

City of Death



Lands in Shadow for Shadow of the Demon Lord

On a peninsula that juts out into the Crescent Bay stands the northernmost member of the Confederacy of Nine Cities, Azūl, the City of Death. Steeped in dark tales, Azūl is a place few dare seek out let alone explore and earned its sinister reputation from its founder, the Witch-King Ashrakal, and from the Black Hand, an insidious guild of assassins who ascended to power in the city by bending the decadent and corrupt Guild Council to their will. Now, Azūl's people live in terror of the assassins, who have infiltrated every level of society, their blades sharp and smeared with poison to dispatch anyone they deem traitor to the Mistress who rules.

This entry into the Lands in Shadow series examines one of the most sinister and frightening members of the Confederacy of Nine Cities. As with other installments, the information presented should serve as a starting point for bringing the city to life in your game. The details provided about the city and its inhabitants serve to spark your imagination for further developing the city to your liking. You should change anything you need to make this city yours.

~Credits~

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A History of Death

Azūl began with the Witch-King.

Nearly a thousand years ago, Ashrakal, named Witch-King by his legions of followers, led the Men of Gog out of exile in the Desolation on a campaign of vengeance against the soft and decadent lands of the south. Bolstered by hordes of undead, dark magic, and vile demons, the Men of Gog laid waste to the land and the meager defenders, shattering defenses and scattering the feeble armies fielded against them. Mile after mile, the wicked horde spread like so much spilled ink across the map, consuming the lands and everyone in them in a tide of darkness until the nation of Edene knelt prostrate before the dread tyrant.

The Men of Gog despoiled, but they also built. They raised monuments to themselves and founded dreadful cities to bear witness to all their dark majesty. They seized the land and its people, bending them to their wretched will. Azūl was one of the first cities founded by the Witch-King, who chose a curved promontory peninsula jutting out into the waters of the Crescent Bay. Ashrakal chose this site to serve as a port, but more importantly, as a shipyard for building a fleet of vessels that could carry his troops south to conquer the lands of Balgrendia and east to seize the resource rich islands in the Auroral Ocean. To oversee the construction of his new city, the Witch-King raised a great, black tower from the highest point on the peninsula, a dark edifice to his staggering arrogance.

Azūl thrived for a century, but like all the cities in the Witch-King's grasp, it fell to the Kalasan invaders and was renamed the City of Death for the horrific carnage the conquerors created in taking the city. Appalled by the horrors perpetrated by its debased inhabitants, the Kalasans put nearly every man, woman, and child to the sword and burned much of the city to its foundations. Only after it was cleansed did the Kalasans begin to rebuild, for it was valuable to them for and the fledgling Empire needed to resume trade if their nation would prosper. In time, the city shook off its sinister reputation to some degree and joined the other great mercantile hubs strung along the shores of the Auroral Ocean.

Decadence would be the Empire's undoing. A series of effete emperors led to the decay of imperial authority, affording the Nine Great Cities greater independence but also leaving them to fend for themselves. With piracy on the rise and merchant ships waylaid and captured by the cruel raiders of the Pirate Isles, the people of Azūl rightly feared an attack by the sea brigands, and eventually black sails appeared on the horizon—pirate ships bound for the city for plunder.

After hours of bombardment by their cannon, the pirates launched landing boats to invade the city. However, within hours of the landing, the boats drifted back to the pirate fleet, each filled with the heads of the pirates who had dared come ashore. Every man who came to sack the city had been killed, silently, unable to alert his fellows or the ships that remained in the harbor. None survived and so the fleet, operating with only skeleton crews of those lucky enough to have stayed behind, hoisted anchor and fled.

The agents behind these killings belonged to a secret society called the Black Hand. Masters of the art of murder, they had hidden within Azūl, conducting their murderous trade without ever arousing suspicion to their presence. Many heard rumors of assassins stalking the shadowed streets, but most considered them to be nothing more than a legend from the time when the city languished under the Witch-King's rule. Faced with extinction along with everyone else in the city, the Black Hand came out into the open and saved the city from almost certain destruction. People continued to fear them, but their gratitude outweighed their misgivings, and the Black Hand became a known, if still somewhat secretive, force in the city and beyond.

