

THE NINE HELLS

The Nine Hells of Baator form a realm of fire and brimstone, war and hatred. The different layers of this plane all have wildly different environments and populations, but the one thing that is consistent here is a pervasive hatred that permeates the entire land.

OPTIONAL RULE: UNHOLY HATRED

Due to the Hatred that infuses this plane, keeping negative emotions in check can be difficult. But acting on hatred has its perks here. Upon arrival and after every long rest, a visitor must make a DC 10 Charisma save or be subject to Unholy Hatred. The DC of this save increases by 1 for each consecutive long rest a creature has taken on this plane. Spells like *Calm Emotions* can suppress this effect until the target completes another long rest. A creature with Unholy Hatred is rewarded any time they act on anger or hatred: dealing an additional 1d4 radiant damage, but they also have disadvantage on any saving throws to avoid being charmed or dominated by devils.

Additionally, a player can choose to fail this save to gain the benefits (and drawbacks). A player that does this deals an extra 2d6 radiant damage instead, and the negative effects cannot be suppressed with magic. All of the effects fade after a long rest taken off of the Plane.

AVERNUS: RING OF WAR

The smell of sulfur and heat of the air assault your senses as you step through the ruby-colored gateway. Fireballs explode in the dark sky above, casting light over what has clearly been a war zone and you step over and around randomly twitching bits of fleshy tissue, bones, and wicked looking weapons and armor as you move forward.

Ahead in the distance is a massive citadel of dark metal. It flies under a golden banner and beyond this citadel you can hear shouts and the clanging of metal on metal: the sound of a large-scale conflict.

DISCOVERY & TRAVEL

Traveling into Avernus and the Nine Hells is a dangerous quest for even the most seasoned adventuring party. The only permanent portals into this Layer connect to the Gate Town, the Infinite Battlefields of Avernus, and the Bleak Eternity of Gehenna. Per orders from Asmodeus himself, no other permanent portals to other planes are permitted here, and the gates to the lower layers of this plane are heavily guarded.

This literal hellscape is covered with pits and fires, smoke and ash, and rivers of actual blood. Nowhere truly feels safe, especially outdoors where there is no significant cover. Food for mortal races is nonexistent, although demons and devils can subsist on the bodies of

the fallen, so humanoid races will need to bring food with them or be prepared to risk going hungry.

Avernus makes up the topmost layer of the Nine Hells, and forms a massive ring above and around the lower levels. Distances here are difficult to measure by mortal standards though, and the time it takes to travel inward or around can vary wildly based on factors beyond mortal comprehension.

SURVIVAL & LOCATIONS

Living in Avernus is no easy feat, even for the locals. Virtually everything here is toxic or otherwise lethal for mortals. Open wildfires, smoke, and roaming creatures make this one of the most dangerous areas in the cosmos. The smog and spontaneous fireballs in the sky make finding a higher vantage point difficult, and the threats on the ground make slower foot travel risky as well. Even within the few settlements life is treacherous and hostile, with devils that are always looking for an excuse to vent the hatred that has built up within them.

THE CENTRAL PIT

A massive crater-like hole sits in the central area of Avernus and contains all of the lower hells. The view from the rim would no doubt be staggering if it weren't the source of the toxic smoke that covers the sky on the rest of Avernus. From some places, a bit of the ground on the Second Ring is visible, but these points are almost random and none of them seem safe points to descend into Dis.

THE BRONZE CITADEL

A central power structure within this layer is the Bronze Citadel. This massive structure is forged entirely from metal, but is so covered with a thick layer of blood, ash, and other grime that it's hard to tell. Easily the size of a small town by itself, the Bronze Citadel is the seat of power on this layer and stands as the central point of organization for the endless conflict with constant invasion of creatures from Gehenna and Archeron.

Any mortals that are captured or those that wish to secure passage deeper into the Hell are brought here to present or plead their case to the Lord of this level or one of the appointed lieutenants.

THE PILLAR OF SKULLS

This massive pile of fiendish skulls reaches up over a mile into the sky and smoke and is visible from at least two days travel away. This height can be deceptive at a distance, as the base of this pillar sits in a lower point on the inner rim of this ring. Beneath this point is the safest location to reach Dis, the second hell. The rocky face is brittle and slippery with sludge and viscera, but a tall spire reaches high enough to be easily seen and a bridge has been secured between it and the nearest ledge.

