; whether they do or not depends entirely on the player's choices.

This raises the conflict that sparks within Tav throughout the story, this being whether they should succumb to their grisly past self or overcome their urges and start anew.

Cazador Szarr

Cazador is Astarion's cruel master and an influential vampire lord. He craves infinite power, which leads him to drastic measures, using Astarion and his other spawn to aid in his efforts. Although Cazador isn't seen at all for most of the game, his influence can surely be felt. He uses his connections and influence to find Astarion by sending others to track him down, never moving a single finger.

Araj Oblodra

Araj is a Drow merchant with a passion for blood-focused alchemy. She has a fascination for anything related to blood, including vampires. Since Araj was a child, she has dreamt of being bit by a vampire in order to study the effects. So, when she meets Astarion for the first time, she will stop at nothing to get her hands on him.

Breakdown

Act 1

When you first meet Astarion, he's screaming for help on the Ravaged Beach. His cries for help echo from across the bend, and naturally, the player follows them. Eventually, they come to find an unusually pale elf frantically waving his hands in the air. Tav comes to Astarion's aid, and for their good efforts, they are almost immediately pinned down at knifepoint. See, there were never any mind-flayers after Astarion; he was never actually in trouble at all. Like a predator luring his prey, Astarion seamlessly manipulates Tav's good-hearted nature, and suddenly this seemingly helpless person is revealed as the true threat. As far as first impressions go, we can surmise one thing: Astarion is a master of manipulation.

Upon learning about the parasite in his brain, Astarion immediately thinks of a way to get rid of it. At first, he thinks it's a good idea to go about it himself. However, if Tav offers him to join their party, he agrees, thinking it would be better to stick together as Tav might be useful to him. Thus begins Astarion's story in Baldur's Gate 3.

If Tav chooses to travel with Astarion throughout Act 1, they will quickly catch on to what Astarion likes and dislikes. One such thing is that Astarion loves it when Tav toys with the weak. When the party continues onward from the Ravaged Beach, they encounter Lae'zel trapped in a cage. Tav has the option to tell Lae'zel to say "please" when she demands they help her get out. Lae'zel, being someone with a huge sense of pride, is humiliated by this. Astarion approves of this decision. Now, why does Astarion take pleasure in messing with those weaker than him? Well, it makes more sense once you find out his secret.

One night, Tav goes to take a well-deserved long rest. It seems like a normal night at the camp, and everyone is sleeping soundly by the campfire. That is until Tav is awoken by a sudden noise. They open their eyes and see Astarion looming over their sleeping body. Tav is startled for good reason, and Astarion immediately stumbles backward to explain himself. It turns out that Astarion is a vampire spawn. Not having eaten in a while, he is quite weak and asks Tav if he could take some of their blood to tide him over in the meantime:

ASTARION. No, I needed you to trust me. And you can trust me.

Astarion is not asking Tav to trust him, but he is telling Tav that they can. He needs Tav to trust him, because if they don't, he's as good as dead.

The next day, Tav can ask Astarion about his past, asking who and what he is exactly:

TAV. Tell me about your history.

ASTARION. Why do you insist on exhuming the past? I was a slave, a vampire spawn, kept by the Szarr family. Perhaps I still am. I was never able to resist their commands. But now, I've been conveniently lost. They won't ever control me again.

Astarion's past seems to be something he'd rather leave behind. However, learning about his past gives insight into why Astarion takes so much pleasure in toying with the weak. Having previously been a slave, Astarion knows what it feels like to be weak. Now that he's free, Astarion can taste some of the power that he lost while under Cazador's control.

As Tav continues their journey, they get to know Astarion more by interacting with him at camp. One night, Tav spots Astarion looking up at the stars. They reminisce about what they've been through together and what is yet to come:

ASTARION. You've been to the hells and back. Survived the crash. Survived

everything that's followed. I'm not easily impressed by people, but you're stronger than I gave you credit for.

Astarion seems genuinely impressed at how Tav has held up so far. However, with a simple insight check, Tav notices something:

NARRATOR. The smile on his pretty lips is a touch too composed, a bit too perfect. He may not mean a word he says.

In Astarion's mind, he needs to secure his safety from Cazador by staying with the party. He does this in the only way he knows how, through the art of seduction and flattery. Manipulating people has become more of a reflex for him—a tactic he pulls off flawlessly. As the narrator says, his smile seems a bit too perfect because he has done this hundreds of times.

On another occasion, Tav walks in on Astarion looking into a mirror. He appears to be admiring himself; however, he immediately recognizes that Tav is behind him. Confused about how he noticed them so fast, Tav questions Astarion, who explains:

ASTARION. I'm looking too. But not seeing very much. Another quirk of my affliction.

TAV. Do you miss it? Seeing your own face?

ASTARION. Preening in the looking glass? Petty vanity? Of course, I miss it. I've never even seen this face. Not since it grew fangs and my eyes turned red.

TAV. What colour were they before?

ASTARION. I don't know. I can't remember. My face is just some dark shape in my past. Another thing I've lost.

TAV. (stares at Astarion's face) I'll be your mirror. What do you want to know?

ASTARION. I want to know what the world sees when it looks at me. What you see.

What proceeds is the option to flatter Astarion. He responds quite confidently, telling Tav to keep coming up with compliments. On the surface, it may seem like Astarion is a narcissist. However, Astarion is quite the opposite; he seems to be insecure.

Astarion doesn't know what he truly looks like and forgets what he looked like before becoming a vampire. He feels like he lost that part of himself long ago. So, by Tav acting as Astarion's mirror, it's as if he's regaining this privilege that was taken away

from him. Astarion doesn't know what he looks like; he doesn't know if he's beautiful or not. In truth, he is seeking validation from those around him, telling him that he is.

