

Twin Crowns: Age of Exploration Fantasy

A Primer of the world of Ptalmanar by Living Imagination, Inc.

Welcome to the world of Ptalmanar, where two empires represent the cradle of civilization while foreign powers loom off every horizon, watching for signs of weakness. As the Imperial rulers find their lands extended to their natural boundaries, great sailing ships strike out across the oceans in search of new lands to colonize for the glory of the crown. The riches flow from the colonies back to the coffers of the King and Queen, as pirates with no allegiances at all strike at the laden ships, announcing their presence with the sharp sound of a cannon's roar. As the mortals wage their wars and struggle to expand, twelve gods watch from above, locked in their own eternal conflict. They sit poised upon the Divine Wheel, three of light, three of darkness and six in between. Each god stares across at their enemy, their personal adversary in the divine struggle. High priests stand in sanctified temples, speaking with the authority of heaven, guiding their initiates to exercise the will of their patron deity.

Included here is an overview of the campaign setting, going over some of the unique aspects of our world and the rules we have introduced. The following is intended as a primer for prospective players and game masters, so they can get a snapshot of the world of Ptalmanar and the *Twin Crowns* campaign setting. We have introduced many new concepts to the standard model of fantasy gaming.

The world of *Twin Crowns* offers four new races, including a unique spin on the existing races; new skills to represent the advance of technology; over a hundred new feats to allow any character, not just Clerics and Paladins, to wield some of the power of their deity; a detailed description of firearms, cannons, and other devices new to the world; detailed rules for designing and building ships, the journeys they will take, and perils they will face; an intricate system of faith and devotion with the power structure of twelve unique churches; many new spells reflecting the character of this campaign setting; and finally an entirely original ritual system for wizards, sorcerers, clerics, and druids with over 100 rituals available.

The overall character of the *Twin Crowns* world is that of fantasy swords and sorcery. There is enough variety in the different locations described to craft a campaign that is decidedly medieval, one with a more renaissance feel to it, or one gripped in an age of exploration. Vast naval exploration has begun, colonization of the New World began only 20 years ago, and the horizons don't seem nearly as far away anymore. The world of Ptalmanar is not a perfect place. There is enough evil and social strife in the world to both entice villains and inspire heroes. There is also a vibrant economic and political system so campaigns can have a more subtle side. The world can accommodate a variety of campaign themes, from dark and gritty to light-hearted and hopeful.

The People of Ptalmanar

Twin Crowns is a supplement for *Dungeons & Dragons* by Wizards of the Coast, and as such uses many of the races found in the core rulebooks. The two notable exceptions are the gnome and the halfling, who do not exist on Ptalmanar. In addition to elves, dwarves, half-elves, humans and half-orcs we offer two new breeds of elf and three entirely new races.

Kithraas are a playful aquatic race that have recently made their way to the coastal lands of Ptalmanar. Created only a century ago by the god Argon, the Kithraas are a sexless humanoid that can breathe water as easily as they breathe air. They live in undersea communities near the coasts where they share stories and raise their hatchlings. Each Kithraas gives birth to one egg every year that they must protect and keep safe until it hatches.

Khesta are short and jolly folk who claim to be the chosen race of Brashtamere, the god of Joy. They have a powerful love of life, and embrace even the most menial tasks with a smile. They are well accepted in society and primarily live among the humans of both empires. There is one city in Novarum, Kinholm, that is peopled entirely with Khesta and that many of the short folk call their ancestral home. Khesta are born with inherent luck, and despite their penchant for mischief and merrymaking, seem to be able to avoid the greatest dangers easily, even when those dangers are self-inflicted.

Shallorians are a race of tall, feline humanoids. With thick fur and sharp claws, Shallorians are often scorned in human society, perceived as monstrous and threatening. Past history shows a time when humans enslaved Shallorians, and even in more enlightened times the royalty has imposed laws that persecute the Shallorians. While few of these laws still exist, the Shallorians have a strong sense of racial pride and unity, and look upon most others as outsiders that would only seek to keep them down.

