This three-encounter adventure, suitable for 12th-level characters, is typical of what characters might face upon arriving in the Nine Hells. After crashing to Avernus, the characters are quickly assaulted by devilish slavers serving their archdevil mistress, an exiled chain devil princess named Baelzra. The adventure ends in Baelzra’s camp, where the characters face the devil princess and her servitors, either as slaves or as liberators of the souls she has captured.

Encounter 1: Fiery Descent

Encounter Level 12 (XP 3,600)

Setup

6 Whitefire burning devils (B)
3 spined devil ravagers (S)

Owing to the turbulent storms just inside the smoke veil of the Nine Hells, the characters’ astral craft enters the hells not through the storm over the Lake of Despond but rather in the empty skies of Avernus. They and their craft are now falling to the rocky plain below, and a horde of devils swept up by the storm falls upon them as they descend.

This is a more difficult encounter than it seems, owing to the time pressure and the need for one or more of the characters to devote his or her attention to controlling the ship.

When the characters cross the color veil into the Nine Hells, read:

The smoke parts, and you hang weightless among the storm clouds for a moment before falling toward the ground. As you descend into the fire and lightning, half a dozen humanoid forms—lurching, emaciated things burning with white flame—latch on to the vessel seemingly out of nowhere. They are just below the railing, tearing at it and jabbering madly with agony and hatred.

Three bulky spined devils land before you, their claws clicking on the deck. “Fleshy, fleshy, in peril now, it is,” says the first. “Going down to join the damned? Give us a taste, fleshtones!”

The characters must defend the deck of their planar vessel from the marauding devils and try to control their mad plummet as best they can. If they don’t try to control the ship, or if they try and fail, they might fend off the devils but will surely crash, making the next encounter much harder.

The burning devils are clinging to the sides of the ship just below the rail. Melee attacks affect them normally, but line of effect for ranged attacks requires the attacker to be in a square adjacent to the target (along the railing), which provokes opportunity attacks from the burning devils. The burning devils pay more attention to destroying the ship, while the spined devil ravagers engage the characters. Both groups must be handled, or piloting will be difficult.
Tactics
The spined devil ravagers delight in toying with their foes. They’re more interested in delaying and frustrating their enemies’ efforts to control the ship than an outright fight to the death. The whitefire burning devils occupy themselves with tearing at the ship (see “Controlling the Ship,” below), but they disengage and move to attack a character who attacks them.

The Ship’s Descent
The falling ship crashes onto the surface of Avernus on its 11th turn (the ship has a +10 initiative modifier). When the encounter starts, and for at least the first 2 rounds of the combat, the ship is falling. If the characters don’t successfully control the ship (see below), the descent becomes more severe—first the ship begins to tumble, and then it goes into a mad spin.

Falling: The ship is simply falling during the first 2 rounds of combat (or possibly longer if a character successfully controls it). Whenever a creature is hit by a critical hit while the ship is falling, the creature is also knocked prone. Pull, push, and slide effects increase by 1 square. If the characters fail to successfully control the ship, it begins to tumble after its first two turns.

Tumbling: When the ship begins to tumble, it rocks back and forth and spins. Whenever a creature is hit by an attack while the ship is tumbling, the creature is also knocked prone. Pull, push, and slide effects increase by 2 squares. If the characters fail to successfully control the ship while it’s tumbling, the ship enters a mad spin in the following round.

Mad Spin: While the ship is in a mad spin, it spins crazily in all directions. Controlling the vessel will no longer help. Any creature without a fly speed that takes any action must spend a move action to hold on or be thrown from the ship and take 9d10 falling damage. Creatures thrown from the ship are removed from the encounter. Thrown characters who survive will rejoin the rest of the group during Encounter 2: Hell’s Chain Gang.

Controlling the Ship
Controlling the ship requires a character to stand in one of the two helm areas (marked on the map with triangles inside circles). As a standard action, a creature at the helm can make an Arcana check or an Athletics check to control the ship. The check’s DC depends on which phase of the descent the ship is currently in.

Falling: DC 18
Tumbling: DC 23

Each round the characters succeed in controlling the ship, they delay the progression to the next stage of the descent on the ship’s next turn. Only one controlling success can be gained during a turn, and the ship can’t be returned to an earlier descent phase. Each time the PCs drop a burning devil, the DC to control the ship is reduced by 1.

The Crash
When the ship crashes, the impact kills all the remaining burning devils but not the spined devil ravagers—they fly away, seemingly abandoning the fight. But they will return with reinforcements during the next encounter.

The crash’s effect on the characters depends on the ship’s descent phase when it crashed.

Falling: Each character takes 2d10 damage.
Tumbling: Each character takes 4d10 damage.
Mad Spin: Each character takes 7d10 damage.