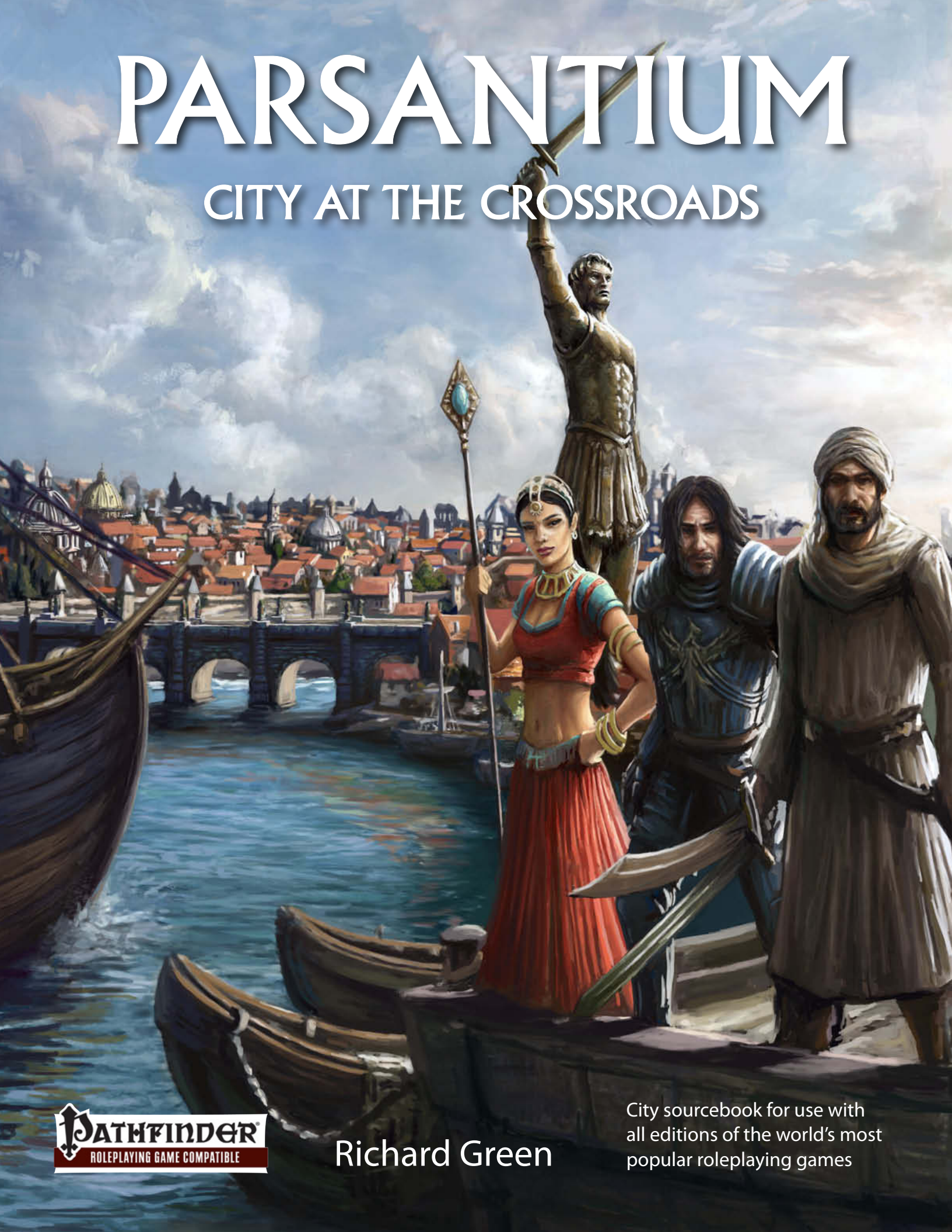


# PARSANTIUM

CITY AT THE CROSSROADS



**Pathfinder**  
ROLEPLAYING GAME COMPATIBLE

Richard Green

City sourcebook for use with  
all editions of the world's most  
popular roleplaying games



# PARSANTIUM

CITY AT THE CROSSROADS

Richard Green





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# Introduction



**Parsantium: City at the Crossroads** is a sourcebook for use with all editions of the world's most popular fantasy roleplaying games. Parsantium is a melting pot, a cosmopolitan place where trade routes meet and where great cultures collide. Inspired by Byzantium with its rich Greco-Roman heritage, it also incorporates characters, monsters and magic from the Tales of the Arabian Nights, ancient India and the Far East, alongside more traditional European fantasy elements. In Parsantium you'll find evil cults, scheming politicians and nobles, rakshasas and serpentfolk, ancient dungeons beneath the city streets, and powerful criminal gangs, not to mention gladiators and chariot racing. In fact, Parsantium (and this book) contain enough adventure hooks, patrons and adversaries to keep most adventuring parties busy throughout their careers without ever having to venture outside the city walls.

Back in late 2007, Parsantium was born as a backdrop for my own ongoing fantasy campaigns, a crossroads city bringing together my two favourite types of setting. I've always loved running games in great fantasy RPG cities such as Greyhawk, Waterdeep, Freeport and Ptolus; and I've also been a long-time fan of exotic settings, from AD&D Oriental Adventures through to Al-Qadim and more recently Rokugan. Real-world Byzantium seemed like a good starting model, since the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire lay at the meeting point of two continents, but I also wanted to incorporate Arabian, Indian and Chinese elements, so I came up with a very different history and a world map that brought my version of India much closer to the newly named city of Parsantium. Finally, much of the city's detail has come from my own travels over the years, with sights, sounds, even smells inspired by trips to India, Morocco, Egypt, Spain, and, of course, Istanbul, as well as a great exhibition on Byzantine art right here in London.

Parsantium continued to develop throughout 2008 and the first game took place there that November, a murder mystery set in the boat town of Flotsam. It was designed to be a dynamic setting, where my two groups of players could be involved in entirely different adventures simultaneously, building a living history that has continued to grow over time. In 2009, I had some RPG material published by Wolfgang Baur through Open Design, then two years later, I wrote half of the *Midgard Bestiary for 4th Edition* and had a number of shorter products published by Raging Swan Press. This work as an RPG freelancer gave me the idea of publishing my Parsantium setting as a city sourcebook. More than a year later, what was intended as a slim sourcebook of around 40,000 words has ended up more than twice that size. During the process of writing, the feedback I received via my blog [parsantium.com](http://parsantium.com) and on the various RPG forums has helped refine what you are reading now.

This sourcebook is intended to be edition-neutral, notwithstanding the Pathfinder compatibility logo on the cover. There are very few stats in the book and those that do exist are intended to give an idea of the relative difference in power levels between, say, Sergeant Saurish of the City Watch (LG male human fighter 4) and Tapasranjan, Grand Master of the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus (LG male vanara sorcerer 19). It should



be easy for the GM to change the levels of the NPCs to match a chosen game system or PC party strength. Parsantium is also designed to be slotted into an existing campaign: while the city has several important trading partners, the wider world is not defined, to make it as easy as possible for the GM to incorporate Parsantium into their own world or a published setting.

Although the book is packed with adventure hooks and secrets, the first chapter, *City at the Crossroads*, is player-friendly, and I would recommend sharing it with your group before starting a Parsantium campaign. As well as a handy overview of the city and its history, this chapter contains useful guidance on which character races and backgrounds are a good fit with the setting. The rest of the book is aimed at the GM, beginning with an overview of life in the city, covering government and politics, law and order, and social customs, before moving on to a chapter on running a Parsantium campaign. The bulk of the book is then given over to the extensive Gazetteer, which describes numerous city locations, along with associated NPCs and adventure hooks, before wrapping up with chapters on the power groups operating in the city, and finally the gods worshipped by its inhabitants.

I hope you enjoy this book and have as much fun running adventures in Parsantium as I have over the last five or so years. I'm still GMing campaigns set in the city and developing it further, so you can expect ongoing support and discussion at [parsantium.com](http://parsantium.com). I'd love to hear about any games you run in the city and also what kind of adventures or other supplements you might want to see for the setting. You can email me at [parsantium@gmail.com](mailto:parsantium@gmail.com), contact me at [parsantium.com](http://parsantium.com) or via Twitter at [@richgreen01](https://twitter.com/richgreen01).

Good gaming!

Richard Green  
January 2014, London





**CIVIC WARD**

1. Royal Exchequer
2. Mint
3. Silver Salver
4. Watchhouse
5. Holy Basilica of Helion
6. Hippodrome
7. Curia
8. Courthouse
9. Ivory Towers
10. Library of All Knowledge
11. Imperial Museum of Antiquities
12. Rambunctious Ferret Tavern
13. Three Ewers Tavern
14. Bookbinders' Guildhall

**VICTORY WARD**

1. Victory Gate
2. Forum of Heraclius
3. White Swan Inn
4. Old Lantern

**GRAND WARD**

5. Shining Goblet
  6. Dinejan's Deliveries
  7. Stone Cyclops
  8. Fireball Club
  9. Glowing Orb
  10. Musty Tome Tavern
  11. Jewellers' Guildhall
  12. Watchhouse
- GRAND WARD**
1. West Gate
  2. Forum of Corandias
  3. Forum of Clementina
  4. Cedar Park
  5. Shrine to Zana
  6. Celestial Bastion
  7. Watchhouse
  8. House Marfisi
  9. House Ziper
  10. House Scipio
  11. Healing Hall
  12. Crusading Brothers of the Sword

**HARBOUR WARD**

1. Dwarven Forum
2. House of Forge & Hearth
3. Bladesmiths' Guildhall
4. Metalworkers' Guildhall
5. Royal Docks
6. Wavecrest Hall
7. Sea Serpent's Kiss
8. Watchhouse
9. Shipwrights' Guildhall

**PALACE WARD**

1. North Gate
2. Forum of the Gorgon
3. House Fonte
4. House Pavone
5. House Megaris
6. House Tzittas
7. House Laro
8. Great Palace
9. Watchhouse
10. Bodyguards' Guildhall
11. Garrison

**DOCK WARD**





# PARSANTIUM

## MERCANTILE QUARTER

- |                         |                               |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Souk of Useful Items | 7. Curio Cabinet              |
| 2. Colossus             | 8. Watchhouse                 |
| 3. Theatre of Cytherea  | 9. Merchants' Guildhall       |
| 4. Tribune's Office     | 10. Church of the Silver Lyre |
| 5. Thirsty Camel Inn    | 11. Counting House            |
| 6. Unlucky Lamb         | 12. Dinejan's Deliveries      |

## ARTISANS WARD

- White Palm Tavern
- Taverners' Guildhall
- Vintners & Brewers Guild
- Plumbers' Guildhall
- Carpenters' Guildhall
- Masonic Hall
- Blue House
- Hippocampus Baths
- Tailors' Guildhall
- Fonduq of Heavenly Fabrics
- Glowing Orb
- Fonduq of the Nightingale's Song
- Marjani Minar
- Harpers' Guildhall
- Drake's Rest
- Watchhouse
- Coopers' Guildhall
- Glassblowers' Guildhall
- Locksmiths' Guildhall
- Physics' Hall
- Chariot Shrine

## CARAVANS WARD

- Camel Gate
- Seven Jugs Caravansera
- Three Palms
- Temple of Puchan
- Fellowship of Venturers Bold
- Watchhouse
- Ostlers' Guildhall
- Dinejan's Deliveries

## DOCK WARD

- Flotsam
- St. Carinus' Redemption
- Orloch's HQ
- Mandira of Solace
- Watchhouse
- Black Dolphin's Wake
- Old Fishery
- Fish Market
- Bilal's Blades
- Old Docks

## GARDEN WARD

- Garden Mausoleum of Hulieman
- Observatory
- Old Palace of the Sultan
- Watchhouse
- House Kapali
- House Qasim

## POOR WARD

- Winking Vixen
- Floating Palace
- Fallen Angel
- Crescent Moon Brewery
- Red Wheel
- Prison
- Chandlers' Guildhall
- Leatherworkers' Guildhall
- Salters' Guildhall
- Watchhouse
- Farmer's Gate

## TEMPLE WARD

- Golden Mosque of Amur
- Vishnu Mandira
- Temple to the Solar Gods
- Deul of Shadows
- Monkey Temple
- Agni Mandira
- House of Learning
- Wayfarer's Rest
- Watchhouse
- Temple of Qian Lao
- Praying Mantis Dojo
- Lucky Fox Restaurant
- House of Heavenly Peace



## CHAPTER ONE

# City at the Crossroads



## City Overview

---

The Free City of Parsantium stands astride the wide and slow-moving Dolphin Strait at the point where the Griffin Water joins the Corsairs' Sea, and is thus at the crossroads of two continents and, more importantly, five trade routes. Here, the great cultures of the world collide, creating a melting pot of adventure and intrigue. To the east, at the end of the Silk Road, lies the exotic land of Tiangao, while to the southeast, beyond the Pillars of Heaven Mountains, are the ancient Kingdoms of Sampur. Across the Corsairs' Sea to the southwest is the wealthy Caliphate of Aqhran, while the Griffin Water to the northeast is the quickest route to the frozen, starkly beautiful land of Urskovia. Overland to the northwest are the Sunset Lands and the feuding city states of the former Bathuran Empire, still plagued by hordes of rampaging humanoids.

Home to more than 75,000 souls, the bustling city is ruled by its basileus, Corandias XVIII the Lion-Blooded, a direct descendant of the famous Bathuran conqueror and mighty general Corandias I the Magnificent. The Basileus and his beloved consort, Thecia, often referred to by disgruntled citizens under their breath as "the Mendatrix" ("she who speaks lies" in Bathuran), rule over the city proper and the surrounding countryside and farming villages. The day-to-day running of the city is delegated to a Prefect, the coldly efficient and uncharismatic Bardas, who presides over its vast Bureaucracy.

Parsantium is divided into three quarters, one on either side of the Dolphin Strait and a third on the central island; each is governed by a Tribune who reports to the Prefect. Great stone bridges, over 300 yards long, built many centuries ago in the Sampuran style, connect the three separate parts of the city. The fact that the Bathuran rich tend to live on the northern side of the water, while the poor, many of Sampuran or Aqhrani origin, live on the southern side, makes Parsantium a divided city culturally and economically, as well as physically.

The Old Quarter on the southern side of the strait is, as its name suggests, the earliest part of the city, built over the ancient city of Dhak Janjua, which was founded nearly 2,000 years ago by refugees from Sampur fleeing the evil geomancers of Karjan. Here, the streets are narrow, dusty and dark, and often feel claustrophobic as a great press of people, bullock carts, donkeys and camels all vie noisily for right of way. The quarter is a chaotic, cosmopolitan blend of cultures: onion-domed mosques and Aqhrani coffee shops jostle for space with Sampuran temples adorned with painted carvings and with elegant Tiangaon teahouses. Alongside are dojos teaching the martial arts of the mountain temples, fonduqs selling all manner of fine goods and, soaring above everything, is the impossibly tall tower of the mysterious Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus. The Old Quarter is also the location of most of



the poorer districts and slums, including the homes of impoverished Sampurans, half-orcs and gnolls.

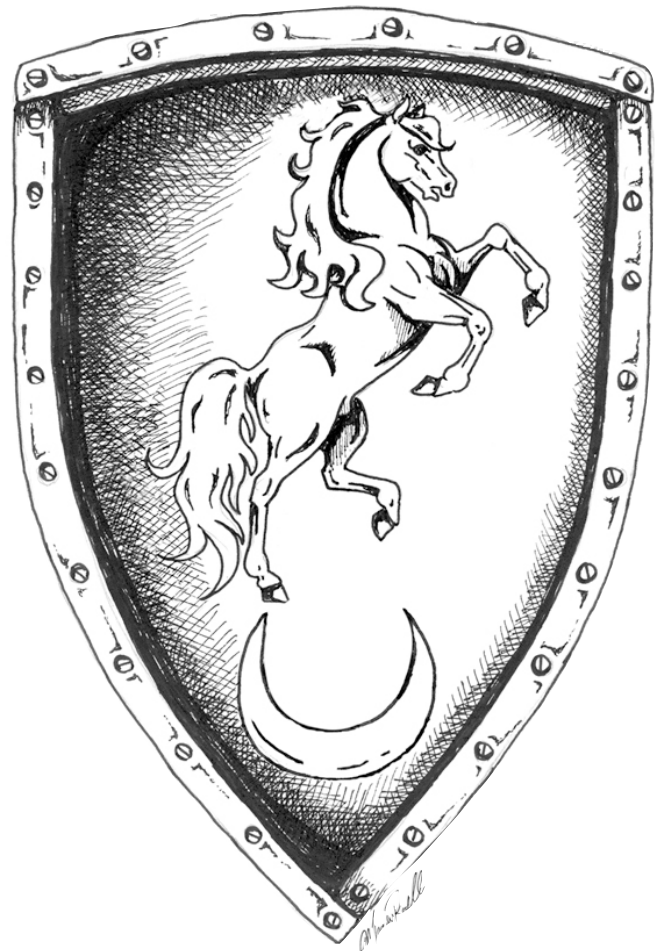
On the north side of the strait, the Imperial Quarter is where you will find the Great Palace of the Basileus, the Holy Basilica of Helion, the Hippodrome and many of Parsantium's other important buildings. It is also home to the wealthy and decadent noble class, many dwarves and dragonkin. Many of the noble families claim to be descended from the Bathuran emperors of old and are buried deep in schemes to increase their already considerable influence and power over Parsantine life. Bathuran architecture dominates the quarter. Glistening white marble buildings often feature columned entrances, surmounted by pediments and friezes decorated with sculptures. Other buildings are crowned with golden domes and sport interiors embellished with beautiful mosaic floors and walls. Tall columns, once topped by bronze statues of emperors and generals, stand at the centre of public forums and at points where the wide avenues meet.

Between the Imperial and Old quarters, occupying the island in the middle of the Dolphin Strait, is the Mercantile Quarter, the world's largest marketplace. Goods arrive in Parsantium from all points of the compass, meaning almost anything can be obtained here as long as the buyer can afford the asking price. A bronze colossus over 200 feet high, depicting Corandias the Magnificent, stands at the centre of the marketplace. This impressive landmark is often used as a meeting point by the locals, so someone might say "I'll see you by the left foot at midday" to his friend. The open-air markets around the Colossus are packed with hundreds of stalls, while snake-charmers, water sellers, tooth-pullers, barbers and musicians wander amongst them, offering their services. Leading off from the market-place in all directions is a maze of narrow alleyways and souks. Aside from the markets, the quarter is also home to the popular Theatre of Cytherea on the southern edge of the island; goods for sale in the souks arrive at jetties on the quarter's western shore.

A fourth, "Hidden Quarter" can be found beneath the city streets. It is composed of the ancient, crumbling ruins of Dhak Janjua below the Old

Quarter, and the cellars, cisterns and tunnels built by later generations on both sides of the Dolphin Strait. Supposedly ruled by a sinister crime lord nicknamed the "Fourth Tribune", the quarter is frequented by criminal gangs, slavers, necromancers and worse, who use the catacombs to conduct their nefarious business away from prying eyes. It is best avoided by all but the boldest adventurers.

Parsantium's climate is one of warm, dry summers and cool, wet winters. The city experiences high humidity, meaning fog is common on autumn and winter mornings. Although precipitation is generally low in the summer, this is when thunderstorms are most likely to occur. Winter snowfall is rare but not unheard of.





## The Free City of Parsantium

Lawful Neutral Metropolis

**Symbol** Leaping horse over a crescent moon, both white against an imperial purple background

**Corruption** +4; **Crime** +3; **Economy** +7; **Law** +4; **Lore** +6; **Society** +2

**Qualities** academic, holy site, magically attuned, notorious, prosperous, strategic, tourist attraction

**Danger** +10 (+20 in the Old Quarter)

### DEMOGRAPHICS

**Government** Overlord

**Population** 76,000 (62,000 humans; 4,000 halflings; 3,500 half-orcs; 3,000 dwarves; 1,000 gnolls; 2,500 others)

### Important Personages

Corandias XVIII the Lion-Blooded, Basileus of Parsantium  
His Radiance Arcadius, Archbishop of Parsantium  
Aurius Kalothese, Tribune of the Imperial Quarter  
Avishandu, "Boss of All Bosses", the "Fourth Tribune"

Bardas, Prefect of Parsantium

Basil Zarides, Tribune of the Mercantile Quarter

Loukas Andronicus, Strategos and Commander-in-Chief of the Parsantine army

Murad al-Rumi, Tribune of the Old Quarter

Tapasranjan, Grand Master of the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus

Thecia, Despoina of Parsantium and wife of the Basileus

Tiberius Goldsmelter, Royal Exchequer

**Major Gods** Helion (patron), Amur, Qian Lao, Vishnu

### MARKETPLACE

**Trade Goods** beer, wine, olives, fine clothing, metal-work, weapons and armour, jewellery, religious icons, rare woods

**Base Value** 33,600 gp; **Purchase Limit** 220,000 gp;

**Spellcasting** 9th

**Minor Items** all available; **Medium Items** 4d4;

**Major Items** 3d4



# History

---

## The Founding of Dhak Janjua

In the distant past, long before the time of the Bathuran Empire, hundreds of refugees fled the Sampuran Kingdom of Karjan and its evil geomancer rulers. Crossing the treacherous passes through the Pillars of Heaven Mountains, they headed northwest through thorn-choked badlands until they arrived at the place where the Dolphin Strait links the Griffin Water to the Corsairs' Sea. Here, on the strait's southeastern shores, they founded the fledgling town of Dhak Janjua that would later become Parsantium.

News reached Karjan that those who had fled had established a place of safety, and the population of the new town was swelled by the arrival of more refugees in the months following. Among this second wave was a young rakshasa named Vrishabha, who had been sent to Dhak Janjua by his fiendish master Nataraj with orders to infiltrate the new city and insinuate himself into a position of power. Vrishabha was both charismatic and devious so this wasn't hard for him, and both his wealth and his influence with the nascent ruling class grew rapidly. Vrishabha soon took control of the burgeoning city as its rajah, aided by powerful servants, including other rakshasas, human sorcerers and warlocks, as well as some infernal allies. By now he had superseded his former master Nataraj in influence and magical power, which granted him independence and advancement to the highest rakshasa caste. Vrishabha's rule over the inhabitants of Dhak Janjua was cruel and tyrannical. He would brook no threats to his absolute authority, outlawing the worship of the goddess Kali, whom he believed to be too popular with the masses, within a few years of becoming rajah.

As rajah, Vrishabha sought to expand the influence of the city, strengthening its trade links with the decadent

pharaohs of the desert kingdom of Khemit and with the barbarian kings of the Sunset Lands to the west. He started a programme of public works to make Dhak Janjua even greater: the huge stone bridges crossing the Dolphin Strait were built during this time, when Vrishabha's power was at its apex.

## A Tyrant Deposed

Three decades after Vrishabha took power, the people of Dhak Janjua, led by the priests and followers of Hanuman the Monkey God, champion of the oppressed, rebelled against him. The revolt was brutally crushed by the rajah's forces, with those directly involved, their families, friends and acquaintances tortured viciously before being put to death. The temples of the Monkey God were razed and his priests rounded up and slaughtered.

However, one young priest, Srivatsa, escaped into the forest outside the city (now known as the Feysshore Forest) and prayed to Hanuman for help. The god sent a messenger in the form of a talking blue-bottomed monkey, who arrived at the priest's camp riding on an enormous white elephant. Wrapped in its trunk the elephant held the means to bring down Vrishabha: a great steel-forged bow that fired holy arrows.

Srivatsa rode into Dhak Janjua astride the elephant, a mount fit to serve the avenger of the god. Unopposed by the guards on the city gate, he was cheered by gathering crowds as he passed through the city streets. Arriving at the palace, the hero fought his way through the rajah's soldiers and sorcerers, before confronting Vrishabha himself in the throne room. Here, Srivatsa shot the rakshasa through the heart with Hanuman's bow, slaying him, and thus saving the city of Dhak Janjua from tyranny and evil.



Srivatsa did not wish to become rajah himself, preferring a life of meditation and religious contemplation, and chose a wise young man named Jagatpal to rule in his stead. For more than six centuries Jagatpal's descendants ruled the city as it continued to grow in size and wealth.

## The Coming of the Aqhrani

Three hundred years or so after the defeat of Vrishabha, traders from the Caliphate of Aqhran to the southwest of Khemit began arriving in Dhak Janjua. The Aqhrani were accomplished sailors and brought exotic goods from across the Corsairs' Sea to trade in the city, returning on ships laden with wine, fine clothing, jewellery, weapons and armour. Many Aqhrani merchants chose to settle in the city, using their considerable wealth to build homes, mosques and fonduqs (two-storey bazaars situated around a courtyard) in what is now the Old Quarter, and establishing their own noble houses.

Nearly four centuries after the arrival of the Aqhrani, in the year 322, the ruling rajah, a young man named Prandeep, fell from his horse and died without leaving an heir. The heads of the noble houses met in council to decide who should succeed him and to the surprise of many almost unanimously selected an Aqhrani merchant, Ishaq al-Tayyib, as ruler. Obscenely wealthy, Ishaq had secured the throne for himself with a number of hefty bribes. He took the Aqhrani title of sultan instead of rajah, and changed the name of the city to Parsantium – after his ancestral home in the Caliphate – upon his accession.

By the time Ishaq became sultan he was already in his late fifties, so he wasn't on the throne long, dying from a wasting disease after just two years in power. His son Hulieman succeeded him, becoming one of the greatest rulers in Parsantium's entire 2,000-year history. An intellectual and a clever politician, shortly after becoming sultan, Hulieman married a charming Sampuran girl named Nivedita from the influential Kapali family, winning over much of the Sampuran population at a stroke. He then started on

a major programme of public works, the biggest since the days of Vrishabha, building a great observatory, a resplendent park, and most importantly, a system of sewers and cisterns to provide adequate sanitation and fresh water supplies for what was becoming a very crowded city. When Hulieman died after 30 glorious years on the throne, during which the city prospered greatly, his body was buried alongside his wife's in a grand mausoleum of sandstone and marble overlooking the waters of the Dolphin Strait and surrounded by beautiful gardens.

## Conquered by the Bathurans

Parsantium had traded with the Sunset Lands to the west for many centuries, and with the kingdom of Bathura since its founding. While Parsantium thrived under the rule of Hulieman and his descendants, the power of Bathura had been increasing steadily as successive emperors sought to expand the boundaries of the empire. In the year 685, the great emperor and general Corandias the Magnificent turned his attention to Parsantium and marched his mighty legions east to conquer the wealthy and fast-growing city.

As the enemy approached, Yazid al-Kabir, proud Sultan of Parsantium, ignored the advice of his generals and ordered his army out of the city to face Corandias's forces on the northern banks of the Dolphin Strait. Here, they were trounced by the superior Bathuran legions and forced to withdraw. Having been pushed back to the water, the retreat soon turned into a rout, with many soldiers falling into the Strait and drowning as they tried to get across the stone bridges into the city. To make matters worse, the Bathuran navy then outmanoeuvred the Parsantine ships and landed reinforcements behind enemy lines. With no escape route available, the Parsantine army surrendered, and Corandias rode across Srivatsa's Bridge and into the city. The victorious general named himself Basileus of Parsantium and gave orders for the sultan to be blinded and sent into exile.



Now part of the Bathuran Empire, Parsantium cemented its position as the most powerful city and trading hub at the eastern end of the Corsairs' Sea. Another period of building followed, this time on the northern side of the Strait, as what would become the Imperial Quarter took shape. As well as a new Great Palace, work commenced on the magnificent Holy Basilica of Helion and the Hippodrome. Corandias's continued presence in Parsantium, in preference to the imperial capital Rezana, encouraged many Bathuran noble families to move here and build luxurious estates in the city.

From his new base in Parsantium, Corandias continued to pursue his dreams of conquest beyond the boundaries of the known world. The deserts to the south deterred him from marching his legions into Khemit, so instead he moved east into the Great Grass Sea – against the advice of his vizier Marcus Servius – in search of the fabled kingdom of Tiangao. This proved to be a fatal error. The region's demon-worshipping gnoll packs and nomadic clans of striped centaurs harried the Bathurans with lightning-fast raids as they crossed the steppes, wearing them down, and refusing to fight fairly. Eventually Corandias got the battle he wanted: the centaur clans gathered under the leadership of the Khan of Khans, leading to a fiercely fought engagement in which the Basileus was mortally wounded by an arrow and his forces routed.

## The Empire Collapses

On Corandias's death, the Bathuran Empire was divided up by his opportunistic generals, since the Basileus's son and heir was only three years old. Parsantium and the eastern Empire went to a grizzled general named Maurianus, who became the new Basileus. In the years that followed, repeated infighting between the successors of Corandias weakened both Parsantium and Rezana, constant warfare preventing the all-important flow of trade from flourishing. The fighting came to an end in 788, but by then the military power of both cities had been diminished.

Repeated invasions by orcs, hobgoblins and gnolls followed over the next half-dozen centuries, leading to the slow, inexorable collapse of the remnants of the Bathuran Empire. Assassinations were commonplace, and more than one basileus was deposed and sent into exile with his nose cut off or his eyes put out. The western capital Rezana was sacked by orcs in 1122, and Parsantium itself was attacked several times during the latter part of this period, before its ultimate capture by the hobgoblin "king" Kalgroth Ironheart in 1443. Kalgroth ruled the city with a mailed fist, subjugating Bathurans, Aqhrani and Sampurans alike, plundering gold from the temples and mosques, and melting down the bronze sculptures that stood atop columns and buildings throughout the Imperial Quarter.

## The Great Crusade to the Present

Kalgroth Ironheart held Parsantium for three and a half years before the city was recaptured by Corandias the Stubborn in the Great Crusade of 1447. This Corandias, a descendant of Corandias the Magnificent, was determined to take back the city from the "infidels". Winning support from the city states of the Sunset Lands and knightly orders such as the Platinum Knights of Themicia and the Crusading Brothers of the Sword, as well as the Tsar of Urskovia, Corandias marched his great army east and freed the city from hobgoblin rule. His victory was aided by the defection of a gnoll warband which, fed up with the constraints of hobgoblin discipline, allowed themselves to be won over by the offer of better pay, and by the well-timed rebellion of downtrodden slaves inside the city, which began as the crusaders' siege towers attacked the walls.

Crowned Basileus Corandias XVI of the Free City of Parsantium, the new ruler set about building stronger city walls, 60 feet high and 20 feet thick, to make sure the city would not fall so easily to humanoid invaders in the future. He granted the knightly orders permission to build chapter houses in the Imperial Quarter, so they could be called upon to defend the city; he allowed the gnolls to join the Parsantine army and invited the Urskovians to stay on as the Axe-Bearing Guard,



responsible for the Basileus's personal safety. Much to the consternation of the noble families, Corandias also freed the city's slaves in recognition of their bravery, declaring "henceforth no man of Parsantium will own a slave". With the city itself secure, Corandias conducted frequent raids into the surrounding countryside, pushing back the orcs, hobgoblins and feral gnolls so that the farming villages Parsantium relied on to provide it with food would remain safe. These efforts were aided by the elves of the Feyshore Forest, who hated the humanoids even more than the Parsantines.

Corandias the Stubborn died in 1460 and was succeeded by his son Florian IV, whose own short-

lived reign came to an end at the hands of his treacherous cousin Tiberius three years later. Trade was growing again and increased considerably when a route – the Silk Road – opened up with the exotic land of Tiangao to the east. Another wave of immigrants followed, settling in the Old Quarter in a former Sampuran neighbourhood that quickly became known as Tiangao Town, adding to the multicultural feel of the city.

The current basileus, Corandias XVIII the Lion-Blooded, took the throne ten years ago, after his elder brother, the Basileus Iosephus II, lost his life in a tragic hunting accident.

## Timeline

<b>c.–400</b>	Dhak Janjua founded by refugees fleeing the Kingdom of Karjan	<b>1052</b>	Florian I builds the Theatre of Cytherea
<b>–395</b>	Tyrannical rule of Rajah Vrishabha begins	<b>1122</b>	Rezana sacked by orcish armies
<b>–391</b>	Worship of Kali outlawed	<b>1443</b>	Kalgroth Ironheart and his hobgoblin armies seize and sack Parsantium
<b>–370</b>	Great bridges built across the Dolphin Strait to link Dhak Janjua with the northern shore	<b>1447</b>	Corandias XVI the Stubborn recaptures Parsantium in the Great Crusade and is crowned Basileus
<b>–364</b>	Failed rebellion against Vrishabha led by priests of Hanuman	<b>1451</b>	Completion of the new city walls
<b>–362</b>	Vrishabha defeated by Srivatsa	<b>1460</b>	Death of Corandias the Stubborn; Florian IV becomes Basileus
<b>c.–50</b>	Aqhrani traders arrive and start to settle in the city	<b>1463</b>	Tiberius III poisons Florian IV and seizes the imperial throne
<b>0</b>	Founding of Rezana	<b>1477</b>	First traders arrive from Tiangao along the Silk Road
<b>213</b>	Iovinus crowned King of Bathura. Bathuran expansion begins.	<b>1516</b>	Corandias XVII orders the construction of the Royal Docks in the Harbour Ward
<b>322</b>	Ishaq al-Tayyib becomes the first Aqhrani sultan of the city and changes its name to Parsantium	<b>1533</b>	Corandias the Lion-Blooded, younger brother of Iosephus II, marries Thecia of House Asterius
<b>324</b>	Hulieman becomes sultan	<b>1535</b>	Death of Iosephus II; Corandias XVIII the Lion-Blooded becomes Basileus
<b>355</b>	Death of Hulieman	<b>1542</b>	Rioting in the Hippodrome on the third day of the Victory Festival
<b>685</b>	Corandias the Magnificent conquers Parsantium	<b>1544</b>	Iancu Petronas wins the Winter Festivities of Cytherea
<b>694</b>	Consecration of the Holy Basilica of Helion in the middle of the new Imperial Quarter	<b>1545</b>	Current Year
<b>696</b>	The Colossus is built at the centre of the Mercantile Quarter's great marketplace		
<b>707</b>	Death of Corandias the Magnificent in battle		
<b>707–788</b>	Wars of the Successors		





# Character Races

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Thanks to its colourful history, Parsantium has an incredibly diverse population. Although the majority of the inhabitants are human, they come from all over the known world, with four major cultures predominating. Plenty of non-humans, of all types, live in the city too, making up nearly a fifth of the population. Parsantium's unique position at the junction of so many trade routes regularly brings folk from both more common and rarely seen races through its gates in search of employment and riches. As long as they have money to spend, or useful skills, they are rarely turned away, making virtually every PC race a viable option. The races most commonly encountered in Parsantium, both human and non-human, are listed below. For information on Parsantine religions, see page 151; for more on the organizations mentioned in this section, see page 126.

## Humans

Human inhabitants of Parsantium are typically Bathuran, Aqhrani, Sampuran or Tiangaon in origin. There are also a significant number of Urskovians, mainly current or past members of the Axe-Bearing Guard, who are often joined by their families once they retire from active service.

**Bathurans** originally come from Bathura itself or its former Empire in the Sunset Lands to the northwest of Parsantium. They are white- or olive-skinned, with a wide range of hair colours and blue, brown or green eyes. While some Bathurans can trace their ancestry back to the noble families of the Bathuran peninsula, others are the descendants of merchants and common folk. Whatever their station in life, they are a passionate people, proud of their heritage, and can come across as arrogant, particularly to the Aqhrani and Sampurans

of the Old Quarter, who they have a tendency to look down on. They speak Bathuran, the official language of Parsantium and the closest thing there is to a common tongue.

The **Aqhrani** are a noble people originally from the deserts of the Caliphate of Aqhran to the southwest of Parsantium, and mostly live in the city's Old and Mercantile quarters. They have light brown to mahogany skin, dark hair and brown eyes, and the men typically wear beards. Honour, family, hospitality, respect for authority, and the six tenets of faith taught by their one true god Amur (see page 164) govern their way of life. The Aqhrani are superb merchants, sailors and craftsmen, and have a fine storytelling tradition. Their native language is Aqhrani but most also speak Bathuran and Sampuran.

The city's **Sampurans** are descended from the original founders of Dhak Janjua, who fled from their homeland in the southeast nearly 2,000 years ago, and live almost exclusively in the Old Quarter. They have light to dark brown skin, black hair and almond-shaped brown or black eyes. Sampurans adhere to a strict caste system which defines each individual's place in society and the kind of occupations available to them. The four castes are brahmin (the highest and most spiritual), kshatriya (warriors), vaisya (traders and farmers) and shudra (labourers and craftsmen). It is hard, but not impossible, for someone to advance in caste in their lifetime – more likely, they will be reborn into a higher caste after death if they have led a good life and followed their dharma (see page 158). Sampurans worship a bewildering multitude of deities and speak their own language. The well-educated also speak Bathuran and Aqhrani.

The fourth largest cultural group is the **Tiangaons**. Comparatively recent arrivals, they have light-coloured skin, almond-shaped brown, amber or green eyes, and



dark brown, black or silvery white hair (even among the young). Tiangaons come across as quiet, polite and very formal to outsiders; poor manners and causing embarrassment to others, particularly someone of a higher social class, is considered shameful. The family clan is at the centre of their world, including grandparents, married children and grandchildren, but other social connections can be almost as significant: two childhood friends are obliged to do favours for each other when they become adults, for example.

Tiangaons miss their homeland and cherish art, music and literature that evokes memories of their

fatherland. They believe that people should live in harmony with the natural order of things, so even in crowded Tiangao Town the inhabitants have planted as many trees, shrubs and flowers as can be squeezed in. Tiangaons worship a large pantheon of gods and speak their own language, called Tian; many also speak at least some Bathuran.

The **Urskovians** hail from the frozen tundra and cold forests to the north of the Griffin Water. Typically tall in stature, blond and pale-skinned with blue or grey eyes, they are outstanding warriors, fierce in battle. There has long been a tradition that young Urskovians would come south to serve as mercenaries in the Parsantine army, but the biggest influx happened 100 years ago at the time of the Great Crusade, when Tsar Vladin sent 2,000 Urskovian troops to help Corandias the Stubborn take back the city. Many stayed on to serve as members of the Axe-Bearing Guard, swearing an oath to protect the Basileus, and there are nearly a thousand Urskovians living in the city to this day. While those in the Guard live a soldier's life in the Great Palace, others who have retired from service are often employed as mercenaries or bodyguards by nobles and merchants, and live with their families who have moved south to join them. Urskovians enjoy drinking, feasting, singing and wenching, but love fighting best of all. They worship the same deities as the Bathurans, favouring Martek, and speak both their own language, Urskovian, and Bathuran.

## Dragonkin

Thousands of years ago the dragonkin (or drakken, as they call themselves) existed to serve their masters, the dragons, rulers of a mighty empire far to the south of Parsantium, now long since collapsed. There was a great diaspora, scattering the dragonkin across the known world as they fled from the terrible fighting between rival dragons. In Parsantium today,





dragonkin paladins serve in the Platinum Knights of Themicia, while others of their race are wizards and sorcerers (nicknamed “wyrmkín” by those wary of their power) and may belong to the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus. Many more, however, are jewellers, gemcutters, smiths or minters; several shops in the Victory Ward specialize in dragonkin-made fine jewellery.

Dragonkin form clans to affirm their shared heritage and sense of history, each based around a common ancestor dating back to the time of the Draconic Empire. Genuine kinship is not necessary; a prospective member can merely acknowledge the ancestor as his and swear an oath in order to join the clan. Many of Parsantium’s dragonkin are members of the Shimmerscale Clan and live close by each other in the same residential district near the Victory Gate in the Imperial Quarter. Dragonkin often worship the Bathuran goddess Themicia, who has an affinity with dragons, or the Sampuran god of artifice, Tvashtri.

## Dwarves

Parsantium’s dwarves can be found throughout the city, having migrated here centuries ago from their holds in the Forgesmoke Mountains to the west. Many work as craftsmen, smiths and brewers, running businesses in the dwarven district in the Imperial Quarter’s Harbour Ward and selling what they’ve made in the Dwarven Forum. Some sign on with the City Watch or are employed as bodyguards, and there are also a small number of Urskovian dwarves serving in the Axe-Bearing Guard. Others still are lured by their natural love of gold into various jobs connected with the finances of the city: the Royal Exchequer is a dwarf, as is the Warden of the Mint, and prominent dwarven citizens run banks, issue letters of credit, and lend or change money in the Civic Ward’s bustling financial district. Dwarves often worship the Bathuran deities Dorna, Martek and Voltan.

## Elves

Both wood elves and high elves are uncommon in Parsantium, despite the nearby Feysshore Forest being home to the two races. Most elves just don’t like big, noisy, dirty human cities, and that’s exactly what Parsantium is. Having said that, elven wizards often seek membership in the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus to study in its impressive library and advance their own magical knowledge. Elves also come to the city for military training opportunities and to fight against the hated humanoids; there is an elite alligation of elven archers in the Parsantine army, and many of the Janissaries (see page 139) are still elves. Those not in military service that live in the city usually make their homes in the leafy Garden Ward in the Old Quarter or in Cedar Park in the Imperial Quarter’s Grand Ward. Elves tend to worship Amarani, Cytherea or Zana.

## Gnolls

Not all gnolls are demon-worshipping fiends like the feral packs who roam the Great Grass Sea to the east of Parsantium. Many of the desert-dwelling gnolls of Khemit and Aqhran have long made a living from their favourite activity – violence and killing – by working as sellswords. When Aqhrani traders first came to Parsantium, some brought gnoll bodyguards with them, and a minority of Parsantium’s population has been made up of gnolls ever since. More recently, a number of gnoll mercenaries in Kalgroth Ironheart’s army defected to the side of the crusaders led by Corandias the Stubborn, and stayed on in the city as part of the Parsantine army once the fighting was over. In recent years their numbers have been swelled by more barbarians arriving from the steppes. Like the half-orcs, gnolls are part of the city’s underclass, but while the former strive to become respectable, gnolls stay true to their savage heritage, finding employment as hired enforcers, bodyguards, bouncers and thugs, often getting mixed up in crime. Parsantium’s gnolls are neutral or neutral evil, rather than chaotic evil in



alignment, and have almost always abandoned worship of Okkidor in favour of Martek or the Sampuran battle god Indra.

## Gnomes

There aren't many gnomes in Parsantium and those who do make the city their home fall into two groups. Firstly, there are the gnomes who have lived peacefully in the city for several generations. These generally cheerful characters often work as entertainers and musicians in the Old Quarter's waterfront taverns or earn their living in the Artisans Ward, making amazingly intricate wooden toys or clever clockwork devices. Amongst them are a small handful of talented illusionists who belong to the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus. The second group are more recent arrivals from dark, dank burrows beneath the roots of the Feysore Forest and are not acknowledged as kin by the other gnomes. They have come to Parsantium with one sinister purpose in mind: to cause trouble for the "big folk". Making their homes in the tunnels of the Hidden Quarter, these nasty little customers wear red caps soaked in the blood of the victims of their cruel, twisted "pranks". The evil gnomes care nothing about the gods, but the good and neutral sorts tend to follow Cytherea, Piagus, Hanuman or Tvashtri.

## Half-Elves

More numerous than the elves, Parsantium's half-elves favour the busy streets of the Harbour and Caravans wards and the Mercantile Quarter, but can be found anywhere the different races and cultures of the city mingle. Due to the diverse nature of Parsantium's human population, the city's half-elves often have light to dark brown skin. Many are merchants, running stalls or shops in the markets and souks, or leading caravans on trading expeditions to distant towns. Others use their diplomatic skills to make a living as business negotiators or translators in the crossroads city. Half-elves worship a wide variety of gods, but many choose Cytherea.

## Half-Orcs

Half-orcs form the bulk of the city's underclass, living mostly in the Poor Ward and other run-down parts of the Old Quarter. Treated as third-class citizens by almost everyone else, Parsantium's half-orcs have banded together to form their own close-knit community and are trying their utmost to become accepted by the rest of the city. Unlike their bellicose orcish ancestors, they are typically honest, clean-living, hard-working and peaceful, performing manual labour and doing the "unclean" jobs that the Sampurans can't do. Orcish is never spoken (although most know the language) but the songs half-orcs sing when they get together are in a patois based on a mixture of orcish and Aqhrani words. Most half-orcs worship the Aqhrani god Amur.

## Halflings

Halflings are common throughout the whole city, with many communities forming in camps outside the gates or on the waterfronts, as the little folk never know when wanderlust will strike. The halfling population is constantly changing: they often arrive as part of a caravan, stay for a year or two and then head off again in search of adventures or riches. Those that have settled down like to get involved in the affairs of the "big folk" in their neighbourhoods so they can keep abreast of what's going on. Generally speaking, halflings get on with nearly everyone, although they are wary around gnolls and can also be suspicious of half-orcs. Mischievous Piagus and maternal Dorna are their favoured deities.

## Other Races

The following races are less common in Parsantium:

**Centaur**s with brown- and white-striped hindquarters sometimes visit Parsantium from the Great Grass Sea to trade goods in the Mercantile Quarter. One or two inns in the area cater for them, providing comfortable stables for overnight stays. They love to drink and tend to get involved in bar fights with little or no provocation.



**Ifrit, oreads, sylphs** and **undines** are humans touched by the Elemental Planes; the few in Parsantium originate in the deserts and mountains of the Caliphate of Aqhran or in the waters of the Corsairs' Sea. Ifrit are the most prevalent of the four types.

**Minotaurs** hail from the island of Phokris, in the southern part of the Corsairs' Sea, where they inhabit a vast underground complex called the Grand Labyrinth. Most of those who visit the city are here looking for work as mercenaries or marines on board a ship, although several are employed as librarians in the university's Library of All Knowledge.

A small number of **tieflings** live in the Mercantile and Old Quarters where they run shops or other

businesses, though they are widely distrusted due to the fiendish cast to their features. Sometimes this is with good reason, as one or two still serve dark masters or are mixed up in organized crime.

**Vanara**, a race of furred, simian humanoids from the jungles of Sampur, can be found living alongside their human counterparts in parts of the Old Quarter. Bold and curious, they are kind-hearted but have a tendency to poke their noses into matters that don't concern them and to play harmless but irritating pranks on others, which they think are hilarious. Tapasranjan, the current Grand Master of the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus, is the most famous vanara living in the city.

## Character Backgrounds

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The following optional backgrounds are intended to help players flesh out their characters and root them more firmly in the context of Parsantium. Each also provides minor mechanical benefits, which are designed to work with the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game (as campaign traits) but can be adapted easily to whatever edition of the game you are using. Any background can be amended to better fit your PCs, or GMs and players can create their own backgrounds; to share these with the community, please email them to us at [parsantium@gmail.com](mailto:parsantium@gmail.com) and we'll post the best ones on [www.parsantium.com](http://www.parsantium.com).

### Arcane Apprentice

You studied magic under a respected wizard, sorcerer, magus or other arcane spellcaster belonging to the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus. As his or her apprentice, you were allowed to study in the fantastic

library of the Marjani Minar, and you yearn for the time when you have gained enough magical knowledge to become a member of the Order yourself. Your master might have been a kindly, wise old soul or a danger to society at large, but he or she taught you well, and you have a good grounding in the arcane arts. You are hoping to discover some rare spell or magical item on your adventures that is unusual enough to impress the four masters on the Esoteric Order's ruling council, allowing you to join the organization.

**Benefits:** *You gain a +1 bonus to Knowledge (arcana) checks, and a +1 bonus to Diplomacy and Sense Motive checks when dealing with other arcanists.*

### Axe-Bearing Guard

You are a blond-haired, blue-eyed Urskovian, either a human or a dwarf, from the ice-bound wilderness to the far north of Parsantium. As a young man or



woman, you left your family behind and made the journey south across the Griffin Water to the City at the Crossroads. Here, following in the footsteps of many Urskovian warriors before you, you bought your way into the Axe-Bearing Guard, elite mercenaries sworn to defend the Basileus from harm, with the aim of returning to your homeland laden with riches. Unfortunately, although being in the Axe-Bearing Guard was indeed lucrative, it was also very dull. Safeguarding the Basileus, the Despoina and their children involved escorting them to and from temple services at the Holy Basilica, guarding doors at the Great Palace and other ceremonial duties. After a year or so of loyal service in which you saw too little action on the battlefield, you left the Guard in search of adventure and excitement elsewhere.

**Benefits:** *You gain a +1 bonus to Diplomacy checks when dealing with those in authority, and resist cold 2.*

## Bureaucrat

You have served in Parsantium's vast and complex bureaucracy as one of the "beardless", a junior civil servant. If male, you may be a eunuch, born to a poor family who handed you over to the authorities for schooling in return for a well-paid government job for life. Alternatively, you could be the second or third child of a wealthy Bathuran family, or a dwarf in the service of the Royal Exchequer. You may have done a superb job, or you may have spent most of your time daydreaming about dragons and dungeons rather than pushing paper around, but you've been overlooked for promotion several times now and your career is going nowhere. You have a good understanding of the workings of the corridors of power in Parsantium, including who wields influence over what, and which fancy hats and obscure job titles have the most prestige. You feel it's now time to do something a bit more interesting with your life.

**Benefits:** *You gain a +2 bonus to Knowledge checks involving Parsantine government and politics, and a +1 bonus to Diplomacy and Sense Motive checks when dealing with those in authority.*

## Criminal Past

You've lived your life on the wrong side of the law, perhaps as a freelance pickpocket or thief, or as a member of one of the Hidden Quarter's criminal gangs. Perhaps you were driven to this life by poverty or you were born into it as a street orphan; you might have chosen it for the thrills. You could still be affiliated with a criminal gang, or they could be after you for unauthorized freelancing or failing to turn over the required percentage, even if you've since gone straight. Either way, you are likely a "known face" to the City Watch, making it hard for you to go about your business without suffering harassment or paying bribes.

**Benefits:** *You know the secret cant of the Hidden Quarter, and gain a +1 bonus to Disable Device, Sleight of Hand and Stealth checks. You suffer a -2 penalty on Bluff checks when interacting with the City Watch.*

## Devout Disciple

A devoted follower of one of Parsantium's many deities, you have been brought up in the god or goddess's service. Your life is pledged to your deity and following his or her teachings, and you have been trained by the priests in the prayers, sacrifices and other sacred rites performed by the clergy. Depending on your deity's background and culture, you may have learned these ceremonial rituals at the Holy Basilica or another Imperial Quarter temple, or in one of the many mandiras or mosques of the cosmopolitan Temple Ward. You live in or near your temple and can call upon the assistance of its priests and acolytes should you need to, including clerical healing for you and your companions in the event of injuries, poisonings or diseases sustained during the course of your adventures.

**Benefits:** *You can rely on your temple to provide you with free healing as long as you remain in good standing with your deity. You also gain a +1 bonus to Knowledge (religion) checks.*



## Feytouched

You grew up in the Feysore Forest, a vast expanse of woodland to the east of Parsantium, where the boundaries between this world and the Realms of Faerie are thin. You could be an elf, a human, a half-elf, or even a gnome, but whatever your race, you have experienced the fey firsthand and have been subjected to their trickery, glamours and curses. Perhaps you have danced in a faerie ring with the pixies and sprites, fled in terror from the ettercaps of Tangleweb, or pledged your service to the Rowan Queen. At any rate, your contact with the fey has changed you and you ended up agreeing (or were compelled) to undertake a quest that has brought you to the bustling city of Parsantium. This many people crammed together in one place is a new experience for you and is going to take a lot of getting used to.

**Benefits:** *Once per encounter you can reroll a failed saving throw against a charm effect or spell, and you gain a +1 bonus to Knowledge (nature) checks.*

## Flotsam & Jetsam

You arrived in Parsantium with high hopes of making your fortune in double quick time. Unfortunately, you found to your extreme disappointment that the streets were not paved with gold, and what little money you came with was stolen from you by a skilful pickpocket almost as soon as you entered the gates. Penniless and homeless, you ended up in the Dock Ward, finding employment at the Old Docks on the fishing boats or as a longshoreman, and living on a leaky houseboat in the floating community of Flotsam. Life is far from easy but you have a roof over your head and earn enough money to afford a bowl of fish curry and a couple of Marlin Brews at the Fat Grouper at the end of each day. You know your way around the Old Quarter now, and are keeping your eyes and ears open for any opportunity to improve your situation.

**Benefits:** *You gain a +2 bonus to Diplomacy and Knowledge (local) checks when trying to obtain information about Parsantium's Old Quarter.*

## Gladiator

You have fought several times on the sands of the Hippodrome to entertain the crowds, killing and maiming wild beasts and your fellow gladiators for money and glory. You were either raised from an early age to fight in the stadium, were sent there by the courts after committing a murder, or you volunteered and won a place through auditions. Now you are part of a gladiatorial team with a flashy name and probably have a stage name of your own. You may have won a medal or two, and although your body bears many scars, you've done well to survive this long without losing more than a finger or two. While you still love the roar of the crowd when you step out on to the sands, you may be starting to question the senseless slaughter, your own life expectancy, or both, and are contemplating retirement.



**Benefits:** *You gain a +1 bonus to Perform checks made to impress a crowd, and to Knowledge checks concerning wild beasts.*

## Imperial Quarter Noble

Born into one of the well-to-do noble families of the Imperial Quarter (see page 145), you have had a privileged upbringing in which you received private schooling from the very best tutors, attended numerous parties and feasts, and went on hunting trips to your family's summer estate outside the city. You are enrolled in the university but probably don't bother turning up very often, preferring to sleep in after late nights spent in the taverns and brothels of the Old Quarter's red-light district with your wealthy chums. On the other hand, being rich while so many others have so little may inspire you to try and do something for the city's poor and downtrodden.

**Benefits:** *You gain a +2 bonus to Diplomacy and Sense Motive checks when dealing with other nobles.*



## Journeyman

From a young age, you were trained in a particular trade by a master craftsman belonging to one of Parsantium's influential guilds. This could be anything from barrel-making, pottery and brewing to gem cutting and carpet weaving. After seven years as an apprentice, you have developed sufficient skill to set up on your own and sell what you make. You are not yet a master, though – to become one you need to devote yourself to your craft full-time for at least a year and submit your work to the guild for evaluation. You know others working in the same trade in Parsantium, and can call upon your guild for help if you need it. In return, you are expected to support your fellow brethren and sistren in times of need – this might mean taking part in one of the frequent inter-guild punch-ups in the Artisans Ward.

**Benefits:** *You gain a +2 bonus to Diplomacy and Sense Motive checks when dealing with other guildsmen and artisans.*

## Merchant

Your background is as a trader, making money through the buying and selling of goods in Parsantium and elsewhere. You might be a local, running a shop or stall in the shadow of the Colossus in the Mercantile Quarter, in one of the forums of the Imperial Quarter or in an Old Quarter fonduq. Perhaps you are a regular visitor to Parsantium from the Caliphate of Aqhran, Sampur or another distant land, spending months at a time travelling the trade routes in and out of the city in search of a decent profit. You might be scrupulously honest and fair in your dealings, or always on the lookout for a way to work the angles to your advantage. The thrill of making money still appeals to you but you've grown bored of the merchant's life, so you've given up your business, hoping to find untold riches as an adventurer.

**Benefits:** *You gain an additional language of your choice, and a +1 bonus to Bluff and Diplomacy checks.*

## Old Quarter Commoner

You come from a poor family struggling to make ends meet in the Dock Ward or Poor Ward of the Old Quarter. You might be a Sampuran belonging to the shudra caste, a half-orc or an Aqhrani. Either way, you toil away as a labourer of some sort, although if you're a half-orc you might do an "unclean" job such as tanning leather, slaughtering animals or working as an undertaker. Alternatively, you could be a street orphan, running errands for local merchants and acting as a tout or unofficial guide. Whatever you do, it's an honest living, and you are part of a community of folk in the same situation, all of whom look out for each other. Life is hard, though, and you earn a pittance. If someone offered you a way to climb up the social ladder, you'd probably grab it with both hands.

**Benefits:** *You gain a +2 bonus to Diplomacy and Sense Motive checks when dealing with other commoners.*

## Platinum Knight-Errant

You belong to a fighting order of clerics, knights and paladins acting as the "sword and shield" of the Church of Themicia, sworn to protect the god's clergy and followers from harm. You were trained in the art of battle and in the chivalric code of your order (see page 140) at the Celestial Bastion, the Platinum Knights' chapter house in Parsantium's Grand Ward. Your organization helped Corandias the Stubborn recapture the city from the hobgoblins in the Great Crusade a century ago, and remains on hand to defend Parsantium from her enemies when called upon to do so by the Basileus. While most Platinum Knights are required to remain on duty in the chapter house, as a Knight-Errant you are free to wander the city and beyond in search of honourable adventures and quests in which you are expected to prove your chivalric values, protect the innocent and mete out justice.

**Benefits:** *You gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls against hobgoblins and orcs, and a +1 bonus to Knowledge (religion) checks.*





## Sea Dog

You have spent months, if not years, on board ships sailing up and down the trade routes of the Corsairs' Sea or across the Griffin Water. Maybe you were born in Parsantium or you may have sailed here from the Caliphate of Aqhran, the Bathuran city of Loranto or the northern lands of Urskovia. Your nautical career could have been as a deckhand, a navigator or helmsman, or as a fighting marine, and spent on board a merchant vessel, in the Parsantine navy, on a pirate ship – or all three. You've probably seen a fair bit of the world on your travels and have plenty of far-fetched nautical yarns with which to regale your adventuring companions.