When the other Great Cities broke from the Empire to form the confederacy, they paid the Black Hand a fortune to encourage the city to join them. The autarchs believed fear of the assassins would keep the Empire at bay, and when Azūl declared its independence, the Confederacy was proved right, for the Black Hand had been blamed for the deaths of powerful and important people all over the Empire, and their association with the Confederacy discouraged the emperor from ordering the orc legions to reclaim the recalcitrant cities. Now, the City of Death moniker has come to take on a second meaning, one tied directly to the assassins living here.

Since joining the confederacy, Azūl has avoided becoming entangled with the petty disputes and occasional fighting between the other Nine Cities. The city's fearsome reputation, made worse by the ascent of its new autarch, has many other cities concerned about the future and what role Azūl will play in the Confederacy's development. Some suspect the City of Death might make moves to supplant the autarchs of other cities, or even break away altogether, leaving the others to fend for themselves against the new threats in Caecras, the frozen wastes, and the pirates of the isles.



The Mistress

The Black Hand has never been interested in politics, not choosing sides in the power struggle. Rather, they preferred to act as weapons for those who could afford them to remove any obstacles blocking their advance to greater power. All this changed when the sitting autarch, with support from the Guild Council, sought to absorb the Black Hand and make them an official part of the city government. Taking this move as a threat, the leader of the Black Hand eliminated the autarch by slipping a venomous serpent into his chambers, and took his place as ruler of the city, a post she's held for the last few years. No one has dared speak out against the coup for fear of the Black Hand, and thus the once secret society now rules in the open.

The Mistress commands with a light touch, knowing fear of her and her society keeps the people in line. Her identity remains a secret, and she always wears a white porcelain mask with blue-painted lips when dealing with the Guild Council or the occasional petitioner who musters up the courage to seek her aid. To outsiders, it appears she has little interest in the city's day-to-day affairs, but the truth is quite the opposite. Since coming to power, the Mistress has established a network of spies throughout the city, who send her reports via rats trained to bear messages.

Rumors swirl around the autarch. Some claim the Mistress is more than one person, each donning the mask whenever they need to make an appearance. While there are whispers about how the Mistress came to power, some believe she hired the Black Hand to aid in her ascension—others claim she is the Black Hand's leader and simply ordered it. If anybody knows the truth, none are talking; the Mistress's enemies have a disturbing tendency to wind up dead in rather spectacular fashion—a member of the Shipwright's Guild was found drowned, sealed in a barrel of wine, floating in the harbor, after he drunkenly grabbed the Mistress at a dinner party.

The Guilds

Like other members of the Confederacy, Azūl boasts several guilds who, until recently, had incredible power in the city. Representatives from each have a place on the Guild Council, who together advise the autarch. The Mistress has shown little tolerance for these grasping plutocrats and has diminished their standing in her government to that of mere figureheads, an ineffectual band of thoroughly cowed men and women who learned the price of disobedience when resentful peers started turning up dead. The major guilds include the Shipwrights, Merchants, Bankers, and Fishers, with a smattering of minor guilds covering the common trades working in the city.



The Mistress and the Black Hand exert incredible control over the Guild Council—members vote as they are instructed, for to refuse the Hand invites its touch. No councilor would dare to move against the Black Hand's interests, and in truth, many are hard-pressed to take any action at all, for fear of accidentally opposing the assassins' plans. Councilors who have never once been approached by the Black Hand still hem and haw over the slightest decision, usually only voting once they see that a majority is overwhelming, as such a majority is believed to be proof that the Hand's wishes must be at work.

Fear of the Hand has also led to members of the Guild Council using fake threats against their fellows, trying to convince them that the Black Hand is behind a particular action—although such tactics are extremely dangerous, should the true Black Hand find out. The Black Hand does not react well to impersonation, so most councilors know better than to take such risks.