Wild Elves and **High Elves** are new to the Empires of Ptalmanar. One hundred years ago the navies of the High Elves sailed across the Quilla Ocean and invaded the western coast of Scolia. The mortal man Argon created a great explosive device known as the Grand Petard, and in one fell act, destroyed the invading ships and devastated the Scolian city of Seagate. Seagate is nothing but a crater of rubble, but the invasion was diverted and the unprepared Empire was saved from certain defeat. High Elves are a militant, expansionist, and fanatical race of racial purists that live on the far side of the continent known as the New World. The Northern and Southern colonies are constantly staving off attacks from the High Elves who seem to want nothing more than to purge the humans from their homeland.

The wild elves, on the other hand, have been peaceful neighbors to the colonists. Living in the forests of the New World, wild elves are a nomadic, primitive culture with a strong affinity for their natural surroundings. Very few



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wild elves have made the trip across the Quilla back to the Empires and, outside of the colonies, are often treated as an oddity.

Twin Crowns uses all of the base-classes listed in the core rulebooks, and would be characterized as a high fantasy setting. Magic is fairly common, with wizards and sorcerers gathering in guilds to consolidate their power and knowledge. Monsters haunt the dark corners of the world while the main cities are well-protected and cosmopolitan in nature. On the fringes of the civilized world are vast expanses of untouched wilderness, unexplored islands and continents, and savage kingdoms of orcs and other monstrosities.

Faith and Religion

Religion permeates all aspects of life on Ptalmanar. Whether you are a commoner or a noble, a hermit or a city dweller, a member of a remote barbarian tribe or a scholar at the finest university of Scolia, the divine powers that created Ptalmanar and continuously shape its destiny will have a direct impact on your life. Both on a personal level and in the political arena, religion to a large part drives the societies of the world. Even though some people may choose to avoid interaction with the churches and gods as much as possible, nobody denies the fact that the gods are always close.

The Balance of the Wheel of the Gods

The Wheel is a commonly used representation of the relationship of the gods to each other, with each god placed in opposition to its divine counterpart. The Maker, god of Creation, is always placed at the top of the Wheel, while the Unmaker, god of Destruction, sits at the bottom. As told in the Creation Myth, these two gods are the opposite poles from which all others have sprung. It is commonly believed that the Maker and Unmaker are the only truly immortal gods, and that the others can change and even be slain, as was evidenced by the events during the fairly recent Time of Great Change.

The Maker and the gods on either side of the Maker – Solaron, god of Justice, and Mirenac, goddess of Healing, – make up a group that is often referred to as the Gods of Light. They stand in direct opposition to three gods commonly known as the Gods of Darkness – Ullon, god of Deceit and Murder, and Grumach, god of Rot and Undeath. The worship of the Gods of Darkness is proscribed in the empires, and most civilized worlds. The evils perpetuated and fostered by these three dark gods and their followers pose a constant challenge to the Gods of Light and their flock. While they may work through others, ultimately almost all evil plans and events can eventually be traced back to at least one of the dark three.

To either side of these two groups stand gods associated with aspects of life that commonly have both good and evil facets. Bellinger, as the goddess of War, espouses violence and conflict, representing a fact of life that everyone may be forced to confront at some point – that the solution to an issue may require violent action. Her opposite, Jaad,

the god of Peace and Wisdom, promotes peace and the collection of knowledge, which sometimes comes at the expense of avoiding necessary change or acquiescing to oppressive rules. Brashtamere, god of Happiness, provides the people with joy and laughter, but his parties can spill over into the vices of drunkenness, lust, and gluttony. Artifice, god of Profit, looks after the material interests of his followers, whether they are used for the betterment of society, or only selfish greed – many an honest merchant has been called a cutthroat by people unable to afford his wares. All four of these gods each have two paths; two distinct methods of worship that are often contradictory to one another.

