

City of Thieves



Lands in Shadow for Shadow of the Demon Lord

Along the southernmost reach of the Crescent Bay, a jumbled city covers a narrow, jagged peninsula, like a scab that just won't heal right. The city of Pruul was once a shining jewel with great wealth, power, and influence that equaled or even exceeded the other cities of the Confederacy of the Nine, of which it is a member. But the city's relentless greed and avarice caused it to tear itself apart, as a tiny minority of rich got richer, and the massive majority of the poor got poorer. In the aftermath of bloody riots that brought down the city's ruling elite, criminals and other unsavory elements filled the power vacuum as the only form of stability and order. Although a hollow shell of its former glory, Pruul, now known as the City of Thieves, serves as a hub for rogues, pirates, brigands, escaped slaves, debtors fleeing their debts, and a variety of other misfits and miscreants.

This installment of the *Lands in Shadow* series provides a lawless place with its own dangerous and obscure rules—a city where anyone with sharp wits

~Credits~

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and a sharper knife can carve out their own destiny. As with the other installments in this series, the information presented here serves as a starting point for bringing the city to life in your game. The details provided are intended to spark your imagination for customizing the setting to your liking, and you should certainly change anything you see fit in order to make it your own.

Wealth for a Thousand Years

Like most of the city-states that would eventually form the Confederacy of the Nine, the Witch-King Ashrakal chose the site upon which Pruul would be built to serve primarily as a military stronghold to consolidate his hold on his conquests. The site's coastal location made it ideal as a port for the building and supplying of warships, while also serving as a minor trading center. The armies of the Men of Gog descended upon the small human settlement already present on the rugged peninsula, slaughtering most of its inhabitants, and enslaving the rest. These slaves, along with a horde of others marched in from Dis, the City of Chains, were driven day and night to raise the city's grim walls, followed by the construction of several imposing fortifications around which the city itself was built.

Squatting on the southern tip of the Crescent Bay, Pruul worked in tandem with Azûl to the north to ensure that the strategically important body of water remained securely in the Witch-King's iron grip. The bulk of the city was built on the peninsula, a giant outcropping of exposed granite, whose steep cliffs provided additional protection from would-be marauders.

As countless slaves built Pruul's walls and fortifications, scouts and prospectors surveyed the land and discovered that it held a bounty of plentiful resources: rich veins of iron, silver, copper, and tin in the ground, along with massive schools of fish and vast beds of pearl-bearing oysters in the bay. Upon discovering the land's wealth, the Witch-King had the slaves shift their focus from building defenses to harvesting this untold wealth, transforming Pruul from a minor outpost on the edge of his realm to a major military, economic, and industrial base for his unholy kingdom.

For decades, Pruul grew at an astounding rate, bolstered by huge purchases of slaves from Dis employed to raise buildings, dig mines, and erect piers and jetties. In addition, twelve mysterious black, windowless, towering obelisks of basalt and white-veined marble were erected as a testament to Ashrakal's power, each believed to be filled either with great riches or vile blasphemies, or both.

Every tree within a hundred miles was cut down to build ships and siege weapons for the never-ending wars the Witch-King waged throughout the continent

of Rûl. Deep mines excavated the vast wealth beneath the city. Workshops, blacksmiths, and smelters toiled ceaselessly, aided by a seemingly endless supply of slaves. For the minions and cronies of the Witch-King, Pruul and the surrounding land seemed like an endless resource that would enrich the sorcerer's kingdom wars for a millennium or more.

Then the Kalasans arrived.

Over the next five years, Pruul easily endured numerous assaults from these strange invaders from the east. Wave after wave of Kalasan soldiers attacked from the land and sea but failed to breach its walls or scale its cliffs. An effective siege was all but impossible, due to Pruul's vast stockpiles of supplies and its easy access to food from the bay and ocean via secret tunnels cut through the rock down to the shoreline of the peninsula.

It was one of these tunnels that would be the city's undoing. Under torture, a Gog prisoner revealed the presence of a secret entrance along the rocky walls of the cliffs facing the bay to a passageway that wound upward into the city's main fortress. Through this tunnel, a small troop of elite Kalasan soldiers snuck into the fortress, hacked their way to the city gates, and flung them open for the rest of their armies to flood in. Mopping up the remaining forces holed up in the city's lesser fortifications took several more months of siege and frontal assaults, but eventually the Witch-King's army in Pruul was starved out or decimated.

From War, Prosperity

The capture of Pruul proved to be a true treasure for the Kalasans. Slaves had already performed the hard work of building docks and digging mines, allowing the invaders to use the city both as a powerful beachhead and a center of commerce from which to wage their war against Ashrakal and the Men of Gog.

The vile idols of the Witch-King were torn down, burned, or toppled into the sea. The dozen Black Obelisks scattered throughout the city, however, proved impossible to either breach or destroy. Fearing their unknown power, the Kalasans simply walled them off, and over time they were ignored and then eventually forgotten by the populace—an act that would prove tragic many years later.