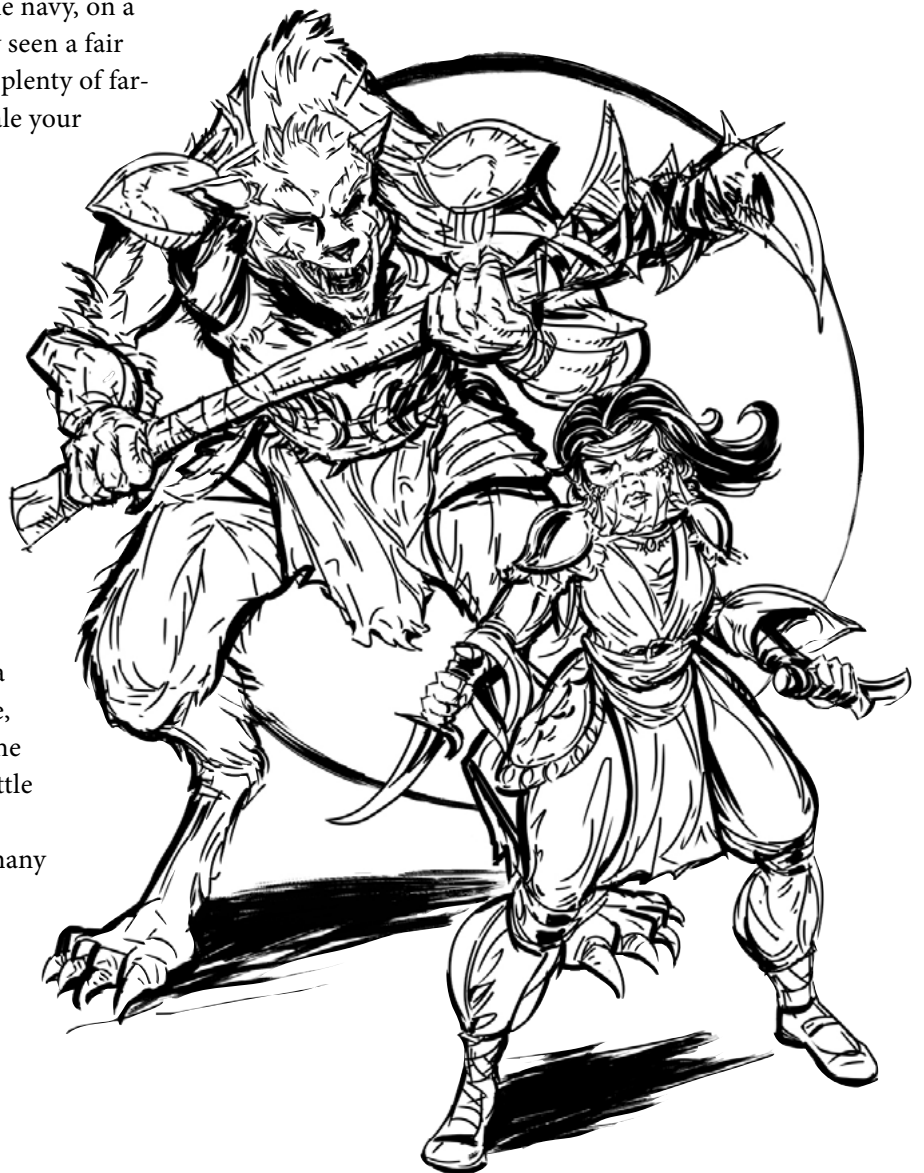
**Benefits:** *You know how to sail a ship or pilot a boat, and gain a +1 bonus to attack rolls made while fighting on board a vessel.*

## Sellsword

You make your living as a mercenary or sword for hire, selling your services to the highest bidder. Perhaps you were once a soldier in the Parsantine army before leaving to go freelance, working as a caravan guard for merchants travelling the long, perilous trade routes to and from Parsantium, as a bodyguard for an Imperial Quarter noble, or as an enforcer for a criminal gang in the Old Quarter. You probably have a few battle scars and one or two tattoos to show for your experiences and have run into many interesting characters in the course of your employment; some of these are people you wouldn't want to cross paths with again. You may not feel entirely comfortable with some of the jobs you've done in the past and are beginning to wonder if there is an easier way to earn

a crust. Those adventurers always seem to have lots of gold to splash around.

**Benefits:** *You gain an additional language of your choice, and a +1 bonus to initiative rolls.*





## University Scholar

Your parents were determined you should have the very best start in life and sent you to the Scholastica, Parsantium's university, to study under the greatest academics in the known world. You threw yourself into your studies and have spent the last three years immersed in books and scrolls, learning all you can from the university's erudite tutors. You have acquired a great deal of knowledge about the history of Parsantium and the Bathuran Empire, the wider world, and the peoples and creatures that inhabit it. Having spent so long studying the world, you yearn to get out there and put some of what you have learned to use, perhaps undertaking an expedition or two on behalf of the Scholastica so that you might add to the body of knowledge held there.

**Benefits:** *You gain a +1 bonus on all Knowledge checks.*

*If you cannot recall the piece of information you require, you can research the subject in the Library of All Knowledge, allowing you to reroll the check with a +5 bonus.*

## Wilderness Wanderer

You were brought up far from civilization and have only recently arrived in Parsantium in pursuit of some personal quest. You could be from the desolate badlands and treacherous canyons south of the city or from the arid wasteland of the deserts of Khemit beyond. Alternatively, you might have been born among the barbarian tribes living in the endless expanse of the Great Grass Sea, or in the steamy jungles of Sampur on the far side of the Pillars of Heaven Mountains. Whatever your origin, you thought you were used to surviving in a hostile environment, but the big city and its sheer number of inhabitants can be overwhelming. Sometimes you feel you have to get away from the crowds and have taken to wandering around one of the parks for a while to get some time to yourself.

**Benefits:** *You gain a +1 bonus on all Knowledge (nature) checks, and a +1 bonus on Survival checks to get along in wilderness areas.*

## CHAPTER TWO

# Life in the City



## Government and Politics

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**P**arsantine politics, while seemingly straightforward at first glance, is a convoluted business. At the very top of the pyramid is the Basileus, the absolute ruler of the Free City of Parsantium and its surrounding territories. Beneath him are his three senior officials, collectively known as the Triumvirate: the Prefect, who runs the city administration through its Inner Council; the Royal Exchequer, who handles tax collection and the city finances; and the Strategos, commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Then, below these four powerful individuals are the three Tribunes (each governing one quarter of the city), the Praetor (who heads up the judiciary), senior military commanders and finance ministers, and a labyrinthine bureaucracy, filled with scheming nobles, ambitious eunuchs and administrators both conscientious and corrupt.

### The Basileus and the Royal Family

The Basileus, a Bathuran word meaning “sovereign”, is the ultimate overlord of Parsantium. His is an hereditary title, passed down the male line, and his authority is said to derive from the divine will of the god Helion. It is not unknown for the divine will to choose as basileus a man who is not strictly next in line: various political arrangements, untimely deaths and sometimes even bloody coups have always ensured

that a candidate for the throne has been found.

The current Basileus, **Corandias XVIII the Lion-Blooded** (LN male human aristocrat 12/fighter 4), has been on the throne for ten years and is a direct descendant of Corandias I the Magnificent. Proud of his ancestry, he is fiercely determined to protect Parsantium and its people at all costs: the city must never again be allowed to suffer the indignity of falling to its enemies. Corandias brings great energy to his mission. He is a short, stocky and physically





powerful man in his thirties who conducts himself with a confidence that borders on arrogance, though he is both handsome and charismatic enough to get away with it. Usually calm and businesslike, he has a violent temper when pushed too far, most often by his maddeningly contrary and beautiful wife, the Despoina Thecia. Corandias is advised by his loyal vizier and right-hand man Arridaeus (see page 75), a capable wizard and himself a descendant of Corandias the Magnificent's vizier, Marcus Servius.

Thecia and Corandias have two daughters, Proseria, 14, and Comito, 11, and two sons. The eldest son, also named Corandias, is nine years old, and the heir to the throne; his younger brother Florentius is seven.

Corandias's wife **Thecia** (LE female human aristocrat 9/sorcerer 3) holds the title Despoina ("empress" in Bathuran). From a lesser noble family, House Asterius, Thecia is a classical beauty with radiant skin the colour of pale ivory and tumbling ringlets of glossy black hair, who caught the eye of the young Corandias before he rose to prominence. As beautiful as she is, she is even more calculating, and cold with it: she has more than one whispered name at court – the more



educated call her "the Mendatrix", but "Mother of Lies" is common, as is "that Scheming Enchantress".

The Despoina may not be popular, but Thecia's position of power is a considerable achievement. Her father was a Parsantine officer who was slain by orcish raiders when she was a child, and she learned court intrigue at the knee of her mother, **Ciceria** (NE female human aristocrat 7/cleric 6), who was an influential courtesan. It was through a combination of charm and her mother's guile that she came to be betrothed to Corandias, and when news of Iosephus's death and Corandias's coronation came, mother and daughter could hardly have been happier.

Thecia's advancement – and Ciceria's – is very much to the consternation of some of Parsantium's most powerful families. She has consolidated her power by using her influence over Corandias to manoeuvre her own relatives into key government positions, most effectively in the appointment of her cousin Aurius as the Imperial Quarter's tribune. She has also relished the chance to have her personal enemies brought low, taking particular pleasure in contriving the downfall of the pompous Symeon Marfisi, the former Strategos who overlooked her late father for promotion to allagator.

Of late, Thecia's frustration has been mounting as Corandias's reliance on his vizier has increased. With her husband heeding only Arridaeus's advice, Thecia has less scope to twist matters to her own preference, and she grows ever more jealous of the vizier. Arridaeus himself compounds the problem by neglecting to hide his mistrust of the Despoina, and she longs for a chance to humble him. Meanwhile, Thecia hopes a plot with her cousin Aurius will see him rise to replace the current Prefect, Bardas (who will be brought down by allegations of corruption and disloyalty), giving her even greater influence at court. Then, perhaps, she can finally move against Arridaeus, though her ambition has blinded her to the fact that Aurius has plans of his own...

Ciceria still maintains her interest in the affairs of court, and mother and daughter have remained close. Thecia is certainly aware that her mother is secretly a



priestess in the Cult of the Black Mother (see page 127), having been initiated by the Sahasran witch Jagadamba many years ago, and she is not above employing the talents of the cult's members for her own ends. It is even rumoured that Thecia herself is an initiate.

## The Prefect and the Bureaucracy

The Prefect is responsible for the day-to-day running of the city, heading up a vast bureaucracy intended to keep the business of government operating smoothly while providing employment for hundreds of citizens.

The current Prefect is a highly capable and apparently passionless aquiline-nosed Bathuran in his mid-forties named **Bardas** (LN male human expert 11). Bardas worked his way up through the labyrinthine structure of the bureaucracy by being very good at his job and by dealing ruthlessly with anyone who got in his way. Now in a position of great power, second only to the Basileus, he is determined to protect the interests of the city by stamping out inefficiency and waste. Unsurprisingly, this has rattled some of the well-paid individuals in cushy government jobs of dubious value, who are hoping that some kind of accident might befall him before long. Until then, they do their best to evade his notice.

Immediately below the Prefect are the three Tribunes who govern each quarter of the city, and the Praetor who acts as head of the judiciary. These five men form the Inner Council, meeting frequently to determine city policy and deal with the pressing issues of the day. The full Senate, which includes the magistrates for each ward, as well as representatives from the largest noble families and the guilds, meets monthly but lacks significant power, dealing only with matters deemed too trivial for the Inner Council.

The city's bloated bureaucracy has nobles from influential houses such as Laro and Ziper occupying a wide variety of positions, with titles as obscure as Keeper of the Imperial Inkstand and Guardian of Documents of the Public Wardrobe. Each of these roles comes complete with generous remuneration, fancy robes and a unique and grandiose hat. The bulk of the

real work is carried out by the "beardless" – junior civil servants, many of them eunuchs who are widely thought of as making the most trustworthy and reliable administrators as they are unable to seize power for their own dynasty. The eunuchs often come from poor Old Quarter families (typically Sampurans and half-orcs) who are more than happy to send their younger sons to a special academy to be schooled after their castration to prepare them for a lifetime of loyal (and well-paid) service to the Basileus.

Dealing with the bureaucracy is almost always a frustrating business for those not familiar with its inner workings. The GM is encouraged to send the player characters on a wild goose chase the first time they turn up at the Curia in search of a permit to explore the tunnels beneath the city or the paperwork needed to buy that tavern they like to frequent. Many officials are corrupt, so "greasing the wheels" with gold bezants may help, but PCs will need to be careful – bribing a civil servant is a criminal offence.

## The Royal Exchequer

One third of the Triumvirate, reporting directly to the Basileus, the Royal Exchequer is responsible for Parsantium's financial affairs, including collecting revenue in the form of taxes and tariffs, and managing the city's expenditure. The city's financial department employs bailiffs, customs officers and tax collectors, as well as dozens of book-keepers and accountants – about half of these are dwarves, and the other half are nearly all human or half-orc eunuchs. The Warden of the Mint also reports into the Royal Exchequer.

The current Royal Exchequer is **Tiberius Goldsmelter** (LG male dwarf expert 10), a bespectacled, bald-headed dwarf with a long-flowing beard and a keen brain for figures, who took over from the previous incumbent, an aged dwarf named Kerlgrim Pennywise. Kerlgrim was fired by the Basileus for failing to spot the lucrative fraud being run by the then Keeper of the Argent Coffers who escaped to the Caliphate of Aqhran with a small fortune. Tiberius



keeps a firm grasp on the purse-strings, spot checking his officials' calculations personally to reassure himself that nothing has been missed and that no one is embezzling city funds.

## The Strategos

The third member of the Triumvirate, the Strategos is commander-in-chief of Parsantium's armed forces, including its standing army and navy, and is responsible for all aspects of the city's defence, meaning the upkeep of the city walls and the watchtowers at the frontiers also fall under his remit. The present Strategos is the cultured, impeccably groomed and softly spoken **Loukas Andronicus** (NG male human fighter 15), a capable strategist and a veteran of many successful battles with the unruly humanoid tribes living near the borders of Parsantine territory. Loukas Andronicus took over from Symeon Marfisi five years ago after the latter was forced out of office by the Despoina; his chief military adviser is the wily Monish Kapali (see page 145), a retired soldier who fought alongside the Strategos on several occasions.

## The Tribunes

Appointed by the Prefect, the three Tribunes each govern one of the city's quarters. They are responsible for maintaining law and order, controlling the City Watch in their territory through their Watch Captains. The Tribunes also appoint magistrates to look after each ward and sit on the Senate.

**Aurius Kalothese** (LE male rakshasa sorcerer 10/ aristocrat 2; see page 150 ) is the Tribune of the Imperial Quarter; his family name means "of good character". Hawk-faced and beautifully spoken, with a cut-glass accent, Aurius is plotting with Thecia to remove Bardas so he can take over as Prefect. What Thecia doesn't know is that her "cousin" is actually a powerful rakshasa.

**Basil Zarides** (LN male human expert 10) runs the Mercantile Quarter. Basil is a shaven-headed, portly eunuch who worked his way up through the

bureaucracy to his current position. He comes across as an affable bon vivant but has a keen instinct for what is beneficial to business and the city as a whole.

**Murad al-Rumi** (NG male human aristocrat 13), a wise Aqhrani with years of experience in the bureaucracy, was recently appointed the Tribune of the Old Quarter. Widely expected to be conservative and unwilling to rock the boat, he has surprised the inhabitants of the Old Quarter by taking an unprecedented stand against its influential criminal gangs.

**Avishandu**, crime baron and "Boss of All Bosses" of the Hidden Quarter (see page 129), is nicknamed the "Fourth Tribune".

## The Praetor

The fifth member of the Inner Council, also reporting to the Prefect, the Praetor is head of the judiciary and responsible for keeping the Codex of Imperial Law up to date. He appoints the judges who preside over trials in the Courthouse, acting as a final line of appeal. In addition, the Praetor oversees the punishment of criminals, including the implementation of prison sentences, floggings and executions. The current holder of the office is an ancient Tiangaon named **Gang Shen** (LG male human expert 14), whose long, thin white beard reaches down to his waist. Tough and unrelenting, he has only overruled one judge in the last ten years, and that was to increase the defendant's sentence.

## The Army and Navy

Parsantium's regular army is made up of a dozen regiments, or allagions, of up to 500 men, each of which is commanded by an allagator. Six allagions are garrisoned in the city itself, while the rest are stationed in the surrounding lands to guard against fairly frequent hobgoblin and orc raids into Parsantine territory. Usually the humanoids retreat back into the



wilderness before the army can be mobilized, much to the frustration of its commanders, but a border posting can still be fairly lively, providing an ambitious soldier with the chance to distinguish himself on the field of battle.

Cavalry units make up half the army, namely one allagion of heavily armoured elite knights (known as the *Kataphraktoi*), four medium cavalry allagions (mostly land-owning soldier-farmers, known as *pronoians*) and one light cavalry regiment of *Aqhrani* horse archers. The six infantry units include spearmen from the militia, peasant crossbowmen, elite elf archers, halfling slingers, dwarven heavy footsoldiers and a fierce gnoll mercenary warband. The *Urskovians* in the *Axe-Bearing Guard* that protect the *Basileus* (see page 137) fight alongside the regular *Parsantine* army but are considered a separate entity, with their own commander, known as the *Akolythos*. The *Guard* ride into battle but do all their fighting on foot.

Soldiers in *Parsantium's* army either serve on a permanent basis or have been conscripted for a fixed period. In times of trouble, the *Strategos* will hire mercenaries or call upon the *Platinum Knights of Themicia* to bolster the ranks. If the need is really dire, more peasants can be called up, but depending on the time of year this may put the harvest at risk.

*Parsantium* also has a small navy of 25 galleys, commanded by the *Grand Dhoungarius of the Fleet, Trasaric Marfisi* (N male human fighter 10), a capable naval officer and notorious womanizer. Based at the *Royal Docks* (see page 73), the navy patrols the waters around *Parsantium*, protecting merchant ships heading to and from the city from pirates and occasionally from the unpredictable *Crusading Brothers of the Sword* (see page 138). The navy's ships are mounted with dragon-shaped *Parsantine Fire throwers* and *ballistas*, and carry *marines* (mostly *Aqhrani*, but some are *minotaurs*) and *elven archers*.

## Law and Order

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With around 75,000 inhabitants, many of whom live in poverty, it is inevitable that maintaining law and order presents a major challenge to *Parsantium's* rulers. And it's getting harder. Beneath the streets of the *Old Quarter*, tunnels, passages and chambers that once formed part of the ancient city of *Dhak Janjua* constitute what's known as the "*Hidden Quarter*", which has fallen under the control of the "*Boss of All Bosses*", *Avishandu*, the so-called "*Fourth Tribune*" (see page 129). From his underworld headquarters, the crime baron masterminds nearly all the criminal activity in the *Old Quarter*, including the slave trade, smuggling, racketeering and theft, as well as some legitimate businesses such as prostitution and gambling. In addition, many smaller gangs and freelance thieves operate throughout the

city streets, and the presence of adventurers has been known to lead to trouble too. To combat this, the *Prefect* and his *Inner Council* rely on the city's laws, its courts, and an inconsistent *City Watch*.

### The Law

*Parsantium's* laws are recorded in the *Codex of Imperial Law*, a huge collection of papyrus and parchment scrolls and enormous leather-bound volumes (so heavy that each one takes two people to carry), dating all the way back to the foundation of *Dhak Janjua*, and spanning the rule of the *Aqhrani sultans* and the *Bathuran emperors* from *Corandias* the *Magnificent* onwards. Many of the early laws are



written in the unholy hand of Vrishabha himself, although most of these have been repealed long since. All told, there are over 5,000 separate decrees and statutes in the Codex. Some make little sense or are exceedingly obscure, such as the prohibition against carrying a black chicken under the left arm while crossing Srivatsa's Bridge, or the statute declaring it illegal to feed a monkey cheese during the months of Aprilis and September. The Codex is kept in the large library of the Courthouse (see page 58), where the judiciary, prosecutors and advocates may consult it under the beady eye of the head librarian.

The Praetor is expected to know the Law inside out since he is responsible for ensuring it is correctly enforced, and only he is allowed to make amendments to it. Even then, this requires the consent of the Basileus. In practice, only the more common laws are kept up to date; there are almost certainly some obscure legal loopholes buried in the Codex that a talented advocate could exploit...

## The Courts

Those who break the law and are arrested by the City Watch for a minor misdemeanour are normally punished by a night in the Watchhouse cells and maybe a bit of a kicking from the arresting officers. Offences such as engaging in a brawl where no one suffered a serious injury, being drunk and disorderly, or looking at a Watch officer in a funny way are regarded as minor misdemeanours. Anyone arrested for a serious offence will first be questioned in the Watchhouse, then taken to the Courthouse and locked in the cells there until their trial can be heard, usually within a week of the arrest.

The Codex of Imperial Law adheres to the principle that everyone is entitled to a fair trial heard by a competent judge. Of course, witnesses can lie or be bribed, an innocent man can be framed, and so on –

but the tough-talking Praetor, Gang Shen (see page 28), has rooted out those judges who were either corrupt or incapable of doing a decent job. All judges, prosecutors and advocates must study the Law at the Scholastica (Parsantium's university) before they are allowed to practice in the Courts.

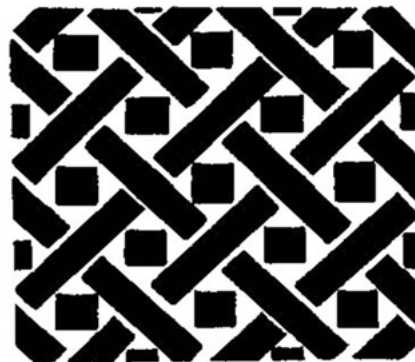
In the Courts, each case is heard by a red-robed judge, with a prosecutor presenting evidence on behalf of the Basileus, and an advocate (if the accused can afford it) presenting the case for the defence. Both sides can call witnesses to the crime to testify on their behalf. Once the evidence has been heard, the judge will make his decision, deliver his verdict and impose a sentence (see page 31) if the accused is found guilty. There is no jury and most trials are swift, rarely lasting more

than an hour or two. Spectators are permitted – it costs 1 sp to sit in a courtroom and watch the day's cases. If a judge has any doubts about whether or not a witness is telling the truth, a priest of Themicia will be called upon to cast *discern lies* during his or her testimony.

After the verdict and sentencing, the City Watch will escort anyone given a custodial sentence to the prison in the Poor Ward (see page 108). Fines, exile and other

punishments are imposed without delay; executions and mutilations usually take place a few days later in the Forum of the Gorgon in the Palace Ward, giving the accused the chance to appeal or beg for mercy from the Basileus.

Civil disputes are also heard at the Courts – these range from disagreements over the quality of goods or services supplied to arguments between neighbours, such as the long-running saga of Anthemius's dispute with Hermogenes over the latter's balcony spoiling the former's view of Cedar Park. In this particular case, the matter eventually made it all the way to Gang Shen, who ordered both men to be banned from living in the Imperial Quarter for ten years.







## Crime and Punishment

The following chart shows a number of common (and less common) crimes with the standard punishments given out by judges. Fines are usually 10 gp for petty crimes, 100 gp for lesser offences and 500 gp for major offences, or an amount equal to the damage caused, whichever is the greater. Those who cannot pay their fine are forced into indentured servitude to the city for

a period of time long enough to work off their debt. This servitude is tantamount to slavery, and could involve manual labour such as building work, street repairs or sewer maintenance, or household service to an important government official, depending on the nature of the individual and the crime. The Codex of Imperial Law specifically prohibits magical healing or restoration following mutilation, and the resurrection of anyone executed by order of the Court.

CRIME	PUNISHMENT
Arson	Fine or imprisonment (up to 1 year)
Assault	Fine or imprisonment (up to 3 years)
Blackmail	Flogging
Blasphemy against Helion	Fine
Bribery	Fine
Dangerous spellcasting within the city walls	Fine or exile, depending on severity
Embezzlement/Fraud	Fine or imprisonment (up to 6 months)
Extortion	Fine or imprisonment (up to 1 year)
Kidnapping	Imprisonment (up to 1 year)
Murder	Imprisonment (up to 10 years) or a year as a gladiator
Murder, Mass	Death by impalement
Necromancy	Death by impalement
Perjury	Imprisonment (up to 6 months) or removal of tongue
Rape	Castration
Rioting	Fine and flogging
Sedition	Flogging and exile
Slave trading	Fine and imprisonment (up to 1 year)
Smuggling	Fine
Spying	Blinding and exile
Summoning a demon	Death by impalement
Theft	Fine and flogging; removal of hand for third offence
Treason	Death by impalement
Vandalism	Fine



## City Watch

The City Watch is responsible for keeping day-to-day law and order throughout Parsantium, something it achieves with varying degrees of success in the different parts of the city. While the standard of the members of the Watch varies tremendously, the best ones tend to serve in the Imperial Quarter and the worst (and easiest to bribe) can be found in the Dock Ward, where crime is ubiquitous.

Each ward has its own Watchhouse, run by a Watch Captain who reports into the relevant tribune. The Watchhouses have barracks and a mess room for the men on duty and a few cells in which to lock prisoners overnight before releasing them or shipping them off to the Courthouse to stand trial. There are usually around 30 watchmen on duty per ward at any one time, under the command of a Watch Sergeant. Of these, two-thirds are generally out on patrol while the others remain stationed in the Watchhouse or guarding the ward gates. The Watch patrols in twos or threes during the daytime, but in groups of half a dozen at night, particularly in the dodgier parts of the Old Quarter.

Watchmen wear conical Parsantine helmets, chain shirts and tabards (white with the city's horse and crescent moon emblem in purple); they are armed with halberds, longswords and light crossbows. The majority are humans (of all cultures and both sexes) but there are quite a few dwarves and a small number from other races too.

The Watch responds as quickly as it can to shouts and alarm bells or gongs sounded by concerned citizens, usually arriving on the scene within a few minutes, although it can sometimes take longer, particularly in the Dock and Poor wards. On those occasions when the incident is over by the time they get there, the watchmen will question any witnesses and record their statements in their patrol report, but that is usually the end of it. The Watch are not detectives, meaning that crimes without an obvious culprit are not investigated. If there is someone to apprehend, though, the watchmen will do their best to arrest that person, using as much force as is reasonable to get their man (or gnoll).

Sometimes they will run into wrong-doers they are not able to handle, perhaps even a group of unruly adventurers. In this case, most watchmen will back off until reinforcements arrive.

Unfortunately, corruption is rife throughout the City Watch, particularly in the Old Quarter, with many sergeants and watchmen receiving hefty payments and bribes from criminal gangs and others. In return, they will look the other way when illicit activity is afoot, deal with adventurers or others getting in the gang's way, or let someone who has been arrested go free.

**Attalus** (N male human fighter 5), the ageing, wheezy-voiced Watch Captain of the Poor Ward, is said to be in the pocket of the infamous Golden Scimitars (see page 130). He meticulously plans out the patrol routes for his watchmen, omitting certain streets in the ward entirely so as to avoid any disruption to the gang's activities.

Things aren't much better in the adjacent Dock Ward, where the Watch Captain is **Nisai** (CN male human fighter 6), a fat, unshaven and rarely washed man with a drink problem who has given up on keeping the criminal gangs under control and will do anything for a quiet life. Unlike his jaded captain, **Sergeant Saurish** (LG male human fighter 4), a young Sampuran watchman, is both dedicated and intelligent. Saurish is keen to maintain law and order as much as is practically possible without getting himself murdered by Dock Ward's criminal gangs. He frequently gets frustrated with his lazy, cowardly and corrupt colleagues, who don't understand why he is bothering to investigate the bodies that turn up floating in the water. Saurish is about 30 and well turned out, with a neatly trimmed beard and moustache. He chooses to wear a turban rather than a helm, fastened with a clasp depicting the leaping dolphin symbol of the ward, and has a Sampuran straight sword – a khanda – instead of a longsword hanging at his hip. He is invariably polite to those citizens he comes across in the course of his duties but is an excellent judge of character and not easily fooled by flim-flam and tall stories from witnesses and suspects.



# Culture and Customs

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Parsantium is a cosmopolitan city, comprising many different cultures and races. This lengthy section covers many of the key aspects of life as a Parsantine, including what they like to eat, drink and wear, how they like to enjoy themselves, and some of their beliefs and customs. Parsantium's gods and religious beliefs are covered on page 151.

## Food

Although Parsantium is a blend of many diverse cultures, all of its citizens have one thing in common: they love their food. And with so many cultural influences all around, it's possible for a gourmand to sample a different dish every day for a year. Popular Parsantine dishes include roasted lamb glazed with olive oil and herbs and served with buttered new potatoes still in their skins; large green peppers stuffed with minced meat and rice; spiced pork with grilled tomatoes, aubergines and fragrant saffron rice; and grilled sea bass with lemon and parsley, accompanied by chard leaves. These recipes are cooked in well-to-do homes or served in good quality inns, taverns and coffee houses throughout the city. Poorer households have to make do with less meat and more vegetables, so dishes like cabbage soup, fried aubergine and peppers with yoghurt and tomato sauce, or big bowls of pilaf made with chickpeas or lentils and onions are favoured.

The Sampurans of the Old Quarter make tasty curries, with freshly caught fish, chicken, lamb or vegetables as the main ingredient. These curries can be very hot, particularly for those not accustomed to the exotic spices and fiery chillies used. Sampuran curries are typically served with rice and chapatis (flatbreads) to mop up the sauce.

Rice is an important ingredient in Tiangaon cuisine too. Dishes can be very spicy, with chillies and garlic

used liberally to flavour meat or fish, along with ginger, peanuts or sesame seeds; mushrooms, bamboo shoots and water chestnuts are common vegetable ingredients. One speciality on offer in Tiangaon Town eateries is crispy duck served with pancakes, scallions and plum sauce. Hearty broths made with vegetables, noodles and a few scraps of beef or chicken are popular with the less well off.

Whatever food is on offer, the evening meal at home is something of a ritual for Parsantine families. Meals take place in a separate dining room and it is customary for everyone to remove their shoes before entering. The family sits on cushions around a large, low table and eats together, helping themselves from communal serving plates and bowls. Although Tiangaons prefer to use chopsticks and Sampurans like to use their hands, most other Parsantines use table forks to eat, a device largely unknown outside the city.

Street food is also popular in all three quarters – Parsantines like to buy a snack or two to munch as they go about their daily business. Favourites include lamb or beef kebabs on skewers, roasted squab-on-a-stick, crispy cheese pastries, thick hunks of bread smeared with tomato paste and olive oil, and dolmas (vine leaves stuffed with spiced meat and rice). Those with a sweet tooth will enjoy Parsantium's fine baking traditions dating back to the Aqhrani sultans – sticky baklava, rich pastries soaked in honey syrup and stuffed with chopped pistachios, are available on every street corner. Fresh and dried fruits and nuts are also in demand – vendors wheel hand carts laden with almonds, dates, apricots, figs and bunches of juicy grapes around the forums and fonduqs.





## Drinks

Coffee was brought to Dhak Janjua by Aqhrani traders over 1,500 years ago and has been a key part of the city's culture ever since, leading to the establishment of coffee houses throughout the Old Quarter. There is nothing most Parsantine men, irrespective of ethnicity, like more than sitting outside the coffee shops, grumbling about the state of business, smoking sheeshah (flavoured tobacco smoked with a waterpipe) and playing backgammon. The beans are grown in the Caliphate of Aqhran and brought to Parsantium by sea, where they are roasted, ground and turned into a strong, bitter drink with the consistency of mud, drunk black and with plenty of sugar.

Tea has been drunk in Parsantium for even longer. The founders of Dhak Janjua brought from Sampur as many of their precious leaves with them as they could carry but eventually these supplies ran out. Since the local climate wasn't suited to growing tea, the drink became the province of the very rich until regular trade opened up with Sampur and later Tiangao. Tea is now commonly drunk all over the city but is ideally enjoyed in the Tiangaon teahouses of the Old Quarter, where a highly ritualized ceremony is conducted to ensure the finest possible flavour and to foster harmony among the tea drinkers.

Beer is brewed in tavern cellars city-wide and there are some excellent ales available. The dwarves of the Harbour Ward make some of the best, including the rusty brown Stonyfist Pale Ale and thick and creamy Stalagmite Stout, but there are fine Aqhrani brewers in the Old Quarter too, including the Crescent Moon brewery, which makes the most popular light beer not just in Parsantium but in the Caliphate of Aqhran and beyond. The brewery was originally based in the White Palm in the Artisans Ward and this tavern is still a great place to go to try a wide range of delicious ales and lagers: ruby red Tiger's Blood and the strong, dark Worg Drool are the favourites of connoisseurs. The Festival of Flagons, a celebration of beer, takes place in September each year.

Wine is also produced locally – there are vineyards in the villages around the city – and the drink is consumed heartily by Parsantines, who usually prefer to water their wine and drink it from bowls rather than glasses. The finest local vintage is Three Monkeys, a dry white wine sold only in the best inns of the Imperial Quarter. Feyshore Rose is also popular; this pink elvish wine, flavoured with forest berries, is always served in tall and elegant thin-stemmed glasses. Other wines are often flavoured or spiced with absinthe, aniseed, chamomile or rose petals.

## Clothing

Walking down any busy street in Parsantium, a visitor will see a vast array of clothes of varying hues, styles and fabrics on display – some are bright and colourful or made from expensive silks, others are plain and drab.



Bathurans, Aqhrani and Sampurans often like to wear the traditional garments of their ancestors, but certain styles of dress are in vogue throughout the whole city, blending elements from several cultures.

The women of Parsantium mostly favour tunics worn over long patterned skirts, with gold, brown, blue, reddish-black, dark green and pale grey the most prevalent colours – purple is the royal colour and so cannot be worn by regular folk. Hair is long and either worn up in elaborate styles, often held in place by a silver, gold or copper circlet or bejewelled clasp, or concealed under a scarf or turban-wrappings. In the Old Quarter, Sampuran women tend to wear brightly coloured saris of cotton or silk over dark trousers. Make-up is usually bold, typically black kohl around the eyes and lips stained crimson or ruby red.

Parsantine men often wear more showy clothing than the women, typically long tunics combining Bathuran and Aqhrani styles, embellished with gold thread if the wearer is wealthy enough; the poorest



citizens tend to wear plain woollen djellabas or robes. Hair is kept long and beards are worn to distinguish the men from eunuchs who usually have shaved heads and are beardless; brahmin and monks frequently shave their heads bald too. Turbans and keffiyehs are common headgear in the Old Quarter and have recently become fashionable among dwarves in the Harbour Ward. Many Tiangaon men shave the front of their heads, braiding the rest of their hair in long ponytails, called queues, and wear conical hats made from straw.

Knee-length leather boots or pointy Aqhrani slippers are the most common types of footwear for both genders. Both men and women like to wear jewellery, especially rings set with fancy or precious stones, large gold hoop earrings, and pendants bearing religious symbols (the sun symbol of Helion, the cloud of Amur and the lotus of Vishnu being the most popular). Aqhrani and Sampuran women often wear a small jewel, a bindi, on their forehead to protect against demons and bad luck; those who can't afford one draw a red dot in vermilion powder with their fingertip.

## The Calendar

Parsantium uses the Bathuran calendar which has the same number of days as ours. Years are counted from the founding of Rezana; the current year is 1545. The names of the months are:

Ianuarius  
Februarius  
Martius  
Aprilis  
Maius  
Iunius  
Quintilis  
Sextilis  
September  
October  
November  
December

The days of the week are:

Solis	(Sunday)
Lunae	(Monday)
Martis	(Tuesday)
Mercuri	(Wednesday)
Jovis	(Thursday)
Veneris	(Friday)
Saturni	(Saturday)

## Festivals

Parsantium enjoys celebrating, and the large number of different faiths and deities worshipped by its inhabitants means that there is a festival of one sort or another going on every week of the year. Some of the most notable festivals are described below.

### Spring Festival of Light

The Spring Festival of Light takes place over five days at the beginning of Martius and celebrates the victory of Srivatsa over Vrishabha. By day, it is marked by religious ceremonies in the Sampuran temples of the Temple Ward; children eagerly attend these rituals as sweets are handed out at the end of each one. At night, the wizards and sorcerers of the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus produce spectacular pyrotechnic displays that light up the skies. During the festival, the women of the Old Quarter dress up in their brightest clothes and decorate their hands with elaborate henna tattoos. It is considered good luck to feed a monkey in honour of Hanuman while the festival is going on and the blue-bottomed primates are everywhere, greedily seeking handouts.

### Grand Race

The Grand Race, a frenetic horse race around the Forum of Heraclius, takes place every Maius. Eleven riders take part, one for each of the city's wards, riding bareback in brightly coloured silk tabards emblazoned with their ward's symbol. The race is preceded by a great parade along the Mese from the Holy Basilica in the Civic Ward (where each horse is blessed by the



Archbishop) and through the Victory Ward to the Forum, celebrating the history, customs and traditions of each ward. Everyone packs into the square at the end to watch the race, which consists of four lightning-fast circuits of the Forum and is usually over in under two minutes. The victorious rider is presented with a purple silk pennant by the Basileus. Bearing the city's symbol, the pennant hangs from a silver-bladed halberd, and is traditionally displayed above one of the winning ward's wall gates for the following year.

For the last three years, the race has been won by the Palace Ward, represented by riders from the army's cavalry alligions, much to the chagrin of the inhabitants of the other wards. Spectators like to bet on the race, but it is considered disloyal to bet on a ward other than your own; the inevitable side bets are therefore placed discreetly.

### Midsummer Night Festival

Parsantium's Midsummer Night Festival is a peculiar Bathuran tradition, dating back centuries, and generally frowned upon by the Church of Helion for the hint of witchery that surrounds it. Folk gather in their homes for the evening, inviting plenty of friends and relatives along, and dress the eldest unmarried daughter of the house in a wedding gown. Various household objects are then thrown into an amphora containing water taken from the Dolphin Strait earlier that day. The daughter pulls out some of these items at random from the jug and predicts the fate of their owners. Generally, this "fortune telling" is viewed as frivolous fun, but on rare occasions a girl has been known to make an ominous prediction that has later come true.

Drinking, dancing and music follow the predictions, with the festivities spilling out into the city streets. The next day is the High Holy Day of Helion, marked by lengthy midday services in the Holy Basilica and in churches throughout the Imperial Quarter; these are often poorly attended by those who celebrated the night before.

### Festival of Starlings

The Festival of Starlings takes place on the seventh night of the seventh moon (in the month of Quintilis) in Tiangao Town, which is hung with strings of red paper lanterns for the occasion, and celebrates the love between a goatherd, Jian, and Chan, a wood spirit girl. The two lovers were separated by Chan's mother, who sent her back to Heaven for falling in love with a mortal boy. Distraught, Jian sought out the Wise Man of the Mountains – some say this is the Monkey God – who gave him a magic flute. Once a year on the seventh night of the seventh moon, the goatherd blows the flute, summoning a flock of starlings that form a bridge of birds, allowing him to walk up to Heaven to be with his love until morning.

Many Tiangaons choose the night of the Festival of Starlings to make a marriage proposal or to get married. Young girls looking for a husband will sit outside their houses, showing off their artistic skills, such as calligraphy or carving beautiful flowers from melons, while praying to the gods for a perfect match.

### Festival of Flowers

The week-long Festival of Flowers, dedicated to the Sapta Sindhu, the seven river gods and goddesses of the Sampurans, takes place in the month of Sextilis. Hundreds of residents of the Old Quarter come to the boat-town of Flotsam at the Old Docks, where the Floating Temple of the Sapta Sindhu is located. During the festival, the boats and rope bridges that make up Flotsam are decorated with hanging baskets of bright yellow, orange and red marigolds. Worshipers make offerings of rice, flowers and sweets at the feet of the seven vividly painted statues of the deities, seeking a blessing for their endeavours. On the last day of the festival, the flowers are all cut and cast into the Dolphin Strait to honour the river gods. If a pod of dolphins appears, the people of Flotsam are going to have a lucky year. No dolphins have been seen for the last seven years...



## Festival of Flagons

The Festival of Flagons started off as a dwarven brewing contest, but has now become a celebration of beer open to anyone brewing ale in Parsantium. The festival takes place over three days in September in the dwarven district of the Harbour Ward. Here, the streets and squares are filled with stalls selling beers of all different types, as well as a huge variety of street food suited to the beers and ales on offer. At the end of the festival the Beer of the Year contest is decided by the judges (senior masters of the Vintners' and Brewers' Guild) and the famous leather "Drinking Boot" is awarded to the winning entry. Last year's victor, Leprechaun's Crock o' Ale, is now being sold at a premium in the city's finest taverns.

## Victory Festival

By far the most widely celebrated event in the calendar is the Victory Festival in the last week of October, a huge city-wide affair commemorating the anniversary of Corandias XVI the Stubborn's Great Crusade that liberated Parsantium from hobgoblin rule. The occasion is marked with a thanksgiving service in the Holy Basilica of Helion, followed by the famous Victory Games at the Hippodrome, which begin with two days of gladiatorial combat and the year's biggest chariot races on the third day. The gladiatorial bouts pit teams of fighters against each other or against monsters until only two remain to battle it out in the grand final for the much-prized Winged Helm. The third day of the Games is a public holiday when the whole city converges on the Hippodrome to support their favourite chariot racing team – the Blues, the Greens, the Reds or the Whites. See page 38 for more on chariot racing.

## Winter Festival

The Winter Festival takes place on the winter solstice and is celebrated in both halves of the city. This is an occasion for drinking, gift-giving and much partying, as well as thanking the gods for having lived through

another year. To blur the distinctions between cultures and social status during the festival, it is traditional for everyone to wear the same sort of conical felt cap, called a pilleus. In the streets of the Caravans Ward, the traditional sport of camel wrestling takes place. Two elaborately garbed bull camels are pitted against each other in a contest that is more comedy than blood sport. Usually the two camels half-heartedly butt and lean on each other until one of them gives in and runs away. The loser will often charge into the spectators, with the victorious bull in pursuit, and everyone must scramble hurriedly out of the way. Accidents are miraculously rare.

## Entertainment

Parsantium is busy all day but certain districts are even livelier by night when people flock to them in search of entertainment. These areas range from the bustling, upscale streets around the Forum of Heraclius in the Victory Ward, where some of the city's finest inns and restaurants can be found, to the buzzing and somewhat dodgy waterfront between Srivatsa's Bridge and the Dock Ward, home to numerous seedy watering holes, gambling houses and bordellos, and frequented by Old Quarter residents as well as nobles from the Imperial Quarter roughing it for the evening. In the streets around the Theatre of Cytherea in the Mercantile Quarter and the Civic Ward's Hippodrome, street performers – musicians, jugglers and tumblers, snake charmers and mummers – entertain the crowds who cannot afford a seat for that night's performance.

## Inns and Taverns

Anyone looking for somewhere to while away the evening will find Parsantium offers a wide variety of drinking and eating establishments, catering for all tastes and wallets. There are inns and taverns all over the city, with the highest concentration of hostleries near the Victory Gate in the Victory Ward, and in the Artisans and Caravans Wards. Quality, prices and clientele all vary tremendously from ward to ward,



and from one watering hole to another. Although the general rule is that both quality and prices tend to be higher in the Imperial Quarter and at their lowest in the Old Quarter's Poor and Dock wards, this isn't always the case. There are well-run places in the Poor Ward, such as the Red Wheel, which serves good value, tasty food and flavoursome ale brewed on the premises to its hard-working half-orc customers. And there are third-rate, overpriced eateries in the Victory Ward, like the infamous Shining Goblet, which serves plates of overcooked lamb and vegetables at extortionate prices to unsuspecting visitors. In both halves of the city, inns tend to be built around courtyards filled with shady palm trees, with a fountain in the centre; taverns tend to be smaller one- or two-room affairs. See the Gazetteer for a selection of Parsantium's inns and taverns.

### Bathhouses

Public bathing is a longstanding tradition in Parsantine culture and is seen as a social activity as well as an opportunity to wash away the grime and tensions of the day; many an important business deal is concluded amid the steamy vapours of the bathhouse. There are numerous bathhouses throughout the city where Parsantines can bathe and exercise. Grandest are those in the Imperial Quarter, usually decorated with intricate mosaics and statues and busts of poets and mythical heroes; these large establishments commonly have an exercise area or gymnasium where patrons can work up a sweat before bathing. Those in the Old Quarter, such as the Hippocampus Baths in the Artisans Ward (see page 96), are smaller and less pricey, but often employ the best masseurs, trained in traditional Aqhrani techniques that are handed down through the generations.

A typical bathhouse has a series of rooms that get progressively hotter. Having stored his clothes in the apodyterium, the bather starts off in the frigidarium (cool room), before moving on to the tepidarium (warm room) and then the caldarium (hot room). After spending some time there sweating, the bather

returns to the tepidarium for a massage and to have the dirt scraped off him with a metal implement. Finally, he returns to the frigidarium for a refreshing plunge in the cold water. Some bathhouses entertain their customers with dancing or provide food and wine for bathers to consume. Others have private rooms where patrons can take a nap following their bath. Men and women usually bathe in separate facilities within the bathhouse, but there are several mixed bathhouses where both sexes bathe together, much to the chagrin of the Church of Helion and the imans of Amur.

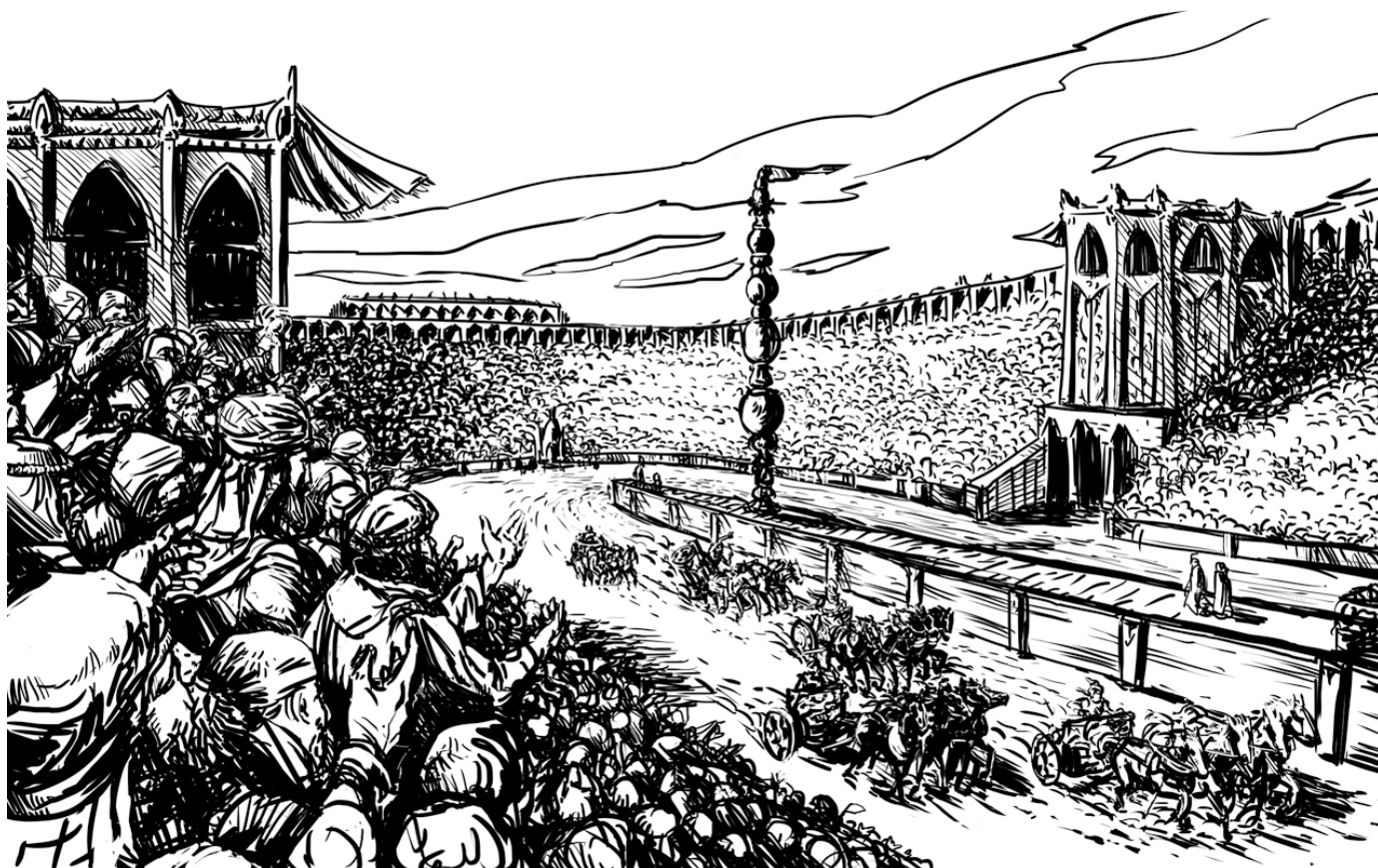
### Chariot Racing and Gladiators

Chariot racing in Parsantium is not so much a sport as an obsession. There are four main teams of charioteers, known as factions – the Blues, the Greens, the Reds and the Whites – with the Blues and the Greens by far and away the more successful and popular. The city is divided along faction lines: residents of the Imperial Quarter tend to support the Blues and the Whites, while those living in the Old Quarter support the Greens and the Reds. Several times in the past few years fights have broken out between supporters of the rival factions before or after a race, and once or twice these scuffles have turned into full-blown rioting. Quite often these incidents are politically motivated, as sporting rivalry inflames the existing tensions between the two halves of the city or between bitter business rivals such as House Scipio (which sponsors the Blues) and House Qasim (which sponsors the Greens).

Up to 16 chariots take part in each race, typically five from the Blues and from the Greens, and three each from the Reds and Whites; each chariot is pulled by four horses. The races are dangerous to both drivers and horses – there is a high risk of serious injury, and deaths from falls and trappings are fairly common. This, of course, adds to the excitement for the spectators.

The best drivers are household names, hero-worshipped by both men and women, who shower them with gifts and pester them for autographs





and kisses. Occasionally the Blues or the Greens will try and lure a top driver from one of their rivals to sign for their faction by offering vast amounts of gold. When a favourite switches sides, he will be loudly booed and jeered by the spurned faction's supporters every time he appears on the sands.

Gladiatorial contests are also hugely popular in Parsantium. Teams of gladiators, sporting fanciful names like Mountain Avalanche and Lightning Strike, belong to one of several stables that are sponsored by a noble or other wealthy patron. Bouts at the Hippodrome pit the fighters directly against each other in straight-up fights or Capture the Flag contests, or against dangerous beasts such as girallons, dire bears and even basilisks. Sometimes the battles are “spiced up” by adding pit traps or other hazards to the arena. As with chariot racing, serious injury and death are occupational hazards.

## The Theatre

Theatre was brought to Parsantium by the Bathurans and remains a popular source of entertainment, particularly among the wealthier, fashion-conscious residents of the Imperial and Old quarters, although cheap seats are also available for “the mob”. The 5,000-seat, 500-year-old Theatre of Cytherea (see page 83) is the largest theatre in the city and stages performances six nights a week. Twice per year, in early winter and late spring, the week-long Cytherean Festivities are held, a drama competition in honour of the goddess in which seven playwrights each enter three plays: two tragedies and one comedy. In the last three years, the talented but highly conservative dramatist Dulicitus has won five out of six times, but the winner at the most recent festival was the iconoclastic and charismatic young bard, Iancu Petronas.



Traditional Bathuran drama involves two or three actors wearing simple white robes and different masks to depict the various characters they are playing, plus a chorus of half a dozen others, dressed in black,



who provide commentary on the action. No women appear on the stage; female roles are always played by men. Violence is also never shown: when somebody is about to die in a play, that person is taken offstage to be “killed” and is then brought back “dead”.

Iancu Petronas (see page 84) and his friends and contemporaries are determined to change all this. Their modern plays feature a bigger cast, colourful costumes, female performers playing women characters, comic relief in serious plays to keep the mob happy, and above all, sublime use of language and poetry. Swordfights and violent deaths take place on stage and there is an attempt to create realistic scenery by hanging painted cloth backdrops behind the action. Unsurprisingly, Petronas and his “new drama” are popular with many theatregoers but rejected by Dulicitus and other traditional playwrights. Iancu and his friends are also habitual drunks, carousers and womanizers, frequenting raucous feshalls and taverns such as the Winking Vixen and the Fallen Angel in the Old Quarter’s red-light district. Of course, this has not helped endear them to the establishment.

### Gambling

Gambling is a common pastime among Parsantines. The chariot races and gladiatorial combats at the Hippodrome attract plenty of betting action, and some of the rougher riverfront taverns in the Dock Ward and Poor Ward stage pit fights between both animals and humanoids (often gnolls). Table games played with dice and cards, such as Hazard and Five Blind Monkeys, are widely enjoyed in taverns and gambling houses like the Floating Palace (see page 106), and betting on drinking games (such as who can drink a yard of ale the fastest)

and arm wrestling contests happens all over the city but is especially popular in the boisterous dwarven pubs in the Harbour Ward. Although it is usually played in the spirit of friendly rivalry rather than for money, backgammon is the best-loved game in the coffee shops and taverns of Parsantium. Boards, playing pieces and dice are often carefully crafted from fine woods and ivory or bone, and are considered prized possessions by their owners.

### Drugs

Some Parsantines aren’t satisfied with alcohol, coffee and tobacco alone and like to indulge in other substances. In the dark alleyways of the Poor Ward and the back streets near the university, a brisk trade takes place in various narcotics, including white lotus dust (brings about a sense of well-being, coupled with pleasant hallucinations), cloud nine (causes euphoria), dash (a powerful stimulant) and mandragore (a hallucinogenic root with aphrodisiac qualities). White lotus is in vogue among students at the Scholastica and cloud nine use is becoming increasingly prevalent among bored civil servants in the bureaucracy, something of which the senior officials take a dim view. All of these drugs are addictive to varying degrees and can cause their users to suffer from anxiety and depression in between fixes. Although not strictly illegal, their use is frowned upon and their sale is often controlled by criminal gangs, such as the Eight Scorpions who operate Tiangao Town’s lotus dens (see page 132).

### Brothels

The oldest profession was banned 300 years ago by the Basilea Proseria on moral grounds. This only succeeded in driving prostitution underground, leading to its control by criminal gangs. It was legalized again by Corandias the Stubborn when he retook the city a century ago, though organized crime continues to run many of the city’s brothels and bawdy houses.

The most infamous red-light district is in the northern part of the Poor Ward near the Dolphin



Strait, where several popular establishments, known as “stews”, can be found, including the Winking Vixen (see page 107) and the Fallen Angel (page 108). Another concentration of bordellos can be found in the Victory Ward to the northeast of the Forum of Heraclius, close to the Victory Gate. These brothels tend to be more expensive, catering in the main to wealthy merchants, both visitors and locals, and randy wizards from the nearby magic district. Customers need to watch out for a common con trick where the swindler storms in at a critical moment, pretending to be the girl’s aggrieved husband. The victim then has to part with a large amount of gold to leave the premises with both his reputation and person unharmed.

## Social Customs

When Parsantines meet in the street or in each other’s homes, they will use different greetings, according to their background, the situation and their respective social classes.

A Bathuran will greet a friend or acquaintance with “May Helion shine upon you and your family”, to which is expected the reply “And on you and yours”, while an Aqhrani will say “May Amur bring you plentiful rains”, with the polite response being “And to you.” The words may be accompanied by a kiss – on the lips of an equal or on the cheek of someone of slightly lower station. If there is a big difference in social class, the person of lower status is expected to bow or even kneel down to the other. On parting, “Go in peace” or “May you always be healthy” are both used.

Sampurans will greet each other with “Namaste” (meaning “salutations to you”), spoken while making a slight bow with hands pressed together in front of the chest, fingers pointed upwards. Tiangaons will sometimes also use this gesture, along with the greeting “Ni Hao” (literally meaning “you good”), or will bow with their right hand shaped in a fist and held in the palm of their left hand. The oldest person must always be greeted first, and it is considered respectful to look down at the ground while making the greeting.

It is customary among all Parsantines, whatever their ethnic background, to bring a gift when visiting friends, relatives or business associates in their homes. Sweets such as rose, lemon, or pistachio-flavoured lokum (also known as Parsantine Delight) or sticky pastries like baklava are generally preferred to flowers or wine. The host is obliged to treat guests with generosity and respect, offering them food and drink at the very least, and if the guests arrive at night, it is considered rude not to offer them a bed. While in his or her home, the host is responsible for the well-being and safety of his guests, and they, in turn, are expected to act with good manners and not overstay their welcome.

## Superstitions

### The Evil Eye

The widespread fear of the “Evil Eye” dates back to the earliest days of Dhak Janjua and the basilisks that lived in the area where the city was founded. These terrible beasts preyed on the refugees as they built their new homes. Villagers would disappear, only for a statue of the missing person to be found nearby, often with a look of horror on his or her face. This caused widespread fear and panic that some kind of terrible curse had befallen the fledgling settlement. Even after the basilisks had been tracked down and killed by a hunting party (including Vrishabha himself), stories of the Evil Eye persisted through the generations. It is common for Parsantines to wear an eye-shaped amulet of blue glass touching their bare skin under their clothes to protect them from its influence. Sometimes these amulets have magical powers of protection, but most are mundane trinkets. Superstitious Parsantines fear blue-eyed spellcasters from the lands to the west and north, believing them to be marked by the Evil Eye and capable of casting malevolent hexes and curses.

### Cats, Monkeys and Sacred Cows

Parsantium is home to thousands of cats, some owned as pets, but the vast majority living wild on the streets of the city, hunting rats and mice or feeding off scraps.



Many superstitions have grown up around these felines: a black cat crossing one's path while walking down the street is thought to bring bad luck, but dreaming of a white cat signifies good fortune, as does seeing a one-eyed cat. If this occurs, a Parsantine will spit on his thumb, press it into the palm of his hand and make a wish (which is bound to come true).

There are even more monkeys in the city than cats, mainly living on the Old Quarter's rooftops. These blue-bottomed primates have a habit of stealing food, shiny valuables, and whatever else they can get their hands on belonging to anyone who allows them to come close enough. Everyone tolerates a bit of petty larceny, though – it is considered very bad luck to hurt or kill a monkey because of the role Hanuman the Monkey God played in freeing Dhak Janjua from the tyrannical rule of Vrishaba.



Many Sampurans hold the cow to be a sacred animal that symbolizes wealth and abundance, and refuse to eat beef. In some parts of the Old Quarter, including the Temple Ward and Poor Ward, cows wander freely through the streets; these cows are held in high regard and must not be harmed. A cow in the road will often put a stop to the busy traffic as traders, shoppers and passers-by pause to let it go slowly by.