Balanced in the middle between light and dark, but opposing each other, are Argon and the Wylds. Both represent the balance of creation and destruction, but the disagreements between these two gods are almost as fundamental as those between the gods of light and dark. The Wylds, the twin gods of Nature, represent nature in all its free beauty and all its potential uncontrolled violence. Argon, on the other hand, is the god of Technology and Civilization, who seeks to harness nature, and to see the forces of creation and destruction finely controlled and guided by his followers.

The Devout

An unknown High Priestess of Bellinger, overheard speaking to a High Priest of Artifice:

“Things are a lot different these days... at least that’s what I’ve read. There may only be twelve gods, but sometimes it feels like two hundred. I swear, in the last hundred years, everyone seems to have gotten their own idea about how to worship. I’m a devotee of the path of the Warrior, Bellinger’s greatest fury running through my veins. I can make my weapon burst into flame as I fight, I know no fear... and then I run into another high priest. Sure he worships Bellinger, but he’s on the path of the Tactician. He tells me what to do, like suddenly he’s superior to me simply because he knows tactics. I’m sure you can understand, with Artifice having two established paths as well...”

*“But this isn’t all I’m talking about! Even churches like Solaron and the Maker have factions arguing with one another! One Solaroni is dedicated to law and order, serving as the captain of the militia in Alnwick, while another one, initiated by the **same** high priest, is so caught up in the concept of justice, he’s gone vigilante. Two initiates, inducted to the same church, under the same patron, by the same high priest, and they’re mortal enemies. I hear the vigilante is wanted for murder in Alnwick now, with a 700 gold reward on his head. If that’s true maybe one of your faith will try to collect the bounty. Imagine that... one Solaroni paying an Artifician to kill another Solaroni.*

“A lot of high priests lament that they don’t get more direct orders from the Twelve when it comes to leading their flocks, but honestly, I’m glad they don’t. Ambiguity leads to argument, and argument leads to conflict. I’m in the War business... and as long as the people have the freedom to interpret the tenets their own way, business is good.”

Most of the people of Ptalmanar worship at least one of the gods. Far fewer are the numbers of the Initiates – those followers who dedicate their efforts to promoting the goals



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of their god. These true faithful have pledged to devote their life to fulfilling the tenets of their god, and are often the foot soldiers in the mortal world for the conflicts between the gods.

Worshipper

A large majority of the people chooses to worship one of the gods. In the empires, which are primarily good aligned, this is most often the Maker. Worshipers are so by their own choice. Declaring oneself a worshipper of a god carries no requirements or responsibilities in itself. It also carries no direct benefit or, conversely, penalty when changing one's worship.

Initiate

Becoming an Initiate of a god requires true dedication. Primarily, you must be within one alignment step of your chosen deity. Four of the gods have two paths (different emphasis of worship), in which case you must be within one alignment step of your chosen path. You must also prove your devotion to the god and your understanding of and commitment to the god's tenets. You must prove this to the satisfaction both in the eyes of the god as well as the representatives of the church where you wish to become initiated. When the church's representatives have accepted you as a potential new Initiate, a High Priest must cast the ritual of Initiation upon you. You may be required to provide the necessary korba or perform some quest before this ritual will be performed. When the ritual is completed, in that instant the god personally will judge you and choose whether to accept you as an initiate. A member of any class can become initiated, although some churches may have other special requirements.

Initiation carries with it great responsibilities. You may be called upon by your church to represent and defend its interests. You are expected to hold the tenets of your god above all other rules and restrictions. Note that while it rarely comes to outright conflict for any but the dark gods, it is not uncommon for the goals and tenets of a church to be at odds with the civil authority and civil laws. Combined with the often-opposing interests of the other churches, you will face many challenging situations. The benefits of initiation, however, are also great. Apart from the obvious advantages of being a member of such a dedicated and powerful organization as a church, your god also grants you special powers. This takes the form Divine Feats, which are only available to initiates of a specific god. You may choose to take one of these whenever your character gains a normal feat as appropriate. You may, however, take each Divine Feat only once. Each initiate has seven Divine Feats they can take throughout their adventuring career that is unique to their patron deity. As an Initiate you are also taught the Ceremony of Life, which will enable you to raise spirits in a shrine, temple, or cathedral of your god (see "Death, Resurrection and the Sprit World" below). Clerics and paladins must be initiated. There are no "generic" or "pantheonic" priests on Ptalmanar.

