

THE FEEL OF PTOLUS

Ptolus is the union of some aspects of real-world medieval Europe (as real as is fun) with the rules and flavor of the D&D System.

The Ptolus Campaign is the D&D rules with the volume turned all the way up. The setting was created with the game rules in mind. The conceits of the game were the conceits of the setting. The feel of the rules was the feel of the city. If the rules suggested that something might happen a lot, then in Ptolus, it happened a lot. The effects of 1st-level spells come as a surprise to no one here.

Merchants might hire wizards to use *detect thoughts* and *see invisibility* to deter crime, and that bars might post signs forbidding detection spells so the patrons can relax. If a City Watch patrol found an entire city street blocked by a *web* spell, they wouldn't be mystified but instead annoyed.

Ptolus lies in a world named Praemal within the bounds of a very old Empire unsure of whether or not it has toppled. Three different emperors claim the throne, and portions of the once great realm cleave off like ice from a melting glacier.

But this is not a time to lose hope altogether. Not so long ago, the first men and women who would one day be called "delvers" returned from exploring the catacombs below the city of Ptolus laden with gold and magical treasures. Today, hundreds of new would-be delvers pour into the city each month, hoping to strike it rich like others before them. Most never crawl up from the realms below, but adventurers keep arriving with dreams of gold and fame. Those who do emerge back into the light bring with them tales of surprisingly vast reaches of natural caverns and ancient passages.

Creatures and individuals (good, evil, and otherwise) that normally remain in the shadows are drawn to this large gathering of adventurers and magic. The needs of the delvers prompt renewed devotion to magic, science, and religion. As the Empire of Tarsis dies, Ptolus—

for years a back-water town on the edge of civilization—is quickly becoming the center of something much larger than itself. No one yet knows exactly what, but something is happening in Ptolus.

THE CITY OF PTOLUS

Ptolus is a major city of about seventy-five thousand people. It is located in the land of Palastan near a large bay on the southern end of the Whitewind Sea. The place was established to serve as the port for an important fortress built at the time of the Empire's foundation, a citadel called Dalenguard. More significantly, however, it lies in the shadow of an impossibly tall (almost three thousand feet) and thin pinnacle of rock known simply as the Spire. The origin of the spire is unknown, but it and the city seethe with mysterious legends and rumors. These tales tell of ancient battles waged and cities erected on the site, of demons and dark lords, of forgotten kings and mighty wizards. Many such stories might be at least somewhat true, for recent developments have revealed vast complexes beneath the city.

Of late, Ptolus has become a city of adventurers, known locally as "delvers". Treasure-seekers flock there to explore and plunder the labyrinthine structures beneath the streets, including the sewers, the remains of an ancient dwarven city, and chambers and passages created by Ghul or even older beings.

TECHNOLOGY

Ptolus has access to a slightly higher level of technology than what would be considered early medieval. This includes spyglasses, pocketwatches, spectacles, and, rarely, powder bombs. In the city, player characters will find printing presses, hot air balloons, and even crude steam engines.

However, all these devices are rare and steadily

becoming more so. Such advancements in science helped forge the Empire, but as the Empire declines, so too does the knowledge of how to create and maintain these wonderful devices. It is often difficult or impossible to purchase such items these days.

RULERS

The city is ostensibly ruled by a council, at whose head is the Commissar, a representative of the Empire of Tarsis.

Truth be told, the real ruler of the city is the Commissar himself, Igor Urnst. The City Watch operates under his direct command from Dalenguard, a historic fortress that still stands in Oldtown. Urnst's group of advisors in charge of the city's defense and protection.

THE AUTHORITIES AND THE LAW

To police the streets, the Commissar of the city commands a force of more than eight hundred troops and City Watch guards, including a few dozen elite individuals (captains, mages, clerics, etc.) They are experienced and well equipped, particularly those known as the Commissar's Men

Nevertheless, this well-trained and well-paid force has its hands full maintaining order in the city. Helping to enforce the law is a special order of monks called the Sisterhood of Silence. These nonspeaking female monks patrol the streets and apprehend criminals, even though they are not—strictly speaking—sanctioned to do so officially. A male eunuch always accompanies a small unit of the Sisters of Silence to speak on their behalf.