The Honorable Cloaks

Founded centuries ago, the Honorable Cloaks, sometimes called the Black Cloaks, serve as Azūl's constabulary, watch, and militia. They also have the power to pass judgment on criminals and carry out sentences, including execution for the most violent and loathsome crimes. Named for their distinctive hooded cloaks, each district has up to a dozen officers who patrol the streets in shifts, while new recruits are tasked with standing guard on the wall until there is an opening in one of the city patrols.

Leading the Honorable Cloaks is Judge Caldwell, a grizzled veteran who spent most of his career walking a beat. He claims he can feel trouble through the soles of his well-worn shoes and has personally solved more crimes than any other Cloak in the history of the organization. His days of catching criminals are long over thanks to frequent attacks of gout, so he spends much of his time in a tidy little office overtop the Rack, the Honorable Cloaks' headquarters in Docklands. He keeps his white hair cropped close to his scalp, and his ruddy face is covered with creases. He usually hobbles about with a cane.

The citizenry respects the Honorable Cloaks for they keep the city orderly and generally crime free. However, they also fear them, for there is no higher authority to which they can appeal when they come into conflict with the law. Though the Honorable Cloaks have proven incorruptible, devoted to the city and to whomever holds the position of autarch, most expect their ranks were infiltrated by the Black Hand years ago.

HONORABLE CLOAK

DIFFICULTY 25

Size 1 human

Perception 11 (+1)

Defense 15 (mail); **Health** 17

Strength 12 (+2), **Agility** 10 (+0), **Intellect** 11 (+1), **Will** 10 (+0)

Speed 10

ATTACK OPTIONS

Sword (melee) +2 with 1 boon (2d6 + 2)

The Dread Legion

Azūl maintains a small army of 200 soldiers (as mercenaries) called the Dread Legion. A mixed force of humans and orcs, the Legion is primarily tasked with guarding the wall overlooking the western approach to the city, with legionnaires billeted in the tower turrets and patrolling the battlements. The Legion is largely just for show; since the Black Hand revealed themselves, no one has dared rattle their swords at the city lest they bring a swift death down on their heads. Legionnaires wear dull gray mail, helmets stylized to look like skulls, and shields bearing the city's symbol a black skull with no jaw.

The Black Hand

The Black Hand has thoroughly infiltrated the city, with members found in nearly every level of society masquerading as merchants, laborers, bartenders, entertainers, and just about every other profession. Living a double life allows the assassins to monitor developments in the city and pass intelligence back to the Mistress, while also giving them access to potential marks, in and out of the city. In addition to the agents embedded in the city, many hundreds more hide in the Empire and beyond, quietly carrying out the missions of murder for which their society was created.

Joining the Black Hand

The Hand's methods for recruitment have changed a great deal since the organization came out into the open. In old times, agents would recruit in the field, overseeing their basic training and then sending them to the City of Death to learn advanced techniques. Now, anyone who wants a place in the Black Hand can petition the masters in Azūl at Coffins, a temple-like complex buried deep under the city. Finding and reaching Coffins is the first test, for the routes are perilous, guarded by lethal traps and strange guardians that kill the body and the soul. Surviving this gauntlet proves to the masters the candidate's worth, and the recruit begins training after a short interview to ascertain the candidate's mental stability.

Black Hand training is difficult and dangerous. Recruits who fail to master the techniques have a tendency to turn up in the bay, and only a fifth of the candidates who come to Coffins make it through training alive. Training focuses on all the various methods of murder, from the creation and application of poisons to fighting techniques that include the knife, garrote, and crossbow. Recruits learn the secrets of stealth and disguise, politics, geography, and a variety of languages.

Fingers and Handlers

Recruits who complete their training become Fingers and are assigned to a place outside the city, usually in a large community somewhere in the Empire, though assignments in others cities in the Confederacy are common too. The assignments come with elaborate identities to mask their activities and give them roots in the place that will become their home and base of operations. In addition, each Finger also has a handler, someone who negotiates contracts on the Finger's behalf to protect the assassin's identity. Handlers are typically assassins themselves, having been promoted out of the field.