The last minor interaction between Tav and Astarion happens when Tav finds him drunk at camp. It seems that earlier, he went hunting and drained a bear of its blood. Tav asks if an animal's blood is any different from a person's, and Astarion explains that there's a huge difference:

ASTARION. But Cazador fed me rats and bugs when you're used to drinking from a sewer, even plonk is a marked improvement.

TAV. Sounds... delicious.

ASTARION. It was exactly as appetizing as you'd think. Still, that was the past. I'll never have to grovel for him again.

TAV. True, you can start over. You can be better than what he made you.

ASTARION. Exactly! I can be better than him. Stronger. More powerful. More – Oh, you meant be kinder? Pet bunnies, that sort of thing? I've no objection to being nice, of course. Once I have the power to bend others to my will.

TAV. You think power lets you do anything, free from consequences?

ASTARION. Well... yes. You can't look at the world and tell me I'm wrong.

TAV. Power corrupts. You'd do well to remember that.

ASTARION. Oh, I hope so. A little corruption sounds fun. I spent centuries as a victim of a corrupt man. It was the mind flayers that plucked me away from that. They gave me a gift: the strength to take my own freedom. I'm embracing the power – you should too."

As previously noted, Astarion takes pleasure in being powerful and picking on the weak. Through this interaction, Tav gets to know a little more about why this is. Astarion still has a grudge against Cazador—rightfully so—but the way he copes with his trauma is based on his skewed perception of power. Astarion wants to be corrupt and powerful, which will inevitably make him fall into the same trap as his master. Ultimately, Astarion seeks revenge, but in a way that will turn him into what he fears the most. As morally corrupt as this seems, it's a realistic depiction of the cycle of abuse.

Tav learns a lot about Astarion at camp, but there's much more to learn beyond these mundane interactions. While exploring the Putrid Bog, Tav encounters Gandrel the Hunter. Upon speaking to him, you quickly find out that Gandrel has been hired by Cazador to bring Astarion back to Baldur's Gate. Of course, Tav won't let that happen, and you can either kill Gandrel or lead him off the trail. Understandably, Astarion gets

paranoid, as Cazador has technically found him. If you speak to him after killing Gandrel, he will say:

ASTARION. And now he sends a gur monster hunter after me? It's a message. He's reminding me of his power. Even in the middle of nowhere, he can reach me. He wants me back.

Even in a desolate swamp, Cazador manages to find Astarion. The freedom he thought he had gained is now threatened by his past. Perhaps Cazador never wanted to catch him but wanted to get into Astarion's head. This not only shows how much power he has in terms of wealth and influence, but also how much power he has over Astarion. They won the battle; they killed Gandrel. However, Astarion can't shake the thought that Cazador is so close to finding him, and he feels as if he can't escape.

If further questioned about the situation at camp, Astarion will say this:

ASTARION. Cazador Szarr is a vampire lord in Baldur's gate. The patriarch of his coven and a monster obsessed with power. Not political power or military power – I mean power over people. The power to control them completely. He turned me nearly two hundred years ago. I became his spawn, and he became my tormentor.

TAV. Tormentor? What did he do?

ASTARION. He had me go out into Baldur's gate to fetch him the most beautiful souls I could find. It was a fun little ritual of his – I'd bring them back and he'd ask if I wanted to dine with him. If I said yes, he'd serve me a dead, putrid rat. Of course, if I said no, he'd have me flayed. Hard to say this was worse.

And, when asked about the tadpole:

ASTARION. If I keep the tadpole, I risk transforming into a grotesque monster. If I lose the tadpole, Cazador has control of me, body and soul, and I return to the shadows. It's grim either way, so why not sell what's left of my soul to a devil? Better he has it than Cazador.

When choosing between two very grim outcomes, Astarion doesn't hesitate in choosing to become a mind flayer, if it means he is free from Cazador. He would rather die while in full control of his body and mind than live as a slave once again.

Even when recounting his time with Cazador, Astarion wonders if he should've said "no" for once and been killed. At least he wouldn't be as humiliated as he had been when he was forced to eat a dead rat.

This proves just how much control Cazador has over him and how much Astarion wishes to be free. He would rather sacrifice everything and die the way that he wants—a privilege that Astarion lost long ago.

If met with a high approval rating at the end of Act 1, Astarion will ask Tav if they want to sleep together. They can initiate the dialogue by talking to him at camp after the celebration of the Act 1 fight between the Tieflings, Druids, and the Goblins. Soon after talking to him, Astarion will start flirting with Tav:

ASTARION. I'm growing to like the whole package, honestly. And you clearly like me too, so...

TAV. So...?

ASTARION. Come now, don't be coy. Your body's already given you away. I could feel it as I was getting lost in your neck. Your little shakes of excitement. You enjoyed it, didn't you?

Astarion often speaks for Tav in this exchange, telling Tav that they like him and that they enjoy getting their blood sucked. When Tav expresses doubt, he tells them that their body has given them away and that they secretly want this. These are classic manipulation techniques used to control how someone feels and make the victim question their behavior.

If Tav agrees to sleep with Astarion, they are taken to a forest in the middle of the night. There, they meet Astarion, and the following exchange happens:

ASTARION. There you are, I've been waiting. Waiting since the moment I set eyes on you. Waiting to have you.

Tav. You don't have me yet.

ASTARION. Don't I? You're here. And I don't think you want to talk. I think you want to be known. To be tasted.

TAV. And what do you want?