## Trade and Currency

Parsantium is above all else a trading city, where merchants come from all over the known world to sell their goods for the highest price possible, and to buy whatever is in demand back home. As well as

exporting goods that have arrived in the city from elsewhere, Parsantium produces a number of sought-after commodities itself, including beer, wine, olives, fine clothing and metalwork, weapons and armour, jewellery, religious icons and rare woods. The purple dye made in the city from local shellfish is also much in demand by wealthy nobles overseas, but its export is restricted since purple should only be worn by the Basileus and his most important vassals.

The principal trade routes heading into and out of Parsantium by land are as follows:

The **Silk Road** heads southeast from the Camel Gate, then east along the southern edge of the Feysnore Forest and the Griffin Water, before crossing the vast Great Grass Sea to reach the distant lands of Tiangao. Silk, tea, jade, porcelain, lacquerware, brocade, fine art objects and swords, as well as white lotus dust (an addictive hallucinogenic drug) are the chief imports into Parsantium.

The **Path to Heaven** also leaves by the Camel Gate, but continues southeast through thorny wastes and badlands before crossing the Pillars of Heaven Mountains by means of a series of treacherous high passes, only accessible for half the year. The road then continues down the mountains into the Kingdoms of Sampur. Rare spices and herbs, ambergris, tea, sandalwood and ebony, turquoise, lapis lazuli, rubies, ivory, pearls and exotic animals are the goods most commonly brought into Parsantium by Sampuran merchants.

The **Via Bathura** leaves Parsantium by the Victory Gate, heading northwest and then west into the Sunset Lands – the former territory of the Bathuran Empire – known as Erebu, the Land of Darkness, to the Aqhrani. The road winds its way through dark forests, rolling hills and high mountains, passing through small baronies and independent city states, many still bearing the trappings of their long-gone imperial masters, as well as wilderness roamed by fierce tribes of humanoids and fell beasts. Eventually, the Via Bathura reaches Loranto, a powerful city state with a navy to match, before finally coming to a stop in Rezana, where the Bathuran



Empire began 1,500 years ago. Iron, gold and silver, wine, timber, pottery and perfumes are most commonly imported into Parsantium from the western lands.

By sea, goods enter and leave the city by three main routes:

Sailing **south from the city**, and hugging the coastline, a merchant ship will pass the fallen desert kingdom of Khemit. If her captain can steer clear of the pirates that prey on shipping in the Corsairs' Sea, she will eventually arrive safely in the exotic Caliphate of Aqhran. Aqhrani merchants bring incense, perfumes, spices, clockwork devices, brassware, exotic birds, rare animal skins, fine rugs and carpets into Parsantium. Many stop off en route at the island of Phokris to trade with its minotaur inhabitants.

The **western sea route** from Parsantium leads past the island of Cervenna and the flying headquarters of the Platinum Knights of Themicia to the wealthy city of Loranto. Merchants taking this route need to be wary of pirates and also the Crusading Brothers of the Sword, a knightly order that has fallen on hard times and has taken to preying on shipping heading to and from Parsantium.

The third route heads **northeast** up the Dolphin Strait and then north to the far side of the Griffin Water and the port town of Karjolat. Here, cargo is loaded onto barges for the slow return trip upriver to the frozen tundra of Urskovia. Barges heading in the reverse direction transport furs, wine, cheeses, wool, tallow, whalebone, art objects and diamonds bound for Parsantium.

### Duties

The Royal Exchequer imposes a ten percent duty on all saleable goods entering or leaving the city. These

are high fees but Parsantium's unparalleled position on the crossroads of so many major trade routes means there is no shortage of merchants willing to make the trip and to pass these charges on to their customers. Merchants from Loranto pay a reduced rate of seven percent as part of an agreement made by Corandias the Stubborn in return for that city's financial support for the Great Crusade. This causes much resentment among other foreign traders, particularly those from the Caliphate of Aqhran who see Parsantium as *their* city.

Parsantium's duties are also high enough to make smuggling a worthwhile enterprise for those seeking some extra cash. While there are customs officials at the Royal Docks and the Old Docks, and at the gates into the city, the Old Docks are used so rarely that the office there is only lightly manned. Smugglers have found it relatively easy to bribe those on duty to knock off early or look the other way when a ship slips quietly into the docks late at night.

### Currency

Parsantium mints its own coins – these depict the profile of the ruling basileus on the obverse and the city's symbol (a leaping horse over a crescent moon) on the reverse. The gold piece is called a bezant, a silver piece is known as a solidus and a copper piece is a sestertius. The Royal Mint only produces platinum coins to commemorate the accession of a new basileus, making them rare, but those from elsewhere are usually accepted by merchants and moneychangers at full value. Gold aurei from Rezana, dinars from the Caliphate of Aqhran, silver rupees from Sampur and yuan from Tiangao are among the foreign coins sometimes taken in payment, but often at only two-thirds or half of their face value.

## CHAPTER THREE

# Running a Campaign



## Campaign Themes

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Your Parsantium campaign might consist of a series of varied and unconnected adventures, or it could have an overarching theme running through it. This section presents several suggested themes for campaigns set in the city. Of course, it's possible – and probably more fun – to keep your players on their toes by combining two or more of these ideas.

### Gangs of the Hidden Quarter

In this campaign, the PCs become involved with the criminal gangs that control much of the Old Quarter. Perhaps a PC thief is a junior member of one of these organizations, or is trying to get by as a freelance operative without being noticed by the gangs. Maybe the PCs help out one or two local businesses being leaned on for protection money by the ruthless Golden Scimitars, or they break up a smuggling operation run by the Dockside Crew during the course of their adventures. Having learned about the powerful crime bosses behind these gangs, the party might go after them in an attempt to clean up the streets. In doing this, the PCs' activities could draw the attention of the City Watch: those who have been paid off by the criminals will attempt to stop the adventurers rocking the boat, but good-hearted watchmen like Sergeant Saurish (see page 32) might want to enlist the PCs' help.

Alternatively, a group of black-hearted PCs could end up working for the Golden Scimitars or another criminal organization as enforcers, spies or assassins.

**Suggested Character Backgrounds:** Criminal Past, Flotsam & Jetsam, Old Quarter Commoner

### Delving into the Past

This is a more traditional fantasy campaign involving plenty of dungeon exploration. The PCs will spend much of their time investigating the tunnels and lost chambers of the old city of Dhak Janjua beneath modern-day Parsantium, either independently or on expeditions sponsored by the Scholastica or the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus. As well as needing to steer clear of the criminal gangs that use the Hidden Quarter as a base of operations, the PCs must be wary of dangerous monsters and fiendish traps as they search for the lost secrets and treasures of the past. Such adventures might bring the party into conflict with the Brotherhood of Spite (see page 126), Rotten Mursel (page 120) or the necromancer Laskaris (page 119). At higher levels, the PCs may well uncover the sinister truth behind the Cult of the Black Mother (page 127).

**Suggested Character Backgrounds:** Arcane Apprentice, University Scholar



## Politics and Intrigue

Centred on the power struggles and conspiracies going on across the city, this campaign might involve the government and bureaucracy, the noble houses, the guilds, or all three. The PCs could start out at low levels as minor supporters of a particular noble house or important government official, but as their reputations and influence grow, they become involved in ever more complex intrigues and missions. This type of campaign is likely to include clandestine meetings amid the steam of the bathhouse, navigating the labyrinthine workings of the bureaucracy, and making deals to play one enemy off against another. Adventures could feature spying, blackmail, diplomacy and negotiation, or downright violence. Confronting influential enemies directly is probably not an option, and the PCs can easily find themselves in over their heads.

**Suggested Character Backgrounds:** Bureaucrat, Imperial Quarter Noble, Journeyman

## Blood and Sand

For a theme that's more suited to a short series of adventures rather than a long-term campaign, PCs can try a stint as gladiators or charioteers in the Hippodrome, attempting to win prizes and the adoration of the crowd on the sands of the arena. The campaign might start with the PCs convicted for violent crimes and electing to serve as gladiators in preference to a lengthy prison sentence. The party should come up with flashy names for themselves and their team, and develop their own fighting styles and signature moves as they compete for glory. They might join the Blues or the Greens and race chariots for their faction, win the patronage of a powerful noble house, or be bribed to throw a bout by a corrupt bookmaker. The culmination of the campaign should be the annual Victory Games (see page 37) when the biggest prizes are on offer – perhaps this is when the mysterious obelisk at the centre of the race track reveals its dormant magical powers?

**Suggested Character Backgrounds:** Axe-Bearing Guard, Gladiator, Sellsword

## The Return of Vrishabha

This is the big one. After his death at the hands of Srivatsa 1,200 years ago, Vrishabha, the rakshasa rajah of Dhak Janjua (see page 11), was reincarnated in his tiger-like form but frozen in ice at the top of the Pillars of Heaven Mountains to the southeast of Parsantium. His servants – rakshasas, yak-headed sorcerers and others – seek to find a way to free their master so that he might reclaim his throne. Vrishabha is a suitable villain for the campaign's climax at very high or epic level, so this storyline should focus initially on frustrating the machinations of his rakshasa followers as they seek to gain influence in the city and to locate the ancient ritual texts and esoteric components required to free the rajah from the ice.

As Vrishabha's two main rakshasa agents in the city, Avishandu and Aurius Kalothese, seek to control organized crime and politics respectively, this campaign works well when combined with the Gangs of the Hidden Quarter and Politics and Intrigue themes described above. In my own campaign, the elusive Heinsoo (see page 130) was a recurring villain who always stayed one step ahead of the PCs, appearing briefly to steal a valuable tome or unusual artefact before vanishing into thin air.

An excellent way to foreshadow this key plotline is by exposing the PCs early in the campaign to a prophecy warning of Vrishabha's impending return. Perhaps a series of carvings can be found in the ruins of Jopura in the Feyshore Forest (see page 125) relating the story of the rajah's fall and predicting his release from his icy prison, or a mystic such as Bahlru (see page 101) might offer a cryptic, prophetic pronouncement to the party. Later, the PCs might come across Vashnawi (see page 63), whose dreams about the imprisoned rakshasa have featured a group of adventurers who bear a striking resemblance to the party members.

**Suggested Character Backgrounds:** Arcane Apprentice, Devout Disciple, Platinum Knight-Errant



## Additional Themes

Here are a few suggestions for some more focused campaign and adventure themes, which can be combined with the broader ones above for a change of pace:

**Agents of the Exchequer:** the PCs are employed by the government as Revenue Protection Officers and issued with the appropriate badges. Their orders are to investigate, either publicly or undercover, various matters concerning the Royal Exchequer, ranging from piracy and smuggling to the reasons why the supply of saffron into Parsantium has recently slowed.

**Guild Wars:** the PCs belong to one of Parsantium's major guilds (see page 142), such as the Weavers and Dyers or the Potters and Tilemakers, and are charged with protecting its members from their bitter rivals. However the PCs choose to conduct themselves, the opposing guild will use intimidation, violence, arson and dirty tricks to get what they want.

**In the Army Now:** the PCs are stationed on the frontiers of Parsantium's territory, defending its farming villages from raiding humanoids. As tension mounts on the border, there will be plenty of opportunities for the adventurers to distinguish themselves in battle and return to the city as heroes.

**Independent Traders:** the party set themselves up as merchants, bringing goods into Parsantium along the trade routes and selling them in the Mercantile Quarter. Perhaps they decide to smuggle valuable goods into the city to avoid paying the extortionate customs duty? Whatever they do, the wheels of commerce seldom run smoothly...

**Pub Landlords:** the PCs figure they spend so much time in their favourite waterfront tavern, they might as well buy it, but owning a rowdy watering hole in the lively part of the Old Quarter proves more difficult than it looks. As well as the nightly bar fights, the tavern is soon targeted by racketeers looking to extort protection money.

# Facilities & Services

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As you might expect, Parsantium offers a wide range of facilities and services to those living in and visiting the city. This section provides a helpful summary for the GM of what is available to his or her PCs.

## Buying and Selling – Equipment, Loot and Magic Items

Adventurers are always in need of newer, better gear, and frequently have jewellery, gems, art objects and unwanted magic items they are eager to turn into cash. Together the markets and shops of the Mercantile Quarter sell almost anything you can imagine from

across the known world, and if a buyer can't find what he is looking for there, there are plenty of other places to look in the fonduqs, souks and forums of the Old and Imperial quarters.

Generally speaking, PCs should be able to purchase mundane gear and other items without difficulty throughout the city, and can sell most non-magical loot without too much trouble. Minor magic items are a bit harder to track down, but these items can usually be purchased from sellers in the Mercantile Quarter (see page 78) or another busy market. Medium and major magic items can sometimes be bought from specialist dealers such as the Curio Cabinet in Tinker's Alley





(see page 82), but even then the selection on offer will be limited and constantly changing. Members of the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus can also buy potions, scrolls, wands and other wizardly magic items from the shops inside the Marjani Minar. Irene at the Curio Cabinet and some of the traders in the markets may be willing to buy unwanted magic items from adventurers, depending on the value.

## Communication

Parsantium's inhabitants often need to send messages from one side of this large city to the other. Couriers can be hired to carry letters or packages across town, usually for around 1 sp or so, more if the package is heavy or urgent. Noble houses and important businesses will often use their own servants to deliver invitations, contracts and gifts, and in the Old Quarter there are always young kids hanging around that can be paid a few coppers to deliver something locally (although it is wise not to pay them upfront). But whoever the delivery is entrusted to, an urgent message can take a long time to reach its destination. Obviously, wizards and other arcanists have the ability to use magical methods such as *sending* to transmit a short message but not everyone is a spellcaster and hiring one is expensive.

Sensing that there was an opportunity for a faster, more reliable service, an imaginative gnome named **Dinejan** (CG male gnome wizard 11) began breeding pigeons and using powerful enchantments to turn them into speedy and dependable messengers based in his tower in the Old Quarter. Dinejan's Deliveries opened for business ten years ago and offers delivery of a scroll or tiny package to anywhere in the city from its three offices (located in the Victory Ward, Mercantile Quarter and Caravans Ward) for 10 gp. The pigeons are



very reliable, tracking down and unerringly delivering their message – to the named recipient only – within 15 minutes, and are a common sight in the skies above Parsantium.

For public announcements, town criers are used to relate the proclamations of the Basileus and the Prefect and to spread important news throughout the city. Found in the forums and fonduqs, town criers can also be hired by individuals to announce a marriage or advertise a business at a cost of 3 sp per day.

## Healing

Adventurers have a tendency to get themselves into scrapes and often end up needing help from a friendly temple. Parsantium has many gods and even more temples, mosques and churches, but only a handful of major temples provide healing services to adventurers in exchange for “religious donations”. The following temples have high-level priests willing to cast spells to bring back dead PCs, remove curses and other enchantments such as petrification and polymorph, cure diseases or restore ability points or levels lost to energy drain:

**Holy Basilica of Helion**, Civic Ward (see page 61)

**Celestial Bastion** [Themicia], Grand Ward (see page 70)

**House of Forge and Hearth** [Dorna and Voltan], Harbour Ward (see page 72)

**Golden Mosque of Amur**, Temple Ward (see page 102)

**Temple of Qian Lao**, Temple Ward (see page 104)

**Vishnu Mandira**, Temple Ward (see page 102)

See the Gazetteer for more information on these temples. All charge standard core rulebook prices for their services, but a group of PCs may well receive a discount (or even free healing) if they have aided the god's cause in the past, have a reputation for goodly deeds, are willing to undertake a quest on the church's behalf, or have the Devout Disciple background (see page 20).



## Places to Stay

As a trading city, Parsantium has a huge number of inns, with the largest concentration of establishments to be found near the Victory Gate in the Imperial Quarter's Victory Ward and in the northwestern half of the Old Quarter's Caravans Ward. Prices and quality vary from a night's stay on the taproom floor in a scruffy pub for 2 sp, right up to 50 gp for the top-floor suite overlooking the Forum of Heraclius at the luxurious White Swan.

Although the city is crowded, it's not too hard for the PCs to find a place to rent. At the lowest end of the scale, a dirty tenement apartment in the slums of the Dock Ward costs 2–4 gp per month, a leaky houseboat in Flotsam costs 3 gp, and a basic apartment in the Poor Ward costs 5–10 gp. Average residential accommodation in the other wards of the Old Quarter, the Mercantile Quarter or the Imperial Quarter's Victory and Harbour wards costs 10–40 gp per month. Large homes in wealthy districts such as the Grand Ward and near the Garden Mausoleum of Hulieman in the Garden Ward cost up to 160 gp per month.

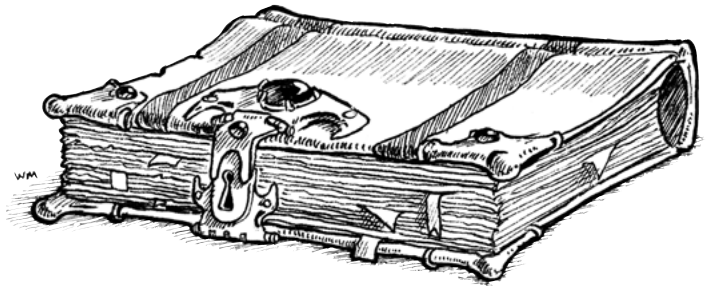
PCs with a surfeit of cash may want to purchase their own home. Poor residences go for 100–400 gp, average homes cost 1,500–6,000 gp and an upscale residence will set you back 5,000–20,000 gp. Noble estates in the Grand and Palace wards are worth in excess of 25,000 gp but are not usually for sale.

## Information Gathering

Adventurers often need to know obscure pieces of lore, such as the location of the Lost Tomb of King Abydos, or how to avoid the Ninefold Curses of the Bronze Serpent. The Library of All Knowledge at the university (see page 63) is a treasure trove of information on the Bathuran Empire and beyond, and charges 20 gp per day for access, which includes assistance from the priests of Amarani. Knowledge checks at the library can be made with a +5 bonus after a full day's research.

To research eldritch matters and arcane spells, members of the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus can access the library at the Marjani Minar; Knowledge (arcana) checks are made here with a +5 bonus after 1d4 +1 hours of study. Non-members might be able to find a member willing to do this research for them at a cost of 2d4 x 10 gp. For more mundane matters, such as who owns the White Palm, Parsantine citizens can visit the Hall of Records in the Curia (see page 59).

In addition, a number of sages and experts in different fields of study can be hired to provide specialist knowledge or advice. Some are professors at the university, for instance Nepotian Megaris (see page 147); others will be masters in the relevant guild. Tracking one down usually requires a Knowledge (local) check, and the PCs need to be ready to pay extortionate sums, often 100 gp per day or more, for the information they need.



## Spellcasting

Spellcasters for hire can be found all over Parsantium but the most reliable are based in the Victory Ward's magic district and in the fonduqs of the Artisans Ward near the Marjani Minar (see Kasif al-Jaludi, page 97). All manner of spells are on offer, ranging from minor magics like *make whole*, used to fix a broken vase, to powerful divinations to locate a legendary item or missing person. Tracking down a spellcaster requires a Knowledge (local) or (arcana) check, and prices charged are generally as per the rulebook, but can be 10–20% more depending on the greediness of the spellcaster and how desperate the PCs seem.



# The Living City

Parsantium should feel like a dynamic, living city to you and your players, where things happen without the involvement of the adventurers. To describe what is going on when the PCs are in between quests, the GM can roll every month or so on the Random Events table below. Of course, some of these situations can form the basis of a new adventure or subplot too. In addition, see page 35 for details of the festivals that take place throughout the year and can be used as backdrops to an adventure.

## Random Events

D100	EVENT
01–05	Assassination
06–10	Birth
11–15	Blood on the Streets
16–20	Death
21–23	Earthquake
24–28	Faction Riots
29–33	Fire
34–38	Flood
39–43	Guild Wars
44–48	Humanoid Raid
49–51	Important Visitor
52–56	Marriage
57–61	Mystic Phenomenon
62–66	New Discovery
67–69	Plague
70–72	Political Conspiracy
73–75	Poor Harvest
76–80	Rampaging Monster
81–85	Trade Dispute
86–90	Trouble at Sea
91–95	Unforeseen Incident
96–00	Unusual Weather

**Assassination:** A well-known figure in Parsantine society is murdered. This could be a government official, the grand master of a guild, a noble, a notorious criminal or wealthy merchant. Whoever it is, there are sure to be repercussions.

**Birth:** An important pregnancy or birth is announced. The Despoina could be with child again, or an heir could be born to one of the important noble houses. This is a happy event and is followed by celebrations and feasting. Alternatively, one of the PCs could find out he or she is going to have a child.

**Blood on the Streets:** One of the criminal gangs of the Hidden Quarter pushes into the territory of a rival, causing mayhem. The City Watch struggles to cope as bloody street fights break out between the two gangs, and the bodies start piling up on both sides.

**Death:** A well-known Parsantine dies, either through illness or old age, or due to some kind of misadventure. There may be repercussions if there is no clear successor to the deceased's title, role or wealth. Alternatively, a relative or close friend of a PC might die.

**Earthquake:** The city is shaken by an earthquake. This is likely to be fairly minor, causing damage to buildings and injuring people living in a single ward, but every so often Parsantium experiences a more serious quake that affects the whole city, causing significant structural damage and resulting in numerous fatalities. Serious earthquakes may be followed by a tsunami that would obliterate Flotsam and both sets of docks. Both minor and major earthquakes could lead to new areas of the Hidden Quarter becoming exposed, and others being rendered impassable.

**Faction Riots:** Following a bad-tempered day's chariot racing at the Hippodrome, fighting breaks out between the rival Greens and Blues in the streets around the



stadium. As the City Watch moves in to contain the fighting, faction supporters turn on the officers of the law and a full-blown riot ensues – fires are started and many people are killed before order is restored.

**Fire:** A large fire starts in the city, burning through a mahalla or perhaps an entire ward (or two) if it can't be contained in time. Many buildings are destroyed and lives will be lost. The fire could have started accidentally, perhaps as a result of irresponsible spellcasting, or been caused by arson.

**Flood:** Heavy rains cause the waters of the Dolphin Strait to rise so much that the waterfront districts (including the Mercantile Quarter) are flooded. Buildings are damaged and many market stalls will be washed away.

**Guild Wars:** Tensions flare up between two or more rival guilds in the Artisans Ward, leading to street brawls and attacks on shops and businesses belonging to guild members. The City Watch do their best to contain the rioting and minimize the casualties.

**Humanoid Raid:** Parsantium's lands come under attack from a warlike humanoid tribe (most likely hobgoblins or orcs). One or more farming villages are burned to the ground, with the hapless inhabitants killed or taken as slaves. The army is mobilized but may not be quick enough to catch up with the raiders before they melt into the wilderness. Patrols are increased in the vicinity in case there is another attack.

**Important Visitor:** A famous individual arrives in Parsantium. This could be a royal dignitary from another land (such as the Caliph of Aqhran or the Maharani of Sampur), a famous adventurer, a renowned charioteer or gladiator, or an eminent academic. There may well be formal banquets and feasts to honour the visitor.

**Marriage:** An important engagement is announced or a wedding ceremony takes place. The marriage could forge a new alliance between two noble houses or guilds, or strengthen Parsantium's ties with its trading partners. If a PC is courting, his or her marriage proposal is accepted. Whatever the circumstances, the engagement or wedding is a cause for much rejoicing.

**Mystic Phenomenon:** The city experiences an unusual or supernatural phenomenon that may have a prophetic meaning. This could be the sighting of a comet in the sky, an eclipse, rains of blood, frogs or fish, a cloud formation that looks like a grinning skull, or some other portentous event. Depending on the phenomenon, it could well cause widespread panic among superstitious Parsantines, with some of the city's priests reassuring their flocks while others proclaim dark times ahead.

**New Discovery:** Adventurers or academics from the Scholastica find a historic site dating back to the time of Dhak Janjua, either in the Hidden Quarter beneath Parsantium or on the outskirts of the city. This could be an ancient temple decorated with well-preserved frescoes or a burial chamber covered in carved inscriptions. Once the news gets out, adventurers and other folk begin to arrive at the site as exaggerated tales of fabulous treasures spread like wildfire.

**Plague:** A highly contagious disease spreads through Parsantium at such a rapid rate that the city's priests are unable to contain it with their magic. The plague likely originates in the crowded streets of the Old Quarter but quickly takes hold of the entire city. The outbreak can last several months; during this time, any PC in the city is likely to be exposed to the disease and will need to make a saving throw each week to avoid catching it. To make matters worse, trade, Parsantium's lifeblood, dries up as merchants avoid the city, causing the prices of many goods to increase two or threefold.

**Political Conspiracy:** A plot is foiled within the bureaucracy against the Basileus or the Prefect. Those responsible are stripped of their roles and fancy hats and exiled from the city in disgrace. It is possible that Bardas uses the opportunity to get rid of an opponent unconnected with the conspiracy. Uncertainty pervades the corridors of power for several weeks.

**Poor Harvest:** The villages that provide Parsantium with much of its food experience a meagre harvest of one or more key crops (rice, wheat, olives), perhaps



brought on by humanoid raids, inclement weather or bad luck. Whatever the reason, food is in short supply, with prices as much as double their normal level for several months following the crop failures.

**Rampaging Monster:** A dangerous monster (or monsters) is on the loose somewhere in the city, destroying property and killing innocent citizens. The monster could have been summoned by a careless wizard, emerged from the tunnels of the Hidden Quarter, arrived in the hold of a ship or escaped from the Hippodrome. The City Watch may ask for help from adventurers or the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus.

**Trade Dispute:** Parsantium falls out with Sampur, Aqhran or another key trading partner over proposed increases to duties and tariffs. The dispute lasts 1d4 months. During this period, fewer merchants from that country come to Parsantium, leading to shortages of the relevant imports with a subsequent increase in prices (up to two or three times normal), and a surfeit of the goods Parsantium produces for export, resulting in a fall in prices for those commodities

(around 25%). See page 42 for a list of which goods are imported from where.

**Trouble at Sea:** Shipping heading in and out of Parsantium has been coming under attack, either from pirates or from the unpredictable Crusading Brothers of the Sword (see page 138). The Grand Dhoungarius of the Fleet doubles the number of galleys on patrol until the enemy ships have been driven off or sunk. In the meantime, certain trade goods could be in short supply.

**Unforeseen Incident:** A tragic incident occurs somewhere in Parsantium – part of the Old Docks is swept away by gale force winds, a badly maintained slum tenement collapses, or a pair of wrestling camels run amok through the streets of the Caravans Ward. This can be a relatively minor incident causing property damage and disruption in the local area or a true calamity with many lives lost.

**Unusual Weather:** The city suffers an extended period of inclement or atypical weather – heavy rains, an unbearable heat wave, thick fog that lasts all day, hail, sleet or snow.

## City Features

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### Walls and Towers

Following his coronation after the defeat of the hobgoblins, Corandias XVI the Stubborn rebuilt Parsantium's walls to ensure the city was better protected against potential humanoid attackers. The new walls, surrounding the Imperial Quarter and protecting the landward side of the Old Quarter, were completed in 1451. Guarded by the Parsantine Army, the walls are 60 feet high and 20 feet wide, with crenellations on both sides, and there are towers at irregular intervals. A 15-foot-wide walkway

between the two sides of each wall allows the soldiers on duty to patrol along the top, and there are dragon-shaped Parsantine Fire throwers stationed every hundred feet.

The towers are 75 feet high and have five floors and a crenellated roof, also mounted with a Parsantine Fire thrower. Doors open out onto the battlements and spiral stairs inside each tower lead down to a sturdy door out into the city. The upkeep of the city walls and towers is the responsibility of the Domestic of the Walls, an official in the bureaucracy who reports directly to the Strategos.





## City Gates

Five gates pierce the city walls. Of these, the Victory Gate (see page 65) into the Imperial Quarter, and the Camel Gate (see page 88) into the Caravans Ward in the Old Quarter are the two greater gates. Both have imposing gatehouses with sturdy iron-bound doors at either end and are protected by murder holes and a portcullis. They are kept locked at night but can be opened for late arrivals or for anyone needing to leave the city.

The other three gates are the so-called lesser gates – the West Gate leading into the Grand Ward, the North Gate into the Palace Ward, and the Farmer’s Gate into the Poor Ward. These gates are 15-foot-wide, heavy wooden doors with no gatehouse.

All five gates are guarded by the City Watch, who collect the tolls for entering Parsantium – 2 cp per person, 1 cp per horse, camel or cow, and 3 cp per cart – and have customs officials on hand to collect the duty owing on trade goods. Queues of people waiting to enter the city are common at all of the gates.

## Roads and Streets

The size and quality of Parsantium’s streets fluctuates tremendously, reflecting the city’s history: while the Old Quarter grew organically over a period of 1,000 years, the Imperial Quarter was planned and built over a much shorter period.

The broad avenues of the Imperial Quarter, such as Lords Avenue, Silver Street and Conqueror’s Road, are 30 feet wide, allowing wagons and coaches to pass each other comfortably, while those on foot have room to walk safely on both sides. These roads are well maintained and paved with cobblestones. The grandest and most important avenue is the Mese (Middle Street), which runs east from the entrance to Cedar Park in the Grand Ward, through the Victory Ward’s Forum of Heraclius, to the Holy Basilica of Helion, the Hippodrome and the Great Palace, and is lined on both sides with colonnaded porticoes. The main streets

of the Old Quarter, such as the Street of Monkeys and Spice Street, connect the wards, running southwest to northeast and northwest to southeast. Around 20–25 feet wide, they are kept in generally good condition, although less attention is paid to the roads in the Dock and Poor wards.

Minor streets are 15–20 feet wide in the Imperial Quarter but only 10–15 feet wide in the crowded Mercantile and Old quarters, making traffic jams common. Where cobbled, these roads are often badly maintained, while those constructed simply from packed dirt become treacherously muddy after heavy rainfall. Alleyways are typically 5–10 feet wide and usually cobbled in the Imperial Quarter; they are unpaved and as narrow as 3 feet wide in the Mercantile and Old quarters. Metal grates provide access from the street to the sewers (and into the Hidden Quarter) every few hundred yards – these grates are kept locked (Open Lock DC 20).

The main streets of the Imperial and Mercantile quarters are brightly illuminated with copious candle-burning glass lanterns each day at dusk; the Mese is lit around the clock with *everburning torches*. In the Old Quarter, cheaper oil lamps are used, which provide fainter illumination and sometimes give off clouds of black smoke, making it hard to see, particularly in narrow alleys.

## Getting Around

On average, it takes around 20 minutes to travel from the middle of one ward to the next on foot. Lazy PCs with cash to spare can hire a carriage and potentially halve the travel time although there is always a risk of getting caught up in traffic, particularly in the Artisans and Caravans wards. In the Old Quarter transport will be a bullock cart costing 1 sp; in the Imperial Quarter it will be a more comfortable carriage pulled by a horse for a cost of 2 sp. Nobles often prefer to travel by palanquin – hiring one costs 5 sp per hour.



## The Dolphin Strait

The slow-moving Dolphin Strait is 20 miles long, connecting the Griffin Water to the northeast with the Corsairs' Sea to the southwest. The water is nearly three-quarters of a mile wide where it runs through the middle of Parsantium, separating the two halves of the city; the average depth is 220 feet. Regular boat traffic makes the 20-minute trip from the Royal Docks in the Harbour Ward to the Old Docks in the Dock Ward (and vice versa), and also to and from the jetties on the western side of the Mercantile Quarter. In addition, many fishermen make a good living catching fish in the waters of the Dolphin Strait, so it's not hard to find someone to take you where you need to go, typically for around 5 cp per person. Larger ships sometimes sail up or down the full length of the Strait, but all water traffic is required by law to stop at either the Old Docks or Royal Docks for a customs inspection and to pay import duties. Commoners arriving at the Royal Docks by boat are expected to show a pass (see below), but this requirement is rarely enforced.

## The Bridges

The two huge stone bridges that cross the Dolphin Strait are each over 300 yards long and 50 feet wide, and were built by Vrishabha nearly 2,000 years ago when he was at the height of his power. Srivatsa's Bridge leads from the Old Quarter to the island holding the Mercantile Quarter, and has apartment buildings lining each side, with an arcade of small shops beneath. The Rajah's Bridge crosses from the Imperial Quarter to the Mercantile Quarter and is a grander sight, free of buildings and lined instead with 200-year-old sculptures of past rulers, starting with Jagatpal and ending with Corandias XIII; made

out of copper, these have turned green with age. Both bridges are crowded from dawn to dusk – at busy times it can take up to an hour to get from one end to the other. Street food stalls have sprung up along each to take advantage of the passing trade, selling sweet and savoury pastries, lamb kebabs, and wedges of bread smothered in tomato paste and olive oil.

The Bathuran rich are keen to keep the riff-raff away from their nice homes, meaning that restrictions are in force at the entrance to the Imperial Quarter from the Rajah's Bridge. Supposedly any commoner (defined as anyone not owning property or belonging to a guild) is required to show a special pass to the City Watch on the gate to gain admission. In reality, the Watch only bother to ask for passes from anyone wearing simple peasant clothes or "looking poor" – this could well apply to some PCs. The Civic Ward Watch, on the other hand, is notoriously racist and liable to challenge even quite obviously wealthy Old Quarter residents because of their dark skin. Passes, good for one week, are obtainable from the offices of the Department of Labour in the Mercantile Quarter and the Artisans Ward, cost 3 cp, and must bear the wax seal of a guild official or registered businessman to be valid.

Clearly, the bridge pass requirements do little to promote harmony between the different cultures living in Parsantium, and have led to a thriving black market dealing in stolen and forged passes, with Old Quarter thieves disguising themselves as nobles or merchants (or crossing by boat) whenever they want to rob a few rich folk on the north side of the Strait. All restrictions are lifted when the chariot races are on and the residents of the Old Quarter come streaming over the bridge to support the Greens and the Reds at the Hippodrome. Of course, the races present an ideal opportunity for anyone wanting to cause trouble to get into the Imperial Quarter.



## CHAPTER FOUR

# Gazetteer

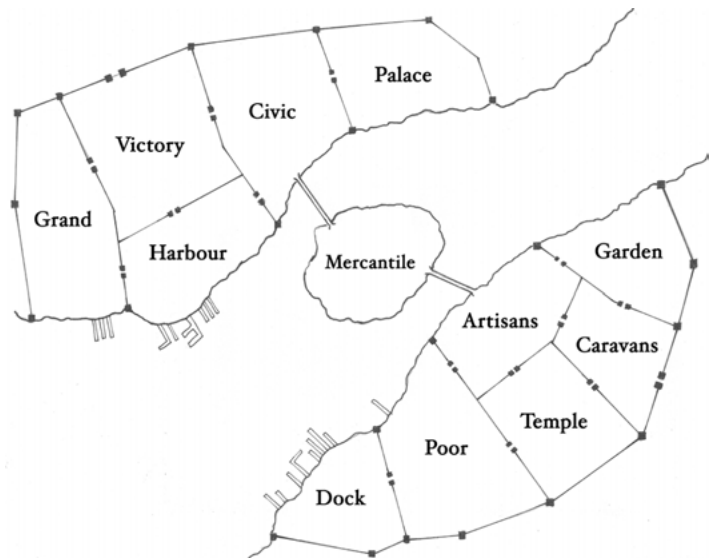


This lengthy chapter is the very heart of the Parsantium sourcebook, presenting the Imperial, Mercantile and Old quarters in depth, as well as describing the Hidden Quarter beneath the city's streets and several key locations beyond its walls. Each section begins with an introduction to the quarter as a whole, before turning its attention to the individual city wards that make up the quarter. Ward entries begin with a general introduction, a First Impressions section (handy for the GM when describing the ward to the players for the first time) and a description of Passers-By (NPCs suitable for incidental encounters as the PCs wander the ward's streets). Entries then follow on the important locations and other points of interest in the ward, together with relevant NPCs, encounter ideas and adventure hooks.

## The Eleven Wards

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Both the Imperial Quarter and the Old Quarter (but not the Mercantile Quarter) are divided into wards. Each of these wards is separated from its neighbours by walls, with archways and gates providing access from one ward to another. These gates are locked at night in the Imperial Quarter, and are supposed to be in the Old Quarter but usually aren't. Late-night wanderers will need to ask the Watch to unlock a gate – it is customary to tip a watchman a copper sestertius or two for doing this. The eleven city wards each have their own unique symbol, which is set into the archway above each gate to identify the ward you are about to enter. In the Old Quarter these symbols are carved into the stone; in the Imperial Quarter they are inlaid with mosaics. Each ward has its own Watchhouse (see page 32).





The table below gives an overview of each quarter, its wards and their symbols:

WARD	SYMBOL	DISTRICTS & LANDMARKS
<b>IMPERIAL QUARTER</b>		
Civic Ward	Horse	Holy Basilica of Helion, Hippodrome, Courthouse, Curia, Scholastica
Victory Ward	Five Coins in a Circle	Victory Gate, Forum of Heraclius, magic district, fine shops
Grand Ward	Sphinx	Cedar Park, Celestial Bastion, noble estates
Harbour Ward	Three Wavy Lines	Dwarven district, Royal Docks, House of Forge and Hearth, Wavecrest Hall
Palace Ward	Crown	Great Palace, noble estates, Garrison
<b>MERCANTILE QUARTER</b>		Markets, Colossus, Theatre of Cytherea
<b>OLD QUARTER</b>		
Caravans Ward	Camel	Camel Gate, caravanserais, inns
Garden Ward	Elephant	Garden Mausoleum of Hulieman, Observatory, Old Palace
Artisans Ward	Hammer and Tongs	Marjani Minar, Fonduq of the Nightingale's Song, Hippocampus Baths, guildhalls
Temple Ward	Sacred Cow	Temples, Tiangao Town
Poor Ward	Bowl	Red-light district, half-orc neighbourhood, tanneries, Prison
Dock Ward	Leaping Dolphin	Old Docks, Flotsam, slums



# IMPERIAL QUARTER

The Imperial Quarter, located on the northern side of the Dolphin Strait, is home to the Basileus, the city's government and its bloated bureaucracy, and the vast majority of its privileged Bathuran noble class. This is the newest part of the city, built following the conquest of Parsantium by Corandias the Magnificent, but is still over 800 years old. The splendid Mese – the city's grandest avenue – runs through the centre of the quarter from west to east, starting at the entrance to Cedar Park in the Grand Ward, passing through the Forum of Heraclius to the magnificent Holy Basilica of Helion with its majestic dome, and past the Hippodrome, before finally reaching the Great Palace of the Basileus. The Scholastica, Parsantium's university and the former Bathuran Empire's greatest centre of learning, is located in the quarter too.

Most of the buildings in the quarter are constructed in the Bathuran style from either marble or bricks and concrete. Many of these grand edifices feature arches, impressive vaults or domes, and are adorned with dazzling white marble sculptures, often set in pediments over the entrance or in elaborate friezes running around the top of the walls. Inside, beautiful mosaics of gold and tesserae (coloured stones) depicting past rulers of Parsantium, famous battles and religious scenes decorate the walls and domes. The Bathurans are a religious people and the quarter is home to numerous churches and small temples dedicated to the gods of their pantheon. Each church, however tiny, houses at least one exquisitely painted icon of its patron god, and most hold a holy relic or two as well.

Beyond the civic and religious buildings, much of the Imperial Quarter consists of insulae – three- to six-storey apartment buildings, with shops on the ground

floor and housing on the upper floors. The largest and most desirable apartments are on the first floor and the cheapest and smallest at the top; many have balconies overlooking the street. This quarter is also where most of the city's dwarves and dragonkin live, dwarves preferring to live on the ground or first floor, while dragonkin clans often convert several small apartments on the top floor of an insula into one large one, capable of housing their extended family. The Bathuran nobility mostly live in large mansions in the leafy Grand Ward in the western part of the quarter or in the prestigious Palace Ward – these homes have much in common architecturally with the civic buildings described above, and are usually set within immaculate (and often extensive) gardens dotted with marble fountains and sculptures.

Less cramped and densely populated than the older half of the city across the Dolphin Strait, the Imperial Quarter has numerous public squares, called forums, where its wide avenues meet. These open spaces tend to have tall columns or obelisks from Khemit, often over 100 feet high, at their centre, and are sometimes entered via ostentatious triumphal arches built by past rulers to mark key military victories. At one time all the columns were topped by bronze statues of the emperor or general each square was named after, but only a few now remain – most were pulled down and destroyed when Parsantium fell to Kalgroth Ironheart. Nowadays, it is not unusual to find a bearded ascetic monk in a loincloth standing on top of a column for days, if not weeks, on end in quiet contemplation. These forums act as the social and trading hub for each neighbourhood. Anyone who's anyone (or hoping to become someone) needs to be seen there each day, meeting with their political and business associates and catching up on the latest news.



# Civic Ward

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Situated at the centre of the Imperial Quarter, the Civic Ward contains many of the city's most notable buildings, including the Holy Basilica of Helion, the Hippodrome and the Library of All Knowledge. It borders the Victory and Harbour wards to the west, and the Palace Ward to the east, as well as providing access to the Mercantile and Old quarters via the Rajah's Bridge.

The ward is divided into three districts. To the west, the financial district beginning on Coin Street is home to the offices of the Royal Exchequer (see page 27) and the Mint, as well as banks and moneylenders, several upmarket taverns and restaurants, and expensive insulae and shops. Armed guards, many of them dwarves, watch over these businesses, keeping out undesirables and safeguarding them from trouble. The district on the eastern side of the ward comprises mostly government buildings, including the Curia and the Courthouse, but also holds the Basilica, the Hippodrome and the ward's Watchhouse. The leafy university district, north of the Mese, is where the Ivory Towers of the Scholastica, the Library and other college buildings are located.

## First Impressions

Everyone in this ward seems to be in a hurry: officials in ostentatious robes and fancy hats scurry to and from meetings in the many ornate government buildings; richly dressed, turbaned dwarves carrying leather bags full of important-looking papers stride imperiously to the bank; and sleepy-looking students with armfuls of books hurry to their lectures at the university. Near the Hippodrome, the wind carries tempting aromas from the street-food stalls; the clash of steel can be heard from within as would-be gladiators audition. Towering above it all is the magnificent Holy Basilica, its many-windowed dome sparkling in the sun.

## Passers-By

**Eulampius** (N human male expert 1), a portly eunuch with a shaved head, wearing grey robes, is one of the Beardless, a junior civil servant in the bureaucracy. His superior, the Custodian of the Red Ledgers, is both lazy and incompetent, and the hard-working Eulampius longs for him to get his comeuppance.

**Aegis Sparkhooves** (CN male centaur barbarian 3/ fighter 2) is a striped centaur from the steppes to the east of Parsantium, currently fighting in the Hippodrome as a gladiator in a team called The Slayers. He is arrogant and boorish, assuming everyone he runs into knows who he is and wants his autograph.

**Ionnia** (NG female human expert 3) is a bespectacled, nervous-looking student at the Scholastica. Sent to the university by her hard-working parents, this very bright young woman has come to some interesting conclusions about the ancient traditions of the religious cults of Dhak Janjua. Unfortunately, her theories have drawn the attention of the Cult of the Black Mother and she rightly senses she is being watched.

## Courthouse

The Courthouse is an imposing marble building with a flight of broad steps leading up to a colonnaded facade. At the top of the steps stands a 20-foot-high statue of Themicia, Goddess of Justice, with a sword in her right hand, pointing down, and the scales of justice raised aloft in her left hand, as if watching over anyone going into the building. It's usually busy during the day, as judges, prosecutors, advocates, witnesses and those accused of crimes come and go, and the City Watch stand guard to prevent any trouble. At night, however, the place is deserted, with only a pair of watchmen on



duty. Inside the Courthouse, criminal cases and civil disputes are heard by the city's judges in half a dozen courtrooms. The offices of the Praetor (the head of the judiciary) and the prosecutors are located here, along with a library where the hundreds of scrolls and books making up the Codex of Imperial Law are kept. The Courthouse also holds several dozen cells where those awaiting trial are kept locked up; this is usually for no more than a day or two.

For more on crime, punishment and the laws of Parsantium, see page 31.

**Luaira Thastin** (CG female half-elf expert 3/bard 3) is a spirited, golden-haired advocate working for the poor and downtrodden folk of the Old Quarter who would not otherwise have legal representation. Luaira defends most of her clients for a token fee and has a good track record in getting cases quashed or the severity of sentences reduced. She can afford to do this because of the occasional but very well-paid work she does for the Hidden Quarter gangs, defending their members in court when they have been arrested by the Watch. Luaira isn't proud of this, but as far as she's concerned, the needs of the many outweigh the sins of the few. The PCs may want to hire Luaira to defend them if they get in trouble with the law; alternatively, they might want to try and dissuade her from defending a gang member they've worked hard to bring to justice.

## Curia

The city's main central administrative building, the dazzlingly white marble Curia, houses the offices of the Prefect, the Imperial Quarter's tribune, and most of Parsantium's vast bureaucracy; the Royal Exchequer is based in a separate building in the financial district. Sprawling across three floors above ground and several below, the layout of the Curia is as confusing as the structure of the government itself. Hundreds of civil servants work here, beavering away in tiny offices piled high with paperwork and attending endless committee meetings of near impenetrable

significance. Both the Inner Council and the Senate (see page 27) sit here – the Inner Council will usually meet in a room near the Prefect's office while an ornately furnished chamber is used for the monthly meetings of the Senate, its apse decorated with fine mosaics that distract bored attendees.

The Curia is also the place where Parsantines must come for all sorts of licences and permits, and to register land ownership and other important transactions, such as the purchase of a property or business establishment. All of this paperwork is kept in the bureaucracy's underground Hall of Imperial Records, a huge chamber filled to the rafters with shelves of scrolls and bound papers. In theory, any citizen of Parsantium is entitled to view the documents held here free of charge, as long as they complete the proper request form and get it correctly notarized by three different officials, a frustrating process that involves traipsing around the building for several hours. Even once this has been done, finding out, for example, who owns a particular house or tranche of land is so difficult that most people choose to bribe one of the Beardless working there to track down the information required.

**Albus Fusco** (LN male human expert 4), a junior official working in the Department of Night Soil Management on the second floor of the Curia, is a troubled man. Albus has worked in the department for over 20 years and has always done a thorough, if completely unspectacular, job. Recent reports received from the sewer crews in the Poor Ward show that a particular series of tunnels has been missed off their maintenance schedule for the last few months. When Albus queried this with his superior, he was told in no uncertain terms to forget about the matter. Albus has heard tales of the Hidden Quarter gangs and thinks his boss and the sewer crews could be mixed up in criminal activity. He's too scared to go into the sewers himself but maybe he could find someone to investigate the possible corruption on the city's behalf?



## Hippodrome

Parsantium's impressive Hippodrome stages regular chariot races and gladiatorial contests which are unfailingly popular with the entire city, rich and poor alike. Visitors heading down the Mese from the Forum of Heraclius will first pass the Holy Basilica of Helion on the right, before the Hippodrome looms into view, a massive wall of white marble, gleaming in the sun. The sheer scale of the building is staggering – this is a larger-than-life arena built for larger-than-life heroes, over 400 yards long and 100 yards wide, with stands capable of holding 50,000 spectators, more than two-thirds of the city's population. Every October, the biggest event in the Hippodrome's (and the city's) calendar takes place: the Victory Games (see page 37 for more on this popular event). Tickets for a day's entertainment at the Hippodrome start at 5 cp for the cheapest seats, furthest from the action, rising to 5 gp for padded seats in the front row.

Races begin at the northern end of the Hippodrome, where a row of starting boxes or carceres, with a tower at each end, is topped with a gilded statue of a chariot pulled by four horses. Located halfway down on the eastern side of the stadium are the VIP boxes, the largest of which is the Royal Box, draped with purple hangings and ornate tapestries on race days; the others belong to the city's richest noble families. Running down the centre of the long U-shaped track is the spina, lined with bronze statues depicting the war god Martek, famous horses, chariot drivers and gladiators. Standing at its centre is a 100-foot-tall ancient obelisk, recovered from the desert ruins of Khemit to the southwest by the Basileus Heraclius. Those who have studied the worn hieroglyphics carved into its four sides say that they hold dormant arcane power – perhaps someone well-versed in Khemeti lore might be able to figure out their meaning and unleash their magic.

Beneath the sands of the arena is a series of underground chambers where gladiators prepare themselves for battle and receive treatment for injuries after a fight, and where the animals and monsters used in the games are kept locked up in cages. These creatures

are cared for by **Borysko** (N male gnoll ranger 7), a beast handler from the steppes who loves his “little pets”. Elevator platforms below the arena allow both gladiators and beasts to be winched up onto the sands *in media res* via hidden trapdoors. Outside the Hippodrome itself, a group of buildings houses the main gladiator stables, accommodation for independent gladiators, the four chariot factions and a temple to Martek.

The Editor of the Games is **Plutinus** (CG male human expert 4/bard 2), responsible for making sure that the Victory Games are as thrilling as possible and that the crowds keep coming back for more. A grey-haired, rosy-cheeked fat man, Plutinus enjoys his wine and has a penchant for poetic declamations about the glories of gladiatorial combat. He knows what he's doing, though – the last Victory Games were widely acclaimed as the best the city has ever seen. PCs wanting to take part in the games as gladiators must go through an audition: as well as a trial fight with an experienced gladiator, a dire bear or other wild beast, prospective fighters must prove their ability to engage with the crowd by demonstrating one or two flashy signature moves and either witty repartee or bloodcurdling curses and threats. Although it's clearly very dangerous, life as a gladiator can be lucrative, with the best fighters earning around 200 gp per bout, plus prizes if they win. See page 38 for more on gladiators.

Chariot racing is a city-wide obsession and fanatical support among citizens for the four teams – the Blues, Greens, Reds and Whites – has been known to lead to fighting and even rioting on occasion. The races also provide a rare opportunity in which the Basileus, the nobility and the common citizens come together in a single venue, meaning that political demonstrations quite often take place in the Hippodrome while waiting for the races to start.

The city's top charioteer is currently **Mercurius** (N male human fighter 5), a blond-haired, blue-eyed Bathuran with glistening white teeth, who races for the Blues. Mercurius is arrogant and cocky in the extreme and the Greens are hoping their best driver, an Aqhrani named **Tarkhan Kadir** (CG male human fighter 4), will beat him in the next race. See page 38 for more on chariot racing.



## Holy Basilica of Helion

The Holy Basilica of Helion is not only the most spectacular temple in Parsantium, but the greatest temple to the Bathuran sun god anywhere in the known world. Built by Corandias the Magnificent following the conquest of Parsantium and consecrated to the god in the year 694, the Basilica serves as the centre of religious worship for the Basileus and his court. The royal family and nobility attend weekly services in the temple every Solis, conducted by His Radiance Arcadius, the Archbishop of Parsantium and head of the Church of Helion. It is customary for ordinary citizens to appeal to the Basileus for his intervention in their affairs as he rides to and from the church each week: crowds of petitioners line the street, hoping Corandias will stop briefly to hear their desperate pleas and rule in their favour. Imperial ceremonial events such as the coronation of a new

basileus, a royal wedding or naming day, take place at the Basilica. The singing at these services is exquisite – the talented choir is made up of male and female elves and human castrati.

Overall the Basilica is 270 feet long and 240 feet wide, making it one of the largest temples in the world. It is surmounted by a magnificent central dome, 100 feet in diameter and rising 180 feet from the floor, supported by four triangular pendentives and four great pillars of granite. The dome has a series of forty windows that catch the sunlight from almost every angle, a fitting tribute to Helion, whose great gilded statue stands beneath it. The walls and floors of the Basilica are polished, multicoloured marbles, green and white with purple porphyry. The massive dome, the pendentives beneath it, and many of the interior walls are decorated with stunning gold mosaics depicting the god, his angelic servants, his hippogriff steed Morning Glory,





and his numerous saints. Worshippers sit on carved wooden pews facing the altar, which is situated directly beneath the dome on a raised dais. The exterior of the temple is covered in yellow stucco with red trim, the sun god's colours; sharp-eyed observers can spot the occasional crack in the stonework where the Basilica was damaged by an earthquake centuries ago.

**Arcadius** (NG human male cleric 17) is a 60-year-old man who relishes his influential role as head of the church and is not shy of reminding ambitious government officials and politicians that the Basileus rules with Helion's blessing. He is thin and stooped, with gnarled arthritic fingers that no amount of clerical magic seems able to fix permanently, and appears weighed down by his ornate red and gold vestments and a fan-shaped mitre so tall and heavy that he has trouble keeping it on his balding head.

During the occupation of Parsantium by Kalgroth Ironheart, many icons, relics and other religious artefacts were looted from the Basilica. **Meletius** (NG human male cleric 4), an earnest, tonsured novice serving at the temple, has been trying to track down the fate of these items so they might be restored to their rightful homes. He has a number of leads that need following up by a doughty band of adventurers, perhaps in exchange for future clerical services. For those PCs who would prefer not to get involved in church affairs, the powerful priests at the Basilica are capable of casting the divine spells and rituals needed to raise a slain adventurer, cure a disease or lift a curse or enchantment, in exchange for a sizeable donation to the faith.

## The Silver Salver

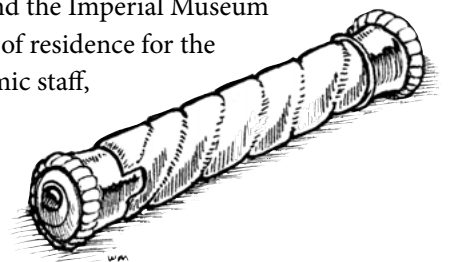
Located at the heart of the Civic Ward's financial district, the Silver Salver is one of Parsantium's most fashionable taverns and restaurants, and certainly its most expensive. The tavern caters mostly for wealthy merchants, moneylenders and high-ranking government officials working at the nearby Office of the Exchequer and the Mint; many of the clientele

are dwarves and nearly all are male. Even Tiberius Goldsmelter, the Royal Exchequer himself, likes to have lunch here on occasion, although he always insists on a private room.

The food on offer is why people flock here – the eccentric chef **Raever Thrandulin** (CN male elf wizard 6/rogue 2) likes to experiment with unusual flavours and ingredients, so diners might be treated to spiced chuul steaks one day and gray ooze porridge the next. However revolting these exotic dishes sound, they taste astonishing and the restaurant is packed every lunchtime with the affluent wheeler-dealers and officials of the district and further afield. What they don't know is that Raever is a con artist and illusionist – none of the dishes he serves are what he claims them to be, but since everything tastes great, he has yet to be challenged. However, the other tavern-owners in the district have been losing customers since the Silver Salver opened and are looking for a means to discredit Thrandulin. Can the PCs investigate the source of his "exotic ingredients" and expose the fraud? A meal at the Silver Salver costs around 2 gp.

## University District

The Scholastica, Parsantium's university, is renowned as the foremost centre of mundane learning in the former Bathuran Empire. Situated in the northern part of the Civic Ward, the university consists of several grandiose buildings set in attractive grounds with neat lawns and ornamental trees. The biggest structure, an impressive marble edifice known as the Ivory Towers (it has several, of different heights), houses the 300-seat Auditorium where lectures take place, the classrooms, and the offices of the tutors. Along with the Library of All Knowledge and the Imperial Museum of Antiquities, halls of residence for the students and academic staff, kitchens and a large dining hall make up the rest of the buildings. Standing at the







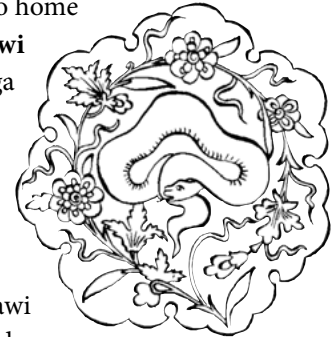
centre of the campus is an ingenious 15-foot-high mechanical clock; small doors open in the sides of the structure when the crescent moon-shaped pointer reaches the hour mark, each revealing a different music-playing automaton.

The surrounding streets are lined with businesses catering to those teaching or studying at the Scholastica: booksellers and binders, map-makers, scribes and stationers, and makers of musical instruments, as well as numerous taverns, pubs and street-food stands. Current favourite of most students, the rowdy Rambunctious Ferret offers free drinks all night to anyone who can beat the record for drinking its yard of ale the fastest. University professors, however, prefer the fusty, smoke-filled Three Ewers, where they can enjoy a half-pint of Stonyfist Pale Ale in peace and quiet and grumble to their colleagues about how students today just don't seem to want to learn anything.

Only the wealthy can afford to send their offspring to study at the Scholastica – the tuition fees are not cheap, and scholars are also required to buy their own books, parchment, pens and ink. For those rich enough, though, the standard of education provided is first rate, and many high-ranking government officials and judges studied in the Ivory Towers, as did the city's finest poets and dramatists. Subjects taught include history, law, mathematics, philosophy, poetry, music, languages and literature. Many of the academics teaching at the Scholastica are the foremost expert in their field in the city, and often the known world, although getting them to part with this knowledge to non-students is usually an expensive undertaking.

The Chancellor of the Scholastica is an Aqhrani poet and literature professor named **Latifa bint Abbas** (NG female human bard 9/expert 4). Now close to retirement, the tiny, thin-lipped Latifa is regarded as one of the world's greatest living poets. She runs the Ivory Towers with an iron hand in a velvet glove, ensuring the university's students receive the finest education money can buy. This means frequently cajoling and nudging her eccentric, recalcitrant and absent-minded staff to turn up and give their lectures.

The Ivory Towers are also home to the enigmatic **Vashnawi** (LG female guardian naga oracle 10), who came to Parsantium from her ruined temple home in the remote jungles of Sampur following a prophetic dream. Vashnawi has a cobra-like hood and



the face of a beautiful dark-skinned woman; her body is 12 feet long from head to tail and is covered in shimmering, rainbow-hued scales. She wears a pair of platinum hoop earrings and has a dozen gold bangles on the end of her tail. The naga divides her time between the Towers and the Library of All Knowledge, and is an expert on the history of Sampur, the geomancers of Karjan and the founding of Dhak Janjua. Recently, Vashnawi has been troubled by her dreams again; these have featured Vrishabha in his icy prison in the Pillars of Heaven Mountains, but also the PCs. Fearing there is a plot afoot to free the rajah in which the adventurers are somehow involved, the naga will invite them to her tower for questioning, before asking them to investigate further on her behalf. Vashnawi is cursed to speak in tongues when she is stressed – this might happen when she meets the PCs, at the GM's discretion.