THE BONE BRIDGE

A thin bridge made of bone and sinew stretches from a ledge near the base of The Pillar of Skulls to the tallest spire in Dis. Beneath the bridge are dark, roiling clouds of smoke that completely obscure everything below. This location isn't always guarded unless a demon has earned themselves a punishment, so if there is a fiend here guarding the path downward, they are likely to be especially angry and grumpy. For more on crossing the Bone Bridge, see the Mysteries & Encounters section below.

RIBCAGE

Although the Gate-Town of Ribcage exists entirely within the Outlands, it provides the safest access point for those that wish to enter Avernus without the potential accuracy issues with *plane shift*. Much of the city is constructed from materials salvaged from Avernus and has a rather grisly appearance, but the town tends to be rather safe due to an overwhelming amount of fiendish guards. The nearby area on Avernus is flat and exposed, and provides a clear view of the Bronze Citadel where either Zariel or Bel rules.

AMBITION'S GATE

The defenses built around Ambition's Gate often seem overkill to people that aren't familiar with the constant war in Avernus, but is due to Gehenna's Ideal of Ambition always pushing its inhabitants to greater goals. Structures near the Gate are never completed before devils from Avernus kill the creatures attempting to build them. Surrounding the gate are trenches, spiked walls, and hundreds of fiends that are stationed here to keep watch. Anyone that seeks to pass through this Gate to enter Avernus must have a proper contract drafted, but passage into Gehenna is generally allowed without such stipulations.

BRUTALITY'S GATE

On the far side of Avernus from Ambition's Gate is the portal to Archeron and the plane of Brutality. Passage through this location is generally heavily watched, but isn't nearly as difficult. Inhabitants of Archeron tend to get along well with the devils in Avernus that are used to war and conflict.

THE LOCALS

The vast majority of living creatures in Avernus are fiends, particularly imp spies, spined devil soldiers, and erinyes to direct combat. Generally, higher orders of devils are able to avoid the dangers involved with fighting here in Avernus, but it's not uncalled for to have barbed or chain devils sent to fight here as punishment.

On occasion there are also humanoids here on specific tasks, but it's far more likely that a non-fiendish person has been enslaved here, and there are several tieflings

and cambions that make their homes here as contracted servants to various devils.

Hierarchy and ranks (and thus, beurocracy) are present here though, and directly acting against a creature of a higher rank can result in very harsh punishments. Still, all of the creatures that make their homes here for long enough begin to have the hateful and odious nature of the plane seep into them and virtually all of the devils that live here are scheming for ways to usurp those above them. This can give mortals a powerful bargaining chip if they're willing to risk their lives (and even souls) in the process.

NOTABLE NPCs

Most of the permanent population in Avernus is in a state of flux due to the endless combat from external enemies and the eternal hatred from the locals. As such, any devils that wish to truly ascend to a more stable post end up seeking promotions to the lower rings. But in this moving political landscape, there are a handful of consistent individuals.

One important note to remember, however, is that the fiends in Avernus are not blinded by their hatred like those in the lowest Rings. Mortals might be surprised at just how reasonable devils in this layer can be, even if they don't fully understand the devils' schemes or plans to ascend the ranks.

Zariel, Archduchess of Avernus.

Originally a native of Mount Celestia, Zariel had been tasked to keep an eye on the endless wars that occur here in the name of Asmodeus. But after years of exposure to the odious nature of Avernus, she was corrupted and abandoned her Honor from Celestia to join the battlefield. Her martial prowess and zeal on the battlefield has led her to overthrow Bel as leader of this ring of Hell. On occasion, Bel may seize control again, but Zariel always has a scheme to gain power back.

Her angelic heritage is still apparent, but her form has grown corrupted and given her a distinctly fiendish look.

Bel, Archduke of Avernus.

One of the fiercest warriors in all of the Nine Hells, Bel was the original archduke of Avernus. He spends less time as Archduke than he would like due to the interference and machinations of Zariel and he wants nothing more than to find a way to get rid of her permanently so he can have control of Avernus forever..