ASTARION. What do any of us want? Pleasure. Yours. Mine. Our collective ecstasy. That's what you want isn't it? To lose yourself in me?

Astarion states that he has been waiting to sleep with Tav since they first met. Although these words might seem sweet to some, they also sound quite predatory. It seems that to Astarion, Tav is no different from the thousands of people he slept with in the past; Tav is simply being used.

He proceeds to spout honeyed words at Tav until they ask him what he wants in terms of sex. In response, he deflects the question by saying, "What do any of us want?" Immediately after, he starts talking about what Tav wants once again. It's almost as if Astarion has never been asked, or maybe he came up with the perfect response to avoid the question entirely. Either way, Astarion never tells you what he wants specifically.

The morning after, Tav wakes up on the ground alone. Tav looks up to see Astarion stretching in the sun and points out Astarion's strange scars on his back, though he simply brushes them off as something Cazador gave him as a gift. Then, they strike up a conversation about how Astarion is feeling:

TAV. Did you enjoy it? It felt like you weren't fully there.

ASTARION. I was holding back a little, it's true. I didn't want to lose control. Delicious as you were, I didn't want to go too far.

We don't see them having sex, but through the dialogue, one can infer that Astarion's mind was somewhere else during the whole experience. As many who have experienced sexual trauma do, Astarion seems to have dissociated during sex. Dissociation is a common defense mechanism in response to trauma, when a person feels like they are somewhere else mentally, as if they aren't in their own body. This is something that many people who have experienced any kind of trauma (be it sexual or not) can relate to.

In all, Act 1 is all about getting to know Astarion. At first, Astarion seems like a power-hungry sadist, but you soon find out that he is like this because he lacked power for so long. He seems like a narcissist, but in truth, he doesn't know what he looks like, and he seeks validation from others. Astarion uses sex and seduction as weapons because he thinks it's the only way that people will stay. What seems like a confident rogue turns out to be a scared and insecure victim of sexual abuse.

Act 2

Starting straight after Act 1, Tav makes their way through the mountain pass. Before arriving at Moonrise Towers, Tav has an interaction with Astarion at camp. They walk in on Astarion, tracing the scars on his back—the ones that he previously brushed off when asked about. Tav offers to help him decipher these scars by drawing what they see onto the ground. Once done, Astarion is speechless:

ASTARION. Two centuries carrying this, and I can finally see it.

This is a simple yet impactful line. Before, Astarion was carrying marks on his body without knowing what they looked like. He can finally see them now; he finally knows what was done to his body.

Discovering that these scars are written in Infernal, Astarion seeks the help of the devil Raphael. They strike up a deal, agreeing that if Tav kills one of Raphael's enemies, then he will translate Astarion's scars. If Tav completes their end of the deal, Raphael will appear in camp and reveal what the scars mean:

RAPHAEL. Carved into that ivory skin of yours is one part of an infernal contract between the archdevil Mephistopheles and your former master, Cazador Szarr.

Then, he explains the ritual in more detail:

RAPHAEL. The rite of profane ascension. It promises to be a marvelous ceremony. Very elaborate, incredibly ancient and entirely diabolical. If he completes the rite, he will become a new kind of being - the Vampire Ascendant.

[...] But the ritual has its price, as all worthwhile things do. Lord Cazador will need to sacrifice a number of souls, including all of his vampire spawn, if he is to ascend. Imagine how he felt, then, when one of his precious spawn simply disappeared into thin air. The only missing ingredient is Astarion. You are the final piece he requires to complete the ritual - your scars bind you to it. Your soul will set off a very wave of death, bringing Cazador his twisted life.

Knowing this, Astarion can never be truly free from Cazador unless he faces his past. The scars on his body will bind him to his old master forever, meaning that Astarion never truly regained control of his body in the first place.

If Tav talks to Astarion once Raphael leaves, he will say:

ASTARION. But if I'm the key to this power he craves, he'll hunt me to the ends of Faerun. I need to take the fight to him. And I need you to help me.

Finally, Astarion realizes that he can't hide forever, and he must face his abuser. He must defeat Cazador so that he can finally be free and have complete control over his body again.

If Tav asks Astarion how he feels about his siblings and the ritual, he will say:

ASTARION. Cazador sired seven spawn - me and my six brothers and sisters. He always insisted we were a family - even when he was carving scars into our flesh. I was one of his first, some of the others came years later. He was a monster to us all, but did take special pleasure in my pain. He said my screams sounded sweetest. And now that I'm gone.... I don't know. I pity the other six...

One can infer through his hesitation that Astarion feels a bit of guilt, considering he escaped and his siblings are still under Cazador's control. Although he would never admit this.

Once you reach Moonrise Towers, Tav can speak to a Drow merchant named Araj. As soon as you talk to her, Araj shows her passion for potion-making and the sanguine arts. She has such a passion for blood that she sets her eyes on Astarion immediately:

ARAJ. Although perhaps, there's one more thing we could discuss: your friend? He's a vampire, no? Or one of their spawn, at least.

ASTARION. Don't worry, we're all friends under the absolute. I won't bite.

ARAJ. Oh, I'd prefer if you did. I assume he belongs to you?

TAV. Excuse me? He's his own person.

ARAJ. I'm sure he really believes that. How utterly adorable. Do you have a name, spawn?

ASTARION. Astarion, but hold on-

ARAJ. Good. Now, Astarion, I've dreamt of being bitten by a vampire since I was a young girl.

ASTARION. I'm sorry? You want to be bitten?

ARAJ. To feel your life's blood slipping away? To dance on the edge between life and death? Yes, I want it. I'll even compensate you - a potion of legendary power that forever increases the strength of the one who consumes it. It's not for sale, but it's yours if you bite me.