High Priest

A High Priest is a cleric who has risen to a leadership

position in the church. The other High Priests of the church usually pick High Priests, who then undergo the Ritual of Ascension. Upon completion of the ritual, the High Priest will feel a very close connection to their god. At this time, and many times following this, the god will speak directly to the High Priest. High Priests are thus the direct conduits of the words of the gods to the mortal world. Of course, different High Priests may interpret their god's words in different ways, which can lead to disagreements and even conflict within a church. High Priests have the awesome responsibility of leading the throng of dedicated worshippers and initiates under their supervision, and meting out punishment when it is required. Only a High Priest has the power and authority to strip someone of their initiation, divesting them from the church.

Magic, Shrines, and Nexuses

Admiral Reginald Mandrake addressing the leaders of the colonial forces on the eve of a major campaign against the High Eleven Command:

"Tomorrow we will be taking our forces deeper into enemy territory than ever before. If successful we will capture valuable territory for the crown and provide a greater buffer of security for the colonies. However, we face severe tactical challenges.

"The campaign is likely to last for weeks, perhaps months. Our greatest difficulty will be finding shrines and nexuses for recharging our spell power. Our clerics, spanning all the legal faiths across the Wheel from Bellinger to Artifice, must have access to sanctified ground in which to regain their divine spells. Their healing will be invaluable and we stand no chance without it. In addition, they will need sanctified ground in order to raise the fallen, so that they may rejoin the campaign. Otherwise we risk losing through attrition. Their spirits can come back to the fort, but that will keep them out of action for days, and longer as we penetrate deeper into high elven territory.

"In addition, our wizards, sorcerers, and bards require an arcane nexus near the front line to recharge their arcane power. Many can go for ten or more days before recharging, but once their spells are dry we can't afford to lose them while they head back to fort to recharge.

"So, here are our resources and options. Our scouts have discovered a natural arcane nexus 5 days travel west. That is our first objective. Once there we will establish a foothold while our ritualists sanctify both a shrine to Bellinger and another to the Maker. Meanwhile, we have established a treaty with the Druids of the Trista forest. They will offer us the use of their druid circles until we can sanctify shrines. That will keep our forces on the front line until we can establish our defenses.

"If progress is slower than we anticipate we will have to rely on our rangers for healing while our more powerful clerics return to the fort for recharge. But we still risk losing our offensive magic if we don't make that nexus in time. But we have one additional resource at hand...a portable nexus. It provides only a limited number of recharges, but it will buy us some extra time if we need it."



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GM's Commentary on Magic, Shrines, and Nexuses

There are many sanctified sites on Ptalmanar that serve as vital conduits between the mortal world and the divine planes. These are called Shrines, Temples, Cathedrals and Druid Circles. Similarly, there are many magical sites, which serve as a conduit through which arcane magical power passes into the world. Such a magical site is generally called a Nexus.

These locations of divine and arcane magic are of vital importance to all casters. They provide the magical energies that enable spell casters to recharge their spells. Without access to such a site, a spell caster will soon be unable to cast any spells at all. Clearly, the creation, possession, and control of these sites is a primary concern for any would-be conqueror. Similarly, knowledge of and access to such sites in the remote wilderness is vital information for any adventurer.

The exception to the need for spell casters to recharge at specific sites is Druids and Rangers. Because they derive their power directly from nature itself, they only need to be in a natural setting in order to recover their spells.