However, neither the city guard nor the Sisterhood of Silence is willing to go down into the Dungeon and fight monsters. Nor are they likely to help against well-known and influential noble families such as House Vladaam or House Balacazar, or powerful groups like the Church of Lothian. Of course, those groups would never break any laws, so there's surely nothing to worry about. . . .

THE FORCES OF LIGHT

Aside from the law-enforcing authorities, both official and self-appointed, Ptolus benefits from the presence of various forces of munificence. Orders of knighthood like the Keepers of the Veil, Order of the Dawn, and Knights of the Pale uphold such concepts as benevolence and nobility. There are even angelic beings in Ptolus. Paladins and clerics of good deities like Lothian, Gaen, and Navashtrom help Ptolus stand against the darkness as well.

And in Ptolus, the dark is deep.

THE DARK SIDE

Like every city, Ptolus has a dark side. Here, criminal lords command veritable armies of rogues and assassins, and war amongst each other as well as against the law. These criminals deal in extortion, smuggling, gambling, usury, and prostitution. Chief among these criminals are Menon Balacazar, leader of the oldest criminal syndicate in the city, and the newcomer Kevris Killraven. They are bitter enemies. Depraved assassins called the Vai hunt victims for money and to fulfill their own bloodlust.

But worse things lurk in Ptolus than simply criminals. Dwelling among the crypts of the city's graveyard are the death-loving Forsaken, so called because the rest of society finds them so abhorrent. Worse still, chaos cultists—in league with terrible inhuman things—plot the city's downfall and, in fact, the annihilation of the entire world to sate their lust for destruction. Lastly, and strangest of all, Ptolus is home to actual demons from the lower realms: Some are merely demon-blooded tieflings, but others are full-blooded fiends that call themselves the Fallen. These beings dwell alongside the Forsaken in a place called the Dark Reliquary.

DISTRICTS OF THE CITY

Ptolus lies between the Spire and the sea. The highest portion of the city, the Nobles' Quarter,

is built on the base of the Spire. From there, the level of the city drops down a sharp cliff to Oldtown, and then down again into Midtown. The final cliffs at the edge of Ptolus drop into the bay, with the only area of dry land at the bottom of those cliffs occupied by the city's docks. Well-worn paths connect the various elevations and help make Ptolus very defensible (although the city has never been attacked).

The King's River flows through the city, spilling into an eroded chasm in the northwest corner and flowing down to the Bay of Ptolus near the docks.

The Docks

Far below the level of the city's streets, the Docks rest at the bottom of the city's eastern cliffs on a narrow strip of land. A dozen or more ships moor in the deep waters here at any given time. This is a particularly rough area of the city, thanks to the influx of sailors and its isolation from the other districts. A single winding road provides access up a steep incline to the city proper.

The Docks area is full of warehouses, shipyards, hostels, and taverns, all catering to sailors and merchants.

Guildsman District

Ptolus teems with guilds. Every type of artisan, smith, or other professional belongs to a guild of similarly trained and employed individuals. This district in the south end of the city holds many tanneries, smithies, foundries, textile houses, grain mills, paper mills, brickmakers, bookmakers, woodworkers, and other production facilities, as well as warehouses, granaries, coalhouses, stockyards, and similar storage sites. Not surprisingly, this district has a distinct odor.

Midtown

As the central area of the city, Midtown is both a commercial and a residential hub. It is also where one finds many local entertainment

offerings, in the form of pubs and taverns as well as theaters, dance halls, gambling dens, and more. Visitors looking for a place to stay usually find themselves directed here, as most of the temporary lodgings in the city are found in Midtown.

