

DESCENT INTO AVERNUS

WELCOME TO HELL

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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 Avernus, the sheer oppressive heat hits them immediately. The River Styx flows to the west, cutting through the ash plains like a jagged scar. Above, flocks of spined devils 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

DM 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.

The Blood War

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 war machines and heavy artillery bombardments. Even a skirmish here involves hundreds of combatants.

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 war machine, avoiding its patrol path.

DENIZENS OF THE FIRST LAYER

Navigating Avernus means contending with its natives. Formations of bearded devils patrol the wastes, enforcing the will of the Archduchess Zariel. 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 yugoloths—though trusting them is entirely foolish.

DENIZENS OF THE FIRST LAYER

Random Encounters

D8	ENCOUNTER	THREAT LEVEL
1	2d4 Bearded Devils	Medium
2	A squad of Hell Hounds	Hard
3	A scavenger imp offering a deal	Social
4	A wandering Vrock (Demon)	Hard
5	An abandoned, broken war machine	Exploration
6	A pit of screaming souls	Hazard
7	An Amnizu tax collector	Social/Deadly
8	A Horned 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 Nine Hells 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 navigating the first layer of hell. They operate complex fortresses crafted from the scavenged wrecks of ancient infernal dreadnoughts and the bones of massive, fallen fiends.

The hierarchy of the wastes is brutally simple: might makes right. The warlords command fleets of infernal war machines—massive engines of destruction powered by soul coins. These vehicles roar across the ash dunes at breakneck speeds, engaging in brutal vehicular combat over territory, resources, and slaves.

Forging a Contract

DM NOTES

Devils cannot lie, but they are masters of omission and twisted logic. Any contract signed in Avernus is binding across the entire multiverse. Breaking one forfeits the signer's soul immediately to the Baatorian 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 WARLORDS

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 *Baatorian 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 Erinyes 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 Dis or Phlegethos.

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 Avernus 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 Bone Devils.

Occasionally, the River Styx overflows its banks, washing away massive swaths of these tormented hills, erasing the physical evidence of the contracts but leaving the infernal debt permanently intact. A party could wander the wastes for an eternity and still owe their souls merely for the privilege of walking on the archduke's sovereign dirt.

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 Blood War.

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.

Pit Fiend
Large fiend (devil), lawful evil
Armor Class: 19 (natural armor) Hit Points: 300 (24d10 + 168) Speed: 30 ft., fly 60 ft.



STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
26 (+8)	14 (+2)	24 (+7)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	24 (+7)
Saving Throws: Dex +8, Con +13, Wis +10 Skills: Intimidation +13, Perception +10 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 20 Languages: Infernal, telepathy 120 ft. Fear Aura. Any creature hostile to the pit fiend that starts its turn within 20 feet of the pit fiend must make a DC 21 Wisdom saving throw, unless the pit fiend is incapacitated. On a failed save, the creature is frightened until the start of its next turn. Magic Resistance. The pit fiend has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.					

THE ARCHDEVIL'S GENERAL

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 Terror (Requires Attunement)
- 4,500 gp in stamped, soul-infused coins.
- A locked puzzle box containing the true name of a lesser demon.