ASTARION. I will have to decline.

ARAJ. Excuse me? This is a once in a lifetime opportunity and you're squandering it.

ASTARION. I gave you my answer.

ARAJ. Can't you talk some sense into your obstinate charge?

TAV. He said no. There's nothing more to discuss.

Araj has a fetish for vampires, which isn't surprising considering where her passions lie. It's also clear that she looks down on Astarion, often trying to get Tav to speak for him and assuming that he is a slave. When Araj does speak to him, it's in a condescending tone, treating him like a pet.

On the other hand, Astarion does not want to go through with Araj's request. He's assertive when he says he doesn't want to go through with this. It's not clear exactly why he refuses, especially since Araj promises to compensate him. If Tav stands up for Astarion, he will be very grateful, and when they return to camp, they will trigger this interaction:

ASTARION. I want to thank you.

TAV. For what?

ASTARION. For what you said while I was in front of that vile Drow. I spent two hundred years using my body to lure pretty things back for my master. What I wanted, how I felt about what I was doing, it never mattered. You could have asked me to do the same - to throw myself at her, what I wanted be damned. But you didn't. And I'm grateful.

TAV. I don't want you to do anything you don't want to do.

ASTARION. It's a novel concept, I admit. And a little intimidating. It would've been so easy to bite her. To just go along with what I was being told to do. A moment of disgust to force myself through. And then I could have carried on, just like before.

Tav. That would've been wrong.

ASTARION. Of course, I needed protection. People don't trust vampires – perhaps understandably - so I needed to get someone on my side. And seducing you was easy, frankly. So, imagine how stupid I felt when I started to genuinely feel something for you. Trust me, I was not happy about it. You were a complication I didn't see coming. And yet... I tried to pick beautiful people where I could, but there were so many over the years. After a while you stop caring.

ASTARION. The entire reason for my existence was to seduce anything with a pulse. And every instinct I have tells me that nothing's changed. That I'm still just a means to an end. You made me see I never stopped thinking like I was his slave, even in freedom. But I'm more than that. More than a thing to be used.

TAV. I care about you.

ASTARION. Really?

TAV. (Hugs Astarion)

ASTARION. You... you are full of surprises, aren't you? Honestly, I have no idea what we're doing. Or what comes next. But I know that this? This is nice.
(Holds Tav's hand)

Astarion refused to bite the Drow simply because he didn't want to. He had no agency over his body for so long. What he wanted didn't matter, and he was forced to do anything his master wanted him to do. So, refusing Araj gave Astarion a sense of pride that he hadn't felt in hundreds of years.

Even he states that it was such a simple request and that he could've sucked it up and bit Araj. However, being able to refuse such a simple act carried a lot of power in Astarion's mind. Astarion makes it known that he is grateful that Tav stood up for him and let him make the decision himself.

This leads him to confess his love for Tav and pursue a genuine relationship with them.

However, if Tav triggers the confession scene before meeting Araj, it will play out differently:

ASTARION. Do you have a moment? I think we need to talk.

TAV. Are you alright?

ASTARION. Oh yea, I'm fine. I just... feel awful. Look, I had a plan. A nice, simple plan - seduce you, sleep with you, manipulate your feelings so you'd never turn on me. It was easy - instinctive. Habits from two hundred years of charming people kicked in. All you had to do was fall for it. And all I had to do was not fall for you... Which is where my nice, simple plan fell apart.

ASTARION. You-you're incredible. You deserve something real. I want us to be something real. Being close to someone - any kind of intimacy - was something I performed to lure people back for him. Even though I know things between us are different, being with someone still feels... tainted. Still brings up those feelings of disgust and loathing. I don't know how else to be with someone. No matter how much I'd like to.

From here, the scene plays out the same as the previous one. Tav hugs him, and they decide to pursue an authentic relationship. This scene focuses less on Astarion's feelings around his newfound freedom and the empowerment he felt when refusing Araj. Instead, this scene focuses on Astarion's struggles with intimacy and sex because of the trauma he endured as a slave. Specifically, he talks to Tav about how he feels about having sex with someone that he genuinely has feelings for. Sex with Tav is different, but the act itself brings up Astarion's past trauma. Despite everything, Astarion wants to have a relationship with Tav.

At the end of both scenes, Astarion holds Tav's hand while saying his last line: "This is nice." Simply holding Tav's hand feels nice to Astarion, as it's a form of intimacy he's never really experienced before. It isn't sex, but it's an act of love nonetheless.

Ultimately, Act 2 focuses on Astarion's character growth as he opens up to Tav and leaves himself emotionally vulnerable for the first time. Astarion finally realizes that, even though he is free, he never stops thinking of himself as a slave. With the help of Tav, he decides to change the way he thinks and finally face Cazador directly.

Act 3

The party finally finds themselves in the big city of Baldur's Gate in the last act. When they arrive, the party learns that the Emperor, a rogue mind-flayer, is the reason why they haven't transformed yet.

The Emperor tells the player of the impending doom posed by three gods in Baldur's Gate, who wish to use the mind flayers and the elder brain to take over the world. To help defeat the gods, he offers the party great power by offering them a parasite that will turn them into mind-flayers.

Tav keeps the parasite with them and can choose who they wish to use to 'evolve' into a mind flayer. If Tav asks Astarion about the parasite, he will say:

ASTARION. We both know what it is capable of. But I'm not touching it.

TAV. Unlike you to be so unwilling to receive a new power...