Vozreth.

Guarding the Gateway to Gehenna is Vozreth, a fearsome warrior with fiendish and draconic heritage. He has signed a contract with Zariel and Bel to guard this entry into Avernus in exchange for the power and authority to command the demon troops there however he pleases. However, the proximity to the Ideal of Ambition has started an itch to climb into higher ranks, against the terms of his bargain.

Karaz

Watching over the Gate to Archeron is Karaz, a bone devil that was assigned this post as a punishment for some infraction centuries before. Because of the post and his proximity to the Ideal of Brutality, Karaz is violent, malicious, and generally better to avoid whenever possible.

POLITICS & FACTIONS

While the political structure across the Hells is fairly rigid, those that rise through the ranks learn to act with subtlety and to act outside the scope of this law. The first rule followed by any natives of the Hells is that everyone owes their allegiance to Asmodeus. The second is that everyone owes their allegiance to their immediate superior. The third is to always follow the directions of a higher devil within your command chain.

This rigidity is imposed as a way to contain and channel the hatred that infuses all of the creatures that live across the Nine Hells, but some smaller factions exist. These factions often exist out of a particular devil's desire for revenge, and are usually fueled by the rage and hate they hold.

Members of any faction have an obligation to higher ranking members of their faction, but they all hate each other. A random devil's reason for following their superiors is often complex and unique, even if hatred is at the core of the logic. They might hate their leader less than others, they might hate their leader more. It's also possible for them to just have a general hunger for rage and a particular leader seems to feed that need.

THE FOLLOWERS OF THE FALLEN

The corruption of Zariel was an event that made news across the entirety of the Nine Hells, and the almost celebrity status that she received after Asmodeus granted her the title of Archduchess caused waves among the other Archdevils.

Members of The Fallen are some of the most zealous lesser devils that exist. They thirst for the thrill of battle and the opportunity to act freely on their nature. Ranking members of this group often wear golden circlets on their head to symbolize Zariel's origin.

THE IRON BLADES

The second largest faction within Avernus are those that follow Bel. They are easy to recognize based on the wicked-looking iron swords and daggers they carry with them. Regardless of who rules over Avernus at any given time, the Iron Blades are in charge of security in the Bronze Citadel.

All of the ranking members of this faction are loyal to Bel, but also obligated to guard Zariel when she is in charge. They are cutthroat and ruthless, but only so they can gain enough prestige to be promoted to a post in a lower layer. Lower ranking members of this faction are generally there as a punishment or demotion.

MYSTERIES & ENCOUNTERS

The rolling tables here have fairly wide challenge ratings, so be mindful of your party's capability. If your players are doing too well, have reinforcements arrive, and if your players are not doing well, remember that devils like to capture mortals and coerce them into contracts for a variety of reasons if you don't want a TPK

COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

Devils are the most common type of creature in Avernus, but it's also possible for demons try to strike into the region.

d20	Encounter
1-4	1d3 Baubau (VGtM p136) or 1d4 Bearded Devils (MM p70)
5-9	1d4 Barlgura (MM p56) or 1d6 Barbed Devils (MM p70)
10-14	2d4 Vrocks (MM64) or 2d4 Crystalline Devils (ToB p105)
15-17	2d6 Draegloth (VGtM p141) or 1d8 Chain Devils (MM p72)
18-19	1 Glabrezu (MM p58) and 1d6 Hellhounds (MM p182) or 1 Bone Devil (MM p71)
20	1 Nalfeshnee (MM p62) or 1d2 Erinyes (MM p73)

NON-COMBAT ENCOUNTERS

d4	Encounter
1	One of the characters notices an imp following them. If they try to interact with the imp, it disappears and tries to escape.
2	The party comes across a fresh battlefield. All of the belligerents are gone, so there's no immediate threat, but they can hear a call for aid not far into the carnage.
3	A devil approaches the party, intent on finding a stolen item. They insist one of the PCs has the object in question and threaten to call in a favor with the Iron Blades if the party doesn't hand over the object immediately.
4	The party comes across a paranoid-looking barbed devil that is fishing souls out of the River Styx. If approached, the Devil becomes suspicious and aggressively possessive of the few souls he's managed to fish out.

