THE ASHEN DESCENT

A one-shot descent onto the topmost tier of the burning wastes

WELCOME TO HELL

READ ALOUD

The sky overhead burns with a sickening crimson light. Jagged spires of obsidian pierce the clouds of ash, and the river winding below flows with molten rock and suffering. The smell of brimstone and iron chokes the air, leaving a metallic taste on your tongue.

As the party arrives in the Ashfields, the sheer oppressive heat hits them immediately. The River Cinder flows to the west, cutting through the ash plains like a jagged scar. Above, flocks of spine-hawks wheel in the fiery sky, searching for lost souls or easy prey. The ground beneath their boots crunches—a mixture of obsidian glass, sulfurous ash, and the shattered bones of countless forgotten legions. Every breath burns the lungs, and the distant, agonizing screams of the damned provide a horrific, never-ending chorus to the landscape.

To survive in this desolate wasteland, adventurers must remain ever vigilant. There are no natural sources of clean water, and the sporadic rains consist of either boiling blood or corrosive acid. The few safe havens are heavily fortified outposts controlled by infernal warlords or heavily armed mercenary companies who charge exorbitant prices for entry.

The Environmental Toll

GM NOTES

Characters who take a long rest here must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or gain 1 level of exhaustion due to the oppressive heat, the toxic air, and the absolute despair woven into the plane.

The landscape itself is hostile. Pools of acid bubble up without warning, and the ash storms can blind a traveler in seconds. Navigating the terrain often requires magical assistance, as compasses spin wildly and the ever-shifting geography renders standard maps completely useless.

SKILL CHECK

DC 18 Perception to notice that the ash on the ground is patterned strangely, hiding an infernal sinkhole just ahead. Or, **DC 16 Survival** to track the passing of a heavy demonic siege-engine, avoiding its patrol path.

The Long Slaughter

The eternal conflict between demons and devils rages endlessly across these plains. To the north, the sounds of clashing steel and booming magic whisper of a battle currently underway. Plumes of acrid black smoke rise miles into the bleeding sky, marking the locations of active siege-engines and heavy artillery bombardments. Even a skirmish here involves hundreds of combatants.

DENIZENS OF THE TOPMOST TIER

Navigating the Ashfields means contending with its natives. Formations of hook-and-glaive devils patrol the wastes, enforcing the will of the Archduchess Malgarah. They march in perfect, terrifying unison, their glaives dripping with venom. Meanwhile, chaotic warbands of demons pour from massive dimensional rifts, seeking only destruction and consumption. To travel safely, many resort to hiring native guides—typically imps or lesser fiends—though trusting them is entirely foolish.

Random Encounters

D8	ENCOUNTER	THREAT LEVEL
1	2d4 Glaive Devils	Medium
2	A squad of Ember Hounds	Hard
3	A scavenger imp offering a deal	Social
4	A wandering Carrion-Wing (Demon)	Hard
5	An abandoned, broken slag-engine	Exploration
6	A pit of screaming souls	Hazard
7	A toll-devil of the Ninth Ledger	Social/Deadly
8	A Warden Devil patrol	Deadly

This landscape is notorious for breaking the minds of mortals. The longer one spends under the crimson lights, the more the pervasive evil of the Burning Tiers seeps into their soul. Even the most stoic paladins find their faith tested when surrounded by the inescapable evidence of the multiverse's cruelty. The party will constantly battle paranoia, heat exhaustion, and the temptation of easy power offered by the plane's inhabitants.

THE WARLORDS

To survive long-term, the party may need to forge a perilous alliance with one of the local warlords. These powerful entities control resources, safe havens, and information crucial to crossing the tier alive. They operate complex fortresses crafted from the scavenged wrecks of ancient slag-hulks and the bones of massive, fallen fiends.

The hierarchy of the wastes is brutally simple: might makes right. The warlords command fleets of slag-engines—massive rolling foundries that burn the ore of the tier itself, and burn it faster than anyone can dig it. These vehicles roar across the ash dunes at breakneck speeds, engaging in brutal vehicular combat over territory, resources, and slaves.