ASTARION. That was before I knew the cost. Before I knew it meant transforming into some grotesque beast. I remember how it hurt when I turned into a vampire. My body writhed and warped while I was utterly helpless, the grip of death owned my heart as it beat its last. I don't want to turn into anything else. I can't do that again. I can't watch my body be taken over.

TAV. You're afraid?

ASTARION. I'll happily murder my way to whatever powerful artefacts we can make use of. Point at the back and I'll stab. Just don't ask me to sacrifice my body. It hasn't been mine for so long.

Refusing such power is out of character for Astarion, but that's because it goes against what he yearns for most. Above all, Astarion wishes to have control over his own body. He's sure of what he wants now and will do anything to be free.

Astarion's newly found confidence shines when they meet Araj in Baldur's Gate once again:

ARAJ. Ah, and the heart-stopping bloodsucker. I hope you've changed your mind. My neck is yours, any time.

ASTARION. And I will keep refusing until the end of time. I'm done bowing to the whims of others.

ARAJ. Never say never.

Compared to their first interaction, Astarion exhibits no hesitation when refusing Araj. He's firm with his refusal to comply and doesn't let Araj pry further.

Astarion's quest in Act 3 starts when he and Tav encounter two of his siblings in the city. Surprised by his sudden appearance, Dalyria and Pale Petras ask why Astarion is in Baldur's Gate:

DALYRIA. Why would you come back? You got out - you were free.

TAV. We're here to kill Cazador. That's the only way you'll be free.

DALYRIA. You can't mean that.

PALE PETRAS. He's playing mind games. He can't raise a hand to the master, let alone kill him.

ASTARION. You have no idea what I can do.

At this point, Astarion grabs Pale Petras by the throat and brings him to the sun. As Pale Petras starts to burn alive, Astarion demands that he reveal Cazador's location or die. Dalyria begs him to stop, but he continues. However, if Tav intervenes, then Astarion will let Pale Petras go.

After letting Pale Petras go, Astarion calms down and tells his siblings of his plans to defeat Cazador. Both spawn question if Astarion really can defeat him, and he reassures them that he's the only one who can:

ASTARION. I'm the only one who can. The sun can't harm me. Cazador can't compel me. I don't need to fear him anymore.

In Act 2, Astarion realizes that he never stopped thinking of himself as a slave. His mindset has changed as he realizes that Cazador doesn't have any power over him anymore. He isn't scared of Cazador anymore, and he isn't hiding anymore. After hearing about Astarion's plan, Dalyria and Pale Petras refuse to believe anything he says and return to Cazador's lair. Once they disappear, Astarion talks with Tav about the situation:

ASTARION. Poor fools. They actually think Cazador will save them.

TAV. I'm glad you spared them.

ASTARION. You sound surprised - I am capable of doing the right thing from time to time. They're no threat to us, and they have no choice but to do Cazador's bidding. I pity them. Worst of all, they don't know their fate's already set. They're doomed. The only question is whether their lives will be sacrificed to a monster like Cazador or serve a greater purpose. Seven sigils on seven spawn, and Cazador has the other six. We have to face him and take that power for ourselves.

TAV. Those six spawn are your brothers and sisters. Are you ready to sacrifice them?

ASTARION. Trust me, I'd rather slaughter someone else's family, but... if that's what it takes. And it's not like they're sweet innocents: they brought Cazador just as many victims as I did.

At first, Astarion seems to pity his siblings. However, when Tav asks him how he feels about sacrificing them for greater power, he seems to be remorseful for a second.

Astarion encounters two more of his siblings one night at camp. Aurelia and Leon try to sneak up on the party and take Astarion back to Cazador. However, their plans fail when Tav is woken up.

Astarion asks his siblings how they found him so easily, and Aurelia tells him that Cazador had always known where he was. To get Aurelia and Leon on his side, Astarion lies to his siblings, telling them that if he completes the ritual, they will be free of Cazador:

ASTARION. After all these centuries of torment, I know what you all want. More than power. More than to walk in the sun. you want to see him dead. The rite of profane ascension will be mine, and he won't see a scrap of its glory. I am going to complete the ritual as the ascendant, and then I am going to kill him. This is your chance. Stand with me. Name me your new master. We will get our revenge, and you will all live again.

He knows that if he does complete the ritual, all of his siblings will be sacrificed. However, Astarion has become blinded by this potential power, and he wants them to run willingly into their deaths for his benefit. Aurelia and Leon give into Astarion's lies and offer to help stop Cazador. However, before they can, Aurelia and Leon are summoned back to Cazador's lair, unable to escape his control.

ASTARION. What a mess. Well, at least you've met my family now.

TAV. I can't believe how you lied to them. You know they'll have to die for the rite to happen.

ASTARION. What does it matter? There's only six of them. And they are vampire spawn.

TAV. You don't have sympathy for others sharing your plight?"

ASTARION. No one ever looked out for me. No one ever said a kind thing to me. You're the only one. Other people don't have a heart like you. You're you. No one is like that."

TAV. The world can be a wonderful, kind place, Astarion, when you find a home in it.

Astarion seems to bear resentment for most others around him because nobody helped him when he needed it. After years of abuse, he has learned to look out for himself only. Tav is the first person to genuinely care about his well-being, and although he recognizes this, he doesn't care about the lives of those who never bothered to help. Considering his siblings were under Cazador's control, they couldn't help. However, Astarion ignores this fact and lets blind rage consume him.

Once he finds out where Cazador is hiding, Astarion travels to the manor along with Tav. As they're headed to the study, where Cazador is hiding underground, Tav checks in on Astarion one final time before he confronts his abuser:

TAV. Are you sure about this? You don't have to face him.