### Library of All Knowledge

This large white marble building, built in the classic Bathuran style, is home to the exhaustive Library of All Knowledge, containing a copy of virtually every known extant work of literature or scholarship from the former Empire and beyond. Its collection has grown over the centuries of Parsantium's existence, although many valuable tomes and parchments were destroyed or lost when the city fell to the hobgoblins. The Library of All Knowledge also serves as the centre of worship for Amarani, the god of knowledge – an imposing marble statue of the deity stands in the atrium and there is a chapel to the god in the west wing. From the entrance,



a visitor can wander into one of the numerous galleries on the ground floor or three upper floors, each devoted to a different subject area and filled from floor to ceiling with books and scrolls.

The Library of All Knowledge is run by the Custodian, an ancient Bathuran high priest of Amarani named **Zenodotus** (LN human male cleric 6/lore master 9). Bald and with a grey beard trailing almost to the floor, Zenodotus invented the current library cataloguing system and undertook a wholesale reorganization of the collection in the decades following the Great Crusade. He is ably assisted by several dozen priests of Amarani, each an expert in a particular field of study. In addition, the Library of All Knowledge employs several minotaurs from the island of Phokris as librarians; these humanoids are able to navigate the confusing layout of the building with ease and act as doughty protectors of the irreplaceable manuscripts and volumes, as well as making sure no adventurers drift into one of several restricted sections “by mistake”.

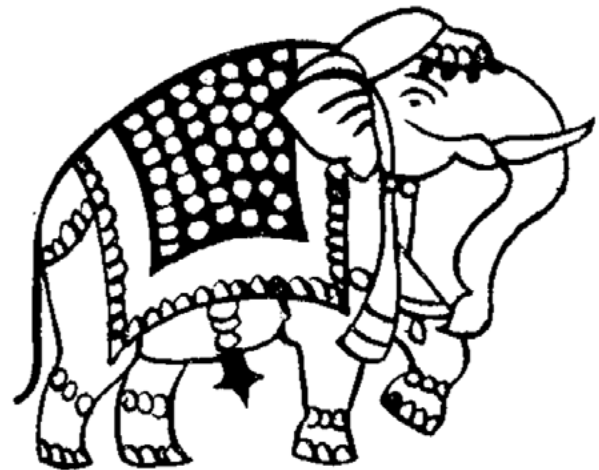
Zenodotus is keen to make sure that the library’s body of knowledge is as complete as possible and to that end the priests regularly hire adventurers to travel to remote locations (including the planes of existence beyond this one) to add to its collection. Sometimes they are sent to retrieve a rare manuscript or tome from its (usually perilous) current resting place; at other times they are dispatched on fact-finding missions to establish the veracity of obscure bits of lore that have come to the priests’ attention – for example, if the Bronze Demon of Lanarka has four toes or six on his right foot. The adventurers are given blank scrolls, stamped with the symbol of Amarani, on which to record the details of their discoveries; payment on the adventurers’ return to Parsantium is dependent on meeting the minimum standards of record-keeping expected by the priests.

Visiting scholars may pay 20 gp per day to study in the library and can call upon the priests for help in finding the relevant texts. Although everything is meticulously

catalogued, the system used by the staff is not easily grasped by outsiders. Knowledge checks at the library can be made with a +5 bonus after a full day’s research.

### Imperial Museum of Antiquities

This sprawling and haphazardly organized museum houses an impressive collection of artefacts from the former lands of the Bathuran Empire, the deserts of Khemit and beyond. Some of its more famous exhibits are the huge granite Criosphinx of Hammunopolis, the carved wooden figurehead of Skornji Frostbrow’s dragonship, and two great ivory tusks said to have come from Srivatsa’s white elephant. It was even more impressive at one time but the museum was one of the first places to be looted by Kalgroth Ironheart’s hobgoblins and many of its treasures have been lost for good. Since the Great Crusade, the museum has been trying to reassemble the original collection, hiring adventurers to track down missing antiquities whenever they get a lead on the whereabouts of an artefact. It is rumoured that hidden vaults exist beneath the building that were never found by the humanoids – these magically warded chambers are said to contain a number of irreplaceable objects too valuable for public viewing, including Vrishabha’s khanda and the bejewelled imperial regalia of Corandias the Magnificent.





# Victory Ward

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Travellers arriving in Parsantium from the Sunset Lands to the west pass through impressive gates into the Victory Ward, so named by Corandias the Stubborn following his defeat of the hobgoblin invaders. Previously, it was known as the Silver Ward for its many jewellery shops and this former name is still used by some of its older inhabitants.

Heading south from the Victory Gate, the Conqueror's Road leads to the Forum of Heraclius in the middle of the ward, from where the Mese runs west to the Grand Ward, and east to the Holy Basilica and Hippodrome in the Civic Ward; to the south lies the Harbour Ward. These two main roads divide the Victory Ward into four districts. The northwest district is mostly residential, its streets lined with blocks of insulae that have housing on the upper floors and shops beneath. Many dragonkin make their homes here, including the master gem-cutters of the Shimmerscale clan, who have their clan hall in this part of the ward. In the northeast corner, the ward's inn district caters for merchants and other visitors, and contains many of the city's best establishments, as well as several that are overpriced and disappointing. A number of bordellos are also located here to serve those in search of company for the night. The southeastern part of the Victory Ward holds some of the finest shops in the whole of Parsantium – this is the best place in the city to buy exquisite dragonkin-made jewellery or a cape woven from peacock feathers. Occupying the southwest corner of the ward, the magic district is where many of the city's wizards and other arcane spellcasters live, study, and shop for scrolls, potions, spell components and inks.

## First Impressions

This bustling district is busy day and night, with money constantly changing hands in the countless shops, inns and taverns. Near the city gates, the sound of voices in

various foreign accents mingles with the grunts and cries of livestock as merchants and farmers bring their wares and animals into the city to be sold in the markets. Magic is in evidence here too – a wizard zooms down the street, sitting cross-legged on his flying carpet, and there's the loud bang of an explosion accompanied by sulphurous fumes as yet another experiment goes awry.

## Passers-By

**Vondra Shimmerscale** (LG female dragonkin expert 4) is a talented jewellery maker who's just sold one of her finest pieces to a handsome Bathuran merchant. She was on her way to celebrate with a glass of wine when the gold coins she was paid with turned to copper.

**Gilgarran Hailsenra** (CG male elf wizard 14) is on a trip to buy arcane spell components in the magic district; a bejewelled longsword swings at his hip and the tip of his staff burns with a blue flame.

**Jobius Hedron** (LN male human commoner 1) is the elderly bartender at the Stone Cyclops and he's late for work. A group of oafish adventurers bowled him over as they tore down the street chasing after a green-haired gnome.

## Victory Gate

The Victory Gate is one of the two greater gates (see page 53) in the 60-foot-high city walls and marks the end of the Via Bathura that connects Parsantium with the city of Rezana far to the west. The City Watch stands guard at the gate, keeping order and collecting the toll from those entering the city. Anyone with goods for sale is directed to the nearby customs office where representatives of the Royal Exchequer will assess the goods' value and collect the duty. Similarly, merchants



leaving the city must also stop here to pay the exit duty on any goods bought in Parsantium for sale beyond the walls in the Sunset Lands or elsewhere.

The gates themselves consist of a pair of impressive iron-bound wooden doors, embedded with bronze studs, at either end of the imposing gatehouse. In between is a 20-foot-long passage protected by murder holes and by a great iron portcullis that can be lowered by the Parsantine soldiers who man the gatehouse and walls. This duty is rotated among the infantry allagions stationed in the city, so visitors might see human spearmen or crossbowmen on the battlements one day, and elf archers or gnoll mercenaries the next. At night, the gates are kept closed but are opened for people leaving or arriving late.

Once a visitor has paid the toll and any duty owing, he or she will usually want to find somewhere to stay. Touts for the numerous establishments nearby in the inn district hang around the gates, yelling out the benefits of the place they represent (“No fleas!”, “Hot baths!”, “Cheapest beds in the Victory!” and so on), and will try to steer the visitor there before they can change their mind. Competition for business can be fierce, and the Watch will intervene if there is undue jostling among aggressive touts. Nevertheless, the Victory Gate is still much more peaceful and better organized than the Camel Gate, its counterpart in the Old Quarter, and what few beggars there are – mostly small children – are chased away by the guards whenever a dignitary is carried past in her palanquin.

## Forum of Heraclius

The Conqueror’s Road meets the Mese in the Forum of Heraclius, located at the centre of the Victory Ward and named after one of the dozen or so basileis not called Corandias. From the north, the Forum is entered through a triumphal arch erected by Corandias XVI the Stubborn after the success of the Great Crusade. This is the largest public square in the city and is filled every day of the week except Solis with dozens of market stalls selling all manner of goods – food (including fruit, vegetables, bread, pastries, cheese, meat, fish, street

food and so on), live poultry, wine, clay pots and vases, baskets, spices, candles, clothes, carpets and tapestries, paper, parchment and ink, leather bags, swords and knives, sheesha pipes, coffee beans and much more.

At the centre of the forum stands a tall stone column, originally topped with a bronze statue of Martek, which was removed and melted down by Kalgroth Ironheart when he conquered Parsantium. In its place, a living Sampuran monk named **Himanshu** (LG male human monk 7) stands for weeks at a time, dressed only in a white loincloth, protesting at the second-class treatment of the citizens of Old Quarter by the Basileus and the city government. Most of the time Himanshu’s eyes are closed in silent contemplation, but every so often he will open them and “sing” a verse or two of protest in a tuneless, wailing voice.

The market is busy all day from dawn until dusk with Imperial Quarter residents and city visitors alike, and is a riot of smells, noises and colour. There isn’t much that’s exotic for sale, though – anyone looking for unusual or very expensive goods would do better visiting the Mercantile Quarter or the upmarket shops in the ward’s southeast district. Among the crowds, well-to-do citizens meet and greet their associates, making deals and discussing the events of the day. It’s noticeable to anyone who’s spent time in the Old Quarter that there are very few dark-skinned faces here.

Apartment buildings with colonnades containing fine shops and expensive places to eat and drink surround the forum. One of these buildings holds the White Swan, a luxurious four-storey inn frequented by the wealthiest visitors to Parsantium; rooms start at 10 gp and go up to 50 gp for the top-floor suite. Delicious Parsantine dishes and fine wines are served amid the scent of evening jasmine in the inn’s flower-filled courtyard – a typical meal with wine will cost around 3 gp. Recently, guests have experienced a series of thefts from their rooms. The White Swan’s owner, a quietly spoken elf of exquisite taste named **Orelinde Telemnar** (NG female elf aristocrat 3), has compensated the victims to their satisfaction, asking them to be discreet, but she needs to put a stop to the robberies before word gets out and the Swan’s reputation is damaged. Can she hire a PC thief to catch one?



## Magic District

The southwest part of the Victory Ward is the city's unofficial magic district. Wizards, sorcerers, bards, witches and other wielders of arcane magic live here, along with the non-spellcasters who run specialist businesses catering for them.

Arcanists are nothing if not individuals and this is reflected in the character of the buildings in the district. Whereas the housing in the rest of the Victory Ward consists of Bathuran insulae, here the mages' homes are an esoteric mixture of frequently clashing architectural styles: a row of tall, grand-looking houses sits opposite a fairytale castle, complete with bright blue towers adorned with golden spires; nearby an elementalists makes his home in a red and green pagoda, while down the street a witch inhabits a small stone cottage surrounded by fenceposts topped with goat skulls. Many of these homes bear the mage's unique arcane sigil on the front door.

Unlike the rest of the Imperial Quarter, the streets in the magic district are often very narrow and the number of side streets, alleys and little courtyards makes getting lost all too easy to do. Following a custom brought to the city by the Aqhrani, many of these streets are dedicated to a particular type of shop, each with its own devotees – Alchemist's Row is filled with places selling bubbling potions, alembics, cauldrons and alchemical formulae, whereas Summoner's Close is a small alley with four pokey little shops dealing in magical chalks, sacrificial bowls and thaumaturgic rituals.

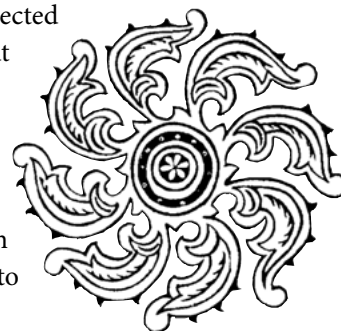
Magical creatures aren't as unusual in the magic district as they are elsewhere in the city – visitors might spot a homunculus or imp running an errand, or a sorceress walking down the street with a golem or shield guardian for protection. Not that everyone travels on foot – *flying carpets*, *wings of flying* and other magical items help wizards in a hurry get from one place to another. Even when arcanists do walk, it's not always under their own steam. On Easy Street, a permanent gentle *gust of wind* effect originally created a decade ago by wizard-at-large Beaubraz Periwinkle helps propel mages who have eaten too much at the Musty Tome Tavern uphill and home.

Of course, with this many wizards living in close proximity there are bound to be occasional mishaps. Sometimes a mage will summon something beyond his ability to control or an experiment will go awry, leading to a dangerous monster running amok through the district, a tremendous explosion, or another unexpected magical effect, such as the time when anyone entering Parchment Street was shrunk down to six inches in height. When this kind of thing happens, the residents tend to band together and sort it out themselves. Such incidents are beyond the Watch's ability to handle anyway, and the wizards enjoy ridiculing the culprit afterwards, getting him to buy a round or two for the house in the Musty Tome once all has been put right.

## The Fireball Club

This exclusive club for "gentlemen arcanists" is located in basement premises on Phantasm Street. Snobbish, sexist and borderline racist, the Fireball Club only truly welcomes rich male Bathurans, although a handful of powerful elven and Aqhrani wizards have managed to get on the members' roster in the last year or two. Its members are rather unpleasant individuals, sitting in the opulent surroundings of the club, drinking expensive wines and discussing how much better things would be if arcanists ruled Parsantium. Nearly all are also members of the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus, but few share that organization's principles that eldritch knowledge should be shared across cultural boundaries; instead they enjoy sneering at "inferior" foreign magical traditions.

Occasionally a new member, always a prominent arcane spellcaster of 11th level or higher, is invited to join the club. If a PC is selected to receive an invitation but has the temerity to turn it down, the influential members will ostracize him, making it hard for the wizard to find shops in the magic district willing to take his custom.





## The Glowing Orb

This small, low-ceilinged tavern on Newt Street is popular with wizards living in the magic district and also those living in the artists' mahalla of the Old Quarter's Artisans Ward (see page 99). Somehow the establishment manages to exist in two places at once, providing a convenient way for those in the know to travel rapidly from the Victory Ward to the Marjani Minar, headquarters of the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus, and back again. When leaving the tavern, a patron merely needs to visualize the street he wants the front door to open onto before stepping through. The Glowing Orb is run by a beautiful Sampuran sorcerer named **Saudamini** (NG female human sorcerer 6), who won it from its previous (gnomish) owner in a mage duel. Saudamini doesn't understand how the magic works, but is very glad of the extra business it generates. She has a sharp tongue, and won't stand for anyone coming in and trying to leave without buying at least one drink first.

## The Old Lantern

Standing outside this good quality inn is its namesake, a five-foot-tall brass lantern with panes of coloured glass illustrating scenes from Parsantium's history. Guests walk through the doorway beyond into a pretty courtyard filled with red and purple bougainvillea, which has a dramatic 15-foot-tall fountain at its centre depicting the alluring but fearsome sea goddess Amphetia: her head crowned with seaweed, she wears armour made from seashells and brandishes a trident. The Lantern's wine list is extensive and several unusual beers are available too, including Thornybush Red, an amber ale flavoured with rare desert flowers (5 sp). The food on offer is also of an excellent standard, with both the spiced lobster chowder (7 sp) and the tamarind roast chicken with apple couscous and cloud forest mushrooms (2 gp) highly regarded by Parsantine gourmets. Comfortable rooms overlooking the courtyard cost 2 gp per night.

Up on the first floor is a tastefully decorated private room, occasionally used by Bardas, Prefect

of Parsantium, for low-key meetings. If the PCs do enough to make a name for themselves and Bardas thinks they can be useful to him, he might invite them here to discuss a potential job opportunity. If this happens, there will be plenty of threatening-looking guards in attendance.

The Old Lantern is owned by **Maximin** (CN male human rogue 8), an immaculately dressed, tanned and silver-haired Bathuran with impeccable manners. Maximin is a retired cat burglar from Loranto and is always wary when merchants from that city are staying at the inn, lest he is recognized. When a former contact of Maximin's, a wily fence named **Eudaemon** (NE male human rogue 5), arrives in Parsantium, he blackmails the ageing thief into coming out of retirement to steal goods for him to sell. Not wanting to go back to a life of crime, Maximin may turn to the PCs for assistance.

## The Shining Goblet

The Shining Goblet Inn is conveniently located just a block from the Victory Gate in the inn district. Its Urskovian landlord **Bjornir Skelsmad** (LN male human fighter 3) employs several enthusiastic (borderline aggressive) touts to bring as many customers as possible to his inn. Once there, they are subjected to overpriced food, drinks and accommodation. Bjornir was once a member of the Axe-Bearing Guard but retired a few years ago, using his savings to purchase the Goblet. A giant blond bear of a man with a bushy beard and long, plaited hair, Bjornir just isn't very good at inn-keeping. The food on offer – Parsantine staples such as green peppers stuffed with minced lamb and roast chicken with rice, tomatoes and aubergines – is bland, overcooked and far from cheap (1 gp); and the rooms (4 gp per night) aren't great either – the beds are uncomfortable, the sheets aren't washed often enough and the plaster is peeling off the walls. Although his touts get him plenty of business, discerning guests try to find somewhere else to stay after the first night, and repeat business is non-existent. Bjornir is thinking of going back north to Urskovia and would happily listen to offers for his inn.



# Grand Ward

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The Grand Ward is the westernmost ward in the Imperial Quarter, bordering the Victory and Harbour wards to the east, and one of the least densely populated areas of the city, a place where only the rich can afford to live. The ward's southern boundary is a waterfront lined with private docks, backed by a wealthy residential district whose broad avenues are home to noble families, as well as successful business owners and merchants. Above the Mese, the northern third of the ward is dominated by a large park – several of the city's elves live amid these peaceful surroundings.

The Mese runs west to east through the top part of the ward, while the parallel Silver Street starts at the West Gate, crossing the ward to the south near the waterfront, before entering the Harbour Ward. The West Gate is one of the three lesser gates into Parsantium (see page 53) and as such has no gatehouse. It is still guarded by the City Watch and has a customs official present to collect duty on trade goods.

Wide, tree-lined Lords Avenue runs through the ward from north to south, with two impressive, well-kept forums situated where it crosses the major east-west roads. The Forum of Corandias the Compassionate, named after one of the city's most benevolent rulers (poisoned by his brother within two years of taking the throne), occupies the junction with the Mese, while the Forum of Clementina, named after a wise and long-lived basilea, is situated further south at the junction of Lords Avenue and Silver Street. Both are mostly frequented by the wealthy women living in the ward, and their servants, and have daily markets selling food and wine. The Forum of Clementina also specializes in fine silk robes and skirts, while the Forum of Corandias sells jewellery and decorative ceramics, much of it of elvish craftsmanship. Each forum has an honorary column at its centre but only Clementina's bronze statue remains.

## First Impressions

The peaceful, green spaces of Cedar Park provide a pleasant contrast to the crowds and noise of the neighbouring wards. Young well-to-do couples enjoy a romantic stroll, birds sing, and children run about and play on the grass. The rest of the ward feels spacious and open, too – maple and oak trees line the wide roads, the houses are splendid, and it's not unusual to see a knight in gleaming armour riding along Lords Avenue on his warhorse. The forums here are also more relaxed – they do a brisk trade, but the shopping is often being done for pleasure rather than out of necessity.

## Passers-By

**Krivinn** (LG male dragonkin paladin 13) is a paladin of Themicia and an uncompromising opponent of evil in all its forms. He is not a member of the Platinum Knights, but is on his way to the Celestial Bastion to seek the counsel of Orthas nonetheless.

**Lady Probina Marfisi** (CN female human aristocrat 5) is heading down to the docks, badly disguised as a commoner, together with her maidservant and her dwarf bodyguard. She plans to visit the “wise witch of Flotsam”, Jagadamba (see page 113) for advice on how to stop her husband's philandering.

**Viator Scipio** (NE male human aristocrat 7) is on his way to meet with the captain of one of his merchant vessels, who has just arrived at the Royal Docks with an eagerly anticipated cargo. He wears fashionably pointy Aqhrani slippers and walks with a silver-topped sword-cane and a pronounced swagger.



## Cedar Park

This 20-acre park occupies the northern third of the ward and provides its visitors with an opportunity to escape for an hour or so from the hustle and bustle of the city. Cedar Park is enjoyed by residents of the Grand Ward and those living in other parts of the Imperial Quarter with enough free time to take a leisurely ride or stroll in its pastoral setting. The park is an idyllic mixture of open grassland, sculpted hedges, rocky outcrops and secluded wooded areas, and has a tranquil lake in the middle for boating and fishing. A charming Tiangaon teahouse sits on the shores of the lake, serving tea to nobles and other folk in need of refreshment. There are just three entrances in the park's stone walls, all of which are locked at night: the main gate in the Forum of Corandias the Compassionate and two more along the Mese.

A small herd of fallow deer lives inside Cedar Park, along with smaller animals such as rabbits, pheasants and squirrels. Several wealthy elves have homes in a section of the park, including Calahir, the Master of Northern Magic at the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus (see page 134). Their houses are built from wood and other natural materials and have been carefully designed in the elvish style in order to blend in subtly with the bucolic surroundings. **Allysha Wildthorn** (CG female elf cleric 4), a cleric of Zana from Moss Stone in the Feyshore Forest, has built a small shrine to the woodland goddess close by. Elves, rangers and druids visiting Parsantium often come to this tranquil spot to pay their respects to Zana.



**Petrocellus** (CG male human werewolf aristocrat 2), a young noble living just outside the park, was bitten by a werewolf while travelling to see out of town relatives a few months ago. He escaped with his life but contracted lycanthropy. On the nights of the full moon, he climbs over the walls of the park and hunts the deer in lupine form. Each morning following, the park keepers find a hideously mutilated and half-eaten animal; they are keen to find the culprit and put a stop to the killings.

## Celestial Bastion

The Celestial Bastion is the Parsantine headquarters of the Platinum Knights of Themicia, established after the organization helped Corandias XVI the Stubborn recapture the city in the Great Crusade. Surrounded by a fortified wall, the large golden-domed temple is decorated with exquisite mosaics and hung with the battle standards and shields of the Platinum Knights who fought in the Great Crusade. Many of these paladins are buried in the crypt beneath the church. Attached to the southern flank of the temple is a cloister leading to a chapter house where members of the order can meet, eat and sleep; it holds accommodation for up to 100 knights and their squires. The compound also contains stables for the knights' mounts – mostly horses, but sometimes there are one or two griffins or hippogriffs in residence, which need to be kept well segregated.

The Knight-Commander of the Bastion is a middle-aged paladin called **Orthas** (LG male human paladin 12), a veteran of many battles against raiding humanoids. Orthas has short-cropped white hair, a heavily lined face and a wiry build. He is brave, honourable and wise, and leads and guides the paladins and clerics of the Bastion in the Code of Themicia, providing honest, sensible advice to any who ask. Orthas has fought alongside the Strategos, Loukas Andronicus, many times and is always ready to answer a call for assistance from his old comrade. Recently, there has been troubling news of troll





attacks on the Via Bathura 50 or so miles northwest of the city – it appears that something is encouraging the monsters to come out of the fens and attack travellers on the road. Orthas has agreed to send one or two knights-errant to investigate.

The high priestess of the temple is a tall, bronze-scaled dragonkin called **Ruthva** (NG female dragonkin cleric 14), who lost a hand in battle with a fearsome orc war chief two years ago. Interpreting her injury as the will of

Themicia, Ruthva turned down the opportunity to have the missing hand magically regenerated and has since devoted herself to spreading the word of the goddess to as many folk as possible. Every evening the gates of the Bastion are thrown open to anyone who wants to attend evensong. Although most Parsantine nobles worship Helion, Themicia's popularity is growing in the city, largely thanks to the joyful celebrations at Ruthva's services.

## Harbour Ward

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Situated in the southern half of the Imperial Quarter, the busy Harbour Ward borders the Victory Ward to the north, the Grand Ward to the west and the Civic Ward to the east, and is bounded to the south by the Dolphin Strait. On the eastern side of the Conqueror's Road is Parsantium's dwarven neighbourhood, packed with sturdily constructed stone homes, often built above or behind workshops, and replete with taverns and breweries. Many of the dwarves living here are craftsmen of one sort or another, but a sizeable percentage work in the Civic Ward's financial district as bankers or bureaucrats, where some are also employed as guards. Most of the city's best beers (see page 34) are brewed in this district and celebrated every September in the popular Festival of Flagons (see page 37).

The lively Dwarven Forum is situated where Silver Street crosses the Conqueror's Road. Here, stalls sell fine dwarven goods including weapons, armour, drinking horns and jewellery. There is no column at the centre of the square; instead a squat stone plinth holds a well-hewn granite statue of the forge god Voltan shaping a battleaxe on his anvil. The food on sale includes rock-hard dwarven bread, only really palatable when washed down with a pint of prizewinning Stalagmite Stout.

West of the Conqueror's Road, the ward is predominantly a middle-class residential district – mostly insulae with shops on the ground floor and apartments above. The nicer blocks are north of Silver Street; to the south, approaching the waterfront and the Royal Docks, the building and streets are not in such good repair and the atmosphere can feel somewhat edgy after dark. This part of the ward is inhabited by large numbers of halflings who occupy several insulae near the waterfront. Most of Parsantium's incoming shipping arrives at these docks, so the neighbouring streets are permanently busy with goods being loaded onto bullock carts to be taken to the markets, or moved to and from warehouses.

### First Impressions

Home to hard-working dwarves, halflings and humans, the Harbour Ward bombards the senses with the sounds, sights and smells of industry. An armourer noisily hammers out dents in a damaged breastplate in his workshop; meanwhile, a strident argument starts up when a cartwheel breaks, causing a traffic jam on packed Silver Street. The strong odour of yeast from the breweries mixes with the smoke wafting through the



air from the many forges. Down at the docks, shouts from sailors and longshoremen peppered with colourful language and insults compete with the screeching cries of the seagulls as a large merchant ship is unloaded.

## Passers-By

**Wergrim Barrelmeister** (LG male dwarf commoner 2) is a short, rotund and jowly male dwarf brewer with a braided ponytail, wearing a grubby apron. He has been working on his latest beer for the past nine months and is convinced he is in line to win this September's Beer of the Year contest.

**Rafiqi Quddus** (N male human expert 4) is a well-dressed merchant, just arrived by ship from the Caliphate of Aqhran, and extremely angry. One of the crates of valuable spices unloaded from his vessel has gone missing from the dockside.

**Barihild Ironshoulder** (NG female dwarf fighter 3) is a dwarf warrior in gleaming plate armour who works as a bodyguard for hire. Currently between jobs, she is touting for business in the Dwarven Forum. Her luxuriant beard makes it hard to determine her gender.

## House of Forge and Hearth

The House of Forge and Hearth is a large temple on Silver Street, dedicated to two important gods in the Bathuran pantheon that are much revered by the dwarven race: Voltan the Smith and Dorna, Tender of the Flame (see pages 155 and 153).

An imposing pale grey stone building, the temple is constructed in the dwarven monumental style, with great statues of the two deities as dwarves flanking the mighty ironbound wooden doors. The stonework is particularly impressive – each block fits seamlessly with its neighbours, and the inscriptions on the frieze running around the building (prayers to the two gods in dwarven) are flawlessly rendered. As a concession to the temple's location in Parsantium, it is topped with a magnificent golden dome, not usually a feature of dwarven architecture.

Inside the temple, the Sacred Flame burns in a huge bronze bowl directly beneath the dome. The flame is kept burning magically at all times, its light reflecting off the golden mosaics that decorate the dome, giving the whole interior a warm glow. Statues of the bearded Voltan, hammer in hand, and his wife Dorna, her faithful hound at her feet, stand on either side of the Flame. Again both gods are depicted as dwarves, although this is not always the case in their temples.

The High Priestess of the House is **Matron Gloril Wiseheart** (NG female dwarf cleric 11), a homely looking (but unbearded) middle-aged dwarf with light brown hair in two braids. She wears the plain blue woollen robes typical of Dorna's clergy and the goddess's brass holy symbol, a fire in a stone hearth. The kindly Matron Wiseheart is a skilled healer and also a talented brewer: in the cellar beneath the nave she crafts sacred ales that grant magical powers to those who consume them. A few days ago, a book of her recipes was stolen from the temple's library. Gloril is keen to recover the book, "Recipes for Brewing the Blessed Beers of Mother Dorna", and has used divination magic to track down the thief to the Hidden Quarter. She fears she is a bit too old to go wandering around in dark tunnels beneath the city streets so offers the PCs a crate of her magic beers if they can get her book back. The powers of the Blessed Beers are up to the GM, but they should typically grant +1 bonuses to saving throws, suitable skill or ability checks, temporary hit points, or some other small benefit for a short time after consumption.

## Wavecrest Hall

Located in the southwest corner of the ward, Wavecrest Hall is a temple dedicated to the goddess Amphetia, Queen of the Sea. Built in the Bathuran style, with green and blue marble used for the columns in front of the entrance and the pillars inside, this temple is regularly visited by sailors and merchants seeking the goddess's blessing before a long sea voyage, and by the fishermen that make their living out on the Dolphin Strait.



Amphetia can be a fickle goddess, much like the sea, and sailors are a superstitious lot, so they prefer not to leave anything to chance.

Inside, the marble floor of the temple is inlaid with fine, colourful mosaics depicting Amphetia's court below the waves, where the goddess sits on her coral throne attended by her merfolk retainers, and the Queen of the Sea riding into battle in her chariot made from a giant clam shell, drawn by hippocampi and flanked by guardian dolphins. A 12-foot-tall white marble statue of the fearsome and beautiful Amphetia stands behind her altar holding a trident made from real gold. Beyond the statue, an archway in the back wall of the building leads to a balcony over the sea, from where important offerings to the goddess are thrown into the waters below. Major offerings are coffers or chests of gemstones or gold; a typical gift from a sailor or fisherman is usually a bunch of flowers, a lit candle or a handful of coins left on the altar. The chests are allowed to lie on the bottom of the sea bed for a week or two, before they are hauled out by the priestesses (using water breathing spells) and locked in the vault below the temple.

Recently several offerings have gone missing from beneath the waves; the priestesses suspect sahuagin are responsible as there have been reports of the sea devils attacking ships in the Corsairs' Sea not far from Parsantium, and even one or two sightings in the Dolphin Strait. If these tales are true, the hated sea devils must be hunted down and destroyed.

Wavecrest Hall's high priestess is an aquatic elf named **Garulae** (CG female elf cleric 10). She is over six feet tall, with green, stringy hair, pale blue skin, and webbed hands and feet – she wears no shoes. Most noticeable of all are the gills running along her collarbone. Like the goddess herself, Garulae's mood can change from serenity to wild-eyed anger in a moment, making any dealings with her unpredictable. There are three other aquatic elves among the otherwise human clergy here.

## Royal Docks

The Royal Docks and the sea wall that shelters them were built on the Harbour Ward's waterfront by Corandias XVII the Enlightened around 30 years ago to encourage wealthy traders from Aqhran to sail into this part of the city, rather than over to the Old Docks. The thinking was to make it easier for in-demand goods such as spices, perfumes and fine carpets to reach the forums and upmarket shops of the Imperial Quarter. Prior to this only the Imperial Navy docked in the Harbour Ward and all goods arriving by sea would come into the Old Docks and either be sold in the Old Quarter or be transported to the Mercantile Quarter for sale. To incentivize the traders to use the new docks, the Basileus reduced the tariff for docking there for the first year. Corandias's plan worked far too well – the lower tariffs and the opportunity to sell goods directly to merchants in the Imperial Quarter caused a wholesale change in the traders' habits, with most switching to the Royal Docks permanently. The Old Docks across the Dolphin Strait have been in decline ever since, contributing to the increasing poverty in the Old Quarter and worsening relations between the two halves of the city.

Merchant ships flying the flags of Parsantium, the Caliphate of Aqhran, the cities of Loranto and Karjolat, and places even further afield keep the Royal Docks constantly busy. Customs officers board each incoming vessel to assess the import duties payable. Cargo is then unloaded onto the quayside for onward transport: by wagon to a warehouse or one of the Imperial Quarter forums, or by boat to the Mercantile Quarter's vast markets.





Parsantium's Imperial Navy is also based at the Royal Docks. At any one time around half a dozen naval galleys will be moored at the jetties; the rest will be out on patrol, protecting Parsantine merchant shipping. These ships, carrying bands of seasoned marines and archers, are armed to the teeth with Parsantine Fire throwers and ballistas. Off-duty naval sailors and marines frequent the taverns nearby; there's a fair bit of tension between these fellows and the merchant seamen, and bar-room brawls and street fights are commonplace.

A charismatic Aqhrani sailor named **Amjad** (CG male human rogue 9) has recently arrived at the

docks on his dhow, the *Bold Venturer*, and is holding court at the *Sea Serpent's Kiss*, a waterfront tavern near *Wavecrest Hall*. Here he is entertaining the other punters with a series of far-fetched tales of remote islands, bottled genies, fearsome sea monsters and fabulous treasures. There could be some truth in these stories, though, as Amjad wears a particularly fine-looking bejewelled scimitar at this side, and his ship arrived apparently laden with valuable trade goods to sell. Alas, Amjad has been attracting the wrong sort of attention since he reached Parsantium and it isn't long before someone steals the bronze flask he says contains a genie. Can the PCs help him get it back?

## Palace Ward

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The Palace Ward is the easternmost ward in the Imperial Quarter, bordering the Civic Ward to the west. It is dominated by the Great Palace of the Basileus, which sits atop a hill at the end of the Mese, overlooking the bustling city and the Dolphin Strait below. One of the three lesser gates into Parsantium (see page 53), the North Gate allows entrance through the city walls in the north of the ward. Like the other lesser gates, it has no gatehouse, but is nonetheless guarded by the City Watch and has a customs official in attendance.

South of the North Gate and west of the Great Palace, wide avenues lead to the walled estates of Parsantium's prominent noble families – these great houses boast minarets and towers, marble colonnades and grand courtyards, set within their own extensive grounds. Neatly trimmed lawns and beautiful gardens are festooned with statues, fountains, and ornamental trees and shrubs. The nobility like to feel secure in their homes so most employ private guards – dwarves

are a popular choice, as are Urskovians, although the Pavone family have been bold enough to hire gnolls for their protection, causing more than a few raised eyebrows among their more conservative neighbours.

The southern part of the ward is mostly a wealthy residential area, but the district also contains the fortified Garrison, where Parsantium's army is barracked, and the Forum of the Gorgon. Located at the very end of Dead Man's Road near the Dolphin Strait, the forum is where weekly executions, mutilations and other physical punishments take place in the shadow of a huge, blackened iron statue of a gorgon. This hollow statue was once used as a vessel to roast criminals alive, a practice outlawed by Corandias the Compassionate in favour of impalement as the preferred method of execution. These bloody events are very popular and attract large crowds of spectators, as well as street-food stalls and other vendors, although few people hang around to listen to the dying screams of the impaled for very long.



## First Impressions

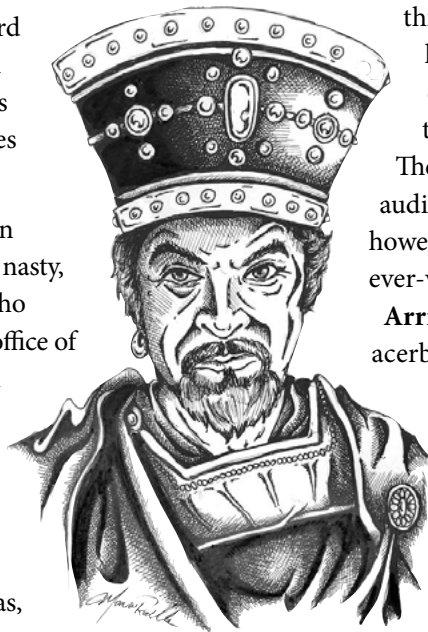
A sense of considerable wealth and privilege pervades this ward, from the grandiose noble estates in the north to the Great Palace of the Basileus atop its hill, visible from almost anywhere. Nobles travel to and fro in palanquins carried by burly looking bearers or are whisked along the Mese in horse-drawn carriages adorned with the family crest. Near the Garrison, a squad of well-drilled halfling slingers marches down the street to their barracks, and the sounds of fighting practice can be heard from the other side of its walls.

## Passers-By

**Parasellis** (LG male human expert 5), a wild-haired, talented sculptor, drives a cart containing his latest work to the Fonte estate. He has tactfully depicted the overweight head of the house as a handsome yet thoughtful-looking Adonis.

**Yegor** (CN male gnomish fighter 6) is the alligator of the gnomish mercenary war band serving in the Parsantine army and stationed at the Garrison. Nearly seven feet tall, with golden brown fur marked with black spots and a greatsword strapped to his back, Yegor is an intimidating figure. He responds in kind to the disapproving stares of nobles as he walks past.

**Bonifacius Laro** (LE male human aristocrat 13), pictured right, is a nasty, scheming Bathuran nobleman who sits on the Senate and holds the office of Grand Custodian of the Imperial Records. Distinguished and silver-haired, he is growing frustrated at his limited political influence and is trying to negotiate a marriage between his daughter Adula and Corandias, the nine-year-old heir to the throne.



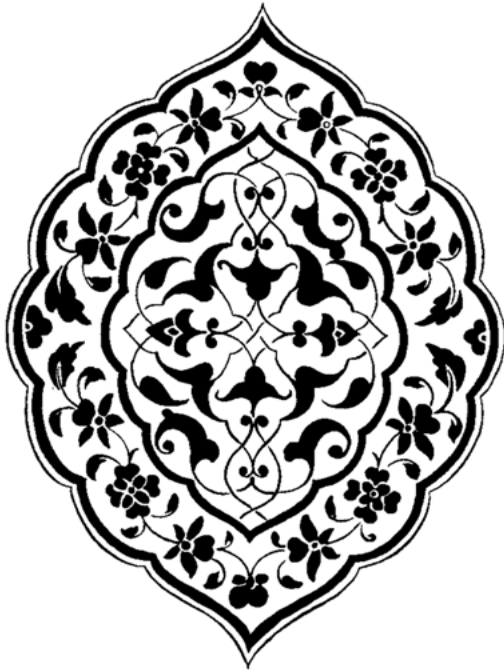
## Great Palace

The sprawling Great Palace complex, sitting atop Palace Hill at the end of the Mese, is home to the Basileus and the Parsantine royal family. Built by Corandias the Magnificent, the palace's high, windowless walls contain a maze of halls, corridors and courtyards, surrounded by elaborate gardens.

Two carved sandstone lions flank the entrance in the arcaded facade leading into the main palace building. Beyond is a domed vestibule with a polished green marble floor and exquisite mosaics adorning the curved ceiling above. Here, visitors will be greeted by **Duproxius** (LN male human expert 4), the pompous Imperial Chamberlain, a podgy eunuch with a shaved head, dressed in heavy golden robes. Duproxius will lead guests along a confusing series of corridors until they reach the throne room, whose great wooden doors are protected by members of the Axe-Bearing Guard.

Inside the octagonal audience chamber, those entering the royal presence are expected to prostrate themselves on the floor, foreheads pressed to the marble with arms stretched wide. Corandias XVIII the Lion-Blooded (see page 25) sits on his golden throne on a raised dais, the throne's arms shaped like sphinxes and its back a spread eagle with emeralds for eyes. The Despoina's smaller throne is on his left, usually unoccupied as Thecia does not often attend her husband's daily audiences. The Basileus's loyal adviser Arridaeus is, however, always present, along with a dozen of the ever-vigilant Axe-Bearing Guard.

**Arridaeus** (LG male human wizard 15) is an acerbic, sharp-witted and wise Bathuran in his fifties, a direct descendant of Corandias the Magnificent's vizier, Marcus Servius. Dressed in plain but finely made black robes, the vizier stands apart from the fancily dressed, scheming officials at court. He has the best interests of Corandias and Parsantium at heart and nothing else, although Tapasranjan's calls to improve the



lot of those living in the Old Quarter haven't fallen on deaf ears. If the PCs gain an audience with the Basileus, perhaps after stories of their heroic exploits have reached him, it is Arridaeus who will ask most of the questions. Only once the wizard has given them a good grilling will Corandias express any approval for their past deeds. Depending on how the PCs conduct themselves, a royal audience could lead to a reward, a challenging mission on behalf of the Crown, or both.

Beyond the throne room, more corridors lead through the Great Palace to areas including the impressive dining hall with its nineteen apses, the private apartments of the royal family, the tranquil bathhouse, the Basileus's harem (watched over by eunuch guards) and the barracks of the Axe-Bearing Guard. The royal apartments are beautiful – many of the rooms have intricate mosaic floors depicting leopards, deer and other animals, or are decorated with lovely tilework in geometric patterns.

Behind the main building, a large terrace embellished with marble statues and ornamental pools overlooks the Dolphin Strait. The Basileus likes to come here with Thecia at the end of the day to relax with a glass of Feyshore Rose wine as the sun sets, while watching

the boats on the water down below. The terrace is also the favourite sunbathing spot of **Sirocco** (CG male young brass dragon), who was hatched from an egg given to Parsantium as a gift to mark Corandias's birth by the Caliph of Aqhran. Corandias and the dragon grew up together and have a strong bond, although as a medium-sized dragon Sirocco is too small to serve as a mount for the Basileus. While Corandias has the weight of ruling the city on his shoulders, Sirocco is still playful and young at heart; the dragon loves living at court and listening to all the gossip from the royal family, the women of the harem and the servants. He gets on very well with the Basileus's daughters Proseria and Comito and sons Corandias and Florentius. Comito and the two boys have told the dragon that terrifying ghostly children haunt their apartments each night. While their mother has insisted they are imagining things, they are not – the ghosts are those of the children of Corandias XV the Ill-Starred, massacred in their beds by Kalgroth Ironheart's hobgoblin troops 100 years ago. Until their bones are found and buried, their spirits cannot rest. Sirocco doesn't know who to tell this story to, or even if it's true, but he would like to find a way to help the children get a restful night's sleep. He's tried hunting for the ghosts himself, but they only seem to appear when the children are alone.

## Garrison

The city's imposing garrison building has the look of a fortress. Surrounded by high walls studded with arrow slits and topped with battlements, this is where the six allagions garrisoned in the city (around 3,000 men) are stationed and also serves as the headquarters of the armed forces.

The main keep-like building holds the barracks and mess halls of the soldiers, as well as the offices of the Strategos, Loukas Andronicus (see page 28), and the Grand Dhongarius of the Fleet, Trasaric Marfisi. Other buildings inside the walled compound include the armoury and a small, plain-looking temple to the war god Martek. The large courtyard offers plenty of



space for military training – targets are set up so that archers, infantry and cavalry can practice their battle prowess, and the clash of steel can be heard throughout the day as the soldiers test each other's skills. Soldiers come and go at all times of the day and night as the shifts change on the walls and at the two major city gates for which the army is responsible. Residents of the Palace Ward are used to seeing bands of men, elves, halflings, dwarves or gnolls marching past, heading to and from their posts.

**Thonor Rimehorn** (LG male dwarf fighter 9) is the dwarven quartermaster in charge of the armoury. Over 150 years old, the white-haired, curmudgeonly warrior fought to defend Parsantium from Kalgroth Ironheart's hobgoblin forces a century ago, returning four years later with the Great Crusade to get rid of the humanoid tyrant. During the fighting Thonor lost his mithral shield, an important family heirloom with a distinctive appearance: it had the names of his ancestors in the

Rimehorn clan inlaid in orichalcum around the boss. He would die a very happy dwarf if he could strap it onto his arm one more time.

Beneath the armoury lies a hidden vault protected by several fiendish traps, which holds the city's supplies of Parsantine Fire. Treat Parsantine Fire as a more potent version of alchemist's fire, doing 3d6 damage to anyone caught in the area of effect. Earthenware pots of the volatile substance can be fired from catapults to shatter on impact, and the Parsantine army and navy are renowned for the dragon-headed flamethrowers mounted on the city walls and on the prows of their galleys. A red-scaled, elderly (and somewhat deaf) dragonkin named **Marozia** (N female dragonkin alchemist 14) oversees the Fire's manufacture and safeguards the secret recipe used to make the substance – the Caliphate of Aqhran and the city of Loranto would both pay very handsomely for a copy of the formula.



# MERCANTILE QUARTER

The Mercantile Quarter, situated on an island in the middle of the Dolphin Strait, is the city's smallest quarter and, due to its size, the only one not divided into wards. As its name suggests, the quarter is the place to come to buy and sell; its vast markets are the world's largest and busiest.

There has been a market on the island since the days of Dhak Janjua. Once the rajah had built the great bridges across the Dolphin Strait, farmers living in the villages on the northern bank brought their livestock and crops over what is now known as the Rajah's Bridge to sell at an open-air market on the central island. In time, they were joined by traders from the Sunset Lands to the west and from Khemit and Sampur to the south, seeking buyers for their wares and goods to purchase and sell back home. Trade continued to grow after the fall of Vrishabha and the arrival of the Aqhrani merchants several centuries later, and further still once Parsantium had been conquered by the Bathurans. It was Corandias the Magnificent who commissioned the 200-foot-tall bronze Colossus in his own likeness to stand in the middle of the marketplace – an impressive symbol to the world of the Empire's growing influence and wealth, as well as a tribute to his own ego. Once trade opened up along the Silk Road with Tiangao 70 years ago, the markets of the Mercantile Quarter were able to offer goods from all over the known world. Now almost anything can be bought here if the buyer is prepared to pay for it, although there are a few exceptions: slavery is illegal in Parsantium, and certain drugs, poisons and evil magicks are proscribed. For these, a prospective buyer needs to venture into the Hidden Quarter (see page 116).

As well as the markets, the Mercantile Quarter is home to the renowned Theatre of Cytherea, located in the south of the quarter. On the western side of the island, there is a series of jetties where goods shipped

over from the Royal and Old Docks arrive to be sold in the shops and souks. **Basil Zarides**, the Tribune of the Mercantile Quarter (see page 28), has an office here but he is rarely in it; instead he prefers to wander the marketplace to make sure all is well and that plenty of coins are changing hands.

The Mercantile Quarter is where all parts of the city meet to trade. As such, there is no uniform architectural style – instead, influences from all over the city (and beyond) can be found here, quite often slap bang next to each other in the same busy street. Usually shopkeepers will live above their shops in cramped apartments, while visiting vendors tend to find accommodation in one of the quarter's many inns and rent a stall for the length of their stay. The Thirsty Camel, Unlucky Lamb and most other such places are no-frills establishments, consisting of a dozen or so basic rooms arranged around a courtyard. After a hard day's trading the merchants will sit drinking wine or beer late into the night, boasting about their swollen coffers or complaining about how tough business is.

## First Impressions

Crowds of people of all races and nationalities push and shove their way up and down a narrow street in the souk, past stall after stall selling brightly coloured exotic spices, piled up in their baskets in pyramids. On a corner, a little old Sampuran man in a turban plays his wooden pipe and his large red- and yellow-banded snake sways in time to the music. Donkeys bray, chickens squawk and goats bleat in the livestock market. Meanwhile, a determined dwarf and an Aqhrani armour-seller haggle fiercely over the price of an ornately carved wooden shield.





## Passers-By

**Thoderic** (NG male hobgoblin bard 4) is a bare-chested, affable hobgoblin who was thrown out of his tribe for cowardice and now makes his living entertaining folks in the marketplace by swallowing swords. He is covered in gruesome-looking tattoos (skulls, knives, snakes, and so on) and knows how to camp it up for the crowd.

**Nallor Flourfingers** (N male halfling commoner 3) is a baker and pastry chef who makes some of the city's

finest baklavas and borek (cheese pastries), which he sells from a small wooden cart he wheels around the markets. Nallor is a great source of gossip – you just need to buy a pastry.

**Brave Ella** (CG female elf ranger 12), stern-faced with long dark brown hair, recently arrived in Parsantium on the trail of the men who massacred her fellow rangers in a woodland glade in the Feyshore Forest. The killers had tattoos with two crossed scimitars. She is in the market to buy more arrows.





## The Colossus

Towering over the markets, the Colossus is a 200-foot-tall bronze statue depicting the hawk-nosed Corandias the Magnificent. The first Basileus of Parsantium is shown with a victor's laurel wreath on his head, wearing a suit of scale armour, and holding a longsword aloft in triumph in his right hand. Built in 696 as part of Corandias's extensive public works programme, the mammoth project was overseen by the (ironically Aqhrani) master sculptor Rafiqi al-Ru'izz and the Basileus's vizier Marcus Servius (the powerful wizard who founded the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus), and took just two years to complete. The monumental statue is often used as a meeting point by locals in the Mercantile Quarter; someone might say "Let's meet by the right foot at sunset" to his friend.

The Colossus is supposedly a golem of great power that will animate and defend the city in times of dire need. No one knows if this is true, although it is said that the statue's eyes lit up with a reddish glow when Kalgroth Ironheart's hobgoblin army took Parsantium. There have been no other reports of the Colossus coming to life or moving in any way, although the fact that its bronze surface still shines brightly after 850 years indicates some kind of magic is in effect. Those who examine the Colossus in detail – only possible by climbing the steps built into the great marble plinth it stands on – can spot what appear to be strange symbols among the patterns decorating the statue's footwear. Archways cut into the sides of the plinth at ground level and up the first flight of stairs lead into small shops.

## The Markets

From the Rajah's Bridge, Coin Street runs southeast to the central open-air marketplace around the Colossus. Here, dozens of stalls selling all kinds of foodstuffs are packed close together beneath the enormous bronze statue. Some have benches where diners can sit beneath brightly coloured awnings and eat whatever is on offer, often kebabs or steaming bowls of pilaf. Others sell

fruits, vegetables, nuts, sweet pastries, meat, cheese, tea and coffee, or offer teeth-pulling or barbering services. Water sellers in bright red outfits and fringed hats ply their trade between the rows of stalls, and there is plenty of entertainment on offer, including musicians, snake charmers, jugglers and fire-eaters.

On the eastern side of the marketplace, another main road, Spice Street, heads to Srivatsa's Bridge and the Old Quarter on the far side of the water. In every other direction, though, the streets leading off the central marketplace enter a confusing maze of narrow alleyways and souks. Each of these streets contains shops and stalls dedicated to a different type of merchandise – pots and vases, live poultry, oil lamps and lanterns, swords, carpets, goats and sheep, furniture, traditional clothing, gems and jewellery, paintings and so on. The alleys and streets twist and turn and it's all too easy for a newcomer to lose his or her way. Young boys and girls will offer their services as guides for a couple of copper sestertii, but will often choose to guide their employers to their uncle's or grandmother's shop rather than where they actually wanted to go. The alleys and passages can be pretty dark too – sometimes the buildings on either side of the street lean into each other, almost touching. Elsewhere, shopkeepers have built makeshift roofs over the alleyways from palm tree branches or planks of wood. It is customary to haggle over the price of non-food items at most stalls, although a small number of shops have fixed selling prices.

Described here are a number of stalls and shops of particular interest to adventurers.

## The Dark Path

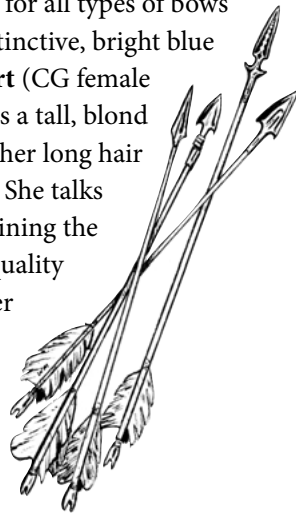
Hidden away in a small courtyard off Tinker's Alley, this dingy shop is run by an ancient tiefling named **Morphrestes** (NE male tiefling wizard 11) and sells all manner of strange, sinister objects to "collectors", including unholy symbols, demonic statuettes, ritual knives and occult tomes. Morphrestes has wrinkled, papery, red skin, two short horns on his forehead, and goat's hooves, and is an expert on the dark arts. He is



rumoured to have once been a powerful diabolist but now seems content to make his living as a dodderly old shopkeeper, buying and selling the things that most traders won't touch.

### Naillae's Fletchings

This stall on Warrior's Way sells finely crafted masterwork arrows and bolts for all types of bows and crossbows, each with distinctive, bright blue fletchings. **Naillae Moonheart** (CG female elf expert 5), the stallholder, is a tall, blond elf from the Feyshore Forest, her long hair tied back with a silver circlet. She talks slowly and deliberately, explaining the painstaking techniques and quality materials she uses to make her arrows to anyone who stops at the stall. As well as her own work, Naillae will often have various magic arrows for sale.



### The Compleat Adventurer

This shop in the Souk of Useful Items sells every kind of adventuring equipment, from the classic (10-foot poles, iron spikes) to the esoteric (dagger boots for climbing trees, brass cones for listening at doors). Inside, items for sale are crammed onto shelves that go up to the high ceiling – ladders are needed to reach the top ones. The owner is a retired Bathuran adventurer named **Bartholemus** (CG male human fighter 4/rogue 3), who spent many years exploring the tunnels of the Hidden Quarter and the ruins of the Feyshore Forest. Bartholemus has a shiny bald head, a bushy grey beard and a jovial manner, and is brimming over with advice for any adventurers just starting out. Some of it is even helpful.

### Vintage Vambraces

Not far from Naillae's Fletchings on Warrior's Way, this large stall sells an eclectic mix of used suits of armour, helmets, shields and other protective items

for the fighter who wants to stand out from his or her peers. All the items for sale are unique and well-crafted, and either made from valuable materials, decorated in some fashion, or both; a few are magical. Prices range from around 175 gp for decorated light armour up to 3,500 gp for a suit of full plate inlaid with gold and gemstones. Vintage Vambraces is run by a pair of flamboyant male half-elves named **Hayavel** and **Dethril** (both N male half-elf experts 4), both possessed of a barbed wit.

### Abdul's Animals

This wooden stall with a gold- and green-striped silk awning is situated in one corner of a small square packed with pens containing the various exotic and trained beasts on sale. These include racing camels (300 gp), guard drakes (500 gp), blue-banded desert eagles (40 gp), hippogriffs (5,000 gp), hyenas (75 gp), leopards (200 gp) and ostriches (50 gp). **Abdul** (NG human male expert 7/ranger 3) is a well-fed, fork-bearded Aqhrani, dressed in a dark green djellaba and a grey turban finished with a silver elephant pin. He oozes charm, flattering his customers, and offering them glasses of refreshing mint tea while they look over his fine selection of animals. Abdul loves to haggle and is likely to double the prices given above for his starting position.

### From the Steppes

This stall on Warrior's Way is decorated with carved rowanwood totems and battered gnoll shields. Its owner is **Taichu** (CN male centaur barbarian 6), a centaur from the Great Grass Sea to the northeast of Parsantium. Taichu has thick black hair and a beard, and off-white hindquarters marked with reddish-brown stripes. He speaks little and his strong accent is hard for Parsantines to understand. On sale is a variety of weapons and armour from Taichu's homeland, including huge recurved (composite) bows, arrows, lances, gnoll cudgels and spears, and light shields decorated with bones and gnoll symbols. A small number of these items are magic.



### Kelleb's Books

This rickety, donkey-drawn cart laden down with books and scrolls can appear anywhere along Scribes Street. The stallholder, a gnome named **Kelleb** (CG male gnome expert 4), is short even for his race at 3' 3" tall (he stands on a wooden box to serve his customers) and has flame-coloured hair that sticks up crazily in all directions. Kelleb buys and sells all sorts of books and is a good source of information on a variety of topics thanks to a lifetime of reading. Excitable and enthusiastic, he regularly drops obscure bits of lore into the conversation. Kelleb's cart carries an interesting mix of books, scrolls and folios, but it's hard for customers to find what they want as the different volumes are piled up haphazardly on top of each other, with even more hidden behind the front row of books. The latest plays of Iancu Petronas might sit alongside an obscure book of hymns to Amphetia, a series of esoteric prophecies by an ancient tiefling warlock, and a well-used copy of "How to Bake 101 Tasty Halfling Pies".

### Jax's Wilderness Outfitters

Located in the Souk of Useful Items, this shop specializes in all kinds of wilderness travel gear, including clothing (lightweight djellabas for the desert of Khemit, thick yak furs for an expedition to the Pillars of Heaven Mountains), tents, fishing gear, hunting knives and tree beds (for sleeping in trees, of course). **Jax** (NG male human ranger 5) is a huge man from the Sunset Lands with thick, bristling eyebrows and a loud, booming laugh, whose motto is "be prepared!". He sells gear in his store for every eventuality and his enthusiastic explanations for each item's functionality make it hard to leave empty-handed. Jax buys and sells magic items designed for wilderness use, such as *boots of elvenkind* and *ropes of climbing*.

### Myrtle's Locks & Keys

This small shop in the Souk of Useful Items isn't what it seems. **Myrtle Thornberry** (CN female halfling rogue 9) is a brown-skinned halfling with braided dark hair

decorated with turquoise beads. She wears brown robes over a dark green skirt and can usually be found sitting behind her counter, quietly fixing a lock. The shop has a range of locks and keys for sale but that's not its primary business. To those in the know, Myrtle also sells a wide range of thieves' tools including lockpicks, glass cutters, disguise kits, loaded dice, caltrops, and a few magic items – *slippers of spider climbing* and the like. To see what's on offer, a customer needs to ask if there is anything more "out back" and Myrtle will let him or her through a black curtain to the hidden showroom beyond.