The handlers never interact with their Finger's directly and instead communicate by message at specific locations or through intermediaries so that the handler can never reveal the killer's identity, even under the pain of death. However, the Finger always knows the identity of the handler and is expected to monitor the handler's activities and ensure the handler remains loyal to the Black Hand.

FINGER OF THE BLACK HAND

DIFFICULTY 25

Size 1 human

Perception 12 (+2)

Defense 14 (soft leather); **Health** 28

Strength 10 (+0), **Agility** 13 (+3), **Intellect** 11 (+1), **Will** 9 (-1)

Speed 10

Assassinate When a surprised creature or a creature from which the Finger is hidden takes damage from the Finger's attack, the target creature must get a success on a Strength challenge roll or take damage equal to its Health.

Trickery Twice per round, the Finger can make an attack roll or challenge roll with 1 boon. If the Finger makes an attack roll with this boon, the attack deals 1d6 extra damage.

Backstab Once per round, when the Finger attacks with a basic or swift weapon and makes the attack roll with at least 1 boon, the attack deals 1d6 extra damage.

Dirty Tricks The Finger's attacks deal 1d6 extra damage when it makes the attack roll with at least 1 boon.

Exploit Opportunity Once per round, when the total of the Finger's attack roll is 20 or higher and exceeds the target number by at least 5, the Finger can take another turn at any point before the end of the round.

ATTACK OPTIONS

Rapier (melee) +3 (Agility) (1d6 + 1 plus Poison)

Long Knife (melee) +3 (Agility) (1d6 plus Poison)

Crossbow (long range) +3 (Agility) (2d6 plus Poison)

Poison A creature must get a success on a Strength challenge roll or become poisoned for 1 minute. If already poisoned, the creature takes 1d6 extra damage. At the end of each round, a creature poisoned in this way must make a Strength challenge roll. A creature takes 1d6 damage on a failure, while three successes removes this poisoned affliction.

SPECIAL ACTIONS

Nimble Recovery The Finger can use an action to heal 7 damage and move up to half its Speed. Once the Finger uses Nimble Recovery, it cannot use it again until it completes a rest.

Quick Reflex The Finger can use a triggered action on its turn to hide or retreat.

Player Characters and the Black Hand

Player characters can join the Black Hand and serve the organization as murders for hire. Aside from taking contracts to kill specific individuals, the organization places few demands on its agents, which frees them up to undertake missions of a different sort. Such characters should always keep their membership a secret, even from their closest companions, lest they compromise their false identity and bring attention to the organization.

A player character must have chosen the assassin expert path to be a Finger of the Black Hand; however, the character can have any novice path and any master path, though, of the latter, acrobat, blade, executioner, infiltrator, and night stalker (see *Terrible Beauty*) are the most common options.

A Fearful Call

Fear reigns in Azūl, fear of the Black Hand, the informers, and the dark secrets of Gog believed to lay buried beneath the city streets. The fear is evident in the mannerisms and speech of the people living here. Most people are polite, almost to a fault, and make every effort not to offend or speak even one word of ill about anyone or anything related to their community. The same consideration they show to one another extends to visitors, leading some feckless travelers to think the city is filled with cowardly pleasers. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Black Hand is everywhere, and one never knows if an arrogant customer or stern city guard is but a disguise worn by one of these infamous killers.

Humans make up the majority of Azūl's population of 20,000 souls, and most claim Kalasan or Edene descent, though some people show traces of Gog blood in their pale skin and bruised eyes. The Black Hand recruits changelings heavily, seeing great value in their unusual capabilities, and scores of changelings hide among the city's people. Peoples from other ancestries can be found here as well but in even smaller numbers, with the occasional clockwork servant toiling for a technomancer or a faun beggar haunting the Gateless Gate.

Since the Common Tongue largely originated in the Nine Cities, it remains the dominant tongue here, though one can hear smatterings of other languages, especially in the Docklands. Of course, the people have certain sayings peculiar to their situation such as "Stay the hand!" which is uttered in response to a bad situation, or "bear the lantern" when someone is faced with a long and thankless task.