ASTARION. Oh, I've never been less sure of anything. But if I don't face him now, I never will. I'll spend the rest of my life running, watching the shadows, never feeling safe. No, this has to happen. Here and now. Also, there's the small matter of all that power I can steal from the bastard. So that'll be nice.

It's now or never, and Astarion is prepared to risk everything for closure. He needs to end this torment once and for all and face his abuser.

Now, the party makes their way underground, where they finally confront Cazador:

CAZADOR. You returned! And true to your word, our prodigal son stands before us. Do not slough before me, boy! Have you no respect for yourself? Look at you, crawling back after abandoning your family. You should be begging for forgiveness.

ASTARION. Forgiveness? You've never forgiven anything. Every mistake, every slip was punished!

CAZADOR. I strove for perfection in all things - even those as imperfect as you. A pity you amounted to so little, despite my efforts."

ASTARION. No! No, fuck you and fuck everything you've ever done to me.

CAZADOR. They told me you had changed. I dared not believe it. Oh, thankless child. Did I not bless you with our immortal gift? Did I not make you what you are?

ASTARION. You son of a bitch!

In a fit of rage, Astarion tries to attack Cazador but is quickly apprehended.

CAZADOR. You truly forget my power. You truly thought our bond as creator and creation was all that stopped you from killing me. You are weak, my child. You are a small, pathetic little boy who never amounted to anything. But today, you will finally do something worthwhile. You will burn, and I will ascend.

Astarion is then thrust into his spot for the ritual, unable to move. After a long and grueling fight against Cazador, Tav helps free Astarion, who pulls Cazador out of his coffin.

CAZADOR. Get your hands off me, worm.

ASTARION. I'm not the one in the dirt. One last thrust and I'll be free of you. I'll never have to fear you again. But if I finish the ritual you started, I'll never have to fear anyone, ever.

CAZADOR. You think me a fool? That I would allow anyone to usurp me, speak the words, and ascend in my place? The runes I carved into your flesh bind you and all seven thousand souls to the ritual. Complete it and those bearing the scars will be sacrificed - you included. You are simply a means to an end. I made you to be consumed."

ASTARION. I am so much more than what you made me.

ASTARION. (turns towards Tav) I can do this, but I need your help.

Tav is then faced with a decision. They can help Astarion complete the ritual, or they can convince him not to go through with it. Both options lead to very different outcomes and impact Astarion's character for the rest of the game.

Ascended

Astarion will ascend if Tav fails to persuade him to stop or agrees to help with the ritual. Once the ritual is completed, Astarion will approach Tav at camp.

ASTARION. I can't believe you let me do that. Killing all those people. A pleasant surprise.

TAV. I wanted what was best for you.

ASTARION. You sweet, sweet thing. I want what's best for you too, of course.

And one wicked turn deserves another. so, tell me what you desire. What can I do for my dearest pet?

TAV. I want to be a vampire, like you.

ASTARION. Oh my sweet, there are no vampires like me. And there never will be again. But if you want the gift of eternity, I can give you that. One more bite is all it would take. That's what you want, isn't it? To be mine? Forever?

TAV. Yes, that's all I want.

ASTARION. Then it's everything you shall receive. I will miss the heat from that body, though. Shall we have one last night together before you join me in immortality? One more for the road, so to speak.

Tav. Please, yes.

ASTARION. Then come with me, my love, and live your final night.

After they have intercourse, Tav is met face-to-face with Astarion at the edge of the room:

ASTARION. On your knees, darling.

TAV. (Kneels)

ASTARION. Tonight, I shall drink every drop of your blood. Own your body, kill your mind. It will only hurt a bit, the pleasure will be far greater than the pain.

ASTARION. (Bites Tav) You have given me everything. Thank you.

He then proceeds to drink Tav dry of their blood, and Tav wakes up as his spawn.

After ascending, the love that Astarion felt towards Tav turns into obsession, and he becomes extremely possessive. Most notably, Astarion no longer calls Tav by name, such as "darling" or "love," but by "pet." By turning Tav into their spawn, he has complete control over Tav, essentially "owning" and dehumanizing them as if they were his pet.

Astarion becomes what he used to fear most in the world; he becomes just like Cazador. Continuing the cycle of abuse, Astarion (once the abused) becomes the abuser.

The game's epilogue gives more insight into how much Astarion changed after ascending. After defeating the Mind Flayers and the Elder Brain, Tav can talk to Astarion about their relationship and how they should move forward:

ASTARION. It feels so good. Freedom- true freedom. Finally. I can feel my strength growing. Every day that passes, I gain new abilities. You know, now that you enemies have fallen, I might be the most powerful person in the world. And as you're my consort, that makes us the most powerful people in the world.

At this point, Tav can choose to break up with Astarion:

TAV. I think we should break up.

ASTARION. Aha! Don't be stupid, darling. You're mine, remember? The tadpole is gone, which means your future is mine to decide. How lucky you are that I chose you as my consort. Chose you to help me take Baldur's gate, then sit by my side as I rule it. There's no backing out now - we'll be together forever. I can promise you that.

However, he doesn't let Tav end things. Now that Tav is his spawn, Astarion completely owns them and won't let them go. He describes this possessive nature as love, but it's the same as the relationship he had with Cazador when he was a spawn.

If Tav expresses their desire to stay with Astarion, the following dialogue will occur:

TAV. I wouldn't want it any other way.

ASTARION. And neither would I. Together, we can do anything. The world is ours for the taking. So, what would you like?

Tav. I want to see the world with you at my side.