### Glorious Garments

**Lilavarti** (LN female human expert 3), an attractive, glamorous Sampur woman in her forties, runs this popular stall in the Street of Silks. She wears an orange sari and heavy makeup – dark eyebrows, kohl around her eyes, and bright red lips – and has a good eye for fashion, picking out outfits for her customers that make them look and feel good, and treating them warmly. Most of her clientele are men and women from the Old Quarter looking for something special for a festival or important meeting, but Lilavarti also has a number of adventurers as regular customers who want to look their best while in the city. The stall sells a wide variety of cloaks, djellabas and robes; occasionally one or two magic items are available for purchase.

### The Curio Cabinet

Popular with adventurers looking to sell some of the more unusual "art objects" they have found on their quests, the Curio Cabinet is tucked away down Tinker's Alley, a backstreet a few blocks from the Colossus. It's an unassuming stone and timber building with a faded sign, hanging half off its hinges; the glass windows are thick with grime and hard to see through. Inside, the shop is a single room with a low, oak-beamed ceiling. Crammed into the space is a vast, untidy and dust-covered collection of items from plundered tombs, dungeons and ruins across the world. Dominating the space is a huge, rather moth-



eaten, stuffed owlbear which stands against one wall, rearing up as if to attack. The other items on show are less dramatic but still exotic – erotic drow sculptures, old treasure maps, statuettes of many-headed and limbed Sampuran gods, canopic jars from Khemit, bronze prayer wheels from a monastery high in the Pillars of Heaven Mountains, gnoll pack totems, and so on.

The shop is run by **Irene**, a sweet, friendly old lady, whose white hair is tied back in a tight bun. She always offers her visitors a cup of tea, keen to see what they have for sale. However, rudeness or, even worse, mean-spirited remarks, will result in a sharp slap on the wrist for the offending PC. Of course, there is more to Irene than meets the eye. The elderly Bathuran woman is actually the polymorphed **Naelere** (LG female very old bronze dragon), who has lived in Parsantium for the last 700 years or so, having moved to the city from her sea cave along the coast. These days, she acts as an unofficial guardian of the city against its enemies, both internal and external. She rarely intervenes directly; instead, she advises the Basileus of the day from time to time, and often points adventurers in the direction of those plotting to harm the city. Naelere can be found in various places and several guises when in Parsantium. Here she is Irene; in the Imperial Quarter she is the young noblewoman Lady Viviana Megaris (see page 147); and in the Old Quarter she is a male dwarf carpenter called Jarwyn (see page 113). As the owner of the Curio Cabinet, Irene is able to steer the adventurers who come to her shop towards the places she wants them to go, for example, by offering them an old treasure map showing part of the Hidden Quarter at a bargain price.

As well as selling unwanted loot, PCs are able to buy magic items at the Curio Cabinet. The GM should pull together a list of around 20 fun items she would like to introduce into her campaign and pick a few for Irene to have on sale each time the PCs visit. Generally speaking, these should be minor or medium items appropriate to the PCs' level; Irene does not typically deal in weapons or armour.

## Theatre of Cytherea

Parsantium's large open-air theatre was built 500 years ago, during the reign of Florian I, in the semi-circular Bathuran style, and is capable of holding an audience of up to 5,000. Spectators watch the performance sitting on tiered rows of limestone seats facing the stage, which is raised up several feet higher than the front row. The best tickets to a performance cost 1 gp each, with regular tickets costing 1 sp. "Cheap seats" are also available for 3 cp – these tend to be at the sides of the auditorium where the view of the action is somewhat restricted. Tickets feature the symbol of Cytherea (a lyre) and are stamped with a letter indicating which block of seats they're in.

At the front of the stage is a large archway, known as the proscenium arch, which acts as a window through which the theatregoers view the play; this arch also has a curtain which opens at the start of each performance. At the back of the stage is the skene, a wide stone building with columns that serves as the backdrop to the action – traditional Bathuran drama doesn't really go in for elaborately painted scenery. The skene has three doors through which actors can enter or leave the stage; it is also used for changing costumes and for storing props. Because the building is only a single storey high, those sitting in the higher tiers can see the Corsairs' Sea beyond, adding to the atmosphere. The theatre has exceptional acoustics: even a whisper from an actor on stage can be clearly heard by someone sitting right at the back.

The Theatre of Cytherea stages nightly performances, and twice a year, in early winter and late spring, a week-long drama competition is held to honour the goddess (see page 153). The most recent winner was the iconoclastic and charismatic young bard **Iancu Petronas**, who has livened up theatre-going, making it more accessible and fun for the masses. Iancu won the





Winter Festivities with three plays – two tragedies and one comedy. These are currently being performed at the theatre for two weeks each, starting with “The Fey King of Darkwood”, a tragic tale of love between Madra, a human woman, and Govannon, the elven “Fey King” of the title. The two fall in love and get married but as Madra grows older, Govannon doesn’t age. Eventually, Madra dies and Govannon’s heart is broken. He neglects his realm and is killed when his kingdom is invaded by foul giants from beneath the earth. A comic interlude in the play, partly designed to entertain “the mob”, features three mischievous and bawdy satyrs who mock the “old ways”, a not so subtle reference to traditional Bathuran drama and its proponents. The other two plays are “The Fable of the Starweaver”, another tragedy, this time focused on a hubristic mage, and “Brother Jun’s Pilgrimage”, a comedy about an accident-prone monk.

### Iancu Petronas and Company

Iancu Petronas’s plays are exceptional works of art, combining beautiful poetic language with dramatic plots to great effect. He uses a talented bunch of actors in his cast and performances feature colourful costumes, painted backdrops on cloth hung from the roof of the skene, and the occasional magical special effect.

Charismatic, talented and eloquent, **Iancu** (CG male human bard 9) is brilliant with words and is also a capable musician and singer. He has olive skin, striking green eyes, a neat beard, and long brown hair tied back with a silver circlet decorated with the lyre of Cytherea. In contrast to the long tunics and sandals of the older dramatists, Iancu likes to wear shirts and trousers, pointy Aqhrani slippers and plenty of jewellery. He loves women, drinking, and bantering with friends and enemies alike.

Attractive, vain, and more than a bit dim, **Beatus** (NG male human expert 4/bard 1) is frequently cast in the leading role in Iancu’s plays for the great passion with which he delivers his lines. Beatus is gay and always dresses to impress. He has a number of wealthy admirers scattered around the Old Quarter who shower him with jewellery in return for his affections.

**Diti** (LG female human expert 4) is a pretty Sampuran actress with striking almond eyes. One of the first women to appear on stage in Parsantium, she is wholly focused on becoming a successful actor, and has made it clear she’s not interested in a romantic involvement with any of the men in the troupe, or in joining them when they go carousing in the Poor Ward.

**Francio** (CN male human expert 3/warrior 1) is a bitter man, resentful of Beatus for getting the best parts when he, Francio, is a far better actor (at least in his own mind). He also has an expensive dash habit and has got himself in debt to a loan shark connected to the Golden Scimitars (see page 130). To avoid being beaten up for not keeping up with his payments, he is now doing some work for the gang he owes money to, mostly intimidating shopkeepers into paying protection money. Although he doesn’t let it show (he’s a great actor!), Francio is desperately trying to find a way out of this situation.

### The Old Guard

Dulicitus, Vetranis and Gerontius are three traditional dramatists who despise Iancu Petronas, his dangerous avant-garde ideas and his louche lifestyle. More than anything else, they are furious at losing the patronage of House Fonte to the young upstart. The trio are willing to pay a handsome fee to the PCs if they can dig up sufficient dirt on Iancu to discredit him ahead of the winter Cytherean Festivities. Since Petronas and his cronies spend most of their time drinking, whoring and gambling, this shouldn’t be too difficult, surely?

**Dulicitus** (N male human expert 5/aristocrat 1) has a scraggly beard and unruly grey hair sticking out crazily from the sides of his otherwise bald head. Pompous and dismissive of Iancu’s “new-fangled” and “vulgar” plays, he is secretly jealous of the playwright’s considerable talent. His best-known play is “The Fall of the Dragon King”, a classic but not a patch on Petronas’s “The Fable of the Starweaver”. **Vetranis** (LN male human expert 4) is also bald with a craggy face and bulging eyes. He writes witty comedies but is morose in person.

**Gerontius** (N male human expert 4) is rosy-faced, has a deep, booming voice and is rather hard of hearing. He doesn’t realize how loud he is talking (or shouting).



# OLD QUARTER

The Old Quarter, situated across from the Imperial Quarter on the southern side of the Dolphin Strait, is where it all began nearly 2,000 years ago, when the original city of Dhak Janjua was founded. This part of the city is an exotic blend of many races and traditions, dominated by the two great cultures of the city's first and second inhabitants – the Sampurans and the Aqhrani. The Old Quarter is where most of these folk live and work.

Little remains above ground of the original city of Dhak Janjua. When the first Aqhrani traders settled in the city over 1,500 years ago, they pulled down a great deal of the existing structures and built new homes, mosques and fonduqs on top of the foundations of the older Sampuran city. Many of these early Aqhrani buildings still exist today, and the current street layout of the Old Quarter is more or less unchanged from how it was all those centuries ago. It was the Aqhrani who built the walls between the six wards of the quarter and also introduced the concept of the mahalla (or neighbourhood) into which each ward was further divided. Each of these neighbourhoods contains a communal well and at least one fonduq or market. Typically, the main streets through each ward form the boundaries where one mahalla starts and another ends.

Around 70 years ago the Sampurans and Aqhrani were joined by a third human ethnic group – new arrivals from the distant east who settled in their own community, known as “Tiangao Town”, in the Temple Ward. Living alongside these three human cultures is a large half-orc community, based in the Poor Ward and willing to do the “unclean” jobs that the Sampurans are forbidden from doing by their religious beliefs; and a sizeable number of gnolls who came to Parsantium centuries ago as bodyguards for their Aqhrani masters. Generally speaking these diverse cultural groups live peacefully side by side, sharing a sense of

solidarity with their fellow Old Quarter residents. The widespread support for the Greens and the Reds in the chariot races is one way in which the Old Quarter stands together against those living in the northern side of the city, who tend to look down on them as second-class citizens.

Although nearly all the important civic buildings are across the Dolphin Strait in the Imperial Quarter, the Old Quarter is nevertheless home to a number of significant landmarks. The Camel Gate is the terminus for both the Silk Road and the Path to Heaven, vital trade roads that bring exotic goods from Tiangao and Sampur into the city. The highest building in Parsantium, the Marjani Minar – the 500-foot-tall headquarters of the powerful Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus – is situated in the Artisans Ward, along with the halls of many of the city's influential guilds. The quarter also holds several prominent temples to the gods of Sampur, Aqhran and Tiangao, as well as a beautiful park containing the Garden Mausoleum of Hulieman, the city's greatest sultan, and the Old Palace of Parsantium's former rulers. In contrast, the Old Quarter is also where most of the impoverished districts and slums can be found, including the homes of the Sampuran poor, half-orcs and gnolls; the city's prison is located here too.

To a privileged Bathuran crossing Srivatsa's Bridge over the strait, entering the Old Quarter can feel like stepping back in time to an earlier age. It can also feel like walking into a city in another country, due to the different physical appearances of the multicultural population and the languages they are speaking. The narrow, dusty streets seem claustrophobic after the wide avenues of the Imperial Quarter and the city feels infinitely more crowded. The roads are packed from dawn to dusk with a chaotic mixture of pedestrians, bullock carts, camels, donkeys and so on, all trying to



get where they need to go, and it's easy to get lost in the bewildering rabbit warren of streets and alleyways once you leave the main drag.

In keeping with the quarter's cosmopolitan nature, different styles of architecture often sit cheek by jowl. Shining gold-domed mosques with tall, graceful minarets stand alongside exotic-looking Sampuran temples, covered in colourful painted carvings of gods and heroes. In Tiangao Town, yet another style is present: here, green-tiled roofs, golden carp motifs and stone lions are added into the mix. Fonduqs (Aqhrani-style bazaars on two levels situated around a courtyard) and maze-like souks replace the open forums of the Imperial Quarter, and coffee shops

and teahouses are as common as inns and taverns. Blue-bottomed monkeys are everywhere, scampering across the rooftops and begging for scraps in the street from passers-by.

Apartment buildings in the Old Quarter are older and not as well built as those on the northern side of the Strait. Here, the apartments are often without heating, running water or toilets, although most have latticed windows and balconies. The inhabitants like to grow tomatoes or flowers on their balconies if they are lucky enough to live in a street that gets sufficient sunlight – many of the alleys are too dingy, with the upper floors of the crammed-in buildings jutting out over the streets.







## Caravans Ward

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Visitors to Parsantium coming from the south enter the city through the Camel Gate into the Caravans Ward in the southeast corner of the Old Quarter. Hectic and noisy, this ward lives up to its name, providing goods and services to the many caravans arriving from Sampur via the Path to Heaven or from Tiangao via the Silk Road. From the gate, Spice Street heads northwest through the Artisans Ward and over Srivatsa's Bridge to the Mercantile Quarter. The ward borders the Garden Ward to the northeast, the Artisans Ward to the northwest and the Temple Ward to the southwest, and is divided into four mahallas.

The two mahallas closest to the Camel Gate hold several caravanserais catering for newly arrived merchants, their servants, bodyguards, animals and merchandise. These large two- or three-storey walled compounds are built around a courtyard and entered through a gate wide enough to accommodate wagons and heavily laden camels. A series of identical chambers with arched doorways are built into the inside walls of the ground floor – some are used as stalls for the animals, others to store goods that will be sold in the Mercantile Quarter. The first floor usually holds accommodation for the merchants and their entourage. Some caravanserais have a bathhouse so the merchants can wash away the dirt of the road; others have shops selling supplies to travellers for their onward journey. Food and drink in the caravanserais is not normally of good quality and tends to be overpriced, but for most merchants the convenience of having everything in one place outweighs the drawbacks. The Seven Jugs Caravanserai (see page 89) is definitely the best of the bunch, but it is relatively expensive and usually booked up well in advance by regular caravans.

The two northern mahallas above Sultan Street are full of smaller inns, taverns and coffee houses,

catering to visitors and locals alike, as well as apartments and shops serving the needs of the folk who work in the ward. The popular Temple of Puchan is in this half of the ward, just off Spice Street, with the guildhall of the Fellowship of Venturers Bold nearby.

### First Impressions

It feels like most people here are either arriving or leaving; there's a real sense of hustle and bustle and the smells of weary, unwashed travellers mingle with those of horse dung and damp camels, creating a pungent cocktail of aromas. Angry shouts fill the air as two drovers argue over who needs to give way on a crowded street; they are speaking different languages but managing to get their points across loud and clear. A small group of unruly-looking gnoll mercenaries gets ready to leave the city with the caravan they are being paid to guard; their merchant patron eyes them dubiously.

### Passers-By

**Deepali** (CG female human commoner 1), a young Sampuran girl in a plain woollen robe, is rushing back to her cruel father, owner of the Three Palms Caravanserai. He gave her a black eye yesterday for being late, so she's in a desperate hurry.

**Arsharma** (LN male human expert 2), a middle-aged Parsantine merchant with a braided black beard, is on his way to the Temple of Puchan to pray for the god's protection on his upcoming trip to Sampur. His last three caravans were attacked by bandits only days after leaving the city. They seemed to know he was coming and which camels were carrying the most valuable goods.



**Misagenes** (NG male half-orc commoner 4) is a farrier, tall and muscular, with dark brown skin, long black hair and two impressive-looking lower teeth. He has fallen in love with Kahena, a human woman whose horses he shoes regularly. He has no idea what to say to her and is looking for someone to give him some romantic tips.

## Camel Gate

Along with its counterpart, the Imperial Quarter's Victory Gate, the Camel Gate is one of the two greater gates into Parsantium (see page 53). It possesses an impressive gatehouse, built by Corandias XVI the Stubborn when he strengthened the city walls 100 years ago; the outside of the structure is decorated with worn carvings depicting a caravan of heavily burdened camels.

The gatehouse and walls here are likewise manned by the Parsantine army, with the City Watch on hand to collect the toll from those arriving in the city from the Silk Road or the Path to Heaven. Here, though, the similarities end. Whereas the Victory Gate provides a well-ordered and peaceful if busy way in and out of the city, down at the Camel Gate there seems to be a permanently chaotic jumble of camels, bullock-drawn carts, argumentative merchants, crippled beggars (and those pretending to be crippled), pushy snake charmers and transvestite hustlers in bright red lipstick. The beggars can be a real nuisance, particularly the swarms of street kids that descend on each group of new arrivals, their hands outstretched. Many of these children are talented pickpockets and it's hard for most visitors to get safely to their caravanserai without losing a few coins or having something fall off the back of a camel. Thanks to the terrible poverty of much of the Old Quarter, corruption and bribery are rife.

**Melpides** (CN male human expert 2) is the Aqhrani customs officer responsible for collecting import and export duties at the Camel Gate. He looks well-fed, has a smartly trimmed beard and wears a distinctive bright yellow turban. An enthusiastic husband and father, Melpides has three demanding wives and 14 hungry children to support, so has fallen into the



habit of taking hefty bribes in return for undervaluing merchandise when calculating the duty a merchant must pay. The Camel Gate's declining revenues have aroused the suspicions of the Keeper of the Argent Coiffers, the dwarven bureaucrat responsible for the collection of customs duties on goods arriving and leaving by land – and he now has his eye on Melpides. He might try to uncover the corruption by hiring the PCs to pose as merchants arriving in the city with goods for sale.

Watchmen Virat and Ahiram are also on the take. **Virat** (LE male half-orc warrior 3) is a huge brown-skinned half-orc, his City Watch tabard stretched almost to bursting across his enormous frame; **Ahiram** (NE male human warrior 2) is a small, weaselly faced Aqhrani with an annoying whiny voice. This pair keep an eye out for valuable, lightly guarded shipments leaving through the gates and pass this information on to Yorren, a shifty gnome scout for the Crimson Hand bandit gang, who is staying at the Seven Jugs Caravanserai. The gang itself is based a day's ride outside the city in an old windmill and has so far racked up an impressive haul based on Yorren's intelligence. Arsharma (see page 87) is one of the gang's victims.



## Temple of Puchan

This white marble temple dedicated to the Sampuran god Puchan is located in the northeast mahalla of the Caravans Ward, just off Spice Street, and is busy with merchants seeking the god's favour before embarking on a long journey. As well as being the patron of travellers, Puchan is the god of relationships, who blesses marriages, and also advises herders on where to graze their cattle.

Entering through the main wooden doors in the east wall, the worshipper passes into a square hall decorated with silk hangings depicting the god riding in his goat-pulled chariot and dragging the sun across the sky. Beyond this chamber is a long, narrow hall used for dances in honour of the god. This, in turn, leads into the dimly lit garbhagriha (the "holy of holies" or inner sanctum), which holds a statue of Puchan, represented as an old traveller leaning on his famous golden lance. Offerings are left at the feet of the statue – these normally take the form of bowls of gruel, as the deity famously has no teeth, having lost them in a fight with the god Rudra. Sitting above the garbhagriha is a 100-foot-tall beehive-shaped tower, its exterior carved with ornamental grooves in various patterns.

**Dharmesh** (NG male halfling cleric 6), the high priest of the temple, is a brown-skinned halfling dressed in a plain white robe, wooden beads, an orange scarf and a white turban. He is wise, calm and kind-hearted and much sought after in the Old Quarter to perform marriages among the Sampuran community. It is said that if a priest of Puchan performs a wedding ceremony, the god himself will watch over the happy couple. As a vigilant priest of Puchan, Dharmesh is always on the lookout for any signs of sinister cult activity involving the dark aspect of Kali. Recently, rumours have been growing about a sect worshipping the Black Mother in the Temple Ward; Dharmesh is keen to find out if there is any truth to these tales and, if so, hire some strong swordarms to stamp out any threat before it grows.

## Seven Jugs Caravanserai

Catering for the more discerning merchant, the Seven Jugs on Spice Street, two blocks from the Camel Gate, is the best and most expensive caravanserai in the Caravans Ward. Bigger than most of its rivals, the Seven Jugs is four storeys tall, with an extensive paved courtyard complete with a decorative fountain depicting the Padisha of the Marids, lots of palm trees, and plenty of space for the animals and merchandise. The caravanserai offers a wide range of facilities for the weary traveller, including the services of a metalsmith, a leatherworker, a wainwright, a harness-maker, a barber, entertainers, and a fine bathhouse decorated with colourful mosaics.

Food and drink are of a much higher standard than is typical for a Parsantine caravanserai, served in a welcoming restaurant on the first floor, overlooking the courtyard. Specialities of the house include chicken in white wine and tamarind sauce served with spiced couscous, and minted lamb on a bed of chard leaves with fiery mixed peppers (both 2 gp). The wine cellar is well stocked, with several fine vintages on offer, including Feyshore Rose and Dravidian Green, both 10 gp per bottle. After dinner, well-fed guests can relax on comfortable silk cushions, smoking strawberry-flavoured sheesha and drinking thick, sugared coffee, while watching the gyrations of the belly dancers or listening to the thrilling tales of the resident rawun (storyteller). It costs between 5 gp and 8 gp a night for a room at the Seven Jugs.

Servants and bodyguards stay in more basic accommodation on the top two floors, at a cost of 5 sp per person, and eat simpler meals, costing 3 sp, in a communal dining room. Reduced weekly rates are available at five times the nightly price.

**Hayal Ranafi** (N male human expert 4/rogue 2) runs the Seven Jugs with his four wives, after retiring a year ago from his previous life as a caravan master, in which he travelled up and down the Silk Road between Parsantium and Tiangao. His experience taught him a lot about what makes a



good caravanserai and he was able to apply this knowledge to his new business venture. Hayal knows that merchants arriving in the city will be tired after their long journey, so he goes to great pains to make sure every caravan is welcomed warmly on arrival, all the animals and goods are swiftly dealt with, and the guests are able to relax in a hot bath before an excellent dinner. Hayal is a short, olive-skinned Aqhrani with a greying beard, clothed in a dark blue djellaba and a white keffiyeh. Although he seems jovial and relaxed, Hayal has a troubled past which has recently caught up with him. When he travelled the Silk Road, he used to smuggle illegal drugs, mostly opiates, into Parsantium on behalf of the Blue Lions, a ruthless criminal tong based in Tiangao. The Blue Lions have been edged out by their rivals, the Eight Scorpions (see page 132), and want to get the route reopened. To this end, they are threatening to harm the innkeeper's wives if Hayal won't go back on the road again.

**Mahmood** (CN male human expert 3) is the caravanserai's barber. Quick-witted and flamboyant, the well-groomed Aqhrani wears a fez atop his shining bald pate as he deftly wields his cut-throat razor. Like most barbers in the Old Quarter, Mahmood knows lots of gossip and rumours about what's going on in the city and outside, serving as a great way to dispense information and adventure hooks to the PCs. He is not to be trusted with secrets though, and his gossiping

about the PCs' antics could well land them in hot water. As well as cutting hair and shaving beards, Mahmood is an expert (non-magical) healer, capable of treating wounds and diseases.

**Chiong Lien** (NE female kitsune sorcerer 4/rogue 3/arcane trickster 3) is a fox-like shapeshifter, appearing in her human form as a tall, lithe woman with striking blue eyes and long, dark hair. A guest at the Seven Jugs, she has just arrived with a caravan from Tiangao led by a merchant named Tan Shi. Chiong Lien dresses in red silk robes and carries a staff; she keeps herself to herself but anyone watching carefully can tell Hayal is wary of her – Lien is the messenger sent by the Blue Lions to threaten the innkeeper. If engaged in conversation, she reveals a wry sense of humour; she is an excellent liar, telling anyone who asks that she is in Parsantium to join the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus.

**Sudhir** (NG male human expert 5/ranger 1) is another guest at the inn, a merchant recently arrived from Sampur with boxes full of expensive spices and rare herbs. He is a wiry, weathered-looking traveller, a veteran of many expeditions to Parsantium from his homeland. He is glad to have made it here safely – his caravan came under attack in the Pillars of Heaven Mountains from yeti and he was lucky to have escaped without losing too many men or camels. Sudhir will be returning to Sampur in a week or so and is looking to hire some extra guards for the trip.



# Garden Ward

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By far the most pleasant ward in the Old Quarter, the Garden Ward is not coincidentally where its most wealthy and influential residents have their homes. Notable locations are the Old Palace (the former home of the sultan, now serving as the office and residence of the Old Quarter tribune), the Observatory, and the Garden Mausoleum of Hulieman, set within a lovely park. The Garden Ward borders the Artisans Ward and the Caravans Ward to the southwest, and the Dolphin Strait to the north. Both gates into the ward are flanked by a pair of impressive sandstone statues of elephants, dating back to the time of Hulieman.

Four mahallas make up the ward. To the east of tree-lined Sultan Street are two residential neighbourhoods: adjacent to Caravans Ward lies a mixture of well-kept apartment buildings, large houses and good quality shops, while the northern mahalla is where the great and the good live, including brahmin, wizards and elves. Here, the residents have built themselves even grander houses, most of them with beautifully landscaped gardens. West of Sultan Street and south of Stargazers Lane is another residential mahalla, also composed of large houses, many of which belong to guildmasters, merchants and other prosperous folk who make their living in the adjacent Artisans Ward. The picturesque northwestern mahalla consists mostly of green open spaces, studded with trees, but also holds the ward's three most significant locations: the Old Palace, the Garden Mausoleum, and the giant astronomical instruments that make up the Observatory.

## First Impressions

Coming through the gates from the Caravans or Artisans wards to the west is to enter a tranquil oasis.

Although there are still people out and about, it is much quieter here, and birds can be heard singing in the many trees that line the streets. The sweet smell of evening jasmine growing on balconies makes a pleasant change from the stink of too many unwashed bodies elsewhere in the quarter. Courting couples kiss on benches in the leafy park looking out over the water; above them the beautiful Old Palace sits atop its hill at the end of Sultan Street.

## Passers-By

**Baskar and Hita** (NG male and female commoners 1) are a young couple very much in love and can be found most days walking hand in hand in the park. Unfortunately, their parents are bitter enemies – Baskar's father is Grand Master of the Coopers' and Wainwrights' Guild and Hita's is Grand Master of the Guild of Carpenters and Joiners. They are at pains to keep their relationship from their families for now, and are planning to get married in secret.

**Eruanna** (LN female elf wizard 3) is a Garden Ward resident who belongs to the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus. She has long, braided silver hair and wears the bright blue djellaba decorated with lotus flowers worn by members of the Order. She is heading to the Observatory to discuss celestial matters with the Royal Astronomer.

**Sorgrim "the Stiff"** (CN male halfling rogue 2) is a shady-looking, foolhardy thief from Flotsam who has come to the Garden Ward to burgle a few wealthy houses. He's already been clocked by the Watch and needs to shake them off.



## Garden Mausoleum of Hulieman

One of the most popular spots in the Old Quarter with both visitors and residents is the red sandstone Garden Mausoleum of Hulieman – a magnificent domed building surrounded by beautiful gardens. Hulieman was one of the greatest rulers in Parsantium's long history, reigning as sultan from 324 to 355, and was responsible for many lasting public works, including the scenic park in which his great mausoleum stands.

Hulieman's great tomb sits atop an imposing plinth with red sandstone arches, each arch leading into a series of chambers beneath the mausoleum; steps from below lead up to the top of the plinth and the four entrances into the main building. The building is constructed from red sandstone with white and black marble and yellow sandstone details. In contrast, the dome is of pure white marble, 150 feet tall, surmounted with a filial topped by a crescent moon. It sits above the main octagonal chamber where the plain white stone sarcophagus of the sultan rests, whose walls are decorated with geometric and arabesque patterns inlaid with coloured marble and stone. Hulieman's body is not inside the sarcophagus; a secret passageway entered from one of the chambers within the plinth leads underground to his real tomb, said to be stuffed full of gold, gems and dozens of priceless artefacts, and protected by fiendish traps. Archways lead off from



the central chamber into four lesser octagonal rooms where Hulieman's wife Nivedita and his sons and daughters are buried. The windows of the tomb display fine lattice screens made from marble.

The gardens that surround the mausoleum were created by elves and are said to represent an earthly paradise where people can relax, socialize and wander the pathways happily. Rather than formal design, the emphasis is on nature, with many trees and plants allowed to grow freely to create secluded dells and shady spots. Such a romantic setting brings many young couples here to spend time together – it's hard to find an unoccupied bench when the weather is fine. In the southwest corner of the park, near the banks of the Dolphin Strait, is a small octagonal mausoleum. This is the tomb of Hulieman's barber, the only man who regularly disagreed with the sultan, and whose advice the ruler consequently valued most.

**Yuroslav Bloodclaw** (N male gnoll druid 10) lives in the park, sleeping rough and feeding on squirrels, rabbits, fruit and berries. He is a frightening sight – dirty and dishevelled with matted fur and numerous fetishes and feathers tied to his ragged, stinking clothes. Yuroslav fled the Great Grass Sea and came to Parsantium after being troubled by disturbing dreams in which he ripped his own wife and children to pieces while in his beast form, that of a spotted steppe lion. Yuroslav quietly tends the trees, plants and flowers here, turning the park into the most beautiful place in the city, and strenuously avoids contact with anyone. He tries not to use his *wild shape* power but sometimes has to change into lion form to hide from park-goers. Whenever he does so, he feels a primal urge to kill come over him. Yuroslav has been cursed by Okkidor, Prince of Demons (see page 156); if the curse is not lifted soon, a couple out for a romantic stroll in the park might well end up ripped to pieces.

## Observatory

The Observatory was built by the great sultan Hulieman as part of the many public improvement works that took place during his 30-year reign.



Hulieman was fascinated by astronomy and astrology, and wanted to use the movement of the stars and planets to predict important events in the future that would affect the city, such as wars, earthquakes, political upheaval and famines. The construction of the Observatory was overseen by a talented vanaran wizard named Vipinbehari and carried out by numerous human and dwarven masons.

The Observatory consists of 16 huge astronomical instruments for measuring time, predicting eclipses and monitoring the positions of stars and other celestial bodies. Each instrument is a large stone structure bearing an astronomical scale; the tallest, the Samrat Yantra or Supreme Instrument, is a 90-foot-high sundial that can tell the time with pinpoint accuracy and is also used to predict crop yields. Other instruments include the Jai Prakash Yantra (two sunken hemispheres that map out the heavens), the Unnatansha Yantra (used to determine the positions of the stars and planets), and the Rashivalaya Yantra (composed of 12 pieces, each of which represents a different sign of the zodiac, which are used to draw up horoscopes).

The giant instruments are located in a walled, grassy compound dotted with trees, with visitors allowed to walk among them. Admission is normally restricted, however, to students from the Scholastica (who take some of their lessons here) and members of the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus. The current Royal Astronomer is **Carreus Pogor** (NG male gnome wizard 11), a scholarly wizard of some renown specializing in divination magic, who dresses in black robes and a matching hat, with stars and moons embroidered in silver thread. His recent observations of the alignment of the stars and planets indicate that a terrible evil is soon to return to Parsantium. Are the stars right for Vrishabha to be freed from his icy prison? Carreus intends to warn the Basileus but has yet to be granted an audience. This is because Aurius Kalothese (see page 150) has got wind of the astronomer's findings and is using his influence in the Bureaucracy to block the meeting. If Carreus finds a way to get round this, perhaps by contacting the vizier Arridaeus, he could be putting his life in danger.

## Old Palace of the Sultan

From the days of Hulieman until Corandias I the Magnificent built his own Great Palace in the Imperial Quarter, what is now called the Old Palace served as the home of Parsantium's ruler. Today this still magnificent building, now slightly the worse for wear, serves as the residence and seat of the Tribune of the Old Quarter, currently Murad al-Rumi (see page 28).



The palace is built on the foundations of an earlier royal residence used by the rajahs of Dhak Janjua as far back as Vrishabha, and there are whispered rumours of hidden underground vaults dating back to the time the rakshasa lord ruled the city. Long since sealed off, these chambers are said to be protected by bound guardian genies and to contain all kinds of fell magic, best left undisturbed.

Entrance to the palace is through a grand white marble gatehouse decorated with fine coloured tilework and flanked by stone elephants, also of white marble. The great brass-bound wooden doors are protected by four of the tribune's personal guard, the Janissaries. These men wear white-plumed conical helmets, scale mail armour, and green tabards bearing the leaping horse and crescent moon symbol of Parsantium in white. The gates lead into a large garden and open courtyard, with stables and barracks to the left and servants' quarters to the right. Straight ahead, another pair of wooden doors, embellished with gold, silver and copper flowers, lead into the palace itself. The archway above the doors is painted to resemble the spread tail of a peacock and is inlaid with gold. Beyond is the inner courtyard with the sultan's pavilion in the centre. Here, the ruler of Parsantium would greet his subjects while sitting on his ornate throne. These days the gold throne now sits in the Great Palace and Murad al-Rumi makes do with a large mahogany chair, its armrests carved to resemble bearded shedu, when discussing matters with his advisers and



officials. Dozens of rooms are arranged around the inner courtyard, but only a small percentage are in use by the tribune, his family and his bureaucrats. Many of the unused rooms, such as the harem, have leaky roofs, are coated in thick layers of dust or are otherwise neglected.

Since becoming tribune a few months ago, Murad al-Rumi has been carefully planning how to bring down the criminal gangs of the Hidden Quarter. Well aware of the City Watch's deficiencies in nearly every ward, his first priority is to replace the corrupt and

lazy Watch Captains, and he is currently trying to identify suitable candidates to take their place. Once this is done, he will almost certainly be looking for trustworthy hired help in order to raid some of the known gang hangouts. Avishandu is obviously keen to stay one step ahead of the tribune so has placed one of his rakshasa agents in the household. Posing as a portly, shaven-headed manservant named **Hamid**, this spy is doing his best to listen in on as many meetings as possible.

## Artisans Ward

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The Artisans Ward is home to most of the city's guilds, many fine taverns and restaurants, and the headquarters of the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus, the towering Marjani Minar. Its handy location between the Caravans Ward (where supplies arrive into the city) and the Mercantile Quarter (where most goods are sold) makes it an attractive base for successful craftsmen of all types. The Artisans Ward also borders three other Old Quarter wards – the Garden Ward to the northeast, the Temple Ward to the southeast, and the Poor Ward to the southwest.

Among the ward's numerous tradesmen and the guilds they belong to, relationships can be fractious. Rivalry brought about by overlapping guild portfolios frequently leads to dirty tricks and acts of sabotage against the competition, and may descend into fighting with fists and clubs in the street as each side attempts to make sure their guild comes out on top.

Three main streets divide the ward into five mahallas. Spice Street runs northwest from the Caravans Ward to the bridge, the Street of Monkeys runs northeast from the Poor Ward gate through to the Garden Ward, and Snail Street – so named because the traffic along

it moves incredibly slowly – runs northwest from the Temple Ward. The two mahallas in the northern half of the ward are filled with taverns and coffee houses where many of the fights between the warring guilds take place, while the southern half of the ward, divided into three distinct neighbourhoods, is home to the majority of their guildhalls.

The mahalla south of the Street of Monkeys and east of Spice Street is where many artists, bards and other creative types live and work. It's hard to walk round this neighbourhood without running into an artist painting a mural on a blank section of wall, or a poet reciting her latest masterpiece to anyone who will listen. This neighbourhood is also home to the Marjani Minar, so wizardly types are a common sight.

To the west, the adjacent mahalla is filled with businesses that produce rugs, carpets, clothing and tapestries, as well as places that deal in life's little luxuries, from relaxing bathhouses to shops selling (and making) exotic perfumes and brightly coloured sweets.

Finally, the noisy, bustling mahalla in the ward's southwest corner is the hub of the construction trades.





Constantly busy, its hard-working artisans toil for long hours to produce all the bricks, marble slabs, wooden beams and other materials required by Parsantium's builders.

## First Impressions

This ward is busy day and night, ringing with the sounds of goods being produced in its many workshops and of loud, drunken conversations from its taverns. The fonduqs do a brisk trade in carpets, clothing, pottery, glassware, metalwork and all sorts of locally produced items. There's tension in the air if two groups of artisans belonging to rival guilds run into each other in the street: violence is always on the cards. In the artists' mahalla, an informal recital is being held in the courtyard of the Fonduq of the Nightingale's Song by a trio of talented musicians. The impossibly high Marjani Minar towers above everything, providing a constant reminder that the city is no stranger to magic.

## Passers-By

**Pompeiana** (LN female human expert 4) is a temperamental female Bathuran singer with blond hair, a large heaving bosom, and a powerful voice capable of breaking glass at twenty paces. She is on her way to a performance at a fashionable restaurant and won't take kindly to anyone foolish enough to get in her way.

**Vaman** (N male human expert 3) is a short, fat, sweaty Sampuran carpetmaker with a problem that he is desperate to share with all and sundry. "Ratmen" are coming out of the sewers near his carpet shop, breaking in and stealing his carpets. His guild won't do anything and the Watch aren't interested either. See the Felonious Larcenists on page 133.

**Tamman al-Hallaj** (NG male human expert 6), a smartly dressed and exceptionally well-groomed Aqhrani, is a high-ranking official in the Vintners' and Brewers' Guild. He is heading to a meeting with the producers of the Three Monkeys vintage to insist

that the wine is made available in the best Old Quarter restaurants, rather than just those in the Imperial Quarter.

## Guildhalls

Not all the guilds have their halls in the Artisans Ward, but many do – these places serve as meeting halls and administrative offices but some also have goods for sale or provide accommodation for their members. Many guildhalls are converted warehouses or taverns, but others are grand purpose-built buildings with gilded lettering or a large replica of the guild badge outside to indicate their function.

### Masonic Hall

Of the many guildhalls in the Artisans Ward, the three-storey headquarters of the Most Excellent Order of Stonemasons is certainly the grandest. Situated on the Street of Monkeys just north of the builders' mahalla, where it avoids getting covered in dirt every day, this gleaming white marble building in the Bathuran style stands out from the drab brick and wooden structures nearby. Masonic Hall has a colonnaded facade and a pediment decorated with fine sculptures of human and dwarven masons at work. Inside, the large columned entrance hall has a floor of shining pink marble; great sweeping stone stairs lead up to the assembly room and offices on the upper floors. Non-guild members will be turned away politely but firmly by one of the grey-robed masters unless they have a prior appointment; the Stonemasons are one of the most secretive guilds in the city and strangers are not welcome. Thanks to the guild's connection to the Golden Scimitars, the masters are able to call upon a dozen or so enforcers stationed on the premises in the event of any trouble.

### Fonduq of Heavenly Fabrics

The Guild of Weavers and Dyers has its guildhall in a fonduq in the weavers' district. Members of the guild come to drink coffee, smoke sheeshah and gossip in the courtyard, surrounded by dozens of fine rugs, carpets,



wall hangings and bolts of dyed cloth produced by the apprentices and journeymen learning their trade from the masters here. The rooms on the lower floor are workshops filled with looms and vats of dye, or used for storage; the upper floors hold offices and living quarters for the apprentices. The *fonduq* is open to all and sundry so long as they have coin to spend on textiles; this is a good place to buy a carpet or rug, with prices usually 10–20% cheaper than elsewhere.

### The Blue House

The guildhall of the Guild of Potters and Tilemakers on Snail Street is named for the attractive blue patterned tiles that completely cover its exterior walls. Inside, a huge two-handled terracotta urn stands at the centre of a shady tiled courtyard where brown-robed guild members sit on divans and cushions socializing over coffee, tea or beer. Non-guild members are admitted only when accompanied by a Potter – recent hostilities with the Stonemasons have been spiralling out of control and the Potters are understandably wary of strangers. Five or six thugs from the Lamplighters gang are usually on hand to deal with any disturbances.

### Taverners Guildhall

This nondescript former tavern just north of the Street of Monkeys serves as the guildhall for the Lively Order of Entertainers, Jesters and Taverners; a wooden sign painted with the guild's symbol, a lute, hangs over the door. The place is little more than a shabby pub inside, with a stage where members can try out new songs, stories or juggling routines on their peers before performing in front of a paying audience. Feedback is honest and often brutal, irrespective of how famous the performer is. If the audience is enjoying what they are hearing or seeing, they bang their wooden mugs on the tables; if not, someone will strike the large bronze gong hanging by the stage to get the performer to stop. Unlike a regular tavern, the guildhall is busy during the day and almost empty in the evening when its members are out working.

## Hippocampus Baths

Located near the *Fonduq* of Heavenly Fabrics, the Hippocampus Baths is one of the best-loved bathhouses in the Old Quarter, patronized by some of its wealthiest and most influential residents.

Customers are greeted in the atrium, where they pay the entrance fee and relinquish any weapons, armour and valuables before entering the baths. Entrance costs 15 sp, with a private bath costing 5 gp; a massage costs an additional 15 sp. Once inside, patrons can get undressed at the marble benches, hang their clothes on pegs and wrap themselves in a towel before heading for one of the four communal (and mixed) baths – the *caldarium* (hot room), the *tepidarium* (warm room), the *frigidarium* (cold room) and the *natatio* (swimming pool) – or to one of the five private baths. Most patrons start with the *frigidarium*, working their way up to the *caldarium*, before returning to the *tepidarium* for a massage and to cool down. The hot rooms are heated by a *hypocaust* system beneath the tiled floor of the bathhouse: the floor is raised above the ground on pillars spaced several feet apart, allowing heat from the furnace to circulate beneath them. Hildvin, the bathhouse's owner, paid a local wizard to summon and bind a small fire elemental into the furnace so it gives off constant heat, day and night.

The bathhouse is decorated throughout with mosaics and statues depicting underwater themes, creatures and gods, including the goddess *Amphetia*, the god *Varuna*,  *nereids*, *tritons*, *merfolk*, *dolphins*, *sea turtles* and more. In the private baths, the sculptures and mosaics have an erotic theme, and some of the masseurs can be paid for additional services.

The bathhouse is owned by a halfling gambler named **Hildvin** (CG female halfling rogue 5/expert 2), who came to Parsantium a few years ago to make her fortune and ended up winning the then somewhat run-down bathhouse in a game of *Five Blind Monkeys*. Sensing an opportunity, Hildvin had the bathhouse restored to its past splendour on the cheap by using local up-and-coming mosaicists and sculptors, to whom she offered free baths and the chance to



showcase their work among the rich guildsmen and merchants of the Artisans and Garden Wards. Next, she hired some skilled masseurs and masseuses and made a few arrangements with some ladies and men in the nearby red-light district to provide “extras”. Word soon got around and the Hippocampus Baths is now a popular and very profitable enterprise. Standing just under four feet tall, Hildvin has olive skin, dark hair and green eyes. She comes across as warm and friendly to her customers, but is a shrewd businesswoman, determined to make as much money as possible so she can retire a wealthy woman. Other staff at the bathhouse include Trillia, a pretty half-elf masseuse, and Umit, a burly half-orc tellak (the person who scrubs the bathers clean).

The steamy rooms of the bathhouse make a good setting for an encounter. Perhaps the PCs come here to foil an assassination attempt on an important guildmaster or politician, or are employed by Hildvin to provide some extra security. Alternatively, they could be hired to spy on a VIP by his wife who suspects him of enjoying more than just a bath when he visits. For more about bathhouses see page 38 .

## Fonduq of the Nightingale’s Song

The Fonduq of the Nightingale’s Song, situated on Spice Street near the Street of Tesserae and the Street of Sitars, is frequented by artists, musicians and their wealthy patrons. Four minarets topped with glazed blue domes adorn the corners of the building, and at the centre of the courtyard, surrounded by palm trees, stands a beautiful fountain depicting the figure of Cytherea the Bringer of Joy, her silver lyre under her arm. During the day, the shady area around the fountain is crowded with the stalls and tents of local artists and craftsmen. Shoppers in the fonduq can buy icons, ceramics, carvings, pieces of sculpture and many other art objects from these stalls and from the shops lining each side of the courtyard. Private guards stand at the entrances to keep out the riff-raff. The streets surrounding the fonduq serve the needs of the local artists and musicians: the Street of Sitars hosts shops

selling musical instruments; the Street of Tesserae is crammed with stalls and shops peddling artist’s materials: paints, brushes and sculptor’s tools, as well as tesserae for mosaics.

**Skorrif** (CE male gnome wizard 11) is a toymaker and clocksmith who runs a shop called **Wondrous Things** up on the first floor of the fonduq. He has ruddy tan skin, white hair and glittering black eyes. Skorrif’s mechanical toys aren’t cheap, typically costing 5–10 gp each, but they are indeed wondrous things – the little birds can fly for short distances, the unicorns will trot across the floor, and the armoured knights swing their tiny swords back and forth. Although most of the toys Skorrif sells are delightful, some are decidedly unpleasant. The toymaker is a member of the Brotherhood of Spite (see page 126), a secret group of evil gnomish psychopaths who compete against each other to create the most ingenious, unsolvable murder. From time to time, Skorrif sells an enchanted toy with a murderous life of its own; these horrible toys will seek to kill their small owners while they are sleeping and escape back to their master.



**Kasif al-Jaludi** (N male human wizard 13) is an Aqhrani wizard-for-hire working from an incense-filled silk tent in the fonduq’s courtyard. Kasif wears a dark green fez on his shaved head, has bushy eyebrows and a goatee beard and likes to wow potential customers by levitating into the air when they enter his tent. Grandiose and condescending, he tries to create an air of mystique around his magical powers and will often use unnecessarily long and obscure words to explain the services he is offering. Despite all this, Kasif is a talented spellcaster, capable of casting divination and warding spells up to 7th level at 10% above usual rulebook prices, and is a reliable source of gossip on arcane matters.



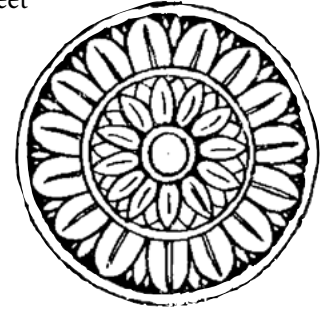
The **Golden Bean Tree** is a coffee shop on the ground floor of the fonduq, run by a pretty, willowy Aqhrani woman in her 30s named **Yasmina** (NG female human expert 2), who looks familiar to anyone who's spent time viewing the paintings on sale in the neighbourhood. It is frequented by painters, mosaicists and sculptors who gather here to drink coffee, smoke sheeshah and boast about their work, all the while on the lookout for a patron to commission their next project. The Golden Bean Tree serves simple Aqhrani dishes accompanied by fresh fruits and honeyed bread and has an excellent selection of coffee beans. Yasmina has an exquisite singing voice, which she sometimes shows off on stage at the Blue Monkey. She ignores the dotting attentions of the artists who hang out here, preferring the company of (usually older) rich merchants and nobles, such as Iovivus Fonte (see page 145). Recently, Yasmina has been threatened by thugs from the Golden Scimitars, demanding protection money. So far, she has managed to keep them at bay but is thinking she might have to pay up if they come back.

The **Blue Monkey** is a tavern on the first floor of the fonduq where customers can hear some of the very best music in Parsantium, performed by local bards and singers, free of charge. The blind landlord, **Hatim the Fat** (N male human commoner 4), has a great ear for music and also hears a lot of interesting whispers. His pet monkey, Abu, does indeed have blue fur. The Blue Monkey has a fine wine cellar and serves decent food, as well as a wide variety of ales and beers.

## Marjani Minar

The Marjani Minar is the headquarters of the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus (see page 134), the world's greatest guild of arcane spellcasters. This slender structure resembles a minaret crossed with the tower of a fairytale castle and is nearly 500 feet tall, soaring over the Old Quarter. Built by the founding members of the Order, including Corandias the Magnificent's vizier, Marcus Servius, the minar is topped with a golden dome, its filial surmounted with a lotus flower; small balconies jut out from the tower walls every 50 feet or so.

Steps lead up a dozen feet to the tower's entrance, a small green wooden door painted with a blue lotus symbol. Only those belonging to the Order can open this door, which is protected by a special *arcane lock* keyed to its members, and enter the much bigger extradimensional space beyond. The doorway opens onto a beautiful courtyard filled with sparkling fountains, statues of famous wizards, stone benches and palm trees. Brightly coloured parrots and hummingbirds fly around and perch in the trees, and there are usually a fair few mages sitting on the benches, chatting or quietly smoking their pipes. From here, each floor of the circular tower can be reached by flights of spiral stairs or by a series of large, slow-moving flying carpets that drift continuously up and down the central shaft.



There are twenty ring-shaped floors to the tower, holding guild offices, meeting rooms, study areas, laboratories and workshops, summoning chambers, common rooms and bars, and other facilities for the Order's arcanists. On the first floor a few small shops sell potions, scrolls, wands, rods and staffs, as well as a selection of wondrous items; magic items bought here cost 20% less than the usual market price.

The Order's extensive magical library occupies the seventh, eighth and ninth floors. Members are able to conduct research here, gaining a +5 bonus on knowledge checks if they spend 1d4 + 1 hours studying the books and documents. The library also has a large number of arcane spells and incantations available for members to learn and scribe into their own spellbooks.

The nineteenth floor houses the Order's "Collection", a gallery of unusual magical artefacts gathered by its members from all over the world and beyond, many donated to meet the membership requirements (see page 134). These precious items include an orcish pirate ship trapped inside a bottle; a sealed copper urn imprisoning the efreeti pasha Ziyad; the broken staff of the archlich



Meregoth the Stone-hearted; the crown of roses worn by the Summer Queen of Faerie at her coronation; the Lost Tablets of Ah-Net-Sun; and dozens more equally curious objects. Most of the artefacts would be worth a fortune to the right buyer, so there are wards in place preventing teleportation in or out of the gallery, and a Master's permission is needed to come and look at the items. If anything is removed from the gallery, **Ziyad** (LE male noble efreet) is automatically freed from his prison to deal with the thief.

The top floor of the tower holds the Chamber of the Masters, with lattice-covered windows at the four compass points behind the polished mahogany chairs of the Masters of Northern, Eastern, Southern and Western Magic. The floor here is inlaid with an elaborate mosaic made from precious stones that depicts the Known Multiverse.

## Wizard Taverns

Two taverns near the Marjani Minar are often frequented by members of the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus:

### The Drake's Rest

This small, scruffy backstreet tavern tucked away behind the Marjani Minar is run by **Kartelides Brightweaver** (CN male human wizard 5), a retired wizard who was thrown out of the Esoteric Order for blowing up four laboratories in a single month. Kartelides has no eyebrows – they never grew back – and still wears his floppy wizard's hat. The pub doesn't do its own food but Kartelides sells pastries from the bakery next door. Drinks are all served from a magic decanter he keeps behind the bar; only "beer", "white wine" and "red wine" are available but the wizards don't seem to mind this, nor the fact that the tables are all wobbly and half the chairs are broken.

The pub is named after **Kordillian**, an alehouse drake (see *The Book of Drakes* from Kobold Press); the plump little amber dragon likes to sit up in the rafters and listen

in on the wizards' chitchat. Kordillian has picked up a lot of useful snippets of information from his vantage point and is usually willing to share them with others if they have something interesting to tell him in exchange.

Two arcanists from the Order have had rather too much to drink in the Drake's Rest and decide to go outside into the street to prove which of them is the better spellcaster in a mage duel. **Himaghna** (CN male vanara sorcerer 9) is a vanara with light blue fur and a prehensile tail; **Fazil al-Zarqa** (N male human wizard 11) is a bearded Aqhrani fire mage wearing a red turban. Both are clad in bright blue djellabas decorated with lotus flowers. The pair's contest starts off good-naturedly and safely enough with the two mages shooting *magic missiles* and jets of fire into the air, and a small crowd gathers to watch. However, as the duel goes on, the mages begin to get a bit slapdash. Fazil launches a fiery blast that accidentally sets fire to some hanging washing, then Himaghna splashes a bystander's donkey with his acid spray. To cap it all off, Fazil summons a huge fire elemental, which appears in between the two mages and knocks them both unconscious, then promptly runs amok. As the spectators flee in panic, any PCs in the vicinity may feel obliged to save the day.

### The Glowing Orb

This low-ceilinged tavern on the Street of Monkeys somehow also exists in Newt Street in the Victory Ward (see page 68), making it a supremely convenient way to travel to and from the Imperial Quarter's magic district. Just make sure you buy a drink here first!

### The White Palm

A large, vibrant tavern near the Dolphin Strait, the White Palm is the original home of the highly successful Crescent Moon brewery. From here, the business grew as Crescent Moon lager became the best-loved light beer in the Old Quarter, then Parsantium, and then in the inns and taverns of the Caliphate of Aqhran and beyond. Needing bigger premises, the company moved the



brewery into a larger building in the Poor Ward but kept the White Palm on as a tavern. It is still owned by the company boss Talib al-Bari; these days his son-in-law Khalid al-Akhir runs the place as its landlord.

The tavern building is notable for its blue-roofed minaret and attractive, shady courtyard adorned with blue and white tiles. Its spacious main common room is decorated with fine Sampuran wall hangings, the floor covered with well-worn patterned Aqhrani rugs. Patrons sit at low tables on divans or comfortable cushions as they enjoy a lager or a glass of cool wine accompanied by pistachios and spicy olives. The menu isn't vast but the lamb tagine (8 sp) and shish kabobs (5 sp) are both tasty. In contrast, the selection of beers is one of the best in Parsantium, featuring the finest ales from the Harbour Ward's dwarven district and from beyond the city, as well as the Crescent Moon's own excellent brews.

**Khalid al-Akhir** (N male human expert 5) is the White Palm's once-handsome, middle-aged Aqhrani

landlord; he is well-dressed, with a neat beard and a warm smile. Khalid is cheating on his wife, Fatima, with a young male actor named Beatus (see page 84), with whom he has fallen head over heels in love. He's so smitten that he has been buying Beatus expensive jewellery he can ill afford and borrowing from the tavern's reserves to pay for it. If his father-in-law finds out, the consequences will be devastating.

Khalid has another "little problem". The Golden Scimitars gang (see page 130) is trying to expand its power base into the Artisans Ward and has scared Khalid into hiring two gang members as waiters so they can spy on the conversations of VIPs taking place in the tavern. Both **Ifar** (NE male half-orc rogue 6) and **Sufyan** (NE male ifrit magus 7) make very poor waiters, so Khalid wants rid of them as soon as possible. If any PCs befriend him, he might take them into his confidence and ask them to deal with the two thugs in exchange for several months' supply of free beer and food.

## Temple Ward

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This ward is named for the number of places of worship, both large and small, found within its ancient stone walls. The Aqhrani god and many of the deities of Sampur and Tiangao have their main temples here, making the Temple Ward one of the most cosmopolitan parts of the city. The northern half of the ward, above Sultan Street, is where many of the religious buildings can be found, but there are temples all along the Street of Many Gods which runs from the Artisans Ward gate in the north down to the city walls in the south. The Temple Ward borders the Poor Ward to the west and the Caravans Ward to the east.

Four mahallas make up the ward. The northeast mahalla is home to many of the larger Aqhrani mosques and Sampuran temples, including the

Golden Mosque of Amur and the Vishnu Mandira, as well as shops and other businesses catering to those who have come here to worship. To the west is Tiangao Town, a neighbourhood almost exclusively populated by people from that country, with temples to their gods, excellent teahouses, and dojos teaching martial arts. The mahalla immediately to the south is all narrow streets and crowded tenement buildings, with extended families packed into each small apartment. Its neighbour to the east has better quality housing and shops, as well as several small mosques and temples. Both of these residential districts are home to a mix of Aqhrani, Sampurans and other races, living side by side or, more often than not, on top of each other.



## First Impressions

This is a ward of striking contrasts – magnificent gilded domes and brightly tiled temple roofs tower over dirty, narrow streets peopled by beggars looking for alms, poor labourers and craftsmen on their way to work, and street vendors selling food and religious artefacts. Imans call the faithful to prayer from soaring minarets, shaven-headed monks in orange robes sit meditating on street corners, and funeral and wedding processions are a common sight. Sacred cows, some white, some painted in vibrant colours, wander the streets, and blue-bottomed monkeys forage for scraps or steal fruit from carts. In Tiangao Town, the clatter of wooden bo sticks can be heard from a dojo's practice yard above the enthusiastic haggling in the bustling street market.

## Passers-By

**Bahlru** (N male human oracle 3) is a blind, loincloth-wearing Sampuran mystic who lies on a bed of nails at the side of the road on the Street of Many Gods with a serene expression on his face and an alms bowl at his feet. He wears a plain white turban, has milky, clouded eyes and a wispy, dark beard. If a coin or two is put in his bowl, Bahlru will give a cryptic piece of advice in return, such as “the happy sparrow flies south for the winter” or “the wise monkey does not fear the darkness”. He may even speak a phrase or two that will turn out to be a useful hint for the PCs in their current or future adventures.

**El'em Terazz** (NG male ifrit sorcerer 6) is a temperamental ifrit, recently arrived in the city from the Caliphate of Aqhran to look for a book of rituals that was stolen from the Blue Mosque in his home town by a mysterious man marked with a tattoo of two crossed scimitars.

**Padmini** (LG female human cleric 4) is a young priestess at the House of Learning, the temple of Brihaspati on the Street of Many Gods. Short and slim, the softly spoken Padmini wears a yellow sari and the god's holy symbol of a quill and scroll, and is an expert on the Sampuran and Aqhrani religions.

## Deul of the Black Mother

This secret temple to Kali is located beneath the Wayfarer's Rest, a cheap inn on the Street of Many Gods that caters for pilgrims visiting Parsantium's great temples. In the alley behind the inn is an unobtrusive wooden door marked with a faint skull symbol in red paint, kept locked during the day but unlocked at night when the temple is open. Two flights of narrow wooden stairs lead down to the temple itself, a large square chamber dimly lit with black candles, its walls painted with frescoes showing Kali triumphing over her enemies in battle. At the centre of the room is a 15-foot-tall statue of the goddess made from black marble and decorated with gold. Kali is depicted as a beautiful, voluptuous four-armed woman, wearing a necklace of skulls and a skirt of severed hands, and brandishing a sword in one arm. In front of the statue is a bloodstained altar where goats are sacrificed to her honour.