Rituals and Korba

Master Arcane Ritualist Thiellen speaking to his new apprentice:

"Do not think you understand anything about rituals simply because you can cast powerful spells. Rituals are much more than just powerful spells, and much different too. With spells you gain the ability to cast more and greater spells as your own power and knowledge grows, but never more than you can handle. With rituals there are no limitations except your own daring.

"You will need great knowledge and skill to cast rituals, and you must take advantage of every resource at your disposal. But with rituals there is never any guarantee. The more powerful the ritual, the more difficult it is to cast, the greater the potential reward, and the greater the risk. You have only your own judgment, and luck, to protect you from disaster.

"But when you have successfully cast a ritual you have accomplished a great and wondrous thing. You can cause a mighty tower to rise out of the ground, make magical items more powerful or change their form, pass into the spirit realm, or even allow a ship to sail the clouds as it would on water. No mere spells can accomplish such things.

"Oh, and there is one more thing you will require as well...korba. You will come to respect and covet these small packets of silvery powder more than any other material resource. Korba is a source of raw magical power, awesome in magnitude, but difficult and unpredictable to control. All rituals are powered by korba. You will need to acquire it, keep it safe, use it cleverly and judiciously. Never waste a dram or you will regret it when you truly need it.

"Where does korba come from, you ask. Solve that mystery, apprentice, and one day you will be my master."

GM's commentary on Rituals and Korba

Both divine and arcane spellcasters in the world of Ptalmanar have developed the skill of casting rituals. Rituals, like spells, are a way of accessing and controlling powerful magic in order to manifest a specific effect. Rituals, however, tend to be more powerful than spells, and also more tricky to cast. Ritualists may cast as many rituals as they please, provided they possess (or have access to) the scroll that contains the instructions to perform the ritual. There is no specific number of rituals that they can cast per day, unlike spells. Rather they are limited by time and the availability of korba.

Rituals provide a unique resource and challenge for players. They will need to acquire both ritual scrolls and korba. They must learn to use such resources carefully, and will be faced with decisions about which rituals to cast when. Should they take a chance on a powerful but risky ritual, or use less korba on a safer, but less powerful, ritual?

They also provide a rich source for plot elements and adventures. NPC's will have powerful rituals to cast as well, and will need to acquire korba to do so. Players may embark upon adventures just to find an ancient ritual scroll, or a legendary treasure trove of korba. The relative power of the various churches, and of the mage guilds, are largely determined by their access to korba and skilled ritualists.

GM's can easily control their party's access to rituals, simply by controlling the availability of both korba and ritual scrolls in their campaign.

Death, Resurrection, and the Spirit World

High Priest Vexus Germanicus, addressing acolytes about to be initiated to the Maker

"Rejoice, my friends, for today will be the greatest day of your lives. In a moment I will begin the Ritual of Initiation. With it I will recommend you to the Maker, who will answer my humble request by looking down upon each of you, looking directly into your hearts. Do not fear. I know each of you well. You are all pure of heart, you carry a deep love of the Maker in your souls, and you are dedicated to the tenets of the holy church of the Maker above all else. Today you will join that church as initiates.

"Once complete, your very soul will be bound to the Maker, and from this day forward you will feel his loving presence with you always. You will feel the power of the Maker within you, and with that power you will be the manifestation of the Maker upon this mortal realm. Those of you who have trained as priests and paladins will cast spells in his name. All of you will wield the power of the Maker, and with it you will bring about creation and order in this world.

"Once initiated you will also have the privilege of upholding the Maker's Plan, for this is the first and greatest tenet of the church. Upon creation the Maker granted to all sentient creatures five Gifts of life, so that what he has created once, the Unmaker must destroy five times. Upon death the spirit will remain with the mortal shell but briefly, and then will depart, allowing the physical remains to fade



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away completely. The spirit is compelled to walk the spirit plane, seeking out a shining light that represents sanctified ground. Once within sanctified ground, initiates will sense the spirit and may cast the Ceremony of Life. The ceremony will cause the spirit to take on a new body, free of all taint, physical disease or deformity, and free of all past guilt. The creature awakens into his new Gift purified in the light of the Maker. Such is the Maker's Plan.