Bustling Trade

Although infamous for its chief export—assassins, Azūl engages in legitimate trade too. Fishers work the Crescent Bay with great success, drawing up crab, fish, squid, and stranger things from the watery deep. The shipyards are famed throughout the Empire for their sleek, swift vessels, which the city exports for a steep fee to other members of the Confederacy as well as the Kingdom of Sails. Woodcutters work the dense forests flanking the land west of the city wall, and their mills work day and night to produce lumber for the shipyards and for export up and down the coast. As well, merchants from all over the continent stop here to trade goods from lands as far away as the frozen wastes in the south.

Azūl's currency matches that used in the Empire, though the city stamps its own coins. All, regardless of denomination, bear a hand on the back, palm out, fingers spread. Gold coins, called "towers," bear the black tower on their faces. Silver coins, called "skulls," show a grinning skull, while the copper coins, called "lanterns," bear the image of one of the hooded lantern bearers that line Petitioner's Walk.

Fading Faith

Azūl's people don't place much stock in religion. The gods have never done a thing for them or their city, and if they would make it in life, they must look after their own affairs. Remnants of the Old Faith can still be found here and there, but most temples stand in ruins or have been repurposed to function as taverns, theaters, and bazaars. The Cult of the New God maintains a thoroughly submissive temple in Northcliff, where fearful priests tend to the needs of the city's downtrodden. Of all the religions active in Azūl, the Solemn Brethren of Father Death retains the respect and influence normally afforded to men and women of the cloth in other lands. These priests are regular sights in the city, their dark, hooded robes sweep the ground as they shuffle along the streets, filling the air with the acrid smoke of burning incense that emanates from their swinging censers to keep the restless spirits appeased and at bay. It means death to touch a priest of Thanatos and thus people keep their distance from them.

Souls and Lanterns

People observe two major festivals unique to the city each year.

Soulsday

Always falling on the longest day of the year, held in midsummer, on Soulsday nobody can show his or her face in public. Most citizens stay home, fasting from sunrise until sunset, but people who venture out do so wearing masks similar to the one worn by the Mistress. These masks represent the faces of the dead. The saying goes that "the dead go forth on Soulsday."

When the sun sets, the people break their fast with a raucous party, celebrating with food, drink, and fireworks, though they still wear masks to remain anonymous, as people indulge in vices normally denied to them. Most people return home before dawn, but some might unmask themselves and reveal their identities to fellow revelers, an act said to be a sign of trust and love.



In addition, Soulsday also sees the guilds notifying individuals who have been accepted into their ranks. Each guild does this differently. The Shipwrights' Guild, for example, marks their prospective member's home by painting a ship's wheel on their door, while the Bankers Guild slips a coin beneath the door. Years ago, the Black Hand participated in this custom, finding candidates on the street and whisking them into the Undercity to set them on the course to find their way to Coffins. Since the Mistress's rise, the Black Hand has not participated, likely because they now recruit candidates all year round.

Lanternside

The second festival takes place on the longest night of the year, in midwinter, and it is when the citizens implore the Lantern Bearers to continue their service to the city, to stand vigil and continue to bear the lanterns to bring light to the darkness. According to local legend, the Lantern Bearers lining Petitioner's Way are the petrified remains of the Witch-King's servants, people who in some way failed or displeased the dreaded dark lord.

Locals believe that on Lanternside a Lantern Bearer's curse can be broken, returning them to the flesh from their petrified states, and thus be freed from their eternal duty. The legend goes on to say, however, that if the last Lantern Bearer ever leaves its post, the sea will rise up and swallow the city. Thus, on Lanternside, the people leave wreaths of evergreen and small gifts at the feet of the statues, as tribute. Traditionally, each family has a chosen Lantern Bearer—usually the one closest to the family home—upon whom the family bestows their gifts. When the long night is over, the continued presence of your Lantern Bearer is taken as a sign of good luck for the coming year. The day after Lanternside is considered the first day of the new year, and a day for feasting with loved ones.