The deul's existence is only shared with those initiated into the Cult of the Black Mother (see page 127) by Jagadamba and her cronies; many of its members are wealthy noble women from the Imperial Quarter who first visited the witch to have their fortunes told and became embroiled in the cult's activities by the allure of doing something fashionably wicked. While the shrine is a genuine place of worship for Kali, it also doubles as a relatively innocent front for the real cult temple, which lies deep below the city in the Hidden Quarter: the dank, winding tunnels leading to the cult temple are accessed via a hidden trapdoor behind the altar. Those who have been initiated only into the first level of the cult are unaware of the Hidden Quarter temple and the human sacrifices that take place there.

The deul is guarded by thuggee dressed in dark crimson robes and black turbans, and armed with scimitars. Its high priestess is the darkly alluring **Chandrika** (CE female tiefling cleric 12), who has ebony skin, small ivory horns growing from her shaved head, and a forked tail. She wears low-cut black robes and a necklace of silver skulls. Chandrika is silver-tongued and beguiling, seeking to reassure any who blunder in



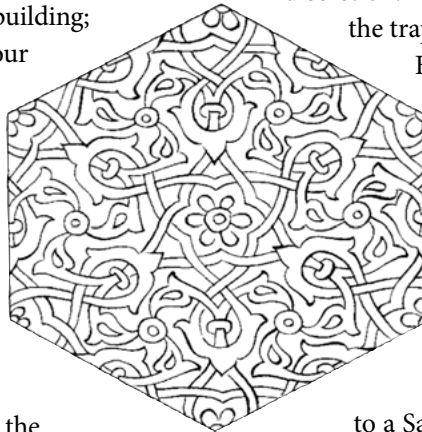
here that there is nothing sinister going on, in the hopes they will go away and not return. If the intruders are not convinced and a fight is inevitable, the powerful cleric can call upon the temple guards and Kali's statue (actually a stone golem) to defend her.

Jagadamba (see page 113) can sometimes be found here, meeting with Chandrika. If the PCs arrive when a religious ceremony is under way, it is possible they might spot a VIP among the hooded, black-robed congregation, perhaps even the Despoina herself.

## Golden Mosque of Amur

There are many mosques in the Old Quarter, but the Golden Mosque of Amur is the largest and most splendid. Amur is the one Aqhrani god, who brings the life-giving rains and floods that allow crops to grow in the hot desert climate of the Caliphate. The mosque has a shining gold dome rising nearly 100 feet over the floor of the prayer hall, encircled by six smaller gold domes, the precious metal enchanted so the domes glow softly with a warm light both inside and out at all times of the day and night. Graceful, needle-like minarets, over 300 feet tall, rise at each corner of the building; a muezzin calls the faithful to prayer four times per day from each of these towers in turn. The main hall of the mosque is surrounded by a vast courtyard, which has a marble fountain for ablutions before prayer and is planted with orange trees and ornamental shrubs.

Inside the prayer hall there is no furniture: this allows for nearly 1,000 worshippers to lay down their mats on the pale blue marble floor. As in all Aqhrani mosques, there are no representations of the god – since no mortal could possibly do justice to the divine form in a painting or sculpture, it would be blasphemous to try. Instead the walls are decorated with exquisite tilework bearing geometric patterns and flowers. A plain wooden minbar (pulpit) stands in the southeast corner, from where the imam delivers sermons and leads the prayers.



The Golden Mosque's treasury holds a set of priceless scrolls said to have been written by Amur himself; these scrolls bring numerous pilgrims to Parsantium from Aqhran, many of whom make generous donations that are used to maintain the majesty of the mosque and to fund hospices for the poor and needy throughout the Old Quarter. Several months ago, the imam of the mosque died of old age and a new high priest, **Imam Efrat** (NG human male cleric 15), took over. When Efrat examined the scrolls in detail following his appointment, he realized they were forgeries. After communing with Amur's angelic servants, the imam discovered that the original scrolls had been stolen centuries ago and that his predecessors had kept this fact quiet to avoid losing the lucrative donations from the pilgrims. Efrat has more scruples and is determined to put an end to the deception. However, he doesn't want the pilgrims to stop coming so the only alternative is to recover the real scrolls. The imam is therefore looking for a band of adventurers, preferably devout worshippers of Amur, who can be relied on to not only bring back the scrolls but to do so with the utmost discretion. Efrat's research has tracked them down to the trap-filled tomb of a long-dead wizard named Huliyas, somewhere in the Hidden Quarter beneath the city. Imam Efrat is an Aqhrani in his early 40s, his face lined with worry; he dresses in a sky blue djellaba and wears Amur's golden holy symbol in the shape of a cloud.

## Vishnu Mandira

This huge building is the biggest temple to a Sampuran god this side of the Pillars of Heaven Mountains. Dedicated to Vishnu, the most widely worshipped god in the Sampuran pantheon, the mandira has four ornate pyramid-like towers: the tallest, at the southern end of the temple, is over 200 feet high, with the others getting progressively shorter towards the northern, entrance end. The towers and the outside walls of the structure are covered in hundreds of brightly coloured, intricate carvings of





Sampuran gods, folk heroes, animals and monsters. These carvings relate a series of obscure Sampuran folk tales but local gossip says there they also contain a hidden message, providing clues to the location of a legendary lost treasure hoard dating back to the distant times of Dhak Janjua. Inside, the garbhagriha (“holy of holies”) forms the central focus, housing a marble idol of the great god Vishnu reclining on a great serpent. There are also subsidiary shrines to several other gods, including Ushas (goddess of the dawn), Surya (the sun god) and Varuna (god of oceans and rivers). It is customary for visitors to remove their footwear before entering the temple, and to make offerings of flowers, rice or sweets at the shrine of the god they are beseeching for help or guidance.

Several sacred cows, painted virulent shades of blue or purple, wander the temple grounds. One of these cows, **Amaravati**, has become awakened through proximity to the god and has been known to give spiritual advice to visitors at the temple in return for sweets. Amaravati can only provide a “weal or woe” answer to a single question about something the petitioner is planning to do in the immediate future and her predictions are only 75% accurate. She responds to questions by shaking her head to ring the bell around her neck: one ring for weal, two for woe, three for both. If the result will be neither weal nor woe, she stamps her left hoof instead.

The high priest of the mandira is a young and passionate shaven-headed brahmin named **Laksmi**nath (NG male human cleric 12), who wears plain white robes and a silver lotus symbol. Headstrong Laksminath has heard the same worrying rumours about bloodthirsty Kali cult activity in the Temple Ward as Dharmesh of Puchan (see page 89), but has gone one step further, donning his silver chainmail and venturing into the Hidden Quarter in search of a secret temple himself. So far he hasn’t been able to track it down, but his actions have drawn the attention of the Cult of the Black Mother. The cult is now planning to send thuggee assassins to the mandira to kill him.

## Tiangaon Town

The mahalla north of Sultan Street and west of the Street of Many Gods is known as Tiangaon Town, an ethnic enclave in Parsantium where the majority of people from that country live and work. Here, there are temples to the gods of the Tiangaon pantheon, restaurants and teahouses, markets and shops, and dojos, all run by and for other Tiangaons. Two main roads run through the neighbourhood: Tranquil Water Street, which heads northwest from Sultan Street, and Harmony Road, leading southwest from the Street of Many Gods. Large red wooden archways (paifangs) mark the entrance to Tiangaon Town at the start of both of these streets, each flanked by a pair of stone lion statues. The male lion to the right of the paifang has one foot resting on an embroidered ball; the female lion to the left has a paw on her cub. Harmony Road and Tranquil Water Street meet at the centre of the enclave, site of a large street market selling all kinds of exotic spices and unusual fruit and vegetables. The Temple of Qian Lao and the Praying Mantis Dojo are at opposite corners of this junction.

Throughout the district, Tiangaon architecture dominates. When the Tiangaons arrived in Parsantium just under 70 years ago, this part of the Temple Ward consisted of a series of run-down tenement buildings. The worst of these were demolished by the eager settlers, with help from the wu jen among their number, and replaced with new apartment buildings, shops and houses, topped with green-tiled rooftops and decorated with golden dragon and carp motifs. Tiangaons being nature lovers, trees and shrubs were planted wherever space could be found, making this one of the greenest parts of the city.

The busy restaurants of Tiangaon Town serve spicy meat, fish and seafood dishes with vegetables and rice or noodles to ravenous diners seated at rows of long benches. Crispy duck with pancakes and sweet plum sauce and plates of little dim sum are the most popular dishes on many menus. The teahouses, in contrast, pride themselves on their tranquility, with tea served according to ancient ritual traditions handed down



through the generations. As well as the types of shops common all over the city, there are several stores in the mahalla selling religious supplies, including small red wooden altars and statues of the gods, suitable for home use, and paper houses, furniture and jewellery for cremation along with a deceased relative to provide them with comfort and material goods in the afterlife.

Unfortunately, the enclave has also imported its own criminal tong from Tiangao along with the culture – the Eight Scorpions (see page 132) – a group of tattooed rogues who still pay tribute to their “Dragon Master” back home. These ruthless gangsters run basement gambling dens, extort protection money from the businesses in Tiangao Town and control drug smuggling via the Silk Road. The Eight Scorpions are seeking to expand their influence into the Artisans Ward to the north, something that is likely to bring them into conflict with the Golden Scimitars. The head of the gang is **Shen Fu** (LE male human rogue 9), a grossly fat gangster with a long moustache, a goatee beard and disgusting personal habits. Shen Fu’s greed is such that he has not considered the implications of his expansion plans – so far, the Eight Scorpions have been overlooked by Avishandu, but this situation is not likely to continue. The tong’s headquarters is located on the top floor of the Lucky Fox Restaurant on Tranquil Water Street; here, Shen Fu directs the gang’s activities and pays homage to Sung Chiang, god of thievery, at his personal shrine to the deity.

### Temple of Qian Lao

Dedicated to the brave and cunning Tiangaon god of wealth, in Parsantium more widely worshipped as the City God, the Temple of Qian Lao is the largest temple of its kind in the city. An ornate, green-tiled roof, decorated with figures of the gods and lucky symbols such as dragons and carp, is the temple’s dominant feature. A pair of bronze lion statues guards its entrance; like the lions at the arches leading into Tiangao Town, one is male and the other is female. Inside is a small courtyard with a large granite bowl where incense and paper offerings are burnt. Beyond, the main hall contains an intricately carved altar and



a great statue of Qian Lao riding his ki-rin. There are gongs, side altars and adjoining rooms with shrines to several other Tiangaon gods, chapels for prayers to the dead and displays of funerary plaques. Three colours dominate the temple decor – red (representing joy), gold (heavenly glory) and green (harmony) – and Qian Lao’s symbol, the abacus, is everywhere. Worshippers enter the temple whenever they want to make offerings, pray for help or give thanks; there is no set time for prayer and no communal service except for funerals. There are usually several dozen oranges sitting on the altar – the most common offering to the god.

The high priest of the temple is **Wang Jin We** (NG male human cleric 9), a capable cleric who is a bit too fond of strong drink and young ladies. Wang Jin We disappeared from the temple a few days ago and his long-suffering student **Gong Sun** has no idea where he is. Sun has tried many of the waterfront taverns in the neighbouring Poor Ward without success and is beginning to think that his master has fallen into the Dolphin Strait in a drunken stupor and drowned. He hasn’t given up yet, though, and is looking to hire some adventurers to track the errant priest down. In fact, Wang Jin We has been captured by the Dockside Crew (see page 131) and sold to the notorious slaver Orloch Scragmane (see page 112). He is currently sitting in a cell waiting for someone to buy him at the Hidden Quarter’s slave market – so far there haven’t been any takers.



## Praying Mantis Dojo

Tiangaons are the world's greatest martial artists so it is not surprising that there are several dojos dedicated to teaching different schools of kung fu in Tiangao Town. The most famous of these schools is the Praying Mantis Dojo, located on the corner of Harmony Road and Tranquil Water Street. The Praying Mantis style involves fluid movement, spectacular leaps, rapid hand strikes and choke holds.

The entrance to the dojo is flanked by the usual pair of stone lions. Inside the hall is a large practice area with a wooden floor and on the east wall a shrine to Kuan-Ti, the god of battle and protection. Doors in the west wall open out onto a tranquil garden, its pond filled with koi carp; the garden is used for meditation and reflection. Upstairs are the dormitory, kitchen and dining hall, where the students sleep and eat between classes. Only the most promising prospects are admitted to the dojo; both men and women can become students, though it is rare (but not unheard of) for the school to admit a non-Tiangaon pupil. Once enrolled, students are expected to show dedication, humility and respect for the traditions of the Praying Mantis at all times.

The master of the dojo is **Sun Yifu** (LG male human monk 12), a little bald man of indeterminate age, with a short white beard. A powerful monk, supposedly Sun Yifu has not been beaten in single combat since he defeated his own master many years ago back in Tiangao. He always appears calm and has a wry sense of humour that his students can find withering.

There is much rivalry between the Praying Mantis and the other kung fu schools in Parsantium, such as the Stunning Kiss and the Way of the Turtle. Regular contests are organized between the rival dojos but sometimes fighting breaks out on the streets of Tiangao Town between disciples of different schools outside of the formal events. These fights are overlooked by the Watch as long as no innocent bystanders get injured, although the losing students are sure to be punished by their sensei. At religious festivals such as the Festival of Starlings (see page 36), students from each dojo will dress in colourful lion costumes and perform elaborate, ritualized "lion dances". These require the dancer to enact complex martial arts moves while burdened down by a heavy animal costume. The best dancers bring great honour to their school.

## Poor Ward

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The largest ward in the Old Quarter, the Poor Ward is well named, with only the Dock Ward to the west having poorer, more desperate inhabitants and worse housing. To the east, the ward borders on the Artisans and Temple wards; to the north is the Dolphin Strait and the city's waterfront red-light district, popular with Old Quarter residents and young nobles from the Imperial Quarter alike. The whole ward is under the control of the infamous Golden Scimitars (see page 130) who have the City Watch in their pocket.

One of the three lesser gates into Parsantium, the Farmer's Gate, a heavy wooden door with no

gatehouse, breaches the walls in the southern part of the ward. Here the City Watch collects tolls from farmers entering with livestock to sell and there is also a customs official on hand to collect any duty owed on trade goods. Since most of what comes in through this gate is from local sources and not subject to duty he isn't usually very busy.

The ward is divided into five mahallas. The south-eastern mahalla, near the Farmer's Gate, stinks to high heaven – this is where the city's tanneries, slaughterhouses and dyeing workshops are located, at a safe distance from the homes of wealthy merchants



and guildmasters. There is very little housing here, just a few basic taverns catering to the local workers, many of whom are half-orcs. It is rare to come across Sampurans working in this mahalla as these trades are nearly all considered “unclean”. Most of the pubs are pretty rough but the Red Wheel Tavern stands out, offering well-cooked food and good locally brewed beers at cheap prices.

The majority of the city’s half-orcs live in the adjacent mahalla to the west. This is a neighbourhood of cheap, cramped and shabby tenement buildings and shops, but its inhabitants have made the best of it, maintaining their homes as best they can and often growing fruit and vegetables on the balconies. Many belong to the Friendly Society of Half-Orcs (see page 141), a social club that puts itself at the heart of the half-orc community. Also in this mahalla is the city’s Prison, tucked away near the walls.

Squeezed Between Sultan Street and the Street of Monkeys are two residential mahallas, filled with poor quality housing, shops and services, as well as an overspill of trades and crafts from the Artisans Ward; the Crescent Moon brewery is in the easternmost of these two mahallas. The dingy streets of the notorious red-light district north of the Street of Monkeys are lined with brothels, gambling joints and seedy pubs. The district is a dodgy part of town and punters need to be wary of being robbed, particularly at night.

## First Impressions

The foul fumes from the tanning vats overwhelm the senses of any visitors to the southern part of this ward. Further north, the stench grows less but the surroundings don’t improve much – the housing is poor, the cobblestones are broken and shady characters hang around on the street corners. A cart goes past, transporting watchmen and their captives to the Prison. Near the waterfront, scantily dressed human and half-elven women call out provocatively from the windows of the brothels as a group of young drunken nobles staggers down the road.

## Passers-By

**Juma Ji’ad** (CN male undine magus 13), effeminate leader of the infamous Juma Gang, an adventuring band of dubious morals, is gambling away his ill-gotten treasure in one of the red-light district’s casinos. Juma owes a fortune to a crime lord in the Caliphate of Aqhran and has only a month left to pay him back in full.

**Toothless Maud** (N female human commoner 2) is Parsantium’s oldest human prostitute at nearly 70 years of age. No brothel will take her in so she wanders the streets, charging a few coppers for a knee trembler in a dark alley.

**Rolgar** (LG male half-orc commoner 1) is a well-built half-orc slaughterhouse worker who hates his job but needs the money it brings in to provide for his family. Though his massive frame, fearsome tusks and blood-spattered clothing tell a different story, he’s a kindly soul.

## Floating Palace

This gaudily furnished gambling hall occupies a large galley permanently moored at a pier in the red-light district. The masts and rigging of the Floating Palace are hung with dozens of crimson and gold Tiangaon paper lanterns and the sounds of Aqhrani music can be heard from several blocks away. Its typical clientele comprises sailors, merchants, and any Old Quarter residents with a taste for gambling. The playwright and actor Iancu Petronas (see page 84) can often be found here with his pals, as can members of the Golden Scimitars, although sophisticates from the Imperial Quarter, even those who like to rough it occasionally, find the Floating Palace too brash and tacky for words.

All kinds of gambling games are played here, including Hazard (dice) and Five Blind Monkeys (cards), with high stakes games taking place in a VIP area that was once the captain’s cabin. Minimum bets are 1 sp at the tables on the lower deck, 1 gp on the upper deck, and 10 gp upwards in the gnoll-guarded VIP area. Gamblers and drinkers are kept entertained by the lively music and twice nightly belly dancing



performances. The food is cheap and cheerful, typically spicy chicken or fish curries with rice or chapatis, and there is a well-stocked bar. This is also a good place to buy drugs – 5 gp will pay for a small vial of dash from Seeru, a skinny Sampuran dealer with thinning, well-oiled hair (see page 40 for more on drugs).

The Floating Palace is owned by Zeno Meverel (see page 130), head of the Golden Scimitars and owner of a dozen or so other brothels, taverns and gambling joints in the Poor Ward. Although the gang leader will occasionally make an appearance in the VIP area to glad-hand the high rollers, the Palace is run on his behalf by **Eshwar**, a short, rotund Sampuran who is under strict instructions to make sure the house always comes out on top: loaded dice and marked cards are used at the tables when big bets are being placed. Dressed in a voluminous djellaba and a bejewelled turban, Eshwar has a thick moustache and a jovial, booming voice. However, “Eshwar” is in fact a doppelganger (NE doppelganger rogue 8) who murdered the real Eshwar a few weeks ago and is looking for an opportunity now to do away with Zeno and take his place. Failing that he’ll plump for one of his richest customers, perhaps one of the PCs.

**Shaima** (CG female human expert 2) is a curvaceous Aqhrani belly dancer who performs her sensuous dances on a small stage at the centre of the middle deck. With her dark hair piled up on top of her head, she wears a veil, a fitted top and hip belt, both covered in jewels and beads, a long red silk skirt, and lots of gaudy jewellery. Shaima’s sister is a prostitute working at the Winking Vixen who was badly beaten by Vadim, Zeno Meverel’s chief enforcer, after a complaint from a wealthy patron. Shaima is out for revenge on Vadim and the Golden Scimitars and may enlist the help of the PCs if she thinks she can trust them.

## Waterfront Stews

Although brothels exist elsewhere in the city, the vast majority are located in the Poor Ward’s infamous red-light district; many are owned by Zeno Meverel, boss of the Golden Scimitars. Nicknamed “stews”, these establishments display either the lyre symbol

of Cytherea the Golden-Haired, goddess of love and desire, or a red lantern outside to advertise their services. They vary considerably in quality and price, typically charging between 3 sp and 5 gp for the company of a male or female prostitute, and more for special requests such as a gnoll or tiefling. Some brothels illegally employ slaves, purchased at the market in the Hidden Quarter – these men and women are prevented from running away by intimidation and violence.

## The Winking Vixen

The Winking Vixen is a typical bordello located on Grape Lane on the waterfront, with a stylized lyre carved into the lintel above its front door. Inside, it’s decorated with erotic murals and sculptures depicting priapic satyrs and buxom maidens indulging in various acts of congress. Patrons are served expensive drinks and food by topless waitresses as they recline on silk cushions, smoking sheeshah and watching a succession of generally bored-looking erotic dancers remove their seven diaphanous veils. The performers offer private dances in curtained booths or company for the rest of the night in the scruffy rooms upstairs.

There is a 1 gp cover charge to enter the Vixen; drinks cost 2 sp for a mug of ale or 3 sp for a glass of wine, food (dolmas, cheese pastries, grilled kebabs on skewers) costs 5 sp, and a private dance costs 2 gp. A night’s company with one of the girls or young men costs 5 gp upwards. Obvious weapons must be checked at the door with **Tamrin** (N male dwarf fighter 3), the tough-looking, gruff-voiced dwarf bouncer.

The Winking Vixen is owned by the Scimitars’ leader, Zeno Meverel, who retains the bulk of the prostitutes’ earnings. The day-to-day running of the place is undertaken by the brothel madam, **Eusebia** (CG female human expert 4), a kindly retired “tart with a heart”, who does her best to look after the welfare of the prostitutes,





fiddling the books to allow them to keep most of their tips. If Meverel finds out, he is likely to take a terrible revenge on her. A trapdoor under a rug in Eusebia's office hides a narrow stone staircase lit with guttering torches that heads down to the Hidden Quarter tunnels and the Golden Scimitars' headquarters (see page 119).

### The Fallen Angel

Altogether more sophisticated than the Winking Vixen, and attracting a richer clientele from across the Strait as well as decadent poets, artists and actors, the Fallen Angel caters for those with a penchant for pain alongside their pleasure, and other specialist tastes. Located off the main drag, the brothel is dark, lit only by sputtering candles, and is hung with black and purple drapes and curtains. Clients, such as Volusian Tzittas (see page 148), are shown up to a private room where they can indulge their fantasies with the woman or man of their choice, paying 10 gp upwards for the privilege.

Because it caters for the darker side of human sexuality, the brothel attracts its fair share of debauched individuals, some of whom have an interest in the "forces of darkness" and demon or devil worship. The Fallen Angel's blond, red leather-clad madam, **Firmina** (NE female human rogue 6), is herself rumoured to be a priestess of the Queen of the Succubi – this is nonsense, but she has done nothing to set the record straight as the mystique surrounding her increases the Angel's popularity. Firmina is certainly evil though, purchasing a constant supply of slaves in the Hidden Quarter to work in the brothel. She is also a well-connected information broker, extracting useful facts from her high-placed clients while under her whip, and selling them on to the highest bidder.

### The Prison

Situated in the southwest corner of the ward, near the Dock Ward wall and the main city walls, is Parsantium's Prison, where criminals sentenced by

the courts are kept locked up for the duration of their sentence. The Prison is a brooding ten-storey keep-like structure, built of dark grey stone with tiny arrow slits for windows, surrounded by a courtyard enclosed by high walls and patrolled by well-armed guards.

The top three floors of the prison are reserved for wealthy prisoners, nobles, merchants and some adventurers, indeed anyone able to pay 25 gp per week in bribes to stay there. Here, they are treated to their own private cells, decent food, watered-down beer and clean clothes and blankets. On the middle and lower floors the regular prisoners live in more squalid conditions. Inmates are crammed four or five to a small cell and fed on gruel, bread and water. Below ground, the dark, dank dungeons are where the most troublesome prisoners are kept in solitary confinement.

The warden is a surly, mean-spirited dwarf named **Holgrom Shackleforge** (NE male dwarf fighter 7) who abuses his position to line his own pockets. There is no time off for good behaviour, but Holgrom may accept bribes from family or friends to release prisoners early (so long as they are not too well known) or from an inmate's enemies to extend his sentence. Occasionally, he even lets a prisoner or two out for the night to go stealing in exchange for a share of the proceeds. Holgrom has a bald head, a thick black beard and a pronounced limp, which he got fighting a gnoll tribesman while serving in the army. He has hated gnolls ever since and refuses to employ any as prison guards; gnoll prisoners get the worst treatment and are never offered the chance of early release.

A mixture of men and women of various races work as prison guards, with humans and half-orcs the most numerous. Several burly minotaurs act as the warden's personal bodyguards and deal with the most violent prisoners. A sadistic ogre named **Gunta** (CE female ogre fighter 3) keeps order down in the dungeons, happily breaking a nose or an arm if anyone "plays up".



# Dock Ward

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You know you've hit rock bottom when you find yourself living in the Dock Ward, the poorest, most run-down part of the city. Stuck in the far west corner of the Old Quarter next to the Poor Ward, this ward is home to those who can't afford to live anywhere other than a slum tenement, an abandoned warehouse or a leaky houseboat. The streets are dangerous after dark and certain parts aren't safe during the day either – criminal gangs run the neighbourhoods, answering to the Dock Ward's "Bosses" (see page 131), independent crime lords who in turn pay tribute to Avishandu, the Fourth Tribune (page 129). The City Watch has almost given up trying to keep crime under control in the ward, although Sergeant Saurish (see page 32) is doing his best to make a difference by diligently following up on the more serious crimes. If he's not careful, his "meddling" could mean he ends up being the next body found floating in the Dolphin Strait.

The ward is divided into four mahallas. Across Sultan Street in the southwest mahalla are the warehouses, wharves and jetties of the Old Docks. With the docks in decline, many of the warehouses are abandoned, or are being used as makeshift homes by beggars, street gangs and even some monsters. To the northeast, the adjacent mahalla is the centre of Parsantium's fishing industry and home to most of the city's fishermen. Fish are cleaned, processed and sold in the neighbourhood's odiferous Fish Market before being shipped across the city to fonduqs and forums and ultimately ending up on someone's dinner plate. The "boat town" of Flotsam bobs about just off the fishermen's wharves, and is inhabited by some of the city's poorest citizens, those who cannot even afford to live in a tenement building.

South of Sultan Street things get worse, as you enter the slums – two mahallas crammed with filthy, run-down tenement buildings of six or more storeys,

where families of 12 might live in a single room with one stove to cook on and no sanitation. Often, these apartment buildings are simply wooden shacks built one on top of the other in higgledy-piggledy fashion to create a tall and rickety block.

## First Impressions

Many of the buildings in this ward are in a parlous state – some look like they are about to collapse, others have been abandoned, their doors smashed in or windows boarded up. Beggars, many of whom are missing limbs or eyes, sit on street corners, their bowls stretched out to passers-by, while cheap prostitutes offer their bodies for a handful of copper coins. Gangs of desperate men skulk in the alleyways at night, looking for people more fortunate than themselves who have money to rob. Down by the docks, the smell of fish is inescapable and hordes of raucous gulls fly overhead, looking for a meal to snatch.

## Passers-By

**Arktaros** (LN male human commoner 1) is a Bathuran fisherman who enjoys a drink or seven after a hard day's fishing out on the Strait. He is balding with a few mad wisps of curly grey hair, sun-tanned skin and a bulbous red nose. Arktaros is happy to chat with anyone who'll buy him a Marlin Brew; he knows a lot about what's going on in the ward, including whether any bodies have been fished out of the channel recently.

**Ranjit** (NG male human commoner 2), a burly Sampuran longshoreman, is unloading crates of Urskovian wine. He's grumbling while he works about one of his colleagues who hasn't turned up for work the last three days.



**Leshmina** (N female gnoll fighter 4), a one-armed gnoll, sits on a street corner, begging. A former bodyguard, she lost a limb defending her employer, the nobleman Bonifacius Laro (see page 75), from an assassin, and was fired afterwards for being unable to carry out her duties effectively.

## Old Docks

Once the main docks for the city, the Old Docks are used almost exclusively by fishermen, smugglers, pirates and other shady characters these days: most merchant ships arriving from distant ports choose to dock at the Royal Docks in the Harbour Ward instead (see page 73). The decline of the docks over the last 30 years has turned what was once a busy, thriving waterfront community into the run-down place it is today, providing the residents of the Old Quarter with another reason to resent those living across the water.

Several of the Old Docks' jetties have fallen into a poor state of repair through neglect. As at the Royal Docks, customs officers board each vessel when it arrives to calculate import duties, prior to the cargo being unloaded onto the quayside. Only a small number of legitimate merchants use the docks and attempts to encourage more to do so by reducing the berthing fees have had little impact. That said, minotaurs from the island of Phokris seem to prefer the Old Docks, as do many Urksuvian traders, who feel more at home in the rough and ready Old Quarter; and they are also favoured by anyone looking to avoid paying the full import duties by bribing the customs officers.

Smugglers take this further by sailing – or rowing in a small boat – into the docks in the middle of the night when the customs office is closed, having paid the night watchman to take the evening off. All sorts of goods reach Parsantium through the Old Docks this way, including spices, perfumes, incense and wine, as well as drugs and even slaves captured at sea by pirates. The merchandise is unloaded in the dead of night and taken swiftly to a warehouse for onward distribution by the Dockside Crew, one of the ward's criminal

gangs (see page 131). Slaves are usually transported inside huge baskets to the Hidden Quarter's slave market (see page 121).

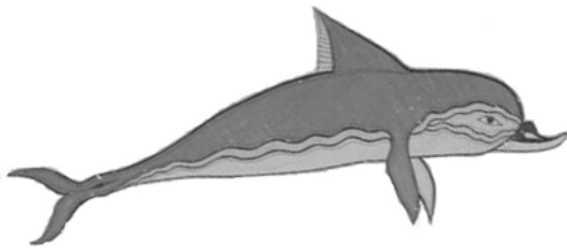
The eastern half of the docks is used by fishermen in the main, and the wharves are busy all day with boats setting off or coming in with a full catch to be unloaded. At the far eastern end, locals make their homes in wooden shacks built on the wharves, while others live on houseboats connected to the piers and each other by rope bridges and planks, in the boat-town community of Flotsam. The Dockside Crew have their headquarters in an old fishery at the end of the spit of land that prevents Flotsam being washed away by the currents.

**Tew Pennyfeather** (N male halfling bard 4) is a halfling musician with long, floppy silvery blond hair who performs in the waterfront taverns of the Dock Ward and the Fat Grouper in Flotsam (see page 114). To talk to, Tew is cheerful and a valuable source of gossip about what's going on in the neighbourhood, but his flute playing, while accomplished, is invariably melancholy. He is a night owl and can often be found in the early hours of the morning sitting on one of the piers, playing softly as he works on a new tune. The bard's dream is to appear on stage at the Theatre of Cythera and he's currently thinking about how he might persuade the fashionable Iancu Petronas (see page 84) to give him his big break providing the music for one of his plays. Tew has a dark secret – he killed his brother in a fight over a woman and fled to Parsantium to escape the consequences. The halfling's seemingly carefree demeanour is a front; his sadness and guilt come through in his music.

## Black Dolphin's Wake

The Black Dolphin's Wake is a scruffy waterfront tavern near the Old Docks. It has a badly roofed porch out the front and a faded sign hangs above the entrance depicting the black fin of a dolphin cutting through the waters of the Dolphin Strait with the city of Parsantium in the background. The tavern's interior is unrelentingly dingy; a pungent blend of stale beer and not so fresh





fish assails the nostrils of those brave enough to enter, while the odd rat scurries around underfoot. Most disturbingly, any PC with a Wisdom score of 15+ will sense that something isn't quite right here, as the hairs stand up on the back of their neck.

The Wake's landlord and owner is **Riyad** (CN male human commoner 1), a lanky, goofy-looking Aqhrani who is more than a bit slow on the uptake but possessed of an overwhelmingly sunny disposition. Riyad bought the tavern on the cheap after it had stood empty for several years with some lucky winnings from the Floating Palace. He paid little attention to the rumours that the place was cursed at the time, but now he's beginning to think there might be something in the tales he's heard after all. Certainly, he gets an odd feeling whenever he goes down into the cellar, and several times he could have sworn he heard a voice whispering "Kill them! Kill them all!" when he went to fetch a barrel. He's worried enough to want to find some adventurers – cheap ones, preferably – to look into the situation, and is willing to offer a fee plus free beer for a month to anyone who can get to the bottom of things. Initially he tried appealing to Elias Wang, boss of the Dockside Crew, for help but the gangster gave him short shrift.

The cause of the strange vibes and the voices is a bloodthirsty daeva (demonic spirit) called **Hidimba**, who was worshipped by an evil cult in the days of ancient Dhak Janjua. After the daeva's following was wiped out by the warrior-priests of Vishnu, Hidimba fell dormant for many centuries but reawakened 20 years ago when a Hidden Quarter gang seeking to expand their tunnel network smashed through a wall into its forgotten shrine. Here, they discovered a bloodstained altar and the six-armed idol housing the daeva itself. Before they realized what was happening,

the hateful spirit had commanded the thieves to kill each other in a frenzy of bloodlust.

In the weeks and months that followed, Hidimba, still trapped in the idol, used its demonic powers of domination to reach out to passing thieves and monsters in the nearby passages, commanding them to commit murder in its name. The more killings there were, the more Hidimba's power grew, until it was able to reach up to the tavern above and compel the then owner, a man named Mikulas, to murder all of his customers by feeding them dolmas laced with poison. Mikulas was killed by an angry mob of local fishermen shortly afterwards and the tavern closed down until the hapless Riyad bought it. Now the place is open again, Hidimba is trying to make history repeat itself, but so far the dim-witted landlord has resisted the spirit's murderous commands.

If the PCs can locate the hidden trapdoor in the tavern's cellar, they will be able to find their way down to the secret shrine where the daeva statue waits in darkness. The idol, made of black stone, depicts a six-armed Sampuran demon with large tusks and terrible claws and gives off a palpable sense of evil. The PCs need to destroy the possessed statue before the demonic spirit compels them to kill each other. Hidimba is able to dominate one PC at a time (as a vampire, but at five times the range) and has animated several thieves' corpses as zombies to defend it from attackers.

## Bilal's Blades

Located on the north side of the Fish Market, this arms and armour shop is patronized by local enforcers, rogues and thieves. Its owner, **Bilal** (CN male human expert 3), is a somewhat shifty-looking Aqhrani with thinning hair and a scar running from under his right eye down to his collarbone – the souvenir of a nearly fatal fight several years ago with a thuggee who tried to rob him as he was walking home after a night gambling at the Floating Palace.

Bilal sells new and second-hand weapons and armour of various types, with scimitars and kukris a particular speciality, and he sometimes has a few



magic items on offer too. One of the magic weapons Bilal has for sale is a strong-willed intelligent blade whose special purpose is to slay the enemies of its original owner, Darias Oakensap, deceased leader of the now-defunct Backalley Boys. The sword won't reveal its personality or its purpose until after it has been purchased; it will then relentlessly urge its new "master" to avenge Oakensap's death or perish in the attempt. Unfortunately, the man responsible for his demise is Avishandu...

## The Slums

The Slums is a filthy place in the worst part of the city, avoided by anyone who isn't desperate enough to call it home. Most of the dark and dank buildings are either completely derelict or halfway there. The streets and alleys are close together and very narrow; the top storeys on opposite sides of a street often lean in so much they are nearly touching, making walking below feel even more claustrophobic and oppressive. Disease is common, and the streets are full of flea-ridden cats and troops of mangy blue-bottomed monkeys hunting for something to eat. The whole district is smoky due to the fires people use for cooking, but the smell of food (usually lentils or rice with some scraps of meat, fish or vegetables and a pinch of spice) does little to mask the stench of unwashed bodies and waste. The residents of the slums are the dregs of society and are bitterly resigned to their fate, knowing they have no hope of escape.

The decrepit apartment buildings are owned by a series of ruthless "slumlords" who charge cheap rents to the tenants but do nothing to maintain the property. Roofs leak, mould grows on the walls, stairways are unsafe, and all types of vermin from rats to giant centipedes and spiders are rife. A shocking number of these slumlords are wealthy nobles and merchants living in the Imperial Quarter or elsewhere in the Old Quarter, but some are crime lords based in the Dock Ward, collectively known as "the Bosses".

The most notorious of these Bosses is the gnoll gangster **Orloch Scragmane** (CE male gnoll fighter 7), nicknamed the Undisputed King of the Slums. Orloch has his headquarters in a tenement building on Mudbrick Street, protected by a barbed iron gate and guarded by his gnoll pack mates, known as the Mangy Curs. As well as exploiting the poor tenants living in his apartments, Orloch operates a kidnapping and slavery ring – he runs an underground market based in the Hidden Quarter (see page 121), where he sells human, dwarf, elf and halfling slaves to unscrupulous brothel keepers from the Poor Ward's red-light district, evil necromancers, and various other malevolent characters. Orloch buys his slaves from pirates (such as the infamous bugbear swashbuckler Captain Ferrukk) and from land-based gangs like the Dockside Crew, who aren't above knocking a few dockworkers out as they wander drunkenly home from the pub. The gnoll is over seven feet tall with a flame red mane and his torso is covered in tattoos marking his kills. He wields a huge axe in combat, and there is nothing he enjoys more than inflicting terrible pain on his enemies.



Next door to Orloch's HQ is St Carinus's Redemption, a chapel dedicated to Helion. **Brother Jerome** (NG male human cleric 2), an elderly, silver-haired, softly spoken man, wanting to do some good for the desperate souls in the slums, runs a soup kitchen for the needy out of the church hall. Some of the Dock Ward's most accomplished thieves and scoundrels are regulars here; Brother Jerome hopes that they will step out of the darkness and into the light at some point in the future. A pair of gargoyles has recently taken up residence on the chapel roof, hiding in plain sight and feeding on the down-and-outs who come to the soup kitchen. So far, no one has noticed their fell presence nor missed any of their victims.



## Flotsam

Flotsam, a town built from boats of every size and shape, bobs on the water at the eastern end of the Old Docks. This floating community consists of around 70 vessels, joined together by a confusing network of gangplanks and rope bridges, and is inhabited by some of the city's poorest citizens: those who cannot afford the rent on a tenement apartment but can just about manage the cost of a cabin in a houseboat. Most of these folk are Sampurans belonging to the shudra caste, although many halflings live here too, paying rent to the retired fishermen and other locals who own the boats. Flotsam is completely afloat and it's possible for the residents to get everything they need without setting foot on dry land, since the boat-town contains shops, temples and even a pub, the Fat Grouper. The layout of Flotsam changes frequently as some of the houseboats double up as fishing vessels, heading out into the channel each morning. When they return in the evening, they often end up somewhere different from where they started. Long-time residents are used to this but the constant reshuffling of the boats often baffles newcomers. Once a year, in late summer, the Festival of Flowers (see page 36), honouring the Sapta Sindhu, is celebrated in Flotsam, drawing visitors from across the whole Old Quarter.

Most of the people living here work as longshoremen, in warehouses or on the fishing boats. Fish naturally forms a big part of the Flotsam diet and the smell of grilling sea bass and grouper pervades the evening air. As well as a market selling fish (of course!) and other foodstuffs like flour, rice and vegetables, Flotsam's shops and services include a bait and tackle shop, a basket weaver, a netmaker, a ropemaker and several carpenters and boat builders.

One of these carpenters is **Jarwyn**, an elderly male dwarf with a fine "pirate accent" and a knack for repairing ships and making sea chests, rudders and other wooden objects used on boats. He lives on a houseboat in Flotsam and is actually a "she" – the dwarf is none other than one of the dragon Naelere's

(see page 83) secret identities. As Jarwyn, she is able to keep an eye on the criminal gangs operating around the Old Docks and in the nearby red-light district, and make sure things don't get out of hand by steering adventurers towards the situation as needed. Recently there has been a number of disappearances from Flotsam, mostly longshoremen and dockworkers. The Dockside Crew (see page 131) are to blame – the men are being knocked unconscious and sold as slaves to Orloch Scragmane – and this is something Jarwyn/Naelere has taken an interest in.

The **Water Boys** are a group of around 20 orphaned human children of mixed (but mostly Sampuran) origin, aged between 7 and 14, who live on a large fishing boat in Flotsam. These kids get by with begging, running errands and messages, pulling stuff out of the water to sell, and a fair bit of pickpocketing and petty theft. Their unspoken leader is Girish (CN male human rogue 3); he's the oldest at 16 and takes responsibility for the other kids, making sure they all get something to eat and that any disputes among the group are resolved either peacefully or after only a brief bout of fisticuffs. The Water Boys sleep in hammocks and on crude cots below decks; their houseboat is decorated with carpets, lanterns, silk cushions, stuffed birds, paintings and other art objects they've "found". If the PCs are looking for a patron's missing property, this is a good place to start.

**Jagadamba** (CE female human witch 13/cleric 2) is another resident of Flotsam, renowned throughout the boat-town and beyond as an excellent fortune teller (she reads palms – the art of *samudrika sastra*), an apothecary and, some say, a witch. It has become fashionable among the Bathuran elite of the Imperial Quarter to consult with Jagadamba, and many women travel in disguise by boat across the Dolphin Strait and into Flotsam to visit her.

Despite its decrepit appearance, Jagadamba's houseboat somehow survives out in the exposed part of the Strait. Inside, it's cosily furnished with colourful hangings, some old but intricately woven Aqhrani rugs and carved wooden statues of the Sampuran gods.



Joss sticks burn, filling the room with thick clouds of incense. Shelves line one wall, filled with bottles of potions and jars of bizarre ingredients, such as basilisk's tears, for sale; a cat-sized purple pseudodragon sits on one of the shelves, looking down curiously at Jagadamba's visitors. The little drake was hatched from an egg given to the witch by a band of adventurers who didn't know what else to do with it and it will protect her fiercely if she is attacked.

Jagadamba is a very old Sampuran woman in plain black robes, tiny and stooped, with a wrinkled face and wispy white hair sticking out in all directions. She wears lots of gold jewellery bearing snake and skull motifs (both symbols of Kali, her patron goddess), but keeps her cobra familiar in a basket, out of sight of her customers. As well as reading palms and selling magical potions and elixirs, Jagadamba identifies strange magical items and can provide useful occult knowledge to clients, although her motives are decidedly dubious: the fortune teller is a prominent member of the Cult of the Black Mother (see page 127), personally responsible for initiating many important people into the ways of Kali, including Ciceria, the mother of the Despoina, Thecia. Jagadamba is a powerful witch and can call upon thuggee killers to help deal with enemies if required.

### The Fat Grouper

The Fat Grouper is the centre of Flotsam, physically and in many ways spiritually, for it's here that many of the boat-town's residents (particularly its fishermen) come to sink a few jars at the end of a hard day's work. The tavern was formerly a caravel; the bar is situated below decks, although on sunny days the cooking is taken outside and tasty grilled grouper is served from a barbecue on the stern-castle.

The landlord of the Grouper is **Glyn Merryfield** (N male halfling commoner 1), a miserable and greedy halfling who constantly complains about how life has dealt him a bad hand. Glyn is fat, balding and pale from spending most of his time below decks. As well

as the tavern, he also owns several decrepit houseboats nearby which he rents out for 7 sp per week. Glyn's wife, **Sarla** (N female halfling expert 1), is younger and much more attractive, but is something of a nagging shrew, continually bemoaning the fact that they live in Flotsam on a boat. She will complain shrilly to anyone who will listen that Glyn will never amount to anything unless he earns enough money to move their tavern to the Artisans Ward, though even the Poor Ward would be an improvement. Sarla's disappointment in Glyn has driven him to try and improve their situation through frequent visits to the Floating Palace, a gambling hall in the Poor Ward's red-light district (see page 106). Predictably enough, the hapless Glyn has been losing heavily at dice and now owes a small fortune to the house and its owner Zeno Meverel. If he doesn't pay back what he owes soon, Meverel will call in the loans and Glyn will lose everything. His increasingly desperate situation means he is on the lookout for any kind of "get rich quick" scheme, however ludicrous, that might come his way.

This is Flotsam, so the taproom isn't fancy, furnished with basic, rough wooden chairs and tables, making splinters in the backside a hazard of drinking here. The only decor is a stuffed five-foot-long purple grouper hanging over the bar and a few other fishermen's trophies: a shark's jaw, a narwhal horn and a couple of fishing spears. The beer is a watered-down, cheap pale ale called Marlin Brew, and the only other drinks on offer are rotgut (a nasty potato-based spirit, much enjoyed by gnolls) and a vinegary red wine known as Sampuran Ruby. Apple-flavoured sheesha is also popular with the regulars but it's the menu that's the tavern's saving grace. Sarla is actually a fantastic cook, so the food, almost always locally caught fish (grilled or served as fish stew, chowder or curry), is universally excellent.

**Mangesh** (LN male human commoner 1) is a dock-worker who spends most evenings in the Fat Grouper, grumbling about his boat, which is always leaking, no matter how often he fixes it. It isn't his repairwork that's at fault; the leaks are caused by a young undine named



**Margarita** (CG female undine rogue 2). Mangesh was very rude to her a few weeks ago as she watched him unloading her father's ship, and in revenge she is sabotaging his houseboat. Margarita won't stop her vandalism unless she is caught in the act, in which case she will demand an apology from Mangesh.

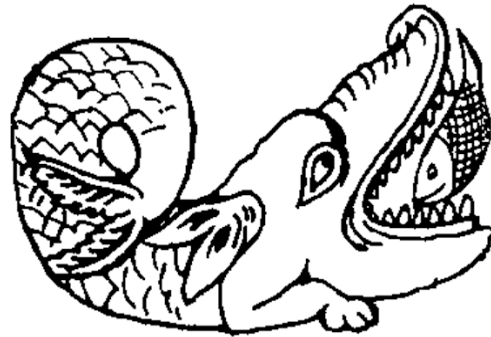
### Dorna's Hearth

This floating shrine to Dorna, the Bathuran goddess of hearth and home, is a popular meeting place for the wives, daughters and young children of the local fishermen. The deck of the boat is dominated by a communal kitchen and dining area where naan bread and chapatis are baked in a clay oven and fragrantly spiced lentil soup simmers away on the stove. The women of Flotsam gather round, chatting about daily life, the latest gossip, politics and recent events in the city. They will make any female visitors welcome, sharing food and conversation.

At the centre of the deck is the hearth-fire itself, with an altar before it, arrayed with offerings to the goddess of food and beer. Goodmother **Bree Eleri** (LG female halfling cleric 3), the shrine's priestess, is a rotund, matronly halfling with rosy red cheeks. The kind and gentle Goodmother is assisted by a young novice called **Hannah** (LE female halfling cleric 4), who comes from a village to the northwest of Parsantium named Nicasia. Hannah is more powerful than she seems and is, in fact, a servant of the dark god Malefar. She has come to the city to destabilize and destroy the good works of the shrine from within by spreading malicious gossip to sow discord among the women of Flotsam.

### Floating Temple of the Sapta Sindhu

This large houseboat serves as the religious centre for the Sampuran community of Flotsam, although these days many of the women pay their respects to the Bathuran hearth goddess Dorna instead. On the deck of the vessel stand colourfully painted statues of the Sapta Sindhu, the seven river gods and goddesses,



including Varuna, god of oceans and rivers, astride his mount Makara (a sea creature resembling a cross between a dolphin and a crocodile). Worshippers at the temple will make offerings of rice, flowers and sweets at the foot of the statue of the god they want to bless their endeavours: praying to Kunar for a bigger catch before going out fishing for the day, asking one of the goddesses (often Sarayu) to help find the perfect wife or husband, or beseeching Yamuna to provide them with a healthy son and heir. Vibrantly dyed flags and pennants run on strings from the mast down to the front, back and sides of the boat, adding to its colourful appearance – which increases tenfold during the Festival of Flowers in the month of Sextilis, when the temple is covered in bright yellow, orange and red marigolds.

**Chandipati** (LN female human cleric 6), the temple's priestess, is a tall, thin woman in her late thirties. Short-sighted, she has a tendency to squint at anyone approaching in an attempt to recognize them (which makes her look rather stern). Chandipati is a strict vegetarian who hates the idea of harming any living thing – she sometimes can't help showing her disapproval of catching and eating fish to her congregation, most of whom are fishermen. Chandipati's husband walked out on her a few years ago after an argument and is now mixed up with the infamous Golden Scimitars (see page 130) – she still loves him and is worried about the company he's keeping these days.



# HIDDEN QUARTER

The Hidden Quarter (sometimes called the “Fourth Quarter”) is the term given by Parsantines to the labyrinthine network of tunnels, catacombs and chambers that exists beneath the surface of their city. Here, thieves, hoodlums and criminals of all stripes use the passages below the city streets to move around undetected by the Watch and hatch devious plots from their secret underground bases. Slaves are traded at an illegal market where both city dwellers and subterranean denizens come to buy the goods on offer. Evil humanoids, loathsome undead and other foul monsters make their homes in dank chambers and dusty halls, while secret cults dating back to the early days of Dhak Janjua still worship in ancient temples dedicated to dark gods.

The Hidden Quarter is a dangerous place, designed to allow the GM to easily include traditional dungeon adventuring in a Parsantium campaign. There are plenty of adventure possibilities if your players prefer to stick with this kind of scenario exclusively, but more fun can be had by combining the intrigues going on in the city proper with what’s down in the Hidden Quarter. Criminal gangs and other organizations, such as the Cult of the Black Mother, operate both above and below ground, allowing the action to switch back and forth between the Hidden Quarter and the city streets, thereby enabling the GM to feature both styles of play in the same adventure. Whichever type of game your group enjoys, it’s easy to come up with adventure hooks to get the PCs down into the tunnels – whether to recover an ancient artefact, rescue a missing noblewoman, or find out why the sewers aren’t being properly inspected (see page 59). Adventurers intending to explore the Hidden Quarter are supposed to obtain the proper permit from the Ministry of Subterranean Matters at the Curia (10 gp per party per week); few bother.

## Some History

The earliest tunnels of the Hidden Quarter date back to shortly after the city’s foundation. Followers and priests of Hanuman the Monkey God and others who sought to overthrow the tyrant Vrishabha excavated a series of catacombs beneath what is now the Old Quarter, where they could meet in secret to plan the rebellion, worship their gods and bury their dead. Other more sinister types also dug chambers and passages beneath the streets, including cultists of the Black Mother and sorcerers wanting somewhere to conduct their magical research in private. When the Aqhrani arrived around 1,500 years ago and started building new homes, mosques and other structures, to save time they often built directly on top of the older Sampuran foundations, rather than starting afresh. This approach meant the remains of many Sampuran buildings ended up buried but still intact beneath the city streets. With the construction of the city’s sewer system and new underground cisterns during the rule of Hulieman came more excavation: the men and dwarves digging the sewers came across existing passages, old crypts and cult temples, which they would attempt to detour around or seal back up again, but frequently the sewer tunnels ended up connecting much of what was already there. In the centuries following, burrowing monsters coming up from the deep caverns below tunnelled into the passages, creating new connections and closing off others. Gangs using the Hidden Quarter as a way to get around the city unseen, or as a place to hide out, further expanded the network of tunnels and halls.

The oldest and most extensive catacombs are beneath the Old Quarter, but there are sewers and other tunnels running below the Imperial Quarter too. After Corandias the Magnificent had the Imperial Quarter sewers built, nobles extending their wine cellars would sometimes inadvertently break into an existing passageway, while



others deliberately dug tunnels to connect their estate with the vaults beneath their places of business.

The Hidden Quarter thus encompasses all the subterranean areas below Parsantium, including the ancient tunnels, catacombs and secret temples of Dhak Janjua, the sewers and cisterns, passages, cellars and vaults built in more recent times, as well as natural caverns. This section provides general information on the tunnels and sewers, as well as several dungeon locations for a party of PCs to explore. No overall map is provided, allowing the GM to come up with his or her own version of the Hidden Quarter.

## First Impressions

Round-edged stone steps, worn smooth and dipped with age, lead downwards from the trap door into an ancient vaulted chamber. Here, the air feels fetid and close. The room's ceiling is held up by strange, malformed columns, some made from mismatched blocks piled one on top of the other and seemingly held together by the weight of the city pressing down upon them. One of the pillars is carved with a grotesque, inverted demonic face; others are decorated with teardrop patterns, glistening with greenish slime. Blind grey fish glide through the shallow, muddy water covering the stone floor.

## Passers-By

**Lafka Slowstep** (CG female halfling rogue 2) is a pickpocket and a member of the Lamplighters. Small even for a halfling, she has light brown skin, curly black hair and an innocent-looking face. Lafka is on her way to see her boss after screwing up a mission to steal a satchel full of guild documents from Grand Master Agapetus of the Most Excellent Order of Stonemasons.

**Gorgi and Hazka** (NG male and female half-orc commoners 1) are sewer workers, wearing the brown uniforms of the Department of Night Soil Management. They are badly wounded and can barely walk after a run-in with a sewer monster.

**Zenobia Greycloak** (LN female half-elf fighter 3/wizard 2) is an adventurer searching for an ancient crypt rumoured to be filled with riches. She has a scar on her left cheek, wears mithral chainmail, and is accompanied by her bat familiar and two fearsome gnoll bodyguards (N male gnoll fighters 3).

## The Tunnels

These passageways, some very old, some dug relatively recently, connect with both the sewer network and with gang hideouts, secret cult temples, ancient tombs, cellars, underground cisterns and other Hidden Quarter locations. A small number of long, deep corridors even run under the Dolphin Strait, linking the two subterranean halves of the city. Depending on how frequently used a particular tunnel is by the denizens of the quarter, it might be lit by *everburning* or regular torches, or might lack any kind of illumination.

Most Hidden Quarter tunnels are between 5 and 20 feet wide with ceiling heights of 10 to 15 feet, and are either worked stone or roughly hewn rock, depending on their origin and age. Stone walls dating back to the days of Dhak Janjua are often covered in Sampuran carvings – common subjects include gods, demons, elephants and monkeys, although skulls, snakes and unsettling, sinuous abstract patterns can occasionally be found. Some passages have muddy or dusty dirt floors; others are laid with ancient flagstones. Although they are often called “dry tunnels” to distinguish them from the sewers, it's not uncommon for these corridors to become waterlogged in places after heavy rains. At such times humans seeking to pass may need to wade through water coming up to their knees or even their waists; shorter humanoids could be in over their heads.

Tunnel doors are mostly of the standard wooden dungeon variety, but carved stone and ceremonial bronze doors are not unknown. Doors may be locked or stuck, depending on whether the area is inhabited.



## Encounters

Choose or roll on the table below to create random encounters as the PCs roam the tunnels and sewers of the Hidden Quarter.

D100	ENCOUNTER
01–05	Adventurers
06–07	1d2 Bat Swarms
08–09	1d3 Giant Bombardier Beetles
10–11	Black Pudding
12–13	1d4+2 Giant Centipedes
14–15	1d6 Chokers
16–17	Cloaker
18–20	1d2 Crocodiles
21–24	1d6 Cultists <sup>1</sup>
25–28	Dark Stalker and 2d6 Dark Creepers
29–31	1d6 Darkmantles
32–35	1d6 Dire Rats
36–37	Gelatinous Cube
38–42	Ghast and 2d4 Ghouls
43–44	Gibbering Mouter
45–46	Gnome and 2d4 Goblins <sup>2</sup>
47–48	2d6 Goblins
49–50	Gray Ooze
51–52	Green Slime
53–54	1d4+1 Gricks
55–56	Mimic
57–58	Dark Naga
59–60	Ochre Jelly
61–64	Otyugh
65–68	1d4 Rat Swarms
69–70	Rust Monster
71–72	1d3 Degenerate Serpentfolk
73–77	1d4+1 Sewer Workers <sup>3</sup>
78–79	2d4 Shadows
80–81	1d8 Skulks
82–83	Spectre
84–85	2d4 Stirges
86–90	1d6 Thieves or Gang Members <sup>4</sup>
91–92	Vampire
93–96	1d4 Wererats <sup>5</sup>
97–98	1d6 Wraiths
99–00	Cavern Dweller <sup>6</sup>

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> choose one of the Dark Gods (see page 156) or the Cult of the Black Mother

<sup>2</sup> one of the Brotherhood of Spite (see page 126)

<sup>3</sup> employed by the Department of Night Soil Management to keep the sewer system working properly

<sup>4</sup> choose one of the Hidden Quarter gangs or bosses (see page 129)

<sup>5</sup> 25% chance to be members of the Felonious Larcenists (see page 133)

<sup>6</sup> choose from the monsters listed on page 119

## The Sewers

The sewers are relatively close to the surface, typically around 20 feet below the city streets, and are easily accessible via manholes (see page 53). The sewers often serve as entry points into thieves' hideouts via secret doors in the tunnel walls.

Main sewer tunnels are 25 feet in diameter, with a 15-foot-wide channel in the centre for the effluent to run down, and five-foot-wide walkways on either side. Every 50 to 100 feet a small stone bridge crosses the channel, allowing sewer workers to get to the other side of the tunnel. Secondary tunnels are 15 feet wide with a nine-foot-wide central channel and three-foot-wide walkways on either side. Smaller drainage tunnels exist – these are five feet in diameter and have no walkways. Characters can pass through these by crouching down and wading through the sewage, a thoroughly unpleasant experience, likely to cause filth fever. Eventually, the sewers empty into the Corsairs' Sea to the west of the Royal Docks on the north side, and west of the Old Docks on the southern side.

The sewer tunnels below the Victory Ward's magic district often carry alchemical waste materials – strange mutated creatures and peculiar magical phenomena are spotted regularly by workers from the Department of Night Soil Management in the area. In the Old Quarter, the sewers are home to gangs of wererats (such as the Felonious Larcenists, see page 133) as well as dire rats, crocodiles and otyughs.





## Caverns Below

Far below the sewers and the upper levels of the Hidden Quarter run miles of deep natural caverns inhabited by subterranean humanoid races and strange monsters. Since these caverns and tunnels often connect with the man-made passages and chambers above, it is not unheard of for such creatures to be encountered by PCs exploring the Hidden Quarter. Members of the intelligent humanoid races, such as drow elves, duergar and goggle-eyed fish-folk, sometimes venture close to the surface in search of slaves, either buying them in Orloch Scragman's slave market or seizing captives in raids to take back down below. Other subterranean monsters sighted in the Hidden Quarter include aboleths, derro, mycolids (see *Midgard Bestiary*), pech, purple worms, ropers, troglodytes and trolls.