Forging a Contract

GM NOTES

Devils cannot lie, but they are masters of omission and twisted logic. Any contract signed in the Ashfields is binding wherever the signer later goes. Breaking one forfeits the signer's soul immediately to the infernal bureaucracy.

If the players parley successfully, they may be offered a Devil's Contract. These legal documents are written on screaming parchment in infernal script that seems to writhe when read. The terms will always heavily favor the devil, often including hidden clauses that demand servitude or the sacrifice of magical artifacts in exchange for safe passage or vital intelligence.

The Fine Print

It is incredibly important that adventuring parties have a high-intelligence scholar, wizard, or bard thoroughly inspect any contract offered. Devils utilize a specific, legally binding dialect of Infernal known as *Infernal Jurisprudence*, which contains hundreds of grammatical traps. For example, a clause stating that a devil will "relieve the party of their worldly burdens" typically means the devil is legally entitled to instantly confiscate all of their magical items, gold, and spellbooks upon signing.

Furthermore, any attempt to magically alter, forge, or physically destroy a Devil's Contract after it has been signed immediately summons a squad of heavily armed, terrifyingly efficient Furies to enforce the original terms. The only known way to safely break a contract without sacrificing a soul is to locate and physically destroy the original copy, which is always securely stored deep within the impenetrable vaults of Cinderhold or Brazenspire.

Many warlords also offer a "trial period" for their protection services, which simply means they will actively send their own invisible imps to harass the party continuously until they agree to sign the final, binding agreement out of sheer desperation and exhaustion.

The Litigious Wastes

The landscape of the Ashfields itself is scarred by millions of broken contracts. Entire mountains are formed by the petrified, screaming souls of mortals who failed to uphold their end of a bargain. Navigating these "Statues of Perjury" is a psychological nightmare; the statues will continuously whisper the party's deepest regrets and hidden shames, attempting to demoralize them into accepting a new contract from the observing Gaunt Devils.

THE ARCHDEVIL'S GENERAL

At the climax of their journey across the wastes, the party will inevitably draw the attention of the higher-tier devils orchestrating the Long Slaughter.

READ ALOUD

The ground trembles. From the canyon emerges a towering figure wreathed in hellfire. Its leathern wings spread wide, casting a shadow that feels physically heavy. It wields a mace of solid magma, and its eyes burn with centuries of tactical cruelty.

Ash Marshal

Large fiend (devil), lawful evil

Armor Class: 18 (scorched plate) **Hit Points:** 253 (22d10 + 132) **Speed:** 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
24 (+7)	15 (+2)	22 (+6)	19 (+4)	17 (+3)	21 (+5)

Saving Throws: Dex +8, Con +12, Wis +9 **Skills:** Intimidation +11, Perception +9 **Damage Resistances:** cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered **Damage Immunities:** fire, poison **Condition Immunities:** poisoned **Senses:** truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 19 **Languages:** Infernal script and speech, telepathy 120 ft.

Field Command. Every devil the marshal can see within 60 feet may add the marshal's Charisma bonus to one attack roll or saving throw per round. The marshal knows the instant one of them dies, and where.

Terms of Engagement. The marshal opens every battle by naming a single condition aloud — that no spell be cast, that no ground be given, that one named character not be harmed. Any creature that breaks the stated term takes 22 (4d10) fire damage and has disadvantage on attack rolls until the end of its next turn. The marshal is bound by the term too, and honours it exactly.

Ledger-Warded. Spells that would charm, frighten or compel the marshal fail unless the caster first offers something in trade. The GM decides what the marshal considers adequate; it is never less than a memory.

Defeating such a creature is nearly impossible for a low-level party. Fleeing or negotiating are the only viable options. If they somehow manage to steal from its hoard:

TREASURE

Infernal Spoils

- *Mace of the Long Slaughter* (Requires Attunement)
- 4,500 gp in stamped, soul-infused ingots.
- A locked puzzle box containing the true name of a lesser demon.

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