The Plains of Rust

A plain coated in dull red particles stretches beneath an eternal twilight sky in the Abyss. Wide, flat basins and gently rolling dunes give way to towering, mountainous heaps and dark pits of unfathomable depths—all caked with rust flakes. Here and there, jagged sheets of corroded iron protrude from great salt flats cast in a hideous, unnatural light. Winds blow incessantly, stirring the rust into a clinging mist.

During the last flare-up of the Blood War, Asmodeus’s devils built strongholds in the Abyss. They used these great iron fortresses to launch attacks against the near-endless demons. Most of these strongholds were perched on the Plain of a Thousand Portals, but the devils managed to secure footholds in some of the deeper layers.

One such layer was a grim, swampy desmesne without redeeming features. It was empty, useless, unimportant. Yet, by a quirk of planar conjunction, it boasted three intermittent portals to the Nine Hells. Using a cunning ritual, the devils regularized the passages and colonized the area. They built fortresses atop rising hillocks and protruding from the swamp before the demons discovered their presence.

The atmosphere of the layer, poisoned by the hideous substances in the swamp, had always been toxic and corrosive. It was not debilitating enough to curtail the devils’ plans—at least at first. Upon learning of the devils’ presence, the demon lords Orcus and Juiblex set their will to enhancing the layer’s existing environment. Between Orcus’s mastery of necrotic energy and Juiblex’s command over caustic ooze, the layer’s atmosphere became supersaturated with decay. Iron fortifications crumbled in a matter of days, and clouds of rust mushroomed into the air. The grist mixed with the swamp, creating a viscous sludge. As it continued to drift down, it covered everything like a horrific snowfall. In time, the ground became a close-packed rust plain blanketeting a highly toxic mire. As the diabolic fortresses crumbled, the demons swarmed, further tainting the rust with the blood of their enemies.

Inhabitants and Culture

No demon lord claims this layer, and the only inhabitants are mindlessly destructive. The essence of slain devils and demons became infused with the necrotic and acidic power of the buried swamp. This mixture gave rise to baleful corrupting undead and malignant constructs that seek to destroy all they encounter.

The demon princes send packs of demons here from time to time to ensure that the portals to the Nine Hells remain buried and unusable. Occasionally, diabolic scouting parties make an effort to reopen the portals. Mortal explorers have established temporary camps while searching the rusted ruins for ancient magic used during the Blood War. None of these groups ever survive long enough, or grow large enough, to form communities. A single tribe of humanoid wanderers the rust plain like nomads in a desert of the world. No one knows who they are, why they dwell here, and how they have managed to survive.

Major Areas

Sinkholes lead to warrens within the rusty mire, and broken, corroded ruins of diabolic fortresses yet house wonders and horrors alike.

The Bloody Fen: Although the realm is pocked with sinkholes, in one expanse the hard-packed rust that covers the plain is thin enough that careless wanderers can sink into the sludge beneath. This so-called Bloody Fen is miles across, a surviving bit of the toxic mire that once covered the entire layer. Passersby who stumble into it must either wade through the venomous muck or pole a barge or raft across. All the while, wen-dwelling horrors lurk beneath the semisolid surface.

Fort Splinter: Most of the devils’ fortresses have been reduced to flakes of rust or a few corroded walls. A few strongholds still stand—not whole, but at least recognizable. The largest of these is Fort Splinter. Legend claims that powerful magic and numerous artifacts wait to be discovered here, perhaps even one of the portals to Hell. Tales also speak of the lurking spirits of its diabolic defenders, ready to slaughter all trespassers.

The Palace of Dust: According to accounts from survivors of the Plains of Rust, clouds of particles whipped by the wind occasionally settle into the form of an ornate palace. Always spotted at a distance, the shape boasts a dozen variegated towers, all surrounded by a bastion that rises and falls like a tide. If it is a mirage, it’s a remarkably consistent one. Still, no traveler has been able to draw near the palace before it disintegrates back to wind-blown dust.

Adventures

Encounters can occur anywhere within the Plains of Rust, and the few creatures that dwell here are universally hostile. Despite its desolate nature, the place attracts interest. Adventurers, devils, and demons seek relics of the Blood War, left behind in the crumbling fortresses or buried beneath layers of dust. The peculiar nomadic tribe or chambers within the Palace of Dust could hold great secrets forgotten since the days of the war.

Then, too, there are the ancient portals. If one or all three were unearthed, they could once again connect the most vile areas in the cosmos. If so, what might they be used for this time? Characters desperate to escape the Abyss might seek these portals as a way out. Hell isn’t a much more pleasant place, but at least devils can be bargained with.
Environmental Features
Most of the plain’s surface is solid and is treated as normal terrain.

**Blood Rust:** These areas behave like blood rock (*Dungeon Master’s Guide*, page 67).

**Corroding Air:** Ferrous metals such as iron and steel corrode swiftly in the Plains of Rust. Each day of exposure, metal weapons take a cumulative -1 penalty to attack rolls made with them (maximum -3), and metal armor and shields take a cumulative -1 penalty to their AC and Reflex bonuses (maximum -3). Such weapons and armor disintegrate into rust when the penalty is greater than the object’s enhancement bonus. The Enchant Magic Item ritual can be used to repair a magic object that is so damaged but not destroyed, at one-fifth the item’s cost.

**Iron Scraps:** The lingering essence of devils or demons might be able to animate portions of iron scraps. Treat the resulting creatures as iron golems or iron golem juggernauts. You can given them a demonic feel by adding variable resistance or making them deal necrotic or fire damage.

**Rust Cloud:** Clouds of rust are kicked up by the winds, creating lightly obscured squares.

**Rust Storm:** The equivalent of a whirlwind (*Dungeon Master’s Guide*, page 69), these squares are also heavily obscured by rust particles.

**Rust, Shifting:** In areas, the rust layer is soft, like fine sand, forming difficult terrain. A few of these areas include sinkholes that drop passersby into the sludge beneath. The muck might be grasping slime (*Dungeon Master’s Guide*, page 68), acidic mire (page 12), or something more dire.

Encounter Groups
Common encounters in the Plains of Rust involve the undead and constructs that haunt the region. The characters also could stumble upon demons or devils searching for the layer’s secrets.

**Level 16 Encounter (XP 7,400)**
- 1 dust demons (level 15 elite controller, page 132)
- 1 demonic slime hazard (level 16 obstacle, *Manual of the Planes* 23)
- 3 immoliths (level 15 controller, MM 56)

**Level 22 Encounter (XP 21,550)**
- 6 abyssal ghoul myrmidons (level 23 minion, MM 119)
- 1 iron golem (level 20 elite soldier, *Monster Manual* 2 134)
- 2 void crust hazards (level 22 obstacle, page 22)

**Level 25 Encounter (XP 41,000)**
- 1 abyssal rotfiend (level 26 controller, *Monster Manual* 2 52)
- 2 dread wraiths (level 25 lurker, MM 267)
- 1 iron golem juggernaut (level 26 elite soldier, *Monster Manual* 2 135)