

DESCENT INTO AVERNUS

Anyone entering Avernus finds a battlefield unlike anywhere else in existence. Evidence of past carnage, such as the ruins of enormous war machines and fields of bleached bones, stretches across the horizon. Through it all, the River Styx winds its way across the plane as knots of demons and devils skirmish along its fetid banks.

—Sylvira Savrikas, *Observations of the Nine Hells*

Welcome to Hell folks, specifically the plane of Avernus. The ‘eternal battlefield’ of the Nine Hells, this is the uppermost plane that sees a great deal of battle and carnage to the delight of it’s Archduchess, a former angel of Celestia, Zariel. This primer is intended to introduce elements of the lore whilst also preparing you for the next major portion of the campaign.

THE BLOOD WAR

Throughout history, the teeming hordes of the Abyss and the strictly regimented legions of the Nine Hells have battled for supremacy in the cosmos. In the mortal world, the scant few scholars, arcanists, and adventurers who know the conflict for what it is refer to it as the Blood War.

The fighting takes place across the Lower Planes, on the Material Plane, and anywhere else that demons and devils might congregate. From time to time, demons spill out of the Abyss to invade Avernus. While the devils defend their home turf, they also make strikes against locations in the Abyss. Although the intensity of the conflict waxes and wanes, and the front lines of the war can shift drastically, a moment never goes by when demons and devils aren’t battling each other somewhere in the multiverse.

DEVILS AND DEMONS

The broad creature type for these two hellish entities is ‘Fiend’, creatures of wickedness that are native to the Lower Planes. Despite this, Fiends are as variable as any other creatures, Devils and Demons are among multiple others similar and different all the same.

DEVILS – LOOK FOR THE FINE PRINT

Devils are native to the Nine Hells, a hierarchical bureaucracy bound by an immense body of rules and regulations dictating how all devils, from lowly Lemures to Asmodeus himself, must conduct themselves. Devils will make deals with mortals with the ultimate goal of acquiring their souls, of which they gain status and power.

There are three main means in which a Devil gains power: accumulation of souls, particularly valuable ones such as good-aligned paladins or clerics, promotions in the wake of valorous duty fighting in the Blood War, and good old-fashioned treachery, plotting your enemy’s downfall and your ascent to glory. The use of Infernal Contracts is integral to the first means, where Devils state their terms as per infernal law.

In short, Devils are Lawful in their brand of Evil.

DEMONS – FOR WANT OF A FIGHT

Demons come from the Abyss, less a plane and more so a grand cosmic wound, a bottomless pit of viral chaos teeming with creatures that exist only to rend, tear and

destroy. It is getting larger. Much like a virus, demonic presence on another world gradually corrupts the landscape surrounding the incursion zone to resemble the malleable, chaotic substance of the Abyss. This is a slow process, but if left unchecked it will only exacerbate the infection.

Whilst devils possess a hierarchy of types and taxonomy, demons are spawned from the stuff of the Abyss in a near-infinite variety of shapes and abilities. Scholars broadly categorize this variety into recognizable creatures, but demons know no such taxonomy. With that said, there are Demon Princes who are long-lived and powerful amongst demons, maintaining their own ‘layers’ of the infinite expanse.

To surmise, Demons are thoroughly Chaotic in their Evil.

AVERNUS AND ALIGNMENT

Because this is D&D and you’re going to the Nine Hells, alignment will be a more prominent part of the campaign. As stated before, The Blood War ultimately serves as a battle of Law and Chaos, and its belligerents embodying these ideals.

Avernus is among the Lower Planes; it is a place wholly suffused with evil from the landscape to food. Its inhabitants, and there are those who call the plane home, understand this and live accordingly. You are within the lands of evil, and evil makes the signposts.

HOUSE RULES

- **Critical Hits.** Instead of rolling twice on the damage die, you add the maximum result of the damage die to an ordinary damage roll.
- **Sundered Shields.** When a character wearing a non-magical shield is hit by a melee weapon attack, they can choose to have their shield destroyed and take no damage from the attack.
- **Bargains.** Death in Avernus may come with an added stipulation of sorts.
- **Infernal Inspiration.** Take a guess. Evil CAN work sometimes...
- **Corruption.** Still working on the details, but some matter of corruption mechanic is on the table for an upcoming portion of the campaign.

CLOSING WORDS AND WARNINGS

Avernus is an evil place that houses evil beings and people who take the chance to indulge in their evil. That said, it’s not all horror and sadness, more so a particularly Metal place. This is a published D&D5E adventure, not the last days of the Weimar Republic. In terms of specific warnings, I am aware of the Lines and Veils of the group and will make sure to keep those in-mind when events occur.