A Tangled City

The first thing one notices on arriving at Azūl is how crowded it appears. Situated on a peninsula and contained by a western wall, the city has run out of room to grow and tiny client villages have popped up around the city, each paying tribute to the Mistress and sharing in the dread the Black Hand awakens in all right-thinking people. Having built overtop the ruins of the old city, people now build up rather than out, piling new homes and buildings atop the old.



Interesting Sights in Azūl

d20	Sights
1	A procession of Father Death's priests walks down a twisting street, creating clouds of foul-smelling smoke as their censers fill the air.
2	A mad, filthy beggar beseeches passersby for coin.
3	A painted whore, male or female, dressed in fine clothing, makes lewd gestures from the mouth of an alley.
4	A weird blot of darkness disappears into a pool of shadow cast by a leaning building.
5	A group of children play a game using a ball painted with a human face.
6	A band of nervous sailors try to find their way.
7	An oily merchant hawks strange wares hanging on the inside of his long coat.
8	A frightened porter hauls goods for a masked and robed wizard, perhaps one from the Tower Arcane, who leads the way.
9	A frothing priest of the New God beseeches people to repent.
10	A pair of nondescript men drags a man into the darkness of a shadowy road.
11	A piercing scream splits the air from some distance away.
12	A round manhole stands open in the center of the street, and a laborer peers into the darkness.
13	Mad laughter echoes from down a side street.
14	A patrol of grim-faced Honorable Cloaks marches down the road.
15	People clear out a path for a palanquin born on the backs of eight straining servants as it makes its way toward Upland.
16	A corpse lies in a widening pool of blood.
17	An odd chalk marking appears to have been hastily scrawled on a building's wall.
18	A filthy man dressed in a rat-skin coat carries a pole on which a dozen dead rats hang by their tails.
19	A discarded purse in the center of a street is ignored by passersby.
20	A sobbing woman on the ground claws at her clothing.

The Wall

A thirty-foot high wall of stone blocks punctuated by six squat towers resembling enormous mushrooms guards the city's western approach, and extends down the peninsula's neck and across a jetty reaching out into the bay. Dread legionnaires walk the battlements at all hours, though they rarely interfere with traffic going in or out of the city. A great yawning archway pierces the wall's center, though no doors stand here, hence the Gateless Gate moniker. Instead, beggars and thieves huddle in the shadows there to find relief from the heat and to harry passersby for alms. Locals know agents of the Black Hand hide among these wretches, and it's whispered they send messages to the Mistress and her advisors by way of specially trained rats.

Clogged Arteries

The major thoroughfares that describe the city's various districts are the only roads that come close to being direct. Most streets are narrow and cramped, twisting and turning through the various districts. Travel by these roads to any destination proves difficult as it's easy to become lost in these labyrinthine corridors, or it is simply the least direct route. Secret ways known only to the Black Hand riddle the city and allow the assassins to move quickly from place to place. These routes have existed for centuries and were instrumental in thwarting the great raid, which brought the Black Hand into the light.

Two major roads offer easier passage through the city. Caravan Street starts at the Gateless Gate and takes a relatively straight path to the Central Market, a bustling open bazaar where anything and everything can be had for a price. The second is the ominous Petitioner's Walk, a road lined with grim stone statues, each appearing as a hooded and robed human bearing an iron lantern in its skeletal hands. Local legend claims these statues are the petrified remains of people who displeased the Witch-King. In the twilight hours, green flames burst to life within the lanterns, burning until dawn. Some believe these flames are the souls of the petitioner's burning in Hell. Petitioner's Walk extends south from the Central Market, climbing all the way up to the foot of the Witch-King's Tower.

Docklands

A district characterized by the abundance of shipyards and warehouses, Docklands spreads south from Caravan Street—the city's main artery—until it reaches the docks, a collection of piers reaching out over the waters. The air here reeks of rotting fish and is filled for much of the day with the noise of industry down by the docks. The waters here are deep enough to accommodate ships of almost any size, though most vessels moored here are fishing boats. Fishmongers prepare the day's catch all along the docks, blood staining the streets, while painted whores, hawkers, drug dealers, and confidence artists ply their trade on new arrivals.