ASTARION. Then you shall. Well travel the lands together, tasting everything Faerun has to offer. Perhaps we'll find somewhere we'd like to stay for a century or two - perhaps not. We have a beautiful, bloody future to look forward to, my love. I can't be sure what it holds for us, but I know one thing. This is going to be fun.

Currently, Astarion's only goal is to obtain infinite power. With Tav at his side, he wishes to conquer lands and taste luxuries beyond his imagination. After ascending, Astarion has become so overwhelmed with power that he has become no better than Cazador.

Non-Ascended

If Tav manages to convince Astarion not to go through with the ritual, he will kill Cazador and release all the spawn. He realizes that if he does go through with the ritual, he will be no better than Cazador.

Back at camp, Tav can talk to Astarion about the situation:

ASTARION. I should probably start getting used to the shadows again. Who knows how long I have left in the sun?

TAV. Regretting your choices?

ASTARION. No, I made the right choice. although I do regret the options I had. Maybe never seeing the sun again is just the price of freedom.

TAV. I'll be with you either way. I hope you know that.

ASTARION. I think I do. Assuming we survive, of course. Because a horrible death is always just around the corner with you. There's Something I'd like to show you, if that's all right? Something out in the city.

TAV. If you want to sneak for a cuddle, you can just ask.

ASTARION. I'll try to restrain myself if you do. Shall we? This way, it's not far.

Astarion takes Tav to a graveyard. Once there, he walks towards a gravestone covered in vines. Astarion brushes the vines away to reveal what's inscribed: "Astarion Ancunin: 229-268 DR." It's his gravestone. Astarion sits by the grave and continues talking:

ASTARION. Nearly two hundred years and I never came back. Not since the night I woke up down there. I had to punch a hole in the coffin and claw my way through six feet of dirt. Then when I finally broke the surface, retching up dirt and congealed blood, Cazador was waiting. From that day on I was his. Until today.

TAV. How does it feel to be free?

ASTARION. Exhilarating. Terrifying. Exhausting. For nearly two centuries I stalked the streets like a ghost while the person I was lay here, dead and buried. Now, I need to figure out who I am. What I want.

TAV. And what do you want?

ASTARION. You... I want you. You were by my side through all of this. Through

bloodlust and pain and misery. You were patient. You cared. You trusted me when that was an objectively stupid thing to do. I feel safe with you. Seen. And whatever the future holds for me, I don't want to lose that.

TAV. You won't. Whatever comes next, I've got you.

ASTARION. Thank you. Well, I should probably fix this.

Astarion then approaches the grave once again. With a knife, he carves something into his gravestone. He writes, "Astarion Ancunin: 229–268 DR 468 DR – ". Exactly two hundred years after he was turned, this new date is the present.

ASTARION. I've been dead in the ground for long enough. Its time to start living again. With everything that life has to offer. (Holds Tav's hands in his)

ASTARION. You know, I didn't care for you when we first met. But I do now. Being with you is about more than lust or manipulating you into a tactical alliance. I love you. I love this. And I want it all.

Finally free, Astarion wishes to live once again. This time, he will live under his terms. The carving is only the first step, serving as a symbol of Astarion's new chapter in life. Hopefully, this chapter will be full of happiness.

The epilogue shows a more hopeful Astarion as he talks to Tav about their plans to move forward:

ASTARION. Hi, darling. I was just thinking about freedom. How I'm free of the parasite - free of Cazador. How I'll never be in someone's power again. And all it cost was my life in the sun. Now I belong to the shadows. So, what happens next?

TAV. I'll help you find a way to walk in the sun again.

ASTARION. You - do you think it's possible I suppose there is a chance? And if there's a chance, no matter how small, I'm going to take it. And it would mean setting off on another adventure together. Is that what you want? Is this what you want? I would understand if you wanted to go your own way.

TAV. No, this is what I want.

ASTARION. Good, because as selfless as I am. I really did not want to let you go. We are rather excellent together, you know. And united, there is nothing we can't do. I can't say what the future holds for us, but I know we'll be facing it together. And were going to have a lot of fun.

As we approach the end of the journey, Astarion has become much more optimistic. Although he did give up the power to be in the sun once again, Astarion got what he wanted most: freedom. When Tav suggests they try and find a way for him to walk in the sun again, he immediately jumps on board.

Considering how much Astarion has grown at this point, it's a stark contrast to his initial character. Now, Astarion is willing to take even the smallest chance at finding a way to walk in the sun again, and he wants Tav to join this little adventure. It's a fitting end for Astarion—an ending full of hope.

Strongest Element

The strongest element of Astarion's personal quest would have to be his non-ascended narrative branch. When Tav successfully convinces Astarion not to go through with the ritual, the following exchange occurs:

TAV. I know you think this will set you free, but it won't. This power will trap you, just like it trapped Cazador.

ASTARION. You-you're right. I can be better than him. But I'm not above enjoying this.

This short bit of dialogue is followed by a cutscene in which Astarion stabs Cazador multiple times. The way he does it is brutal, sloppy, and full of anger. He continues to stab Cazador even after he's dead, just to make sure. After stabbing him so many times, Astarion kneels back on the floor and cries.

Other than the sound of sobbing, the room is completely silent as Astarion processes everything that's happened to him. The silence allows the player to let this moment truly sink in.

For the first time, we see Astarion as completely vulnerable. He doesn't have to be afraid anymore. He is finally free. It's a raw and purely emotional scene. All in all, the strongest element of Astarion's story is how they convey his emotions so vividly in the non-ascended narrative branch.

Unsuccessful Element

The most unsuccessful element would have to be Cazador's presence in the narrative, or lack thereof. The reason for which Cazador did not appear in Acts 1 and 2 was to show the player how influential he was. He posed a threat without ever being seen. However, I think that Cazador should've been introduced earlier.