## Bone Catacombs

The Bone Catacombs is the name given to the extensive network of tunnels, burial chambers and ossuaries beneath the Forest of the Dead (see page 124). These catacombs have been expanded time and time again to accommodate the growing numbers of Parsantines requiring burial in the cemetery, and connect with the tunnels beneath the Old Quarter. Ghouls are common in the Bone Catacombs due to their penchant for tunnelling into tombs and feeding on corpses; common and dire rats and other scavengers are also frequently encountered.



**Laskaris** (CE male human wizard 13) is an emaciated, pale-skinned human necromancer in black, hooded robes. He has a bald head, sunken, bloodshot eyes and long, gnarled fingers, and carries an ebony staff topped with a silver skull. Laskaris has taken over a series of chambers and crypts in the Bone Catacombs where he is conducting his distasteful experiments, including attempts to graft undead limbs and other body parts onto living beings. When these experiments succeed, Laskaris plans to replace his own eye with that of a powerful lich in the hope that this will grant him the insight he needs to interpret what is written in the obscure occult tomes he has collected. The priests at the Sacristy of Soranus, above ground in the Forest of the Dead, are desperate to put a stop to Laskaris's foul activities but as yet have not been able to penetrate his lair, which is well defended by four-armed skeletal guardians and other undead servitors.

The catacombs are also supposedly home to the feared Boss of All Bosses of the Hidden Quarter, Avishandu, the Fourth Tribune (see page 129). Very few people have seen the inside of his secret lair but those who have done claim that the crime baron enjoys reclining on a golden peacock-shaped throne surrounded by dozens of beautiful (and very valuable) art objects, while his harem of scantily clad human and elven women lie draped over silk cushions at his feet.

## Golden Scimitars' Hideout

Like many of the criminal gangs and thieves' guilds of the Old Quarter, the Golden Scimitars have their headquarters beneath the city streets. Their base is located below the Winking Vixen brothel (see page 107), where a trapdoor leads down a long flight of narrow stone stairs into the tunnels of the Hidden Quarter; the headquarters are concealed behind a secret door in the tunnel wall, and anyone venturing into the main entrance hall [area 1 on the map] is exposed to missile fire from guards lurking behind the arrow slits on both sides. The ancient west wall of this room was once part of a civic building in Dhak Janjua and is decorated with worn carvings depicting city life and the building of the

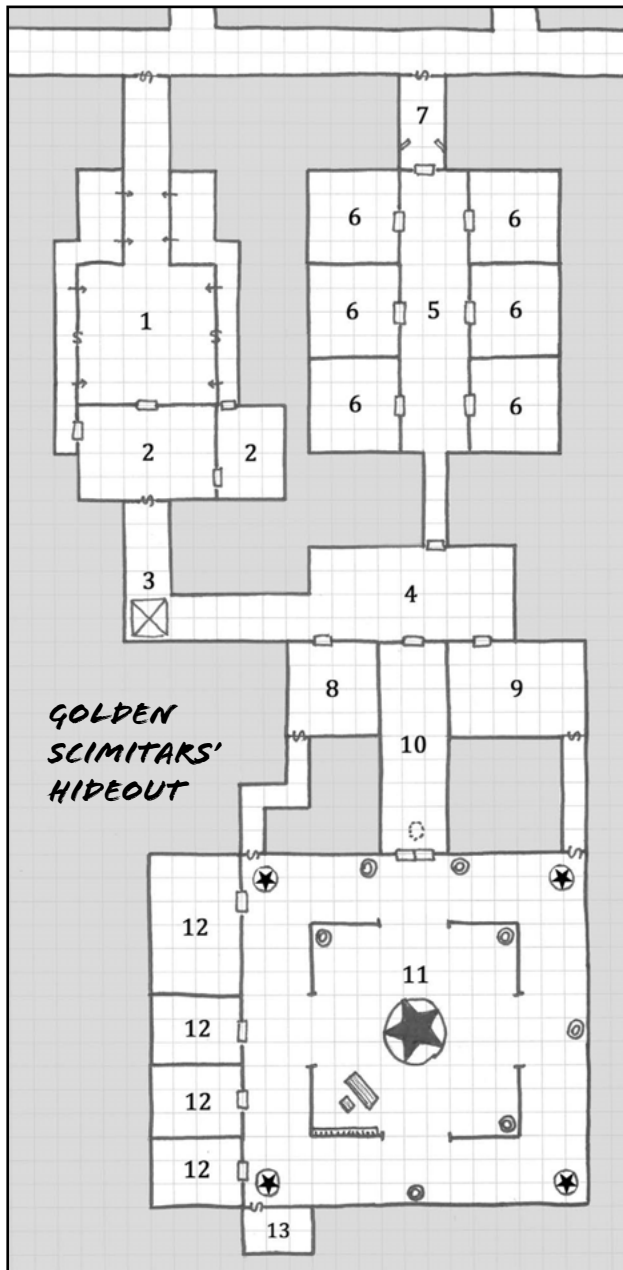


two great bridges. Beyond here are just two chambers [2], designed to fool intruders into thinking this is only a small outpost – the bulk of the lair hidden is behind another secret door, protected by a false floor pit trap with poison spikes [3].

The main body of the headquarters consists of a large common area [4], a wide corridor [5] leading to

sleeping quarters for two dozen gang members [6], a training room [9], a storage chamber for supplies and equipment [8], and an escape route leading back into the tunnels [7]. This escape route is hidden behind a secret door and protected against intruders by a flame jet trap. At any one time, there will be 10–12 Golden Scimitars in these rooms, typically human fighters and rogues. A long corridor trapped with an arcane turret which fires *magic missiles* at unauthorized visitors [10] leads from here to a pair of very old wooden double doors, carved with elephants and flowers.

Beyond is an ancient Sampuran temple, 80 feet square with a 30-foot-high domed ceiling, lit by braziers [11]. A huge fierce-looking statue in the centre of the garbhagriha (inner sanctum) depicts Ravana, god of rakshasas – the grey stone statue is over 20 feet tall and shows the demonic god with ten heads and several dozen arms. The 18-foot-high outer walls of the garbhagriha are painted with faded battle scenes showing Ravana crushing his enemies. This impressive chamber serves as the office of the Golden Scimitars' leadership. In the northwest corner of the inner chamber stand a desk and chair, in front of bookshelves lined with ledgers containing the gang's immaculately kept accounts. PCs who have made it this far will probably encounter **Zeno Meverel** (LE human male rogue 12, see page 130) and his lieutenants, **Vadim** (NE human male fighter 11), **Ayla** (NE female half-elf sorcerer 9) and **Pavlo** (NE male gnomish fighter 8/rogue 2). Ancient Sampuran writings around the statue will glow if a battle occurs in the temple, providing evil creatures with a +2 bonus to their attacks. Doors lead off from this chamber into the leaders' private rooms [12]; a secret door conceals the gang's vault [13] filled with their ill-gotten gains.



## Rotten Mursel's Gang

**Rotten Mursel** (CE male ghastr rogue 8) is the cunning leader of a pack of ghouls and ghastrs that prowls the tunnels of the Hidden Quarter close to the Golden Scimitars' hideout and the stairs leading down from the Winking Vixen. He was once a man, gluttonous



and grossly fat, who lived in a large house in the Garden Ward and owned several slum tenements in the Dock Ward. Mursel would ignore calls from his tenants to have the dangerously unsafe buildings repaired, and would immediately throw out on the street anyone who went into arrears with their rent. When he evicted a starving family of 12 during a particularly cold winter, the aged grandmother cursed Mursel with her dying breath: no matter how much he ate, he would always be hungry from that day forth. The old woman's curse killed Mursel soon afterwards – his hunger drove him to huge bouts of binge-eating and during one mammoth series of enormous dishes he keeled over and died. The curse didn't stop there though. Mursel transformed into a ghost after his death, still unable to satisfy his hunger and now craving human flesh above all else.

While wandering one of the main tunnels, the PCs may hear sobbing coming from a dark side passage. If they are brave or foolish enough to investigate, they will spot a little girl in a red dress, sitting up against the wall and weeping to herself. The “little girl” is actually one of Rotten Mursel's goblin slaves – he uses a bunch of the pathetic creatures to lure his victims to their deaths, and as an emergency food source. The goblin waits until the PCs get close, then leaps to her feet and runs round the corner, leading them into a ghoul ambush. If the PCs survive Rotten Mursel's attack, they will find three more goblins behind a door, all dressed as little kids – one is gnawing on a human arm while the others play with some grubby dolls. They throw themselves at the party's feet, sobbing and begging for mercy.

## Slave Market

**Orloch Scragmane**, the Undisputed King of the Slums (CE male gnoll fighter 7; see page 112), runs an underground slave market beneath the Dock Ward where all sorts of unsavoury characters from the Hidden Quarter and the city above come to purchase slaves at auction. Beneath the slumlord's headquarters on Mudbrick Street (and also accessible via a tunnel

from the Dockside Crew's base) there's an ancient stone dock alongside an underground river that flows northwest into a natural tunnel. Brave PCs can board the skiff that is moored here and steer into the dark river passage. The water flows fast, requiring some boating skill to keep the skiff afloat and away from the cavern walls as it heads downstream.

Eventually, the river rushes over a small waterfall and into a large underground lake. On the far side of the lake is a wooden jetty, hung with glowing lanterns, and guarded by a pair of bow-wielding gnolls from Orloch's Mangy Curs, and beyond this, the slave market itself. The cave's ceiling, 50 feet above the surface of the water, is a mass of stalactites, and several pillars and rock “islands” rise up out of the water. This huge cavern is home to a bloodthirsty and ill-humoured black dragon named **Gloomscale** (CE female young adult black dragon), who only allows Orloch and his slaves to pass in exchange for regular tribute payments of “sparklies”. Occasionally Gloomscale “forgets” the bargain she's made and eats the odd gnoll or slave, but generally the arrangement works well. If she senses intruders, the dragon likes to glide silently through the water before striking suddenly to devastating effect. Gloomscale's lair and her substantial treasure hoard are located on the western shore of the lake, beyond a patch of glowing green fungi that sprays obscuring clouds of spores if disturbed.

Across the lake, steps lead up from the dock to a processing chamber where slaves are met by Orloch's gnoll overseers. From here, a corridor runs past a series of small holding cells to a staging room, where the slaves are soaked with a bucket of water or two to clean them up and get the straw out of their hair, before being herded into the amphitheatre beyond where the auctions take place, presided over by Orloch himself. Typical bidders might include brothel owners looking for sex slaves, crazed necromancers in need of experimental subjects, and dark elves or fish-folk from the deep caverns wanting to purchase thralls or sacrifices. Several more Mangy Cur gnolls are on hand in case of trouble. A pair of double doors



leads out of the amphitheatre into a tunnel connecting with the city sewers and to passages heading deeper below Parsantium.

## Temple of the Black Mother

The Temple of the Black Mother is located deep beneath the Deul of the Black Mother in the Temple Ward (see page 101), reached by following a long, winding tunnel accessed via a trapdoor behind the altar. After a while, this passage connects with a much older one, dating back centuries to the time of Vrishabha's rule over the city. The stonework in this ancient corridor is carved with worn swirling spiral patterns and snake-like motifs. Eventually it reaches the series of caverns that makes up the temple complex – these chambers include living quarters for the priests, cells where the sacrifices are held, and drugging rooms where they are given narcotics to numb their senses, as well as crypts filled with the mummified bodies of snake-like humanoids.

Set in a capacious vaulted cavern, the temple itself features a bloodstained altar where sacrifices (preferably young maidens) are beheaded by priests wearing dark green hooded robes at the feet of a giant black basalt statue of the four-armed goddess. Victims' severed heads then are thrown into a tall clay jar filled with ravening worms, so that their picked-clean skulls can be displayed in the hundreds of niches in the cavern walls. The headless bodies are tossed into the deep chasm that runs through the centre of the temple, separating the priests, altar and statue from the

congregation. Scavenging monsters living at the bottom of the chasm make short work of these corpses.

Although this temple appears to honour Kali, the Black Mother is actually the serpent goddess Manasangra, worshipped by the kundali, shapechanging cobra-headed serpentfolk who came to Dhak Janjua hidden among the Sampuran refugees and who have remained concealed among the population ever since. Only Inner Coil initiates into the Cult of the Black Mother (see page 127) are aware of the goddess's true nature, and that many of her priests are actually serpentfolk. In this temple, the cult worships a snake-like being it believes to be the living incarnation of the goddess. They believe that if enough worthy sacrifices are made, this incarnation of Manasangra will awaken from her deep slumber and arise from her chamber behind the statue of the goddess to bless her worshippers. The incarnation of the goddess is a gargantuan naga with a cobra's hood, a dark-skinned female human face, and black scales with gold bands. She has only woken up once in the last 200 years but the cult's priestesses believe she will again in the very near future. The incarnation's chamber is sealed shut with a pair of large stone doors that remain locked until she awakens.

A high-level adventure pitting the PCs against the Cult of the Black Mother may bring them here to attempt to rescue an important sacrifice. Alternatively, they may need information possessed only by the incarnation. Will they allow the sacrifice to take place so they can learn what they need to know?





# OUTSIDE THE CITY

Not all of Parsantium's locations are within its city walls – the ever-changing halfling camps close to the Victory and Camel gates (home to many of the “small folk”) and the Forest of the Dead, the city's burial ground, both lie just outside. Beyond, farmland stretches for 30 miles or so in all directions, encompassing the villages that feed the city's growing population, and the watchtowers that protect them from raiding humanoid.

Three main roads pass through this territory: the Via Bathura, heading north and then west to the Sunset Lands; the Silk Road, leading east along the southern edge of the mysterious Feyshore Forest; and the Path to Heaven, which penetrates the thorn-choked badlands to the southeast en route to the Pillars of Heaven Mountains.

## Halfling Camps

Outside both the greater gates into Parsantium – the Victory Gate and the Camel Gate – halflings live in makeshift camps, composed of tents, wagons and flimsy-looking wooden shacks, as befits their nomadic heritage. These villages are home to between 300 and 700 halfling men, women and children along with their livestock – mostly goats, pigs, chickens, rabbits and ponies. While many move on after a few months, some of the halflings live here on a permanent basis. Although their caravan still has wheels, the family might have long since sold the horse that pulled it, or they may have traded in their tent for a sturdy wooden hut with a thatched roof. There is a deep well outside the Victory Gate that provides the camp with water; the Camel Gate camp has a small stream running through it.

Both camps have a relaxed, friendly atmosphere: children play between the tents and wagons, chickens and goats wander freely, and music and laughter can

be heard everywhere. The halflings are keen gardeners, growing their own vegetables and herbs, either in plots in the ground or in window boxes and pots that can be taken with them when they up sticks and leave. The villagers generally operate a barter system to trade with each other but use coins when dealing with visiting merchants and Parsantine citizens. Prices here are usually cheaper than within the city walls, making the camps a good place to come to pick up a bargain or have something mended cheaply. There is always a blacksmith, a weaver, a cobbler and a wainwright on hand, and all sorts of goods will be on sale too, including exotic items found on the halflings' travels, handcrafted jewellery, embroidered clothing, fine cheeses and loaves of crusty bread. While wandering around the market stalls, it's customary for visitors to enjoy a glass of locally brewed cider or perry.





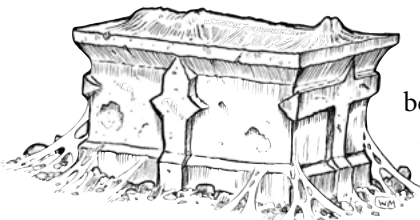
Both camps have shrines dedicated to the halflings' favoured gods – Dorna and Puchan are honoured in the camp near the Camel Gate, and the Victory Gate has a caravan-shrine to the mischievous and well-endowed Piagus, god of travellers, tricksters and merchants.

**Brandil Hollowreed** (CG male halfling rogue 3) is an overly curious halfling rogue who wandered down the wrong tunnel in the Hidden Quarter and blundered into the Temple of the Black Mother (see page 122). Beating a hasty retreat, he was chased by the kundali priests but managed to escape with his life and is currently lying low in the Camel Gate camp. It is only a matter of time before thuggee killers track him down, but he won't leave the city without his mother's ashes which are sitting in an urn on the mantelpiece in his Poor Ward apartment. If the PCs can fetch them for him, Brandil will pay them what little gold he has and even provide them with directions to the temple if they are interested. Brandil has brown skin, black hair braided with red and gold thread, and dark brown eyes that dart nervously around in all directions.

## Forest of the Dead

Known as the Forest of the Dead, Parsantium's walled cemetery, southeast of the city, is filled with cypress trees under whose branches stand thousands of tombs and mausoleums. The oldest part of the cemetery is the Sampuran section, where there is a small shrine to Yama, god of death, but there are Aqhrani and Bathuran areas too, as well as a small Tiangaon section. Each has its own style of tomb architecture. For example, the tall slender white marble Aqhrani tombstones are typically surmounted with a curved turban if the deceased is a man, but ornamented with a palm branch for a woman. Some Bathuran graves (from a custom dating back

several hundred years) depict the manner of death of whoever is buried below. Visitors to the cemetery can come across tombstones with bas-reliefs



depicting men being decapitated in battle, or impaled or hanged from the gallows for a capital crime. Noble houses, such as the Marfisi or Laro, have ornate family vaults for their dead, usually decorated with imposing marble statues.

Because it was traditional to plant a cypress tree beside the newly dug grave of a loved one, the Forest of the Dead lives up to its name – there are hundreds of trees growing in the cemetery. During the daytime, the coo-ing of multitudinous turtle doves on the wing or perching in the cypresses fills the air; by night, bats and owls haunt the skies undisturbed. The Forest of the Dead is a favourite place for Aqhrani women to spend their afternoons and it is common to spot someone praying at the narrow opening to the tomb of a parent, husband or brother. The cemetery is patrolled by the City Watch during the daytime; at dusk, it becomes off-limits and the gates are locked. Nevertheless, many individuals hide inside or climb over the walls to hold clandestine meetings at night under the trees.

The Sacristy of Soranus, a domed temple to the god of death, can be found in the Bathuran section of the cemetery. The ministers at this small, solemn temple perform funeral ceremonies and preside over the dead beneath their feet, striving to keep the bodies safe from those who would defile them. They do not raise the dead or perform resurrections – once someone has passed into Soranus's care in the Underworld, it is a sin to bring him or her back as far as they are concerned. A far worse sin is the creation of undead of any sort and the priests often venture into the Bone Catacombs (see page 119) beneath the Forest on ghoulish expeditions. They have not been able to deal with the foul necromancer Laskaris, though, and would be willing to reward any PCs handsomely for his defeat.

The priests of Soranus wear black robes and the god's holy symbol (a bronze owl); when going into battle against the undead, they switch temple robes for black plate armour and wield morningstars. The High Minister of the Sacristy is a lanky, bald Bathuran named **Stauracius** (N male human cleric 9), who speaks in an impressive, sonorous voice and bears more than a passing resemblance to Laskaris. Are the two perhaps related?



## Farming Villages

The hamlets and villages surrounding the city number between 100 and 900 inhabitants and grow all kinds of crops and vegetables, including wheat, rice, vines, olives, aubergines, peppers and tomatoes, as well as keeping cows, pigs, sheep, goats, chickens and other livestock. Each village is governed by a muhtar (an elected headman), supported by a village council. Taxes are collected locally and paid to the Royal Exchequer four times a year.

The Parsantine army is responsible for defending these villages and mans a dozen watchtowers along the northwestern and southeastern frontiers of the city state's territory. Each fortified watchtower is the base for 250 men (half an allagion), supported by local peasant militia in the event of an increase in humanoid activity. The northwestern allagions are kept busier than their counterparts in the southeast – several warlike orc and hobgoblin tribes live north of the Via Bathura and frequently raid into Parsantine lands. The southeastern villages are occasionally troubled by bandits but there hasn't been a gnoll or centaur incursion for many years.

## Feyshore Forest

The Feyshore Forest is situated 40 miles to the east of Parsantium, running along the southern shore of the Griffin Water for nearly 90 miles. The majority of its trees are oaks, chestnuts, cedars and pines, and the forest is home to ancient ruins, elven villages, capricious fey and fearsome beasts. Within its confines, the borders between worlds are thin, making it possible for wanderers in the woods to drift into the land of Faerie without realizing it. This phenomenon doesn't just affect individuals – the high elven town of Forathin alternates between the two worlds and sometimes even manages to exist in both simultaneously.

Forathin is an elegant place of natural beauty at the heart of the forest, whose graceful buildings and delicate spires exist in perfect harmony with their woodland surroundings. The town has a population

of about 1,000 high elves and is ruled by the Rowan Queen, who pays homage to the Lady of the Summer Kingdom in the Faerie lands. Recently, Forathin has come under attack from fomorian giants and their cyclops allies – something has caused the foul creatures to boil forth from their underground lairs and raid the surface lands, and the Queen is anxious to find out what this might be so she can put a stop to it.

Alongside Forathin, there are several wood elf communities in the forest, including Misthollow, a traditional elven treetop village near the western border of the forest, and Moss Stone, the site of an important shrine to Zana, goddess of nature and the hunt. The latter is named for an ancient standing stone covered in strange, worn spiral patterns, which predates the arrival of the Sampuran refugees in the area. On the outskirts of the woods, along the banks of the Shimmering River, are a handful of human villages inhabited by foresters and hunters. As long as they don't venture too far into the forest or cut too much wood, they are mostly left alone. Besides elves and humans, other creatures living in the forest include goblins, bugbears, ogres, gnomes, pixies, satyrs, treants, ettercaps, giant spiders and hags.

There are a number of overgrown ruins in the forest dating back to the time when Parsantium was Dhak Janjua and ruled by the dreaded Vrishabha: these were once small cities that paid tribute to the rajah in return for his protection. Srivatsa, the priest who slew Vrishabha and ended his reign of tyranny, came from one of these cities, named Jopura. The recent rediscovery of Jopura's ruins, with their impressive Elephant Gate and Great Temple to the Solar Gods, has come to the attention of a Sampuran historian at the Scholastica named **Sreedhar** (NG male human expert 5/rogue 1). He is keen to mount an expedition there as soon as possible to see what can be discovered about the life of the legendary hero, and to try and recover some interesting artefacts for the Imperial Museum of Antiquities. Sreedhar is bold and brave, but far from a capable fighter, so he is going to need to hire some muscle – the ruins of Jopura are inhabited by harpies, goblins and barghests under the control of a powerful hag.

## CHAPTER FIVE

# Organizations



This chapter covers some of Parsantium’s key power groups, noble families and criminal gangs: some are downright evil, others are benign, but most sit somewhere between the two extremes, focusing on their own goals and interests first and foremost. It’s almost guaranteed that the adventurers will come into conflict with several of these groups during the course of the campaign. Certainly, the Golden Scimitars and other criminal gangs, the Cult of the Black Mother and the rakshasas are important villains and mixed up in a lot of nefarious plots. Player characters could also end up joining, allying themselves with, or working for one or more of these organizations. The Fellowship of Venturers Bold, the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus and the Platinum Knights of Themicia are obvious choices for PCs to join, but rogues might end up in a criminal gang or the whole party could be hired by one of the guilds or noble families. Government and civic organizations such as the City Watch, as well as the chariot racing factions, are covered in Chapter 2, Life in the City.

### Brotherhood of Spite

Some gnomes are friendly little folk, renowned for their ability to make all sorts of wonderful things – clockwork devices, toys, jewellery and other finely crafted objects – and for their fun-loving sense of humour. Others have a nasty streak and take fiendish delight in causing misery and pain to the “big folk”. The pranks they play aren’t innocent jokes that cause embarrassment; instead, the aim is to maim or kill their victims. Fortunately, the first group of gnomes is by far the larger, but the second lot are present in Parsantium too and have banded together to form the Brotherhood of Spite.

The Brotherhood of Spite has around 70 gnome and goblin members, who moved to the city from their dark burrows beneath the Feyshore Forest over the last year or so. Every few weeks, the psychopathic humanoids gather in a secret location in the Hidden Quarter, wearing caps soaked in the blood of their victims, to share their deadly pranks and ingenious murder methods. The nasty little creatures are keen to outdo each other, both in imagination and in body count, although there is no prize other than bragging rights. Skorrif the toymaker

(see page 97) is one of the most notorious Brothers but several other members vie with him for infamy:

**Posy** (CE female gnome rogue 5/assassin 2) is an innocent-looking gnome with strawberry blond hair and pale skin, who hangs round in the busy fondouqs of the Old Quarter, pretending to be a little girl separated from her wealthy family. Promising a fat reward if her victim will help find her father, she lures him into a quiet backstreet where she stabs him with a dagger coated in sleep venom. The victim wakes up to find himself stripped naked and strapped to a wooden table in an old underground cistern. Here, Posy and her sadistic goblin sidekicks slowly torture him with blunt knives, vials of acid, hammers and rusty nails for many hours before leaving him for the rats to finish off.

**Ressek** (CE male gnome alchemist 4) is a stooped, elderly fellow with a shock of white hair and ruddy brown skin who sells brightly coloured candles from a handcart he wheels around the Mercantile Quarter’s markets. Most of these candles are perfectly harmless but some give off deadly fumes when burned, while others burn normally to start with before spraying furious clouds of sparks everywhere, liable to cause a fire.





The matronly **Krisella** (NE female gnome rogue 5/wizard 1) works as a midwife in the Poor Ward. She has dark brown hair tied up in a bun, mahogany-coloured skin and a kindly face. She is well-respected among mothers, helping to deliver babies of all races. Every so often Krisella will steal the real baby, replacing it with a changeling – a goblin disguised by illusion magic that fades after 24 hours. The real babies are never seen again.

**Twicross Graveltoes** (NE male gnome expert 6/rogue 3) is a bulbous-nosed trapsmith with wild tufts of green hair sprouting from his head and chin. Twicross makes deadly traps for nobles, merchants and criminal gangs seeking to protect their vaults from would-be thieves. Once his work is finished, he encourages his employer to test everything works properly with predictably bloody results. Zeno Meverel (see page 130) has put a price on Twicross's head after he tricked one of his lieutenants in the Golden Scimitars into decapitating himself.

## Cult of the Black Mother

The Cult of the Black Mother is a secret religious sect dating back to the founding of Dhak Janjua that purportedly worships Kali, the dark Sampuran goddess of creation and destruction. Its members include lowly initiates, thuggee assassins and priestesses of the goddess; only the priestesses know the true identity of the Black Mother.

During the early rule of Vrishabha, worship of Kali was driven underground by the rakshasa rajah, who viewed the deity's large following as a threat to his power over the city. Kali's priesthood had been infiltrated already by the kuldani, shapechanging serpentfolk cultists of the snake goddess Manasangra, and once the temples of the Black Mother were razed and her worship outlawed, they seized complete control. The serpentfolk had brought a large black leathery egg with them to Dhak Janjua, given to them by the High Priestess of Manasangra in their homeland, which supposedly contained the living incarnation of their goddess. In a hidden temple they built deep beneath the city, the serpentfolk led Kali's

worshippers in blood-soaked ceremonies honouring the "Black Mother", while standing guard over the holy egg, which they had secreted in a special sanctum behind the goddess's statue.

When Srivatsa slew Vrishabha and ended the rajah's reign, the incarnation's egg hatched. In the centuries that followed, the hatchling grew into a naga of gargantuan size, with the face of a dark-skinned Sampuran woman, the hood of a cobra, and a body of sinuous black scaled coils wrapped with gold bands. The serpentfolk priestesses would make plentiful human sacrifices to the goddess, and in return the naga would whisper magical secrets to them, as well as advising on how they might insinuate themselves into the power structure of the city. In the decades following the death of Hulieman, serpentfolk cultists wormed their way into many important positions in the sultan's government. Then, everything changed. Corandias the Magnificent conquered Parsantium, and the sultan was blinded and sent into exile, along with many of his ministers, some





of them serpentfolk. The cult went into decline and the goddess's incarnation drifted into a torpor from which she has only awakened once – when Kalgroth Ironheart briefly ended the Bathuran Empire's hold on Parsantium.

Though short-lived, the awakening of the incarnation successfully revived the cult after centuries in the doldrums, and the serpentfolk are scheming again to grow their influence in the city and bring about the end of Bathuran rule. This time, however, things are harder as the rakshasas have also returned, seeking to bring their master back to power, and they already hold several key positions in the government. Taking a different tack, the cult has targeted the women of the royal family, initiating the Basileus's mother-in-law Ciceria into the priesthood and offering support to the Despoina herself in an attempt to bring her into the fold. The priesthood's other priority is to awaken their goddess and for this they need to offer her plenty of sacrifices. Female virgins are preferred and the cult has been using the Deul of the Black Mother (see page 101) to provide suitable subjects from its congregation; Chandrika selects some of the young noblewomen coming to the deul for this "special honour". The girls are taken down to the true Temple of the Black Mother (see page 122), drugged and kept prisoner until the time has come for them to be sacrificed. Brutal street killings by the thuggee are also performed in the goddess's honour, and the cult has been eager to rent them out as killers for hire to the Hidden Quarter gangs and thus generate more sacrifices. If the incarnation reawakens, it means that the cult has the goddess's favour and power over Parsantium is within their grasp.

There are three levels within the cult, known as coils. The Outer Coil comprises those who believe they are worshipping Kali, including most of the thuggee. These cultists attend ceremonies honouring the Black Mother at the Deul in the Temple Ward; some are noblewomen from the Imperial Quarter initiated into the cult by the witch Jagadamba (see page 113). The Inner Coil is for those who know the truth – that the Black Mother is actually Manasagra – and includes priestesses such as Chandrika and Jagadamba, as well as thuggee leaders like Jagadish. Ciceria has just entered the Inner Coil by

becoming a priestess of the Black Mother at a ceremony in the true Temple. The third level, the Hooded Coil, consists of the serpentfolk priestesses, charged with awakening the goddess's incarnation from her torpor.

The cult's powerful melshanti (high priestess) is named **Vishaka** (CE female serpentfolk cleric 15). In her human guise, she appears as a voluptuous Sampuran woman with long, dark hair and full lips, dressed in hooded green robes and a necklace made from the skulls of human children and halflings. In her natural form, she has iridescent green scales, yellow eyes and a flickering black tongue. Vishaka is over 400 years old and has lived patiently through difficult times for the cult, plotting quietly for centuries. She believes the time is now right to strike, and strike hard. Manasagra's altars must overflow with blood and the niches of the temple must be filled with the fresh skulls of the innocent. Only then will the goddess awaken.

## The Thuggee

The thuggee are an ancient order of robbers and assassins who serve the goddess Kali, killing their victims in her name and dedicating them to her as sacrifices. There are around 200 thuggee living and killing in the Old Quarter of Parsantium. Most have dual identities, working as longshoremen at the Old Docks, fishermen in Flotsam, or tavern keepers in the red-light district, although some are full-time temple guards at the Deul of the Black Mother. Each thuggee cell of around ten members has a leader who can quickly call upon his men when they are given the name of a target. Most of these leaders have been initiated into the Inner Coil of the Cult of the Black Mother; rank and file thuggee believe they are killing in the name of Kali.

When not carrying out the instructions of the cult's priestesses, the thuggee act as killers for hire, selling their services to anyone who will pay – the gangs of the Hidden Quarter are regular customers. Thuggee prefer to attack with surprise, sneaking up behind a victim and throwing a knotted cord or weighted handkerchief (called a rumal) around their neck, before pulling it tight and strangling them to death. If this surprise attack fails, they will attack openly with war picks and kukris.



Cold and calculating, **Jagadish** (CE male human rogue 5/assassin 3) is a thuggee cell leader, a deadly killer for hire, and a member of the cult's Inner Coil. A tall, hefty Sampuran, over six and a half feet tall, with a heavy beard and moustache, he typically wears a dark red tunic over his leather armour and wraps his hair in a black turban. He has a black skull symbol tattooed on his arm and a coiled snake inked at the base of his spine. Jagadish is an expert with his rumal (treat as a garotte) and, for a large man, is surprisingly stealthy. He wields a scimitar in melee and carries four throwing knives.

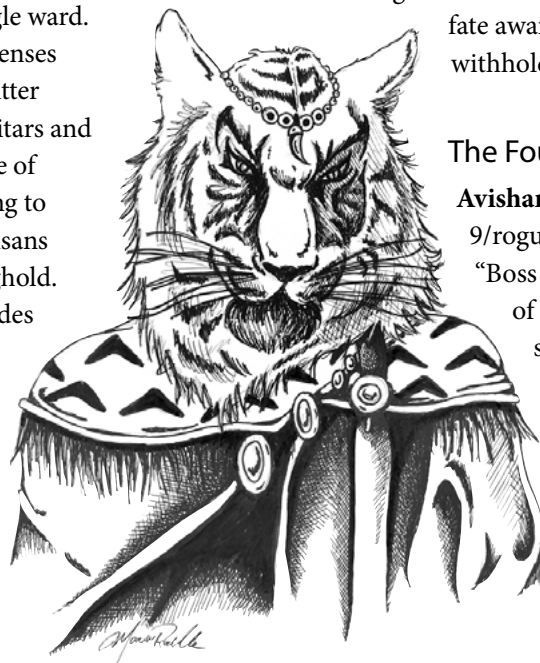
## Gangs of the Hidden Quarter

A dozen or so criminal gangs control the majority of organized crime in Parsantium, including theft, extortion, smuggling and the slave trade, as well as legal (but still morally dubious) activities such as gambling, selling drugs and prostitution; this section covers the most significant gangs and leaders. Most gangs are based either in the Old Quarter or beneath its streets in the tunnels of the Hidden Quarter, and pay regular tribute to Avishandu, the “Boss of All Bosses”. Although they ultimately answer to the Fourth Tribune, each gang operates independently and controls its own territory, usually within a single ward. Turf wars can occur when a gang senses weakness in a rival – the current bitter struggle between the Golden Scimitars and the Lamplighters is a good example of this, where the Scimitars are seeking to expand their territory into the Artisans Ward from their Poor Ward stronghold. Avishandu does not usually take sides in these disputes, unless the steady flow of tributes into his coffers is put at risk.

PC rogues and fighters might want to join one of the criminal gangs or may already belong to one (see the Criminal Past background on page 20). Gang bosses are always on the

lookout for anyone who can demonstrate earning potential for the organization, either as a capable thief or fearsome enforcer. If a PC expresses an interest in joining the gang, she will need to pass an initiation test – depending on the type of organization, this could mean knee-capping someone who hasn't kept up with their protection payments, or breaking into a jewellery shop and making off with the stock and takings. After the test, the prospective member will be questioned by the gang leader or one of his lieutenants to make sure that she isn't a Watch informer or plant – magic such as *zone of truth* or *discern lies* will be used in this interview if the gang has a member who can cast the necessary spell. Once admitted, the PC is expected to pay the gang weekly dues equal to 15% of her criminal earnings; in exchange, she can use gang facilities and contacts, is able to call upon the rest of the gang for support, and may be asked to undertake special, often very lucrative, missions.

Not every thief in Parsantium belongs to a gang – it is possible to work independently or as part of a small crew in exchange for a weekly tribute of 10% of earnings. Freelance thieves who operate in gang territory without paying their dues are likely to end up floating face down in the Dolphin Strait. The same fate awaits those rogues who get caught withholding dues after a big score.



## The Fourth Tribune

**Avishandu** (LE male rakshasa sorcerer 9/rogue 4) is a powerful rakshasa, the “Boss of All Bosses” or Fourth Tribune of the Hidden Quarter. From his secret headquarters in the Bone Catacombs beneath the Forest of the Dead, he controls the city's criminal gangs, presiding over any necessary strategic decisions, resolving disputes and taking a sizeable cut of the profits. Avishandu's power base is firmly in the Old Quarter – he currently



has little influence in the Mercantile and Imperial quarters, but plans to address this in the future if he can do so without coming into conflict with the Imperial Quarter tribune, Aurius Kalothese (see page 150).

Only the leaders of the biggest gangs have actually met Avishandu, and none of them knows what he really looks like or even that he is a rakshasa. His natural form is that of a sleek, white tiger-headed humanoid with bright blue eyes, striking markings and impressive whiskers. His preferred human guise is that of a handsome Aqhrani merchant in a jewelled black turban and purple silk djellaba, sitting on a golden throne and surrounded by beautiful women. He has an impeccably neat moustache and beard, his eyes are the same piercing blue, and he often has a cruel smile playing across his face.

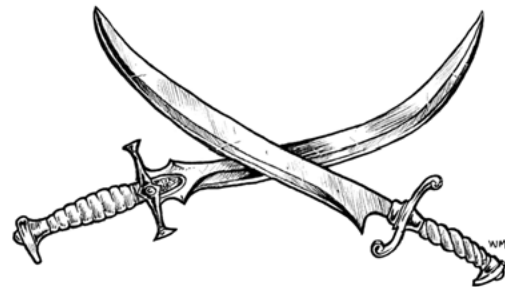
Avishandu is cunning, absolutely ruthless and phenomenally patient – it has taken him over ten years to build up his current power base. Devoted to his master Vrishabha, he is playing the long game, gradually gathering more power in Parsantium while aiding in the search for the means to set the rajah free. He has some concerns about the new Old Quarter tribune Murad al-Rumi and his plans to tackle the criminal gangs – for now, he has placed a spy in the tribune's household to gather more intelligence. The Fourth Tribune is feared and treated with great respect by the gang leaders, some of whom have witnessed first-hand how he deals with those who have displeased him. They watched Darias Oakensap, leader of the Backalley Boys, die in terror, his face wracked with pain, at a mere gesture from the rakshasa lord after Oakensap failed to meet his tribute target.

Avishandu's right-hand man is **Heinsoo** (LE male rakshasa assassin 10), a deadly assassin who quickly and efficiently eliminates anyone who interferes with the Fourth Tribune's plans. Heinsoo is currently tracking down a number of obscure books and scrolls that may contain information vital to freeing Vrishabha. He uses a range of different identities while going about his secret work for Avishandu but often favours appearing as a red-headed female dwarven warrior or a bald male Tiangaon monk. In his natural form he has the head of a black leopard.

As well as Heinsoo, Avishandu can call upon several other rakshasas and numerous human and gnoll enforcers based in his headquarters in the Bone Catacombs. If he needs reinforcements or disposable foot soldiers, he will order the leaders of the Golden Scimitars and the other gangs to supply them.

### Golden Scimitars

The Golden Scimitars are the most powerful of the Hidden Quarter criminal organizations, specializing in extortion, gambling and prostitution. They own many of the inns, taverns, brothels and gambling houses in the Old Quarter's Poor Ward, and regularly send round their enforcers to demand protection money from local businesses. Thanks to a series of hefty bribes and more than a few threats, the gang have the Poor Ward's Watch Captain, Attalus, in their pocket, allowing them to go about their activities unchallenged by the forces of law and order.



There are more than 150 members of the Golden Scimitars, mostly human and gnoll enforcers, as well as twice that number of independent burglars, muggers and beggars who pay dues to the guild. Upon passing their initiation test, all full members are tattooed with two crossed scimitars on their upper arms. Gang members add a small skull tattoo beneath the scimitars for each man they've killed after joining the group; some have arms completely covered in skulls. The gang's base is a secret hideout below the Winking Vixen brothel (see page 119).

The leader of the Golden Scimitars is **Zeno Meverel** (LE human male rogue 12), the owner of the Winking Vixen, the Floating Palace (see page 106) and a dozen or



so other brothels, taverns and gambling joints in the red-light district of the Poor Ward. Zeno is in his late twenties and unremarkable in appearance: an olive-skinned Bathuran, he has short, light brown hair, blue eyes, an instantly forgettable face, and wears no jewellery. Early in his career, Zeno owned a merchant business in the Caravans Ward, which failed after several of his caravans were robbed, forcing him to start again, this time as a brothel keeper in the less salubrious surroundings of the Poor Ward. He did better in his second line of work, becoming rich and successful by operating outside the law. Zeno holds legitimate businessmen in contempt, but still likes to masquerade as one, spending time in his many establishments, glad handing his wealthy guests and acting as the perfect host. Behind closed doors, he is both greedy and cruel, swiftly and violently dealing with anyone who gets in his way. As he doesn't like to get his soft hands dirty, Zeno will usually have his chief lieutenant, the sadistic, scarred Aqhrani warrior **Vadim** (NE human male fighter 11) deal out any physical chastisements, while he watches, grinning with pleasure. Zeno is unwaveringly loyal to Avishandu, mostly out of fear, and is always ready to put the Golden Scimitars at the Fourth Tribune's disposal. Recently, this has meant stealing some esoteric books and tomes on behalf of Heinsoo (see page 130) – Zeno knows better than to ask why they are needed.

With a firm grip established on the Poor Ward, Zeno and the Scimitars are seeking to expand their influence into the neighbouring Artisans Ward, currently the territory of the weaker Lamplighters. So far, they have established an alliance with the powerful Most Excellent Order of Stonemasons against their Lamplighter-backed enemies, the Guild of Potters and Tilemakers, and have started demanding protection money from shops, taverns and coffee houses such as the Golden Bean Tree (see page 98). The gang is eager to infiltrate two more influential trade guilds and has placed men on the waiting staff at the White Palm (see page 99) and other taverns to spy on the guildmasters and important locals who eat and drink there.

## Dock Ward Bosses

Six "Bosses" run crime in the Dock Ward. Rather than presiding over a particular neighbourhood, each of these petty crime lords controls a different type of criminal activity; many also own run-down slum tenements which they rent out to the desperately poor. The best-known of the bosses is Orloch Scragmane (see page 112), slaver and leader of the Mangy Curs. The other five bosses are detailed below.

**Elias Wang** (NE male human sorcerer 5) heads up the Dockside Crew, a gang involved in smuggling, slavery and kidnapping, based in an old fishery near Flotsam. The Boss of Smugglers is a sinister sorcerer of mixed Bathuran and Tiangaon ancestry; the owner of an impressive Fu Manchu moustache, he wears red and gold Tiangaon robes and a round black hat. Not entirely sane, when under attack he will shriek infernal curses at his enemies in a high-pitched voice while brandishing his skull-topped rod. Wang is protected by **Lo Chung** (LE male human samurai 3), his taciturn Tiangaon bodyguard, an ageing but capable swordsman with a greying ponytail and moustache, clad in black leather armour and wielding a fine longsword with a gold lung dragon hilt. The Dockside Crew work with the boats that smuggle goods into Parsantium's Old Docks – sometimes cargo arrives by ship in the middle of the night, but at other times the smuggling takes place in broad daylight with gems and other small valuables hidden inside recently caught fish. Wang's men unload the boats and transport the goods to their fishery HQ to be sold on to corrupt merchants. Occasionally, the rendezvous is with a pirate ship instead, bringing slaves to be sold by Orloch Scragmane in the Hidden Quarter's market. The Crew often add to the inventory by kidnapping a few drunken sailors, fishermen and dock workers to sell on to the gnoll slaver at the same time.

**Sisethros Clovenhoof** (CE male tiefling fighter 4/rogue 3) is the Boss of Robbers. A brutish tiefling with red skin, two ram-like horns and a pair of cloven hooves, Sisethros is not to be trifled with – he has a foul temper and is prone to lashing out at his lackeys if



they don't bring him enough cash each week. His men are mostly human thugs and muggers, who prowl the streets of the Dock Ward day and night, looking for people they can bash over the head with their clubs and deprive of their purses, jewellery and other valuables. Sisethros enjoys listening to his men swap tales of their robberies, particularly if the victim put up a fight and blood was spilled.

**Meera Nimblefingers** (N female halfling rogue 8) is the Boss of Beggars and Pickpockets. A brown-skinned halfling with a pointy nose and shoulder-length dark brown hair, Meera likes to wear beggar's rags, smear dirt on her face, and go out on the streets herself each day to see how much money she can earn by cutting purses and begging. After dusk, the boys, girls and older folk that work for her bring their takings to an old building located below the streets in the Hidden Quarter, where the whole gang meets and eats supper together. Any of her minions who earned more than Meera that day are praised and get a proper meal and wine; those who earned less are ridiculed and have to make do with chapatis and small beer.

**Hemendu** (LE male human rogue 6) is the Boss of Thieves. A handsome young Sampuran man with a well-kept beard and an arm scarred after his abortive attempt to burgle a fire wizard's tower a couple of years ago, Hemendu is cocky, boastful and daring, and expects the thieves in his gang to be the same. He encourages his men to sneak up and steal crates of goods from the quayside under the very noses of the merchants and longshoremen, or to empty an entire warehouse in a single night. Only a few of his crew are talented enough to win Hemendu's respect; the rest are a constant source of disappointment. He became a Boss by cutting the throat of the previous incumbent while he slept and is paranoid that something similar will happen to him; he keeps four huge (and very loyal) gnoll bodyguards with him at all times.

**Raenquis Silvertongue** (NE male half-elf rogue 4/bard 2) is the Boss of Con Artists and Racketeers. A half-elf with light brown skin, green eyes and a showy dress sense, Raenquis usually wears a turban, a brightly

coloured silk shirt, billowing trousers and several large gold hoop earrings. Full of swagger, the Boss can charm his way out of most difficult situations with his smooth-talking, and is a master conman who once reputedly sold Srivatsa's Bridge to a Tiangaon merchant for a small fortune. Around a quarter of his crew are grifters, relieving the unwary of their gold through a mixture of short cons such as change raising or pigeon drops; the others are racketeers, collecting regular protection money from local businesses.

### Eight Scorpions

The Eight Scorpions are the Parsantine branch of a powerful criminal tong that controls organized crime in the major cities of Tiangao. Their activities in Parsantium don't extend much beyond Tiangao Town, where they are based – the tong's headquarters are above the Lucky Fox Restaurant on Tranquil Water Street. The gang runs several gambling joints in the basements of shops and inns in the district and they demand protection money from local businesses. More significantly, the Eight Scorpions control the trade in white lotus dust, an addictive hallucinogenic drug they smuggle into the city in caravans arriving via the Silk Road. Quantities of the dust are supplied to drug dealers in the Imperial Quarter, who sell it on to students at the Scholastica – white lotus dust is particularly popular with intellectuals, poets and musicians for the inspiration its hallucinations can sometimes provide. Some also goes to the Golden Scimitars, who sell it on the streets of the Poor Ward, and the rest ends up in the lotus dens of Tiangao Town, which are owned by the tong. In these establishments customers can buy the dust along with the paraphernalia required to smoke it – long bamboo pipes and oil lamps to vaporize the drug. Higher-end lotus dens offer luxurious surroundings, where smokers are tended to by beautiful young serving girls, but there are scruffy, basic places too for the less well-off users. Whatever the quality of the establishment, smokers of the drug feel a sense of well-being and warmth wash over them, accompanied by pleasant



hallucinations – as if in a lovely waking dream they don't ever want to leave. Smoking pure white lotus dust is highly addictive, ensuring a steady stream of income for the Scorpions as addicts return again and again. Since the drug is expensive – a visit to a lotus den costs between 10 gp and 25 gp – many Tiangaons eventually turn to crime to feed their habit.

The leader of the Eight Scorpions, Shen Fu (see page 104), is looking to open one or two lotus dens in the Artisans Ward, which abounds with potential artist and poet customers. Such expansion is likely to bring the tong into conflict with both the Golden Scimitars and the Lamplighters and will almost certainly prompt intervention from Avishandu, who may well decide Parsantium is better off without their presence.

Members of the Eight Scorpions wear elaborate tattoos for identification, which also indicate rank within the tong. The most junior members have a small tattoo on one arm; those of the highest rank have tattoos covering both arms, back and chest. Any tong members that displease Shen Fu lose one or both little fingers to his knife. Some Eight Scorpions members are capable martial artists and fight unarmed; others use katanas, butterfly swords or nunchaku in combat.

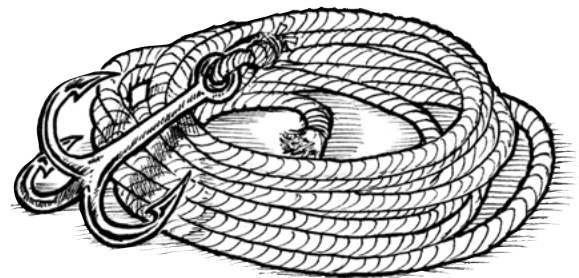
### Felonious Larcenists

When crates of valuable spices or coffers of lapis lazuli and pearls go missing from a well-guarded caravanserai or a secure vault beneath a merchant's shop in the Caravans Ward, or jewellery is stolen from the dressing table of a wealthy Garden Ward lady while she's in her bath, it is likely to be the work of the Felonious Larcenists. This notorious thieves guild is renowned for carrying off the biggest and most daring burglaries in the Old Quarter, and probably in the whole of Parsantium, although Hemendu, Boss of Thieves, disputes this.

The Larcenists haven't always been a gang of master thieves. Ten years ago, they were the Sewer Rats, a small band of wererats and goblins based in the tunnels of the Hidden Quarter beneath the Caravans Ward, who would sneak out of the sewers at night, climb over

the walls of the caravanserais and steal from the rooms of sleeping guests. The pickings were fairly slim but it was too difficult to break into the lock-ups where the trade goods were stored so they didn't bother trying. One night, one of their sleeping victims, a young Bathuran noble and caravan master, woke up. A scuffle ensued and the wererat rogue bit him before running off. The unfortunate noble, a man named **Vitalius** (CN male human wererat rogue 7/aristocrat 2), contracted lycanthropy, becoming a wererat at the next full moon a few days later. Swearing revenge on the wererat who infected him, Vitalius went into the Hidden Quarter with his caravan guards and tracked the lycanthrope down to the hideout she shared with the other Sewer Rats. When his men kicked open the door, Vitalius couldn't bring himself to give the order to strike down the thieves, a pathetic-looking bunch of children dressed in ill-fitting stolen clothes, and a few scrawny goblins. Taking pity on them, he decided to help rather than punish them. Perhaps if he could provide the Sewer Rats with some leadership and get them to hone their skills, the situation could also provide something of a business opportunity.

Under Vitalius's guidance, the Sewer Rats worked hard at their craft, learning how to pick the complex locks the wererat merchant brought them to practise on, how to ghost through the streets without being heard or seen, and how to climb a sheer wall and force a barred shutter. In time, they became the Felonious Larcenists, stealing valuable trade goods from under the noses of their owners, and burgling wealthy Garden Ward houses. Now Vitalius employs a network of informants so he can pick the best targets from the caravans arriving in Parsantium and identify the richest





Old Quarter residents. Once his gang have stolen the goods, Vitalius sells them to various merchants in the Mercantile Quarter who will buy with no questions asked. The wererat also makes sure that Avishandu is paid his tribute in full and on time to keep things running smoothly.

There are around 30 Felonious Larcenists in total: some are wererats, the rest mostly humans and halflings, although there are still three goblins in the gang and a couple of half-elves. The guild's hideout is beneath the Caravans Ward, in an ancient buried building accessed via a secret door in the sewer tunnels and protected by devious traps. The Larcenists mostly operate in the Caravans and Garden wards but Vitalius isn't afraid to venture into the Artisans and Temple wards if he has word of a really plum target. Joining the gang is difficult – prospective members need to pass a series of tests of their thieving skills, culminating in a daring burglary. Once admitted into the guild, the new thief is given a pearl earring to wear in her left ear as a sign of membership.

### Lamplighters

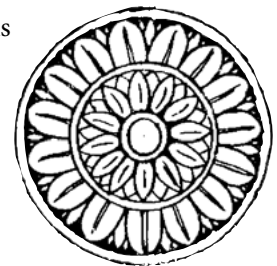
The Lamplighters were originally a group of private guards that guilds and craftsmen would hire to protect their premises and goods from thieves and to defend their members from rivals. Over the years, the Lamplighters gradually moved into racketeering, demanding protection money with menaces and smashing up the businesses of those who refused to pay them. The gang now controls theft and extortion in the Artisans Ward, providing protection services to many of the guilds based there, including the Guild of Potters and Tilemakers and the Guild of Carpenters and Joiners. Rival guilds that are not protected, such as the Most Excellent Order of Stonemasons, are targeted for theft and vandalism; this has driven the Stonemasons to ally themselves with the Golden Scimitars as the gang seeks to expand its activities into the Artisans Ward. A violent turf war between the two gangs is now inevitable, under cover of a guild dispute between the Stonemasons and Potters.

The Lamplighters are led by **Sevde Steeleyes** (N female human rogue 3/fighter 3), daughter of the gang's original founder. Sevde is half-Bathuran, half-Aqhrani and has light brown skin, dark hair and blue-grey eyes. She wears a chain shirt and black leather breeches and wields a pair of matching hand axes with red dragonskin hafts. Clever and devious, she knows the gang is in trouble but is determined to go down fighting. Finding some potential allies who share her feelings towards the Golden Scimitars is her top priority – this could be where the PCs come in.

Members of the Lamplighters are taught a series of complicated secret hand signals when they join the crew, used to identify genuine members and to communicate silently with each other while out on a job. The gang's headquarters are in the Hidden Quarter beneath the Artisans Ward. Several different underground chambers are being used in a random sequence to hinder the Golden Scimitars' attempts to mount an offensive.

### Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus

Based in a tall, slender tower – the Marjani Minar – in the Artisans Ward, the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus is the world's foremost arcanists' guild. The Order's foundation dates back to the conquest of Parsantium by Corandias the Magnificent, whose vizier Marcus Servius was



intrigued by the exotic Sampuran and Aqhrani magics used in battle against the Bathuran army by Parsantine sorcerers and wizards. Servius, a capable wizard himself, studied these unfamiliar traditions and set up the Order so that magical knowledge could be shared across cultural boundaries. The Order takes its name and its symbol from the rare blue lotus plant, renowned for its magical properties – it enhances the range and duration of an arcanist's spells when consumed – that still grows along the banks of the Dolphin Strait. Parsantium serves as the headquarters





of the whole Order, but there are smaller branches in several other major cities such as Rezana, Loranto and Qadisa (capital of the Caliphate of Aqhran).

The organization's goal is to advance magical knowledge through ongoing arcane research and the recovery and study of lost magical treasures, such as those of the fallen desert civilization of Khemit to the south. Recently, the Order has let it be known that it is interested in acquiring any spells, tomes and magical artefacts to be found beneath the city in the buried remains of Dhak Janjua to add to the library or its "Collection". Traditionally, the Esoteric Order stays out of city politics but will act to defend Parsantium when it is threatened – the City Watch habitually appeals to the Order for help when they are faced with a particularly dangerous monster or group of unruly adventurers.

The Esoteric Order is ruled by a council of four arcanists, each representing a different magical tradition. This is a lifetime role; on the death of a master, the other three will meet to choose his or her successor. Each master serves as Grand Master for two years in rotation.

The Master of Western Magic is **Sabir al-Falasifa** (N human male sorcerer 12/genie binder 5) from the Caliphate of Aqhran. The temperamental Sabir is highly adept at dealing with geniekind – it was he who imprisoned the efreeti pasha Ziyad in a great copper urn and added him to the Collection – and he is also an expert on alchemy and brass automatons. Sabir has light brown skin, a fine waxed moustache and immaculate mouche, and wears a white and purple striped turban fastened with a ruby brooch. He is next in line to be Grand Master and is champing at the bit; the other three Masters are somewhat fearful of what he might do when he takes charge.

The Master of Northern Magic is **Calahir** (CG male elf wizard 18), a high elf arcanist from the city of Charouse in the Sunset Lands. Over 150 years old, Calahir is a wise, thoughtful mage, specializing in divination and enchantment spells. He does not allow his emotions to get in the way of rational argument and often acts as the voice of reason on the council. Calahir has long silver hair, worn loose, and bright violet eyes.

The Master of Eastern Magic is **Meiying** (NG female bamboo spirit wizard 17), an elemental mage from Tiangao and the Order's leading authority on elemental magic, including the lesser known arcane elements of wood and void. Serene and gentle, she believes magic can do much to bring joy and goodness into the world and often finds herself in disagreement with Sabir. Bamboo spirits are the offspring of a human and one of the thousands of spirits that inhabit the trees, rocks and rivers of Tiangao. Like many of her race, Meiying is slender and tall, with a golden brown complexion, deep set hazel eyes, and green hair woven with flowers.

The Master of Southern Magic and current Grand Master of the Esoteric Order is **Tapasranjan** (LG male vanara sorcerer 19), a superlative practitioner of the magic of the mind. Tapasranjan is just over five feet tall and his body is covered in snow white fur; he rarely sits on his Master's chair, preferring to float in the air in the lotus position instead. The Sampuran Grand Master is extremely intelligent, honest, and very direct, cutting straight to the heart of any argument. He hates bullying and oppression and recently has been speaking out about the prejudice faced by the citizens of the Old Quarter and the worsening division between the two halves of the city.





**Arridaeus**, the Basileus's vizier (see page 75), is also a member of the Order but does not participate in guild politics and rarely visits the tower. He is, however, an old friend of Calahir, and the two wizards frequently discuss magical matters and current events in the city over a glass of wine at the elf's home in Cedar Park.

Membership of the Order is open to arcane spellcasters of 5th level and above and costs 1,000 gp per year. To join, the prospective member must donate a scroll of an obscure spell or an unusual magic item to the Order. Members gain access to the Order's library (see page 98) and laboratory facilities for the purposes of research and learning new spells, can make use of the summoning chambers, common rooms and bars in the Marjani Minar, and are also able to purchase magical items in the tower's shops (20% below market price). In addition, members' apprentices (see page 19 for the relevant PC background) are allowed to use the library and other facilities in the Marjani Minar for the duration of their apprenticeship. There are around 300 members of the Order living in Parsantium at any one time – humans make up the majority but there are significant numbers of elves, half-elves, gnomes and genasi too, and nearly every race is represented.

It's possible, but not easy, to get thrown out of the Order. Necromancy and demonology are capital crimes if practiced within the city, but since the Order is dedicated to the advancement of magical knowledge, studying these schools of magic is considered perfectly acceptable. What it does not tolerate is the withholding of arcane lore from the Order; the last person to do this, the arrogant and self-centred Aqhrani mage Najib al-Mawli, was expelled from the organization three years ago and subsequently barred from the Drake's Rest and the Glowing Orb too.