A few canneries have sprung up in recent years to tin fish, clams, oysters, and squid for distribution inland. The Sleeping God cannery dominates the market, and its product has spread across much of the Empire. In addition to the businesses, one can also find taverns, hostelries, and outfitters, each catering their businesses to people who work and travel the seas.

Northcliff

Crossing Caravan Street from the Docklands takes a traveler to Northcliff, which is home for most people who ply their trade on the docks. A place of crushing poverty, the ramshackle homes crowding the streets look as if they could fall at any time, as they lean or rest against each other to stay upright.

Three locations stand out from the district's filth and squalor. The first is the humble shrine of the New God, where a group of priests minister to the poor and tend to their needs. Situated in an old temple once dedicated to the Old Gods, the priests have removed all the old icons except those of Father Death, who is the city's patron god.

The House of Healing also has an outpost here, built during the third century when the Shuddering Pox ravaged the countryside. Red-cloaked healers accept anyone into their halls to tend to their hurts and cure their sickness to the best of their ability. For all the good the House does, people remain suspicious of the tight-lipped healers and some believe their charity masks a darker purpose.

Finally, Northcliff is home to the Racks, the Black Cloaks' headquarters. A tall building of gray wood and slate shingles, Cloaks come and go from the place at all hours. The building has a small court, where the magistrates dispense justice, and a sinister dungeon extends deep into the ground below the building.

Central Market

The Central Market stands at the center of the city and is its economic center. From it, one can reach all the other districts in the city. In contrast to the rest of the drab city, the Central Market is a riot of colorful tents under which merchants from all over come to ply their trade, selling everything from spices to textiles, from weapons to exotic goods such as potions and marvels of engineering from wondrous Lij. As well, smaller Guilds maintain shops facing the square, offering goods from local artisans. Azūl has few laws concerning what can be bought and sold, so amongst the mundane goods one can also find plenty of strangeness, from drugs to dark magic inked on scrolls of human skin. Black Cloaks patrol the market day and night, quick to arrest the few thieves working in the city.



Eastcliff

The ramshackle buildings describing the Northcliff district surrender to the nicer, though no less crowded, Eastcliff, a slice of the city occupied by the city's artisans. While much of the structures here are homes, one can also find signs of a thriving artistic community, with colorful murals painted on the walls of alleys, statuesque fountains erected at many intersections, and bits of stylized glass and metal hung on doors or from the occasional lamp, which are lit nightly by the city's lamplighters. One of the safest communities in Azūl, the people of Eastcliff form a tight-knit community, and each watches over their neighbor's house to thwart thieves and other troublemakers.



Midland

Azūl's wealthiest district, Midland rivals Northcliff in terms of territory, positioned between the artsy Eastcliff and the raucous Docklands, and commands a great view of the docks below to the west and the Auroral Ocean to the east. Unlike the rest of the crowded city, Midland has resisted overcrowding, and the district has been carved up into small estates with fine houses hidden behind high walls and ornate gardens. Merchant princes, caravan lords, members of the Guild Council, and wizards all make their home here. The farther south one travels, the higher the elevation and the higher the social standing of the residents.

One notable exception to the fabulous wealth on display here is the Old Cemetery that abuts the road Cliff Street, which divides Eastcliff from Midland. A dark and gloomy place tended by the Solemn Brethren of Father Death, the Old Cemetery was untouched by the Kalasan conquerors when they raised the city, so one can find tombs dating back to the city's founding. The priests safeguard the dead from undesirables and necromancers, and any ghouls found wandering among the graves are strung up and left to rot on the surrounding iron fence, deemed unworthy of a proper burial.