Midtown is home to both Tavern Row and Delver's Square, where many employers seeking to hire adventuring parties can post their announcements. It also has a few shops and plenty of residential areas, such as Emerald Hill, where most elves choose to live.

Some of the Delver's Square shops that adventurers frequent would be Rastor's Weapons, the Bull and Bear armory, Ebbert's Outfitters, and Myraeth's Oddities). The most popular adventurer hangout is the Ghostly Minstrel tavern and inn in Delver's Square.

The Necropolis

A city several centuries old tends to have a large graveyard, and Ptolus is no exception. The vast Necropolis in the city's northeastern corner sits on a few rolling hills, now completely covered with mausoleums, crypts, and graves. The entire Necropolis is surrounded by a wall, with guards posted at each of its four gates. These guards' primary duty is to warn people not to stay in the Necropolis after nightfall and to watch for grave robbers. Most people know that undead roam the Necropolis, but various churches and holy orders, such as the Keepers of the Veil, do their best to contain the menace.

Nobles' Quarter

Ptolus has no shortage of wealth or wealthy people. Technically outside the city's walls, the Nobles' Quarter, with its row upon row of manors and estates, climbs the city's western cliffs abutting the Spire itself. Travelers can enter the area only via a single avenue up from Oldtown that runs through the old fortress of Dalenguard before reaching the Nobles' Quarter.

The largest estates in this section of town belong to the ten noble families that have held

power in the area—to one degree or another—for centuries. In addition to the homes of the wealthy and the services that cater to them, this district houses the Holy Palace, where the Prince of the Church lives. The Nobles' Quarter holds the Crown Theater opera house, the Imperial Academy of Music, fabulous eating establishments, a floating apartment building, and other luxuries and sites of interest.

North Market

When one enters the city from the north, one is greeted with the sights and smells of a busy marketplace. Vendors occupy wooden booths, pushing carts, or simply hawking wares they tote in massive baskets on their backs. Other goods are for sale in small shops, tents, or from the backs of wagons. The City Watch patrols this busy area to keep thieves and pickpockets from running rampant.

Oldtown

Ptolus was founded three centuries ago as a small community surrounding a fortress called Dalenguard. Over time, the community grew into an important port, and the need for Dalenguard as a wilderness bastion waned. Today the old fortress is still used by the Imperial-appointed ruler of the city, the Commissar, and the area surrounding it on the city's near west side is known as Oldtown. It sits atop a ridge higher than most of the rest of Ptolus, but still lower than the Nobles' Quarter.

The stone and marble buildings of Oldtown reflect a grander, earlier age. Graceful columns, majestic entrances, tall stone towers, and buildings of three or even four stories are common sights here. Today many of these buildings house the bureaucracy the Empire forces upon the city. There are wonderful theaters, auditoriums, and even a grand Arena in this large district of the city.

The City Courts are located here, and as are the City Council's meeting chambers. Both the

Delver's Guild Library and Maproom (but not the guild's main office) and the City Library are here.

Rivergate District

Strictly a residential area, the Rivergate District is as close to a "middle class" neighborhood as Ptolus gets. Its residential cul-de-sacs—called "burrows" by those who live here—each boasts its own unique architectural identity.

South Market

To locals, the North Market is simply "the Market," while this area is the "South Market." Unlike its counterpart, the South Market is not an open-air marketplace. It has fewer vendors dealing out of carts and more established shops and places of business. Goods usually cost more in the South Market, but a buyer is far more likely to find trustworthy and reliable salespeople here. You're more likely to get something made to order, custom, or to fit a special physical need in the South Market.

Temple District

Although the worship of Lothian, the official Imperial deity, is the dominant religion of the city, Ptolus' cosmopolitan residents revere hundreds of other gods as well.

Temples, churches, shrines, and small monasteries fill this district in the north central part of town, with the Street of a Million Gods (a bit of an exaggeration) running through it all. The Temple District has a single bar, Taggert's, which is also a temple to Ollom, god of the keg.