"Now, let us begin..."

GM's Commentary on Death and Resurrection

The Maker's Plan is perhaps the single most important aspect of life on Ptalmanar. The Maker's Plan refers to the fact that all living sentient beings – whether human, elf, dwarf, ogre, or merman – are given 5 chances at life by the Maker at their birth. These are commonly referred to as the five Gifts, or as Maker's Gifts.

When a person is killed, it is commonly referred to as the "loss of a Gift." This is a sad occasion, but by no means the end of that person's life. The spirit is not lost, rather it can be easily raised and placed in a newly created body. This common event is known as the Ceremony of Life, and is performed in a Shrine, Temple, or Cathedral by an initiate of the god to whom the site is sanctified, or by a Druid in a Druid Circle. The initiation of the person being raised has no effect on this Ceremony, although spirits will usually go to Shrines of their own god or a closely aligned god, if the person was aware of their existence nearby.

On the other hand, the loss of the fifth and final Gift is a matter of great consequence, as at this point the spirit travels to the Maker's or Unmaker's realm and cannot be raised again. Once the fifth and final Gift is lost, there is absolutely no known spell or power that can return the person to life. Any such attempt to do so is an attempt to defy the Maker's Plan, and is considered an evil act.

Within the standard rules, the death of a player character is almost an all-or-nothing loss. Except for the loss of a character level, if they are resurrected they come back and may continue to adventure through an unlimited number of such deaths. If, however, a resurrection cannot be found or afforded then even one death can end a character's career. What determines whether or not a character comes back is often luck or the benevolence of the game master rather than player skill. The delicate life of low-level characters is replaced by a feeling of invulnerability once the characters reach a level where they can cast their own resurrection spells.

On Ptalmanar the playing field is somewhat leveled. Getting resurrected four times is almost a matter of course, unless characters run afoul of dark or evil magic that can trap their spirit. Still, in such cases coming back is still possible, it is just a matter of finding the solution. At first it may seem that players can be daring, even reckless, with their characters since they know they will be able to raise no matter what happens to them. However, this attitude quickly changes as a character has fewer and fewer Gifts remaining. Those with one or two lives remaining are likely to think twice before charging into a dragon's lair. Characters that are better able to stay alive will tend to have longer careers and rise in importance in the world, while those who are reckless will retire earlier or die off quicker.

Yet the Maker's Plan ensures that everyone will get his or her fair allotment of five Gifts.

High-level parties still have a significant advantage over lower level parties due to the availability of *spirit tether*, *grant life*, and other such spells which allow for the bringing back of characters from death without the loss of a Gift. They do not, however, represent absolute proof against death, just more tactical options and conveniences for higher-level characters. The challenges for high-level parties are also greater, as their enemies may use *spirit sever*, *Defy the Plan*, or other such dark powers against them. Therefore a game master can maintain a healthy respect of death even in high-level player characters.

The Maker's Plan allows for low-level adventurers to last a bit longer, as that lucky orc will only cause them to lose a Gift, not end the existence of the character. At the same time, the farther along the characters get, more than likely, the fewer Gifts they will have remaining. Even if they manage to achieve 10th or 12th level without the loss of a single Gift, the player will know that after 5, it's all over for them no matter what resources or allies they have managed to make in their lifetime.

Conclusion

We hope you have enjoyed this brief walkthrough of Ptalmanar and the *Twin Crowns* campaign setting. Of course, this is just the beginning. *Twin Crowns: Age of Exploration Fantasy* contains over 100 feats, more than 150 new spells and rituals, prestige classes, new skills, comprehensive rules for naval combat and sea-borne adventuring, a detailed gazetteer of the lands of Ptalmanar, new monsters, magic items and more! *Twin Crowns* is available through your local game and hobby stores, Amazon.com or our website. Any questions about the rules, setting or atmosphere can be directed to our Forums, or feel free to contact us directly.



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