As the other city-states that would eventually form the future Confederacy fell or surrendered to the Kalasans, Pruul served as a crucial trading and shipbuilding port. Goods from the north and south flowed into and out of its docks, and eventually from the west as the Kalasan conquest expanded into the interior of the continent. The mines dotting the south and west of the city proved more robust and varied than thought, producing huge quantities of gold, iron, silver, copper, tin, and gems.

For centuries after the Witch-King's downfall, the citizens of Pruul lived long, fruitful lives and even the poorest among them had little to complain about, compared to other common folk throughout the continent. Other than the occasional pirate raid, most citizens had little to worry about: food was plentiful, work was abundant, and pay was high. This "golden era" marked the highest point of Pruul's expansion and population.

The Sins of Envy and Greed

The establishment of Caecras as the seat of the Empire initially brought additional prosperity to Pruul, but also the seeds of its undoing. A hundred years after the Empire's founding, the great-granddaughter of Eronymous, Gwyneth the Iron, named the wealthiest and most influential of Pruul's merchants and captains-of-industry as lesser Imperial nobility.

Despite all the wealth that Pruul enjoyed, it paled by comparison to another: Kem, the City of Gold. Although trade between the two cities was brisk and lucrative, the landed gentry of Pruul bristled with envy at the huge amount of coin Kem raked in, and the overt opulence its citizens enjoyed, which greatly exceeded that of Pruul. In addition, the gentry of Kem were unabashed in their snobbery and condescension towards those in Pruul, viewing them as little more than uncouth upstarts.

Heady with power and poisoned by jealousy, Pruul's newly minted lords and ladies expanded their reach, building extravagant villas and farms in the country south of Pruul, while simultaneously engaging in riskier and bolder economic ventures. Slavery, a practice long abandoned after the city was wrested from the Men of Gog, slowly and quietly returned to Pruul, first behind the walls of the villas and mansions of the rich, but soon in the mines and farms surrounding the city. Production soared and wealth flowed in faster than ever, but it still wasn't enough to compete with their hated rivals in Kem.

The Dread Discovery

Three centuries ago, the ruling autarch Zenneth faced a serious challenge to his authority from Vikra, his chief rival and the head of the city's Mining Guild. Egged on by the guild master, Pruul's wealthy elite increasingly expressed their lack of confidence in the autarch's ability to surpass the economic powerhouse of Kem. The savvy and cunning Vikra parlayed their discontent into support for her political challenge to Zenneth. An election was called, and massive bribes were made by both sides to secure the final tally that would ultimately determine the next leader. Zenneth's

spies quickly determined that the amount of bribes flowing out of Vikra's coffers would overwhelm Zenneth's several times over.

Desperate to find additional monies to compete in the spiraling bribery war, Zenneth turned to a soothsayer to guide him. After communing with the spirits, the soothsayer was suddenly overcome with a seizure and collapsed. Flailing and foaming at the mouth in Zenneth's arms, she uttered a cryptic last phrase: "the obelisks ... great riches ... one word will open them all." Then, grabbing him by the hair and yanking his head down, she whispered a word of Dark Speech into his ear, its malevolent dark power causing him intense pain as it seared itself into his mind. Once the word was spoken, blood instantly poured from the soothsayer's eyes and ears, as she writhed and twisted in agony until she died.

After this grotesque episode, Zenneth donned a disguise and made his way through Pruul's streets in the dead of night. He visited each of the dozen Black Obelisks, speaking the word of power that allowed him to enter each one. His bodyguards followed him at a discreet distance, surprised that after entering each one, he exited without any gold, treasure, or any item at all. They became even more alarmed by Zenneth's increasing mania and the madness that crept into his eyes. He returned to his throne in the Coral Fortress empty-handed but cackling with hysterical glee for hours until dawn broke.

In the next few days just before the election, Zenneth's luck turned miraculously around—his personal mines suddenly discovered rich lodes of precious gems and deep veins of gold, his seaborne ventures returned to port loaded with fine silks and treasures, and, by bizarre coincidence, workers renovating the palace accidentally broke through an old wall that concealed a massive treasure trove of gold and gems left behind from the days of the Witch-King.

With his sudden new-found wealth, Zenneth handily won the final election tally, retaining control of Pruul's autarchy. The night after the election, Vikra was found dead in her bed, her head half-submerged in a puddle of her own blood, which had apparently exploded from her eyes and ears.

His subsequent decrees and shifts in policy brought in immense wealth for both him and Pruul's elite, but at great cost to the lesser citizens of the city. Wages were slashed to a tenth of what they were before while their work was doubled, and little regard was paid to the workers' safety or need for rest.

In a matter of months, the city became an archipelago of walled manors filled with armed guards and unimaginable luxury surrounded by a sea of the poor desperately living in the worst conditions Pruul had ever seen.