The Warrens

The Warrens in the eastern part of town is a terrible slum sick with poverty and crime. Rumors say that the City Watch won't go down into the Warrens. The streets here have no names, and most of the buildings aren't marked—the place is not friendly to outsiders. Some visitors may have experienced a little theft or crime in the city, but it's nothing

compared to what goes on in this district. Some place the headquarters of the Vai within the Warrens. Others whisper of a gang of young thieves called the Pale Dogs who really run the place.

NOBLE HOUSES

Ptolus has ten noble families, all of whom enjoy special status by ancestral right. They have seats on the city council and great influence.

Abanar: A mercantile house, Abanar is very wealthy but not well regarded. Dered Abanar is the very old head of the house. There is much controversy now among his many children as to who will take control when he is gone.

Dallimothan: Often called “House Dragon,” the members of this house are primarily dragonborn. They are a powerful and wealthy force in the city.

Erthuo: Scholars and gentlefolk, They avoid confrontation and rarely gets involved in squabbles between other houses. A family of elves and half-elves belong to this house, headed by Peliopo Erthuo, a half-elf.

Kath: A wealthy house, Kath is known for its talented, glamorous, attractive family, which patronizes the arts.

Khatru: Famous for its military leadership and martial prowess, House Khatru is made up of arrogant boors and self-righteous warriors.

Nagel: This old, charitable, and altruistic house has recently fallen on hard times.

Rau: Foes of House Khatru, the Rau have a reputation as rogues, pirates, and scalawags. The house has a fair number of spellcasters as well. The head of the house is Verrana Rau.

Sadar: Known for its long line of mages, this house—which some call the House of Shadows—is quite powerful. Its leader, Lord Renn Sadar, has a strong association with the

Inverted Pyramid arcanists’ guild and shadow magic.

Shever: Known for its skill with machines, House Shever made a great deal of gold long ago.

Vladaam: An evil house, and very ancient, House Vladaam seems to have lost much of its power and influence in recent times. Iristul Vladaam is the current master of the house, although he has not actually been seen in the city for years. Most people whisper that demonic blood runs through the family’s veins.

ORGANIZATIONS

Ptolus teems with various factions that all have their own agendas and goals. In brief, these include (but are not limited to):

Balacazar Crime Family

Probably the most powerful crime family in the city, the Balacazars are certainly the oldest. Menon Balacazar is the aging head of the organization, with his son, Malkeen, serving as his second in command.

The family funds a number of criminal endeavors, gaining profit from theft, extortion, smuggling, illegal gambling, assassination, and trade in slaves, drugs, and evil magic items.

Brotherhood of Redemption

An order of monks who believe that no evil is irredeemable, the Brotherhood of Redemption seeks to give any evil creature a chance to repent. They make it known that they willingly accept any prisoners who are not of the major races—in fact, they’ll pay a small for evil creatures with a modicum of intelligence, who they then convert.

Delver’s Guild

For the last five years, the Delver’s Guild has

grown in influence, becoming both popular to join and wealthy. The Delver's Guild offers its members information about job opportunities and events pertaining to the exploration of regions below Ptolus. The guild also maintains the city's most extensive collection of maps of the underground realm and an impressive library for research.

Dreaming Apothecary

Those in the know claim that a secretive group of spellcasters crafts magic items for people, making transactions with them magically in their dreams. Darker rumors accuse these powerful mages of keeping others in the city from making magic items for profit by coercion, backed up by their formidable magical might. Potential customers can reach the group at Danbury's in Delver's Square.

The Fallen

To most, they are only a rumor or myth, but some claim to know of "young demons," living in the Necropolis, though few people care to dwell long on the question of who the "old" demons might be. If they exist, they must surely be allied with the Forsaken.

Fate Weavers

The Fate Weavers are a small group of prophets and seers who claim the ability to tell people's fortunes. Locals consider the group a front for prostitution.