The first time the player sees Cazador is at the end of Astarion's story quest. And, as soon as they meet him, the player defeats him. It makes Cazador seem much less powerful than Astarion described him.

Perhaps the intent was to show how Cazador manipulates and uses his power to make others believe he is strong. In reality, Cazador appears weak and finds himself hiding underground to complete the ritual.

Introducing him so late in the story also brought up pacing issues. Astarion's story quest slowly develops over Acts 1 and 2: Tav gets to know Astarion, and they eventually discover the secret of what his scars mean. This takes place over two acts. In Act 3, Astarion's siblings appear; they infiltrate Cazador's mansion; they intervene in the ritual; and so on. It would've been better to space this out, as it seems quite convoluted compared to the previous acts.

As mentioned by Astarion's family early in Act 3, Cazador always knew where Astarion was:

AURELIA. Master Cazador has known where Astarion was this entire time. He knew he would return.

If Cazador was so determined to get Astarion back for the ritual, they could've introduced his character earlier. This could have allowed the player to further explore the dynamic between Astarion and his family, as well as establish Cazador as a greater threat.

Highlight

The non-ascended graveyard scene showed just how far Astarion has come since Act 1. After getting his freedom back, Astarion decides to move on and create a new path for himself. By carving the inscription "Astarion Ancunin: 229–268 DR 468 DR – " onto his grave, Astarion tells Tav that he wishes to start living again.

It was this scene, when Astarion carved a new birth date onto his gravestone, that stood out to me most. Its meaning, representing Astarion's rebirth, showed that the end of Astarion's quest was just the beginning of a new chapter. Finally free, Astarion wants to be himself once again, or at least find out what "himself" looks like.

Critical Reception

"The pale elf Astarion's romance plotline is also one of the game's best-written. Initially, he seduces the player character because he wants to keep them dependent on him. His first intimate scene is casual, almost dismissive, with little emotion involved. However, if the player chooses to continue romancing him, he begins to develop genuine feelings for the first time in his life. He is confused by this strange new "love," but ultimately decides to accept these feelings and stand by the player's side. He is one of the romanced companions who will stay with the player no matter what decisions they make - even if they are forced to transform themselves into a mindflayer. Seeing

this once self-interested vampire learn how to truly value and love another is a masterfully written story.” ([GameRant](#) , Katelyn Mitchell Jewett)

“When Astarion's arc hit its climax, I couldn't see the forest for the trees anymore – no good or evil. Both major decisions are framed as 'help him out of this nightmare'. Help him reclaim autonomy, to feel he'll "never have to fear anyone, ever" again, despite the enormous cost; or talk him down, while banishing him into darkness. Either way, he's a vampire in a world of juicy necks. What's the greater 'good'? And, honestly, do I even care anymore? That changed everything. Baldur's Gate 3 exploded all notions of RPG-flavored goodness I'd long relied on. I couldn't be a hero here – and I'm not sure I even wanted to.” ([GamesRadar](#), Carrie Talbot)

Lessons

Depiction of trauma: The way that Larian handled Astarion's healing journey from sexual trauma was very well-handled and realistic. Too often, the media romanticizes sexual abuse, especially towards women. However, Larian doesn't romanticize Astarion's abuse at all and touches on the subject in a very mature manner.

When Astarion approaches Tav about their relationship in Act 2, he explains how he needs time to figure out what intimacy means to him. Explaining that he feels disgusted and tainted when he has sex, but he wants to figure out a way to genuinely be with Tav regardless. Astarion maturely communicates his feelings, and Astarion's trauma is never romanticized in any way.

It's also very refreshing to see themes of sexual trauma depicted in a man. In all, this representation and realistic approach to subjects such as sexual abuse is something that more games should be taking into consideration when writing a character such as Astarion.

Each choice comes with a price: Not every choice is the "right" one in Baldur's Gate 3, and this heavily applies to Astarion's story quest as well. Specifically, the choice to ascend Astarion or not comes with many complications.

Ascending Astarion means his vampiric weaknesses are null, and he can walk in the sun. However, by ascending, Astarion becomes exactly like Cazador.

If Astarion does not ascend, he becomes hopeful and decides to move forward to create his own life with Tav. However, Astarion is still a vampire spawn, so when the parasite is removed, he regains all his vampiric qualities.

Each ending is bittersweet and comes with its pros and cons. This is a great way to write endings, as no choice is truly "right" or provides a perfect ending for Astarion. Like life, everything comes with a price, and nothing goes perfectly. There is never a "right" choice.

Summation

In all, Astarion's story resonates with so many players because of how real his story and his character feel. We start by knowing Astarion as this manipulative and seductive elf, but soon enough, the façade is broken, and we get to know the true Astarion. Deep down, he's just a scared victim of abuse, desperate to be free. With Tav's help, Astarion overcomes his fears and faces his abuser. He stops hiding and frees himself and his siblings from two hundred years of abuse.

As the non-ascended, he is finally able to live again. Astarion decides to take his own path alongside those he loves, embarking on a journey of self-discovery. As the ascended, Astarion is corrupted by power and becomes exactly like Cazador. Either way, Astarion represents the process of healing from sexual abuse. Something that is all too real for many in this world.

In all, Astarion is such a beloved character because so many people can empathize with him. Be it survivors of sexual abuse or any other kind of trauma, many who get to know Astarion fall in love with his character because of how much he grows throughout the story. The Pale Elf, so untrusting and power-hungry, becomes compassionate and vulnerable. And, most importantly, he becomes free.