Upland

Upland commands the highest point of the peninsula and has traditionally been the seat of power for the city leaders. Here, Ashrakal's dark tower still stands; a 50-foot tall pillar of black stone rises from the southern point of the district like an accusing finger pointing toward absent gods. No entrance has been found to the tower's interior since the days when the Witch-King dwelled here.

On the district's western side stands the equally impressive Guildhall, where the Guild Council convenes and settles the occasional dispute between the city's citizens. The Manor of the Autarch is attached to the Guildhall, and it's here where the city's highest leaders have traditionally lived and thus it is home to the Mistress. The meeting places of the most powerful guilds are also found in Upland, along with the homes of the wealthiest citizens, next door to the very banks that hold their money.

Undercity

The city of Azūl stands on the ruins of an older city, one razed by the Kalasans when they broke the back of the Witch-King's tyranny and liberated the lands from his crushing grasp. When the people rebuilt the city, they did so overtop the old, which created a maze of shadowy streets under the foundations of the newer construction, leading to many places that

recall the old city's dark majesty. The Black Cloaks never patrol the Undercity, as it's generally thought to belong to the Black Hands, who have their ancient stronghold, Coffins, hidden somewhere in its depths. If the assassins are not enough of a deterrent, spirits, undead, ghouls, and other horrors lurk there, all eager to end the lives of those who haplessly stumble into their lightless realm.

Adventure Ideas

Azūl is a great setting for adventures, as the City of Death has many mysteries to solve and much strangeness to uncover. Here are some ideas.

- One of the player characters is approached by a member of the Black Hand and offered directions to Coffins.
- Members of the Black Hand start turning up dead.
- A new drug enters the city from an unknown source. Using it causes madness and, eventually, death.
- Members of the Guild Council work in secret to remove the Mistress.
- A fisherman drags up something strange from the depths of the ocean, an odd statue scrawled in dark runes. Soon after, he begins acting strangely.
- Something stirs up the spirits haunting the Undercity, and phantoms and poltergeists rise up to terrorize the locals.
- Members of the Guild Council start dying, and the Black Hand is not to blame.
- A new plague sweeps through the city, rumored to have originated from an ancient vault in the Undercity.
- The eerie green flames lighting the Lantern Bearers all go out one night and never light again.
- A door appears at the base of the Witch-King's tower. The Mistress placed a squad of legionnaires there to prevent anyone from entering the structure, but each night, one of the guards disappears.



Character Backgrounds

Characters originating from the City of Death can use the following table in place of their ancestry background table to determine a salient event in their path.

Background Table For Azūl

d20	Background
1	A loved one once tried to find a way into the Witch-King's tower and was never seen again.
2	A member of your family is said to work as a handler for the Black Hand.
3	You clawed your way out from the slums of Northcliff.
4	The Black Hand wiped out your family, but left you alive and you don't know why.
5	You awoke one morning next to the Witch-King's tower. You have no memory of anything before your awakening.
6	You bear a startling resemblance to one of the Lantern Bearers.
7	Your family members are highly placed Guildsmen who live in Midland.
8	You tried to join the Black Hand, but you failed to reach Coffins. You hope to try again one day.
9	You spent your childhood as a servant in the homes of the wealthy in Upland.
10	You know the identity of a Finger of the Black Hand.
11	You saved a merchant from an assassination attempt. You worry that you've gained the enmity of the Black Hand.
12	You have recurring dreams of the Witch-King's return.
13	You were hired onto a Caravan and haven't been back to Azūl since.
14	You and your family are humble fishermen, and know nothing of assassins or the Witch-King.
15	A former lover now belongs to Azūl's Guild Council.
16	You once hired the Black Hand to assassinate one of your enemies. You still owe the organization and suspect they will come at any time to make sure you pay your debt in coin or in blood.
17	You know of a secret coven pledged to serve the Mother of Monsters, an aspect of the Demon Lord. You know they practice their filthy rites somewhere in Upland.
18	Your family owns a carpenter's shop in Eastcliff.
19	Your father left you an ornate key when he died. He said it is the key to Ashrakal's tower.
20	You grew up in Upland and tend to look down on those of the lower classes.