The Forsaken

Those who value death and undeath more than life are called the Forsaken. Necrophiles, necrophages, and necrophiliacs, these disgusting people worship dark gods and consort openly with the undead. They base their activities in the Necropolis.

Inverted Pyramid

The Inverted Pyramid is a mysterious and ancient guild of arcanists. Their membership

roll remains shrouded in mystery, but it most likely includes the most powerful mages in Ptolus—and probably the world. For years they have wielded considerable influence in the city. Their headquarters is said to lie somewhere hidden from normal sight by powerful spells.

The Inverted Pyramid concerns itself with preserving magical lore and all things arcane from those it believes would eradicate such knowledge.

Keepers of the Veil

The Keepers of the Veil is an order of holy knights dedicated to the destruction of undead.

Killraven Crime League

A recent arrival in the city, but now the second most powerful criminal organization in Ptolus. The league deals in extortion, prostitution, and illegal drugs. A number of non-humans work for Killraven—troglydites, ogres, and many other creatures.

Knights of the Golden Cross

An ancient order, the Knights of the Golden Cross, has remained alive through the extreme devotion of its members and their descendants. They worship the mostly-forgotten Elder Gods and try to re-introduce that pantheon to society. They oppose evil in all its forms, although they have a particular hatred for the wicked House Vladaam.

Knights of the Pale

The Knights of the Pale are a small order dedicated to combating supernatural threats, particularly demons and spellcasters. Although not an official organization of the Church of Lothian, they focus their whole organization on the veneration of Lothianite saints. The knights work with the Keepers of the Veil.

Longfingers Guild

This thieves' guild has enjoyed a long tradition

in the city, but many say its day has passed in light of the growing power of other, broader criminal organizations. Its headquarters is said to lie deep below the city.

Pale Dogs

A gang of young thieves based in the Warrens, the Pale Dogs paint their fingernails black and often wear double rings. They may have connections to the Balacazars or the Vai.

The Shuul

Once a simple organization created to uphold the concept of order, the Shuul has grown over the years into a powerful force attempting to restore the prominence of technological devices such as clockwork devices and steam technology in the city.

Sisterhood of Silence

An all-female order of monks dedicated to law and defense. As their name suggests, the Sisters of Silence do not speak. Instead, they employ a cadre of devout eunuchs to speak for them.

The Vai

The Vai is a wicked assassins' guild in Ptolus. Each member takes an oath to kill an intelligent creature every day. They are tied to almost every evil organization in the city in some way.

RELIGION

In Ptolus, there is one religion and there are many. While the Church of Lothian remains the official religion of the Empire, tied closely to every aspect of Imperial government, many other far smaller and less popular religions exist as well. These faiths worship gods like Celestan, the moon god, Melann, goddess of farming, the chaotic neutral Fifty-Three Gods of Chance, deities of chaos and randomness; Gaen, Goddess of Light, a popular lawful good deity; Tevra, the clockwork goddess, Asche, god of

cities. There are many more, too many to list; nearly any esoteric faith can find at least a small presence in Ptolus.

The Church of Lothian

As the most prominent (and officially sanctioned) church, the Church of Lothian remains involved in day-to-day government administration and the making (and sometimes enforcing) of laws. Lothian's priests serve as judges and officials in the government. The Emperor of the Church makes currently makes his home in the city.

The core of Lothianism is the belief that Lothian, a mortal, rose to godhood. He is considered the lawful good god of justice and purity.

For more than a century, his followers believed him the only god and persecuted other faiths, though that edict has been repealed.

THE EMPIRE TODAY

The Empire teeters on the brink of disintegration. Barbarians make incursions on the borders, and three different people claim the throne: (1) the secular cousin of the previous emperor who died with no heirs, (2) the powerful and aged councilor to the previous emperors, and (3) the head of the Church of Lothian, who now resides in Ptolus.

Not all are concerned with the Empire's demise, and in Ptolus, long independent, many might view life after the Empire with a hope for better times ahead.