MINOR QUEST HOOKS

Because of the nature of devils, exchanges for services are common and contracts are everywhere. If the party needs help with a larger quest goal, they may need to find some contracted work. The Quests below include some options for that a Devil might want from the party in exchange for filling the party's need.

Tier 1 Quests (Levels 1-5)

1. A lesser devil suspects another cadre of is plotting against one of his superiors. He hopes to uncover the plot and be promoted, but will need the help of outsiders. He only needs evidence, and doesn't want them killed.
2. A hag has set up a stall in the markets of the Bronze Citadel and is buying and selling all kinds of revolting wares. She somehow knows just what the party is questing for, and will point them in the right direction if they will do something for her in return.

Tier 2 Quests (Levels 6-10)

1. A fiendish scout reported a group of more powerful demons that have broken through the inter-planar boundary. Avernus cannot redirect their own troops to deal with the demons, so the job is offered to the PCs.
2. The lieutenant of either Zariel or Bel (whoever is not currently ruling Avernus), approaches the party. They are clearly not locals and will need help with whatever it is they're here to do. If the PCs can implicate the other lieutenant of foul play, that help can be provided in spades.

DESCENDING INTO DIS

Travelling into Dis shouldn't be an easy feat, but also shouldn't be impossible to do without help for experienced adventuring parties. If the party is able to secure a fiendish guide of sufficient rank, locating and getting to the safer places to descend is significantly easier, but most guides will not pass across the border between rings unless a contract specifically states they must. Less agreeable devils, or looser contracts can sometimes result in a devil leading the party to The Central Pit and simply pushing one of them over the edge before turning and heading back home.

THE BONE BRIDGE

As mentioned above, the safest point of crossing the boundaries between rings is at the Bone Bridge. This crossing connects to The Spire, one of the taller buildings in the city of Dis, and is often the preferred crossing location for mortals that can make an informed decision. While the Spire is heavily guarded, and the sheer drop from the top landing is well over a thousand feet, this pathway is structurally stable and isn't difficult to climb down.

On occasion, bulky fiendish guards are posted along the stairs that wind around the exterior of this tower. They generally block the entire pathway, and will refuse to allow passage those that do not have the approval of the Archduke or Archduchess of Avernus (or at least a stamp of approval from one of their clerks - most often in the form of a contract). Even if they will allow passage, they do not move aside; instead the PCs must find a way to climb around the guard.

If the PCs are able to safely descend the tower, they will arrive in a large, open marketplace near the Iron Walls on the outer edge of the City of Dis.

THE IRON GATES

If the party doesn't want to risk a fall, they can also seek passage into Dis at the Iron Gates. This area is heavily guarded and heavily travelled by fiends that need to move through the layers. In some ways, the travel is actually safer this way, but with more fiends around, it can be much more dangerous for low and mid level parties; devils that are not contracted to the PCs are likely to be hostile to anyone that isn't native here.

This path into the Second Hell is found near the Central Pits, and the path descends along the interior cliffs for about an hour's worth of walking before it turns into the rock face. Continuing through the tunnel, it eventually comes out in the side of a canyon in the Ring of Dis. This exit is at least a week's worth of travel to the City of Dis.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

Avernus should be a survivable, but otherwise hostile place for adventurers from the Material Plane. Even powerful characters are out of place in this warring region and should be noticeably so, even if they attempt to disguise themselves (they won't be familiar with customs and culture in the Hells).

In Avernus, the pattern of devils being driven more by hatred for something should be subtle: more undercurrent than a clear-cut driving force. It's something that canny players and characters pick up on and is something they could use to their advantage to get more favorable contracts. It's possible that a devil might even freely give this information to the PCs as a way to try and gain their favor. As the characters adventure deeper into the Hells, this aspect of the Plane should become more obvious and much less subtle.

ADDITIONAL INSPIRATION

If you have access to Mordenkainen's Tome of Foes, this interpretation of Avernus and the Nine Hells should be compatible with the section on The Blood War. The Tome of Foes also has more detail on Zariel and her fall from grace, along with details for the other Archdevils

More of my Atlas and Codex: [LINK](#)