## Fellowship of Venturers Bold

With around 250 active members, the Fellowship of Venturers Bold is Parsantium's adventurers' guild. Founded 20 years ago, this organization exists to provide assistance and employment opportunities to

its members, as well as a place for them to meet up and exchange information. Joining the Fellowship requires sponsorship by two members in good standing in the guild – one to propose, the other to second. Annual dues are 15 gp per year and allow the member access to the guildhall, voting rights in the annual election for president, and a 10% discount on mundane gear at The Compleat Adventurer, Jax's Wilderness Outfitters and Glorious Garments in the markets of the Mercantile Quarter (see page 80).

The guildhall is situated on a quiet backstreet in the northernmost mahalla of the Caravans Ward. Here, members can relax in the shady courtyard with a drink from the well-stocked bar, chat to other adventuring groups and swap stories of derring-do. This is a good place to hire additional muscle, an extra spellslinger or just a fresh torchbearer for an upcoming adventure, and those looking for a new challenge can often find something among the notices posted on the "Situations Vacant" board. The Fellowship encourages its members to submit maps following any expeditions into the Hidden Quarter, showing where they went and what they found there for the benefit of other members. Although these maps are often contradictory, inaccurate, or their details obscured by blood splatters, studying the many documents pinned to the walls in the Great Hall before a Hidden Quarter expedition is a worthwhile exercise: 1d4 hours study grants a +2 bonus to Knowledge (dungeoneering) checks and can provide useful clues. Finally, the guildhall provides comfortable accommodation to its members at 5 sp per night.

**Sigurd Rasmusson** (LN male human fighter 7) is the current president of the Fellowship, recently re-elected for the fifth successive time. A grizzled Urskovian warrior and former member of the Axe-Bearing Guard, Sigurd is a veteran adventurer, happy to provide the benefit of his experience to any eager youngsters who will listen. He worked as a sellsword for a time after leaving the Basileus's service but upset a couple of influential patrons when he walked out on missions involving attacks on innocent folk. These patrons, one noble and one gang leader, both bear grudges against



him, and Sigurd has been picky about who he works for ever since. He knows a number of interesting places in the Hidden Quarter worth exploring, details of which he is happy to share if befriended over a few drinks. The petrified form of a snake-tailed medusa he battled and turned to stone using a mirrored shield is on display at the centre of the guildhall's courtyard.

## Fighting Orders

With warlike orcs, hobgoblins, gnolls and centaurs on Parsantium's doorstep, and a relatively small standing army, it isn't surprising that the city hosts a number of knightly orders and fighting brotherhoods. The four most important groups are detailed in this section, but there are also several mercenary bands, large and small, based in the city and available for hire by those in need of extra protection.

### Axe-Bearing Guard

The Axe-Bearing Guard is the name given to the Basileus's elite personal bodyguard, also known as "the Company". Originally northern mercenaries from Urskovia, the Axe-Bearing Guard have served the Basileus of Parsantium for a century, dating back to the time of Corandias XVI the Stubborn. See page 19 for the Axe-Bearing Guard PC background.

Urskovians had served in the Parsantine army in prior centuries, but in the year of the Great Crusade, Corandias XVI was sent 2,000 warriors by Tsar Vladin of Urskovia to help him retake Parsantium from the humanoid hordes. The Urskovians, including a strong dwarven contingent, fought more fiercely and bravely than any other regiment in the battle to liberate the city. Once Parsantium was safely in his hands, the victorious Corandias offered the Urskovian troops the opportunity to stay on as his elite imperial bodyguards. In exchange for an oath sworn in Martek's name to defend the Basileus and the royal family with their lives, they would be paid handsomely and take up residence in the Great Palace. Nearly all the surviving Urskovians accepted the offer and swore

the oath. Calling themselves the Axe-Bearing Guard after the enormous two-handed weapons they wielded in combat, these warriors ferociously defended the Basileus in battle from that day on, taking part in many great skirmishes with hobgoblin and orc raiders in the years following.

The Axe-Bearing Guard is the best-paid military force in the lands of the former Bathuran Empire – in fact, it is so well paid that membership has to be purchased by those wanting to join; the current initiation fee is 150 gp. Not only are the wages good, but members of the Guard are also paid bonuses each year at the time of the Victory Festival and upon the accession of a new basileus, and are given a share in the booty from any military campaigns. These generous terms of employment have brought more mercenaries from Urskovia and other lands to the north and west of Parsantium to join the Axe-Bearing Guard, with the aim of returning home wealthy once their term of service was finished.

Considered completely incorruptible, the Guard are renowned for their unswerving loyalty to the Basileus, an unusual phenomenon in a society as riddled with intrigue as Parsantium, but they regard their duty to protect the Imperial Person as a holy pledge which they must keep inviolate. Having said that, it is worth remembering the oath the Guard swear is to the office of the Basileus itself and not to any one individual. When Tiberius III poisoned his cousin the Basileus Florian IV and his despoina at a banquet in 1463 and sat on the imperial throne, the Guard immediately swore loyalty to the new Basileus. If Florian IV had still been alive, they would have defended him with their lives, but there was no reason to avenge his unfortunate death once he had passed on.

The Guard are fiercely proud of their martial traditions. Obsessed with the glories of ancient Bathura, in his reign Tiberius III sought to impose a traditional weapon on the Guard, a fearsome scythe-like weapon called the rhomphaia. The Guard responded by simply renaming their Urskovian greataxes as "rhomphaia", meeting the letter if not the spirit of Tiberius's proclamation.



The humans and dwarves of the Guard are barracked in the Great Palace. They wear a uniform of red silk tunics and blue cloaks and bear gilded long axes. These axes are man-high (or dwarf-high), single-bitted, with hafts of oak, and are terrifying weapons to face in battle. There are skilled swordsmen and archers within the Guard too. In battle, the Guard are usually held in reserve for critical moments when their appearance will turn the tide of the fighting, or else used in the thick of the combat where the fighting is at its fiercest. They ride into the fray on horseback, but do all their fighting on foot – long axes do not make good cavalry weapons – and attack with reckless ferocity, not seeming to notice their wounds.

In recent years, the regular Parsantine army has been able to take care of any humanoid raids without the Basileus needing to leave his palace, so the Axe-Bearing Guard has seen little military action. Instead, the Guard's duties to protect the Basileus and the royal family revolve around guarding doors and audience chambers in the Great Palace, accompanying the Basileus to festivals, the theatre and the Hippodrome, and keeping the crowds in line when the royal family makes its weekly trip to the Holy Basilica of Helion. The Axe-Bearing Guard also has important ceremonial duties to perform during the crowning of a new basileus or basilea, during imperial weddings, and at the funerals of rulers, but these events are few and far between.

The commander of the Guard is known as the Akolythos – the position is currently held by **Hroaldr Karlsson** (NG male human fighter 8), a towering blond giant with a huge beard, piercing blue eyes, and an inability to speak quietly. Hroaldr walks around the Great Palace, his voice bellowing out instructions to his guardsmen to ensure they are all standing bolt upright at their posts, with eyes front. He is worried that the Guard won't fight as well as it should,



having gone soft sitting around the Palace, so has been conducting frequent and very rigorous training sessions. Since the Guard is over 300 strong and it doesn't take that many men to protect the Basileus, the Akolythos has taken to posting small bands of guards alongside the army in the watchtowers on the frontiers of Parsantium's territory where they might actually see some fighting.

### Crusading Brothers of the Sword

The Crusading Brothers of the Sword were once a fighting order of knights dedicated to the war god Martek and the defence of the civilized lands from evil humanoids; nowadays, the order has become little more than a mercenary band with low moral standards that carries out acts of piracy to keep its coffers full. The society was founded in Rezana around 200 years ago by a devout paladin of Martek and initially relied on the support of the church and on charitable donations for its funding. As orc and hobgoblin incursions into the lands of the Bathuran Empire grew more frequent, road travel became increasingly unsafe, so the order offered the services of its knights as protectors for travellers along the Via Bathura. Merchants came to rely on the protection afforded by the Crusading Brothers and the order grew in size and wealth. When Corandias XVI the Stubborn announced the Great Crusade to free Parsantium from the hobgoblin infidels, the Crusading Brothers of the Sword were one of the first fighting orders to sign up. In exchange for their loyal service in retaking the city, the Basileus granted the order the right to establish a chapter in Parsantium; they built a chapter house near the West Gate in the Grand Ward.

In recent years, with the advent of relative peace in the region, the order has fallen on hard times – the Parsantine army hasn't needed to call on the Crusading Brothers for additional support, and although there have been some mercenary contracts from merchants and nobles, these have not been very lucrative. To balance the books, the order has abandoned its knightly ideals and has taken to attacking "enemy" merchant



ships from the Caliphate of Aqhran, and sometimes even those sailing from Loranto to Parsantium, from a hidden island base in the Corsairs' Sea. Cargoes and treasure are seized, the ships are sunk, and everyone on board is put to the sword to ensure the order's bloodthirsty secret is kept safe. It's only a matter of time before the game is up, though: wealthy merchants who have lost ships have appealed to the Basileus to intervene and the Parsantine navy is now patrolling the waters in search of the mysterious attackers. The Crusading Brothers' acts of piracy will soon bring them into conflict with their erstwhile allies in the Great Crusade, the Platinum Knights of Themicia, who have sworn an oath to keep the Corsairs' Sea safe for merchant shipping. The order would relish an armed confrontation with the Platinum Knights – the fact they have flourished since the Great Crusade while the Brothers have struggled is a source of much resentment.

The order has around 75 knights based in its Grand Ward chapter house and a further 100 at sea on its two galleys. Members of the order are knights (paladins and fighters), disciples (ship's crew and rank and file infantry) or chaplains (clerics); all wear pure white cloaks and carry shields bearing a flaming sword *gules* (red) on a field *argent* (white). Joining the Crusading Brothers of the Sword involves an esoteric initiation ceremony held in the chapter house at midnight, in which the prospective knight must swear a number of oaths of loyalty to his brethren and to Martek.

The Grand Master of the Crusading Brothers is **Epiphania** (LE female human ex-paladin 9), the Bathuran knight who set the order on its current course. Epiphania supposedly prayed to Martek for guidance for 12 hours before announcing the Crusading Brothers of the Sword now considered the ships of other nations to be fair game. What she hasn't revealed to anyone is that she has since lost her powers as a paladin and the ability to cast divine spells. Epiphania is in her early thirties, tall and muscular, with short-cropped blond hair and a careworn face. She liberally sprinkles both military jargon and vulgar nautical metaphors into any conversation, no matter who the audience.

## Janissaries

The Janissaries date back to Ishaq al-Tayyib, serving as the personal “door guards” of the first Aqhrani Sultan of Parsantium. At first only wood elf youths from the Feyshore Forest were recruited to the order – not only for their skill with the bow, but also for their perceived lack of interest in Parsantine palace politics. It was hoped this would facilitate the Janissaries' personal loyalty to the sultan. Recruits were encouraged to pursue interests in the law, religion, music and literature, as well as continuing intense military training. Fully trained Janissaries would live under a strict code of discipline in which the corps was considered their home and family, and the sultan their father. Their role was to protect both the sultan's person and the royal throne from harm; they would fight in battle alongside their ruler, and in peacetime would serve as palace guards, as well as supporting the City Watch and acting as fire fighters when called upon.

After the Bathuran conquest of Parsantium, the Janissaries continued to serve the ruler of the city, now the Basileus, as his personal guard. Over time, the well-educated and highly trained corps became more powerful in the palace administration and their ambition grew accordingly. Following the death of Corandias the Magnificent and the subsequent break-up of the Bathuran Empire, the order began to acquire a reputation for insubordination, and there were several revolts by the Janissaries against attempts to curtail their status and influence over their own remuneration. Things got worse during the Wars of the Successors and over the following three centuries the Janissaries supported a number of coups, turning on the Basileus they were sworn to protect to put one pretender or another on the throne. Eventually, Florian I dissolved the order, and it wasn't until the period following the Great Crusade that it was reborn as the palace guard of the Tribune of the Old Quarter.

Although entry to the corps has been opened to all races, there are now fewer than a hundred Janissaries. However, the old traditions of discipline and schooling are in place once more to ensure that the “door guards”



regain the renown they once had. The selection criteria are very strict, but the order offers an attractive alternative to becoming a eunuch and entering the Bureaucracy for young boys in the Old Quarter.

Janissaries are armed with sophisticated composite bows and scimitars, and wear unique uniforms comprising tall, white-plumed conical helmets, scale mail armour, and green tabards bearing the leaping horse and crescent moon symbol of Parsantium in white. The helmets have a small spoon clipped to the side, which symbolizes the brotherhood shared between members of the order who eat, sleep, fight and die together. The men are permitted to grow moustaches, but only officers may grow beards – a fact that has discouraged dwarves from applying. The Janissaries once marched into battle to rousing music played on drums, trumpets and cymbals, inspiring them to fight bravely and striking fear into the hearts of their enemies; these days, musicianship is still part of their training and battle music plays a ceremonial role. Members of the order are adept in all aspects of siege engineering, as well as uses of the alchemical arts in warfare.

The leader of the Janissaries is a male high elf named **Dhoasruil Cyredrylth** (NG male elf fighter 6/duelist 4), a talented swordsman who stayed on in Parsantium after fighting in the Great Crusade nearly a century ago. The Tribune of the Old Quarter needed someone to lead the Janissaries and Dhoasruil, with his deep-felt philosophy that grace, skill and learning are the keys to becoming a great warrior, seemed to fit the bill. The elf has long blond hair which he wears loose, bright emerald eyes, and a duelling scar on his left cheek; he still appears young and spritely, despite being over 200 years old. Dhoasruil's Janissaries exemplify the original ideals of the sultan's door guards, standing firm against the tribune's enemies.

### Platinum Knights of Themicia

The Platinum Knights of Themicia is a fighting order of knights and paladins acting as the “sword and shield” of the Church of Themicia, sworn to protect the god's clerics and followers from harm, and to mete out

justice to evildoers. Throughout the Sunset Lands, the Knights build chapter houses in cities and towns; from these bases, they defend the local population from orcs, goblins and other warlike humanoids. Many of the order's human members are the devout younger sons of nobility, but dragonkin also join in large numbers, nearly all of them paladins.

**Grand Master Baragarr** (LG male dragonkin paladin 16) is the leader of the Platinum Knights; a female adult silver dragon named Theodoracia is his companion and mount. He directs the order's activities from its headquarters in a cloud fortress hovering several thousand feet above the island of Cervenna, in the Corsairs' Sea to the southwest of Parsantium. The island was granted to the Knights by the Bathuran Emperor Iosephus 300 years ago for saving Rezana, the Empire's capital, from a savage orcish attack. Although the fortress appears fixed in the same position over the island, it is rumoured that the castle can move through the skies, allowing it to fly into battle and drop its elite warriors into the action from above. Baragarr's priorities are to keep the Corsairs' Sea safe for merchant traffic by dealing with piracy, and to protect the remnants of the Bathuran Empire from humanoid and giant attacks. The first objective will soon bring the Platinum Knights into conflict with another knightly order, the Crusading Brothers of the Sword (see page 138), who have taken to attacking both Aqhrani and Lorantine ships en route to Parsantium.

One hundred years ago, the Platinum Knights helped Corandias XVI the Stubborn recapture Parsantium in the Great Crusade. Describing their great charge at the climax of the battle outside the city, the Basileus's daughter Anya said that the Platinum Knights “could have broken through the walls of Parsantium itself”. Following the victory, the order established in the city's Grand Ward a chapter house known as the Celestial Bastion (see page 70) and offered its support to the Basileus in the event of war, forming the core of Parsantium's Kataphraktoi allagion in open battle. The Knight-Commander of the Bastion is **Orthas**, a veteran of many battles against raiding humanoids; the high priestess of the Bastion's temple is **Ruthva**, a dragonkin.



To join the Platinum Knights, the prospective member must first serve as a squire to an existing knight for at least a year, carrying his shield and armour, tending his mount, bearing his standard, and carrying out various other duties in exchange for training in combat and in the Code of Themicia, the nine chivalric principles all Platinum Knights must adhere to. At the end of her training, if vouched for by her knight, the squire is admitted into the order at a ceremony in Themicia's temple where she is presented with a new sword in recognition of becoming a Platinum Knight. These swords are of masterwork quality and often have a dragon-shaped hilt made from gold or silver. New knights are assigned to a chapter house where they will be stationed, ready to be called upon to defend their host city or town. A small number choose instead to become Platinum Knights-Errant (see the PC background on page 22), free to wander the lands, taking up honourable and chivalric quests to fight evil, protect the innocent from harm, and mete out justice.

#### THE CODE OF THEMICIA

Protect the weak and the vulnerable  
Live and die with honour  
Fight for justice and welfare for all  
Punish the evildoer  
Respect and obey your superiors  
Guard the honour of your brethren and sistren  
Do battle bravely and fairly, eschewing trickery and deceit  
Always speak the truth  
Never leave a quest unfinished

#### Friendly Society of Half-Orcs

The lot of Parsantium's half-orcs is not to be envied – they live in shabby apartments in one of the poorest wards in the city and end up doing the unpleasant and badly paid jobs no one else will touch, such as tanning hides or slaughtering animals. Because life is tough, half-orcs often band together in close-knit groups so they can look out for each other. Many belong to the Friendly Society of Half-Orcs, a fellowship that looks after its members' interests and organizes social gatherings.

The society was founded 150 years ago by a compassionate half-orc named Mazzaruk. When a co-worker at the tannery where he was employed became too sick to work, Mazzaruk persuaded other fellow workers to club together and help pay the sick half-orc's rent until he recovered. Afterwards, Mazzaruk suggested setting up a formal arrangement where each worker would pay a small percentage of their wages each week as membership dues, and if they became sick they would receive an allowance to cover their financial obligations. The idea caught on and the society expanded to include half-orcs in other tanneries, then in the slaughterhouses, then other trades. Alongside the financial aspect of the society, members also meet socially, eating, drinking and singing songs together at weekly gatherings above the Red Wheel Tavern. Half-orcs share stories of the prejudice they have experienced, discuss conditions where they work, and chat about how their families are doing. Where a particular employer is identified as offering an unfair wage or otherwise treating his labourers poorly, the society's leaders will often pay him a visit to discuss the error of his ways,





threatening to advise all society members to walk out if improvements are not forthcoming. This doesn't always work but the society has forced at least one greedy tanner to increase wages after his entire workforce downed tools in the middle of scudding a large pile of hides that were needed urgently by a merchant.

The current High Chief Ruler of the Friendly Society is the formidable-looking **Zejevaga** (NG female half-orc commoner 3), who works as an undertaker. Nearly seven feet tall with greenish-grey skin, thick eyebrows and two prominent lower canine teeth, she has long black hair woven into beaded braids. As head of the society, Zejevaga has encouraged members who can read and write to teach the children and adults who can't, and regularly meets with local businessmen in the Poor Ward to lobby for better working conditions for society members. She is compassionate and kind, but also has a fearsome temper which she loses frequently when faced with bosses who won't listen to her. Zejevaga and the Society have recently come into conflict with the Golden Scimitars, who are trying to recruit strapping young half-orcs to act as gang enforcers by arguing that a life of crime is more lucrative than one of good, honest labour.

## Guilds

Most of the skilled trades in Parsantium are controlled by its guilds. These wealthy and influential organizations were founded around 200 years ago to champion the sale and distribution of the specific goods or services provided by their members, setting official prices and rates of pay, and establishing standards of quality. There is no requirement for members to adhere to guild prices, but they provide a useful guide which many end up following. Where the guild determines the quality of raw materials to be used in any work, it often purchases these materials in bulk for its members.

There are usually four ranks in each guild: apprentice, journeyman, master and guildmaster. All members of the guild proudly wear a badge denoting both the guild and their rank; some also insist their members dress in livery of a particular colour.

An apprentice will be taught the trade by a master for a period of between five and seven years in exchange for room and board. After the apprenticeship is concluded satisfactorily, the apprentice will be promoted to journeyman, entitled to practise the trade, either on his own or working for a new master in order to develop his skills, and to display a guild badge. Journeymen (see page 22 for the relevant PC background) earn a wage and must contribute part of their earnings to the guild as dues, usually around ten percent. After a period of no less than a year, a journeyman can seek full membership as a master, submitting his work to the guild for evaluation. If this is judged to be of sufficient quality, he is promoted to the rank of master and can apply for a loan from the guild to start up his own business, taking on his own apprentices and continuing to pay his dues. The guilds maintain a list of all members in good standing capable of carrying out their trade to a decent standard which is provided each month to the Department of Mercantile Affairs.

Guildmasters are elected from the masters annually and are entitled to a seat on the Senate (see page 27), where they argue vociferously against anything not of benefit to their guild. Quite often one guild's interests might bring it into conflict with other power groups, such as a rival guild, the government or the nobility.

Guilds also offer a place where members can meet and discuss business – the guildhall (see page 95 for several examples) – and often provide warehouses or other storage facilities for their members' use. In addition, they look after the best interests of their members, safeguarding them against fraud and theft and supporting retired members with a pension. Guilds protect their halls and other property by hiring private guards, often turning to Hidden Quarter gangs such as the Golden Scimitars and the Lamplighters. The frequent overlaps between the trades of Parsantium's guilds can lead to conflict, which all too quickly turns into violence. Street battles between the members of rival guilds such as the Stonemasons and Potters are common, as are arson, theft and sabotage.

Each guild is briefly described below. The Fellowship of Venturers Bold, the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus





and the thieves' guilds of the Hidden Quarter are described elsewhere in this chapter.

**Brotherhood of Merchants and Caravan Masters**

Based in the Mercantile Quarter, this is a relatively new guild that has yet to convince many traders that they need to give up a percentage of their profits to the organization.

**Chandlers' and Lampmakers' Guild** This guild is based in the Poor Ward and has a monopoly on the production of candles; there is an overlap with the Potters who make earthenware oil lamps and the Master Metalworkers who make brass and bronze ones.

**Coopers' and Wainwrights' Guild** This guild manufactures barrels, the wagons and carts used to transport them, and other large wooden objects, leading to friction with the Carpenters. Its guildhall is in the Artisans Ward and its members wear brown cloaks and blue caps.

**Fellowship of Bladesmiths and Armourers** Half the members of this guild are dwarves and its guildhall is situated in the Harbour Ward. The Fellowship designs and manufactures all kinds of weapons and armour, including axes, spears, bows, arrows and shields. Large orders from any one individual or group must be reported to the Department of Mercantile Affairs, who like to keep tabs on such things.

**Fellowship of Plumbers and Sewer Workers** Based in the builders' mahalla in the Artisans Ward, this guild builds, maintains and repairs water and sewage systems, including the city's water cisterns, public baths and sewer network. Unlike most guilds, many of its members are employed by the city government, working for the Department of Night Soil Management.

**Guild of Carpenters and Joiners** Also based in the Artisans Ward's builders' mahalla, the Carpenters control wood cutting, furniture making, joinery and other carpentry, and wear mustard yellow cloaks and felt caps. They hate the Coopers, who also work in wood, and employ the Lamplighters for protection against their rivals.

**Guild of Jewellers and Gemcutters** With a membership comprising humans, elves, dwarves and dragonkin, this guild has too much tension within its own ranks to worry about other guilds. Based in an Victory Ward guildhall, the Jewellers work with precious metals and gemstones.

**Guild of Master Tailors, Drapers and Glovers**

This large and powerful guild, based in the weavers' mahalla in the Artisans Ward, controls the manufacture of all kinds of clothing. Disputes often break out with the Leatherworkers over shoes and sandals, and with the Weavers over everything else.

**Guild of Ostlers, Saddlers and Farriers** From its guildhall in the Caravans Ward, this guild deals with the breeding, care and sale of horses, camels and other mounts, including exotic griffons and hippogriffs, as well as the manufacture of riding gear such as saddles, bridles and horseshoes.

**Guild of Potters and**

**Tilemakers** One of the most belligerent guilds in the Artisans Ward, the Potters employ the Lamplighters to fight for them against their arch-enemies, the Stonemasons. The Potters wear brown robes and caps and are led by the paranoid Grand Master Olybrius, who sees Masonic conspiracies everywhere. Their guildhall is the Blue House (see page 96).



**Guild of Weavers and Dyers** The Weavers are an old, proud guild, led by their stubborn Speaker, Bahram Peroz, who has been resisting overtures from the Golden Scimitars to protect them from their rivals in the Tailors. They are based in the Fonduq of Heavenly Fabrics (see page 95).

**Joyful Order of Harpers and Instrument Makers**

This small guild located on the Street of Sitar, in the artists' mahalla of the Artisans Ward, concerns itself with the playing of music and the production of musical instruments. Admission to the guild requires



an audition – craftsmen are expected to be decent musicians too. The order lives up to its name; its members share a love of music and don't get involved in the guild wars.

**League of Master Shipwrights** The members of this guild are expert in designing, constructing and outfitting all types of boats and ships, as well as the manufacture of ropes, sails and fishing nets. Their guildhall and shipyard are near the Royal Docks in the Harbour Ward.

**Leatherworkers', Tanners' and Cordwainers' Guild** Based in the Poor Ward, close to the tanneries, this guild controls the tanning and curing of hides and the manufacture of leather goods, including shoes, boots, belts, whips and waterskins.

**Lively Order of Entertainers, Jesters and Taverners** This large guild has a wide remit, supposedly controlling the entire entertainment and hospitality industry. In fact, serious musicians tend to join the Harpers and many tavern keepers join the Vintners, but no one really cares. Unlike most guilds, the members of the Entertainers are too busy making money to worry about who is or isn't part of the order. The Lively Order meets in the Taverners' Guildhall in the Artisans Ward (see page 96)

**Most Careful League of Glassblowers** This small guild based in the builders' mahalla has a monopoly on the production of glass objects, including wine bottles, potion vials, glass windows and alembics for alchemical experiments. They wear pale green robes.

**Most Excellent Order of Stonemasons** This powerful and secretive guild is based in the grandiose Masonic Hall in the Artisans Ward and has a large dwarven contingent among its members. The Stonemasons wear grey robes and have allied themselves with the Golden Scimitars against their enemies, the Potters. **Grand Master Agapetus** (N male human expert 9) leads the Stonemasons and has not spoken to Olybrius of the Potters following a bitter row over a spilled pint of beer at their last meeting.

**Most Punctilious Council of Bookbinders, Scribes and Cartographers** Located in the Civic Ward close to the Scholastica, this guild is open to those highly educated folk who provide writing services, produce books, scrolls and maps, or manufacture parchment, inks and quills. Members wear black gowns with hoods lined with white fur.

**Most Worshipful Company of Locksmiths** Members of this guild are highly skilled smiths, capable of producing complex locks and keys, hinges and bolts, secure vaults and secret doors, for merchants, banks and anyone else wanting to protect their valuables from theft. The guildhall is located in the Artisans Ward and is said to hold schematics for every lock and security device invented by its members, protected by a series of "unpickable" puzzle locks.

**Steadfast Brotherhood of Bodyguards** This guild might appeal to a few PCs – its members are bodyguards and mercenaries for hire, unaffiliated to a fighting order or Hidden Quarter gang. Many are dwarves or gnolls; others are ex-gladiators or former members of the City Watch or the army. The guild vets its members in an attempt to filter out any bad apples; guild membership is seen as a sign that the person being hired as a bodyguard is relatively trustworthy. The guildhall is on Dead Man's Road in the Palace Ward.

**Salters' and Packers' Guild** Presiding over the production of salt and the preservation of foods, this guild is notoriously corrupt. Salters working in the Poor Ward where the guild is based are involved in smuggling valuables out of Parsantium, hidden inside barrels of salted and pickled foods.

**Solemn Order of Apothecaries** Herbalists, physicians, dentists and others practising non-magical healing belong to this guild, based in the Artisans Ward. The Solemn Order's guildhall, Physics' Hall, holds the Pharmacopoeia, a series of scrolls dating back to the time of Hulieman that detail hundreds of formulae for medicinal remedies and deadly poisons. Many of these recipes require exotic ingredients such



as powdered bulette claw and harpy tail feathers. The Order is often willing to purchase monster parts from adventurers in order to replenish its stocks.

**Tireless Guild of Master Metalworkers** This wealthy Harbour Ward guild includes blacksmiths, goldsmiths, silversmiths and other metalworkers, and controls the manufacture of all metal objects apart from weapons, armour and jewellery. Dwarves make up a sizeable part of the membership. A giant bell hangs over the door to the guildhall which is rung to announce the election of a new Guildmaster.

**Vintners' and Brewers' Guild** An organization of brewers, distillers and wine-makers based in the northern part of the Artisans Ward, this guild is dedicated to ensuring that Parsantium's wines and beers are the best in the world. It runs the annual Festival of Flagons (see page 37) and its senior members judge the Beer of the Year competition. Guild members wear dark red hooded robes and go barefoot inside the guildhall to show off their grape-stained feet.

## Noble Families

The wealthy and decadent noble class has a considerable amount of clout in Parsantium. Although there are several dozen rich families who consider themselves to belong to the aristocracy, ten noble houses in particular wield significant power and influence over Parsantine politics. Eight of these can trace their ancestry back to the Bathuran peninsula; of the remaining two, one is Aqhrani and the other Sampuran in origin. All of these families have a representative on the Senate, usually the head of their house.

PCs with the Imperial Quarter Noble background (see page 21) may already belong to one of the Bathuran noble houses listed. During the course of a campaign, a PC might join a noble house by marrying one of its members, or by being adopted into the house as a reward for loyal service. Any noble house could act as patron for a group of adventurers, hiring them to perform open or covert missions in their service, or as bodyguards.

## Fonte

The members of this house are great patrons of the arts, seeing themselves as possessed of discerning taste and the ability to discover up-and-coming talents in the fields of music, poetry, painting, sculpture and drama. The head of the house is **Iovivus** (LN male human aristocrat 9), a balding, overweight and overbearing Bathuran who believes himself much cleverer than he really is. Iovivus has a ruddy face and bulbous nose from drinking too much wine and suffers from gout brought on by eating too much rich food. He has, however, recognized the considerable talents of Iancu Petronas (see page 84) and is sponsoring the young bard's latest play, a fact that has upset Dulicitus, whose plays House Fonte had previously sponsored.



Iovivus's youngest daughter, **Catella** (CN female human aristocrat 3), is having an affair with Didymus, the married head of House Ziper and the young woman is threatening to tell all and sundry if Didymus doesn't leave his wife in the next two weeks. House Fonte's estate is in the Palace Ward; both the mansion and the gardens are overflowing with hundreds of valuable works of art. The house's crest is a blue and green peacock in its pride on a silver field.

## Kapali

House Kapali is an ancient Sampuran noble family belonging to the kshatriya (warrior) caste and its members have held positions of influence in Parsantium for over 1,500 years – Nivedita, wife of the great sultan Hulieman, was a Kapali. Today the Kapalis are known for their military clout: the dashing handsome **Chirayu Kapali** (CG male human fighter 8) is an allagator in the Parsantine army, commanding an allagion of medium cavalry, while his equally attractive sister **Pramada** (NG female human fighter 11) captains a galley in the navy. There is much rivalry



between Houses Kapali and Marfisi, which intensified recently when Trasaric Marfisi was appointed Grand Dhoungarius of the Fleet ahead of Pramada, a superior sailor and commander. The rift grew further when Trasaric assigned Pramada to tedious patrol duty in the Dolphin Strait after she rejected his amorous advances. Pramada would love to find some means of getting her revenge but is too honourable to employ dirty tricks.

The head of House Kapali is Chirayu and Pramada's father, **Monish** (LG male human fighter 12), a retired soldier who fought bravely alongside Loukas Andronicus and now serves as chief military adviser to the Strategos. Monish has a pronounced limp, souvenir of a bloody skirmish with a hobgoblin warband. House Kapali's estate, in the Garden Ward, close to the Old Palace, has beautiful "paradise" gardens, bursting with orange trees and bougainvillea. The Kapali crest is a gold elephant *passant* (walking) on a red field

### Laro

Populated by ambitious schemers, House Laro wields significant political power, holding several key government positions including Grand Custodian of the Imperial Records, Logothete for Diplomatic Relations and Warden of the State Granaries. Members of this house will stop at nothing to increase their influence, making secret deals and trading favours with government officials, rival noble families, guilds and other power groups. House Laro employs a variety of tactics to achieve its goals, including bribes, blackmail and intimidation, and is willing to use violence if necessary, hiring unprincipled mercenaries to carry out acts of kidnapping and even assassination. Laro will sometimes ally itself with House Pavone; its biggest political rivals are Houses Ziper and Marfisi, both of whom hold sway over parts of the Bureaucracy and the military.

Head of the house is the ruthless **Bonifacius Laro** (LE male human aristocrat 13; see page 75), who is currently plotting to marry his daughter Adula to the nine-year-old Corandias, heir to the throne. Bonifacius was recently the victim of a failed assassination

attempt, which he suspects House Ziper to be behind, after Laro wrecked their scheme to siphon off funds intended for the Victory Games into its coffers. House Laro's extensive walled estate is in the Palace Ward; the main building is noted for its tall golden-domed minarets. The house crest is a pair of crossed golden keys on a black field.

### Marfisi

The Marfisi family has a fine military tradition, holding key positions in the Parsantine army since the time of Corandias the Magnificent. There have been many famous commanders and soldiers in the house's history, including Philoxenus, one of the first Corandias's generals, briefly crowned as Basileus during the Wars of the Successors before being deposed and having his nose and ears cut off, and Helladius, the Strategos who successfully defended Parsantium against a savage gnoll attack 300 years ago. Other members of House Marfisi joined fighting orders such as the Platinum Knights of Themicia, battling bravely against evil humanoids throughout the lands of the former Bathuran Empire. In recent years, the house's influence has declined; the current Strategos, Loukas Andronicus, is not a Marfisi and his chief military adviser belongs to the rival House Kapali. Having said that, Trasaric Marfisi (see page 29) holds the office of Grand Dhoungarius of the Fleet and four other members of the house are alligators in the army.

The head of House Marfisi is the widowed **Lady Honorata** (N female human aristocrat 9), a proud, thin-lipped dowager who makes no secret of her contempt for the Strategos, making snide remarks about Loukas Andronicus not being a "real man", unlike her deceased husband Symeon, who previously held the position. Lady Honorata ignores her son Trasaric's philandering, but his wife Probina (see page 69) is determined to put a stop to it and is planning to visit the Flotsam witch Jagadamba for a love potion to win him back. The Marfisi estate is in the Grand Ward near Cedar Park and is surrounded by crenellated battlements. The family crest is a black keep and three silver stars on a blue field.



## Megaritis

The scholarly Megaris family have lived in Parsantium since the time of Corandias the Magnificent and were instrumental in the foundation of the Scholasticia, using their considerable wealth to fund its construction. Members of the house have taught at the university for centuries and some still do – the current head of the house, **Nepotian Megaris** (LN male human expert 11), is Professor of Philosophy and a renowned authority on religions and cults. Like others in his family, he eschews fine clothing and riding around in palanquins in favour of ink-stained robes and a pint in the Three Ewers at the end of a hard day trying to impart his considerable wisdom to a bunch of lazy students. House Megaris earns a sizeable income from its property holdings and vineyards, and stays out of politics unless the pursuit of knowledge is at stake. The house has an extensive private library of priceless ancient texts on the top floor of its great tower in the Palace Ward; the family are always interested in adding to this collection and sometimes hire adventurers to obtain obscure tomes and scrolls from dangerous, trap-filled dungeons. House Megaris's crest is a white open book on an orange field.

One member of House Megaris is unlike all the others: the fashionable and seemingly air-headed **Lady Viviana**

moves in the circles the rest of her family avoids and even sponsors a gladiator stable at the Hippodrome. Lady Viviana is an extremely beautiful young woman with a stunning figure and a palpable aura of sensuality. Her clothes and jewellery are expensive and tasteful, yet designed to show off her body to great effect. She is aware of the impact she has on people, especially men, but pretends not to notice, acting like an archetypal dizzy blonde to lull admirers into a false sense of security, allowing her to prise all sorts of secrets from them. In fact, Lady Viviana is another of the bronze dragon Naelere's guises (see page 83). Rumours that she has caught the eye of the Basileus as a potential mistress allow her to meet with the ruler "discreetly" and pass on details of any plots that endanger the city. For his part, Corandias values the information she gives him, but is unaware of Viviana's true form. Of course, the situation leads to glacial looks from the Despoina at the Hippodrome or any other public function where the two women's paths cross. Indeed, Thecia is even now plotting to get rid of the young noblewoman.

## Pavone

The other noble families tend to be somewhat wary of House Pavone. A very wealthy house, it is intensely secretive about its business dealings in the Imperial Quarter, which, if not always illegal, are certainly on the shady side. These include running Victory Ward bordellos and employing con tricks to extort extra funds from their customers; dealing white lotus dust supplied by the Eight Scorpions (see page 132) in the university district; and controlling much of the gambling on fights and chariot races at the Hippodrome, often fixing the outcome of these matches by bribing gladiators and chariot drivers to take a dive. House Pavone is ruthless in its ambition to make as much money as possible and employs fearsome gnoll mercenaries to defend its interests.

The head of House Pavone is a fat-bellied, balding Bathuran named **Calliarchus** (LE male human rogue 9), who is a very shrewd businessman, despite his advancing years. He plans to retire soon and hand the running of



the family's concerns to his eldest son, the hot-headed and borderline psychotic **Beppolenus** (CE male rogue 7). With Beppolenus in charge of House Pavone, bloody conflict with Avishandu and the Hidden Quarter gangs when the Fourth Tribune starts to expand into the Imperial Quarter is almost inevitable. The family estate is in the Palace Ward near the North Gate; its main building is a huge white marble structure with an ostentatious entrance colonnade. House Pavone's crest is a gold sun above a blue racing chariot on a green field.

### Qasim

House Qasim is a well-known Aqhrani noble family that rose to prominence in the time of Corandias the Magnificent, after publicly expressing support for the conquering Basileus's public works programme. This didn't endear the family to the other Aqhrani and Sampuran noble houses, but it allowed House Qasim to manoeuvre itself into a position of influence with the new ruler of the city. From this springboard, House Qasim went on to become a very successful merchant house, with a fleet of ships heading to and from the Caliphate of Aqhran to this day. The family likes to secure additional profits by smuggling valuables into and out of Parsantium, paying hefty bribes to the Salters' and Packers' Guild (see page 144) to secrete precious items inside barrels of preserved foodstuffs. The house is the biggest sponsor of the Greens chariotearing faction and the bitter rival of House Scipio, another merchant family that serves many of the same markets and sponsors the Blues. House Scipio often seeks to undercut the Qasims; in response, House Qasim has turned to violence, sending masked thugs to torch Scipio warehouses.

The head of the family is the feisty **Raziya** (CN female human expert 5/rogue 3), an experienced merchant-sailor and eldest daughter of **Safwan** (N male human expert 9/aristocrat 3), the ageing patriarch of the house who has recently stood down. Raziya is troubled by terrible nightmares of alien creatures plotting the downfall of humanity from their homes at the bottom of the sea. She has told no one

about these dreams as yet but they are becoming more and more frequent. The Qasim estate is in the Garden Ward and consists of a large house built around a shady courtyard and decorated with exquisite tilework; secret passages running beneath connect its cellars with the tunnels of the Hidden Quarter. The house crest is a gold dhow above three blue waves on a silver field.

### Scipio

Rivals to House Qasim, this noble family are successful merchants and property owners but most famous for breeding horses on their land outside the city. The finest animals are sold to other nobles as personal mounts; others go to the Hippodrome to pull chariots for the Blues (the faction House Scipio sponsors) or to the army's cavalry allagions. As a merchant house, Scipio trades with the cities of the Caliphate of Aqhran in direct competition with House Qasim. Initially, House Scipio gained the advantage by using bribes to get the best deals but recently House Qasim has started to employ violent methods to get back on top. The head of the Scipio family, the swaggering **Viator** (NE male human aristocrat 7; see page 69), is in clandestine discussions with the Crusading Brothers of the Sword about an attack on House Qasim vessels. Viator is supremely confident, often going out and about without a bodyguard – a fact that Raziya Qasim hasn't failed to notice. House Scipio is considered vulgar by the other prominent Bathuran noble families for its mercantile activity, and Viator's arrogance and fashion sense do little to change their opinion. Unbeknownst to its head, Aurius Kalothese (see page 150) has infiltrated House Scipio, placing a pair of rakshasa agents within it. The family estate is in the southern part of the Grand Ward. House Scipio's crest is a red lion rampant on a gold field; an ostentatious gilded lion statue stands just inside the entrance to the grounds of their home.

### Tzittas

If the other noble families are wary of House Pavone, they avoid having any dealings whatsoever with House Tzittas. This house has a dark reputation and with good



reason. The Tzittas family are diabolists who have made infernal pacts with the Nine Lords of Hell, trading their immortal souls for material wealth and power. House Tzittas has many business interests throughout the city, owning housing (including several slum tenements), banks, moneylenders, shops and taverns. The powerful warlocks of the house seek to grow their magical power too, studying evil lore acquired from forbidden tomes and from diabolic messengers sent to them by their dark patrons.



The leader of the house is **Maruthus Tzittas** (LE male human wizard 15), a stooped, sneering, withered old man who has prolonged his life beyond 200 years with magic. Maruthus speaks in a papery, whispering voice, his words loaded with menace and spite. He rarely attends Senate meetings, for which the other councillors are intensely grateful. The youngest member of House Tzittas is **Volusian** (NE male human aristocrat 4/wizard 3), a teenager with debauched tastes who has taken to making frequent visits to the Fallen Angel (see page 108), where his sadistic behaviour is even starting to concern Firmina; the Tzittas patriarch may need to rein in the young man before he draws unwanted attention to himself and the house. House Tzittas's estate is in the Palace Ward – a tall, black tower with no obvious windows and a single iron door, surrounded by a high wall. Its crest is a red and gold flame on a blue field.

## Ziper

Once very influential in Parsantium's government, House Ziper's star has fallen in recent years. Firstly, the fragrant Minicea Ziper was overlooked by Corandias in favour of the much lower born Thecia.

Then, the elderly Pegarius Ziper, Tribune of the Imperial Quarter, died choking on a fishbone at a royal banquet and was replaced by Thecia's distant cousin Aurius Kalothese. Shortly afterwards, the Prefect Bardas failed to appoint Ziper's new head, **Didymus** (N male human aristocrat 10), as Grand Custodian of the Imperial Records, giving the position to Bonifacius Laro instead. Finally, to cap things off nicely, House Laro interfered in the financial arrangements Didymus had made for the Victory Games in his new, lesser position as Logothete of Circuses, costing House Ziper a small fortune. In revenge, Didymus sent assassins after Bonifacius, only to have them foiled by the latter's brave gnoll bodyguard; he is nervously awaiting House Laro's response.

The Ziper head is also having an affair with Catella Fonte and is looking for a way to get rid of his wife **Patricia** (LN female human aristocrat 5) so he can marry the younger woman before she makes their tryst public knowledge. He knows she has been visiting the witch Jagadamba – perhaps he can pay some Hidden Quarter ruffians to arrange an “accident” when she next goes to Flotsam. House Ziper's estate is an impressive marble building in the Grand Ward surrounded by topiary in the shapes of fantastic beasts. The house crest is an emerald green dragon *guardant* on a silver field, beneath a blue chief.

## The Rakshasas

Thoroughly evil, ambitious and arrogant, a small number of rakshasas hold positions of power and influence in Parsantium. They are scheming to bring back the “golden age” of Dhak Janjua, when their master, the rajah Vrishabha, ruled the city and its empire with an iron fist. Two powerful rakshasa nobles lead the others: Aurius Kalothese, the Tribune of the Imperial Quarter (described below), and Avishandu, the “Fourth Tribune” of the Hidden Quarter (see page 129). The pair are fierce rivals, with neither trusting the other, but they have been forced to work together to prepare for their master's return from his icy prison in the Pillars of Heaven Mountains.



Each of the lords is building his own power base – Aurius seeks to grow his influence in the government and among the nobles of the Imperial Quarter, while Avishandu is tightening his grip on organized crime and has infiltrated several of the guilds. The rakshasas will often assume multiple identities while carrying out their complex plots, allowing them to pull a target's strings several times, perhaps using a different method for each guise, whether it be charm, double bluff, bribery or intimidation. They enjoy toying with mortals and seeing them suffer, so if they can corrupt a virtuous paladin or inflict misery on a gullible young noblewoman while working to increase their power and wealth, so much the better. So far, the rakshasa leaders' plans have been highly successful. In addition to his own trusted position as tribune, Aurius has manoeuvred rakshasas into House Scipio, the office of the Royal Exchequer and the Department of Mercantile Affairs, and has many mortal pawns in the other noble houses and elsewhere in the Bureaucracy. Meanwhile, Avishandu has placed his rakshasa agents in the Old Palace of the Sultan, the Most Worshipful Company of Locksmiths, the Steadfast Brotherhood of Bodyguards and the Esoteric Order of the Blue Lotus.

From time to time, the rakshasa lords receive cryptic missives from a cabal of yak-headed sorcerers who serve Vrishabha in the distant snow-capped peaks, demanding they obtain ancient books and scrolls and other eldritch items needed for the rituals to return the rajah to his rightful place on the throne of Parsantium. These texts and other components often seem random and unconnected, but the rakshasas do their utmost to meet the requests. Avishandu tends to use his trusted lieutenant Heinsoo for these missions, whereas Aurius prefers to hire a group of disposable adventurers by posing as a respectable mage or kindly priest in need of the item for a mighty spell. He will wait patiently until

the party has defeated whatever guardians are defending the item, then stepping in, revealing his true nature and killing them slowly, before taking the treasure.

### Aurius Kalothese

Arriving in the city ten years ago, the rakshasa lord calling himself Aurius Kalothese (LE male rakshasa sorcerer 10/aristocrat 2) was appointed Tribune of the Imperial Quarter five years later, following the death of previous incumbent Pegarius Ziper. Of course, this was all planned – Aurius arranged the choking incident that got the elderly Ziper out of the way, and by posing as a sympathetic, distant cousin to the Despoina, won her support for the position. Aurius is now plotting with Thecia to discredit the humourless Bardas so he can take over as Prefect of Parsantium, also assuming the guise of the Despoina's dressmaker and confidante to strengthen his influence over her.

In his mortal guise as tribune, Aurius is a hawk-faced Bathuran with thinning sandy brown hair in his early forties, who speaks with a cut-glass accent. He wears white robes edged in purple and gold, an elaborate gold hat and several pieces of finely wrought jewellery. In his true form, he has the head of a feral-looking tiger with malevolent green eyes, a large white facial ruff and backward-facing palms that end in vicious claws.

Like Avishandu, Aurius is cunning and patient, but he is even more arrogant and willing to take risks. He loves music and poetry, regularly attending the Theatre of Cytherea and the elaborate parties thrown by House Fonte to introduce bright new talents. Occasionally Aurius decides that he must “own” one of these musicians or poets and has them kidnapped, imprisoning them in the dungeon beneath his luxurious Palace Ward mansion, so he can listen to them over and over again at his leisure. Eventually he will get bored of an artist and devour him or her for supper.



## CHAPTER SIX

# Religion



Parsantines venerate a large number of gods and this chapter covers the most widely worshipped, plus a handful of evil deities followed by malevolent cults lurking beneath the city streets. Each deity's description includes the god's domains, favoured weapons and symbol, as well as listing Parsantium's highest level priest and the god's major temples, cross-referenced to the Gazetteer where appropriate.

## Gods of Bathura

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The gods of the former Bathuran Empire are worshipped throughout Parsantium, predominantly in the Imperial Quarter, in the Sunset Lands, and in Urskovia, where Martek, and to a lesser extent Amphetia, are held in high esteem. Several of these deities are popular with dwarves, elves and halflings, as well as humans, and the Dark Gods have many followers among the humanoid tribes of the region.

### Helion, Lord of the Gods

NG god of the harvest, summer and the sun

**Domains:** Community, Good, Nobility, Plant, Sun

**Favoured Weapon:** scythe

**Symbol:** the sun

**High Priest:** His Radiance Arcadius, the Archbishop of Parsantium (NG human male cleric 17; see page 61)

**Temples:** Holy Basilica of Helion (Civic Ward), St Carinus's Redemption (Dock Ward)

Helion is the chief god of the Bathuran pantheon, the husband of Lycilla and the father of Martek, Themicia,

Voltan and Zana. He is the mostly widely worshipped deity in the lands of the former Empire, popular with nobility and common folk alike. His faith is the closest thing to a state religion in Parsantium – the Basileus is said to rule by divine right granted by Helion and blasphemy against the god is treated as a crime in Parsantine law. Followers of Helion are expected to spread the light of civilization throughout the world, to show kindness and compassion to others, and to guard against evil.

Helion is frequently depicted on icons, where he is shown as a benign old man with a flowing beard of gold, riding his great hippogriff Morning Glory across the sky, pulling the fiery orb of the sun behind him on a golden chain. His many saints include St Carinus, who spent his life administering to the poor and needy, and St Rustica, who taught the first Bathuran farmers settling the land around Parsantium what to sow. Helion's clergy dress in white and gold robes; his Archbishop wears red and gold vestments and a tall, fan-shaped mitre.



## Amarani, All-Knowing

N god of knowledge, magic and secrets

**Domains:** Knowledge, Magic, Protection, Rune, Trickery

**Favoured Weapon:** quarterstaff

**Symbol:** closed book

**High Priest:** Zenodotus (LN human male cleric 6/ loremaster 9; page 64)

**Temples:** Library of All Knowledge (Civic Ward)

Amarani is worshipped by wizards, sorcerers and other arcanists, high elves, librarians, sages and those who seek knowledge. He is a master of magic in all its forms and a guardian of learning. His followers are expected to pursue knowledge through study, track down and preserve lost lore, and share what they discover with others, although eldritch lore and other dangerous secrets should only be passed on to those who are worthy. Amarani is represented as a tall bald man in a hooded robe, bearing a rune-covered staff topped with a glowing orb and with a great book tucked under his arm. This tome is said to contain all the knowledge in the world, written in minuscule script by angels so small a dozen of them could stand on the point of a needle. His temples are most often built inside libraries, arcane colleges and other places of learning, and his grey-robed priests are invariably experts in one or more fields of study.

## Amphetia, Queen of the Sea

CN goddess of fishermen, sailors and the sea

**Domains:** Chaos, Destruction, Travel, Water, Weather

**Favoured Weapon:** trident

**Symbol:** conch

**High Priest:** Garulae (CG female elf cleric 10; page 72)

**Temples:** Wavecrest Hall (Harbour Ward)

Amphetia is the fickle goddess of the sea: sometimes she is a friend to sailors and fishermen, blessing them with calm waters and favourable winds; at other times she is wild and angry, unleashing terrible storms on those who dare sail above her watery realm, wrecking

their ships and sending them to their deaths. All who make their living on the sea venerate and propitiate the goddess with simple offerings before each voyage in the hope that they will come home safely with their holds full of fish or valuable cargo. Amphetia's worshippers include the sailors, pirates, fishermen and merchants who sail the Corsairs' Sea, and the Urskovians who travel downriver to Karjolat and across the Griffin Water to Parsantium. In the deep caverns below the city, the Queen of the Sea is also venerated by a race of insane fish men who have warped her religion into their own bizarre cult.

Amphetia is usually depicted as a wildly beautiful woman wearing seashell armour and a seaweed crown, holding a trident and seated on a coral throne attended by her merfolk courtiers or riding into battle in her clamshell chariot drawn by hippocampi and attendant dolphins. She is an occasional consort of Martek; their passionate love-making is said to be the cause of any earthquakes that shake Parsantium.

### ICONS

Icons are religious works of art depicting the Bathuran gods and saints painted onto flat wooden panels, with the figures usually shown against a gold background. These images adorn temples throughout Parsantium where they are used in prayer, acting as a focus for the supplicant's thoughts. Icons come in various sizes – large paintings might occupy an entire wall in a church, whereas an icon kept in the "holy corner" of a Parsantine's home is likely to be painted onto a small folding panel. Although icons are not intended to be holy objects, some are so beautifully rendered and awe-inspiring that they are assumed to have been created not by mortal hands, and are thus venerated as relics. Helion and his many saints are the most popular subjects, but all of the gods are represented in icons. A small, fairly crude icon a few inches square can be bought for as little as 1 gp, with a well-painted example fetching anything from 25 gp to hundreds of gold pieces, depending on its size and the skill of the artist. Many priceless icons by renowned religious painters went missing when Kalgroth Ironheart ruled Parsantium – no one knows if these were destroyed or are still lying hidden somewhere, waiting to be rediscovered.



## Cytherea the Golden-Haired, Bringer of Joy

CG goddess of art, love, music and passion

**Domains:** Chaos, Charm, Good, Luck, Trickery

**Favoured Weapon:** rapier

**Symbol:** silver lyre

**High Priest:** Coravinis (CG female half-elf cleric 5/  
bard 3)

**Temples:** Church of the Silver Lyre (Mercantile Quarter)

Sensual and passionate, the popular goddess Cytherea presides over love and desire as well as art and music and is worshipped by lovers, prostitutes, actors and artists. She brings love and joy to all and expects her followers to do the same, making the world a better place by spreading art, music and delight wherever they go. Parsantium's great theatre is dedicated to the goddess, holding the twice yearly Cytherean Festivities in which the city's best dramatists compete against each other in her honour.

In art, Cytherea is shown as a stunningly beautiful woman with flawless pale skin, lustrous golden hair, and sheer robes that accentuate her figure; she is usually playing a silver lyre. Her clerics are attractive men and women – usually humans and half-elves – with long, flowing hair, clad in deep crimson robes, cut in such a way as to show off their near-perfect bodies.

## Dorna, Tender of the Flame

NG goddess of brewing, cooking, hearth and home

**Domains:** Community, Fire, Good, Healing, Protection

**Favoured Weapon:** dagger

**Symbol:** fire in a stone hearth

**High Priest:** Matron Gloril Wiseheart (NG female  
dwarf cleric 11; page 72)

**Temples:** House of Forge and Hearth (Harbour Ward),  
Dorna's Hearth (Flotsam, Dock Ward)

Dorna is the much-loved goddess of hearth and home, the wife of Voltan the Smith, venerated by hard-working humans, halflings, and especially dwarves. Some say the dwarves regard Dorna as the

mother of their race and Voltan as their father; cynics think it is her status as goddess of brewing and beer that has made her popular with the bearded folk. Whatever their race, Dorna's followers are expected to honour the family and the home, and to provide a hot meal and a warm bed for anyone seeking shelter at their hearth. The goddess can be depicted as a dwarf, halfling or human, depending on the artist, but she is always shown as a smiling, matronly figure dressed in simple homespun clothes with her faithful dog resting at her feet. Dorna's clerics, known as Goodmothers, are always female; high priests are known as Matron or Matron Mother. Both wear plain blue woollen robes.

## Lycilla, the Wise Mother

LG goddess of healing, kindness,  
mothers and wisdom

**Domains:** Community, Good,  
Healing, Law, Protection

**Favoured Weapon:** quarterstaff

**Symbol:** mortar and pestle

**High Priest:** Veneranda  
(LG female human cleric 5)

**Temples:** Healing Hall  
(Grand Ward)



The wife of Helion and the mother of Martek, Themicia, Voltan and Zana, Lycilla is the gentle and loving matriarch of the Bathuran pantheon, worshipped by mothers, midwives, herbalists and physicians; members of the Solemn Order of Apothecaries tend to worship Lycilla. Her followers are expected to do good wherever and whenever they can, demonstrating kindness and compassion to the sick, the poor and the unfortunate – this is the main creed taught by her priests to their congregations. Lycilla is represented as a tall olive-skinned woman wearing long white robes, with a gentle smile on her face and flowers in her dark brown hair. Clerics of the Wise Mother are nearly always female and wear white vestments embroidered with gold flowers.



## Martek, the Great General

LN god of courage, gladiators, soldiers and war  
**Domains:** Destruction, Glory, Law, Strength, War  
**Favoured Weapon:** longsword

**Symbol:** lion

**High Priest:** Solon Strongarm (LN male human cleric 6/fighter 2), based at the Hippodrome

**Temples:** at the Hippodrome (Civic Ward) and the Garrison (Palace Ward)

Fearsome Martek is the mighty god of war, worshipped by warriors everywhere; he was the patron deity of the Bathuran legions in the Empire's heyday, and is also much loved in Urskovia. Although non-worshippers see Martek as a violent thug, his true nature is that of a wily general, bravely leading his all-conquering armies into battle to expand the boundaries of civilization. Since the god represents strength and victory too, he is the patron of gladiators, who worship him at a temple at the Hippodrome. Martek is the eldest son of Helion and Lycilla, and the brother of Themicia (whom he sometimes fights alongside), Voltan and Zana. He is in love with Amphetia but the capricious goddess isn't interested in marriage, despite Martek's many proposals. Instead, he has to make do with infrequent but passionate trysts.

Martek is most often depicted as a clean-shaven Bathuran warrior wearing golden plate armour embossed with a lion symbol and holding a longsword aloft, or as a powerfully built, bearded Urskovian clad in a lionskin and wielding a greataxe. His clerics are mostly (but not all) male, and wear highly polished ceremonial armour while carrying out their duties.

## Piagus, King of the Road

CN god of merchants, rogues, travellers and tricksters  
**Domains:** Chaos, Charm, Protection, Travel, Trickery

**Favoured Weapon:** club

**Symbol:** bag of gold coins

**High Priest:** Perigenes Shadowpalm (CN male halfling cleric 4/rogue 1)

**Temples:** Counting House (Mercantile Quarter)

Piagus is the monstrosly endowed King of the Road and patron of both merchants and thieves.

Shocking to foreigners, the image of gnome-like Piagus with his massive

phallus is one of irreverent

comedy to Bathurans. Said to have been aroused by seeing the naked form of the goddess Cytherea while she was bathing, Piagus uses his member as a handy club to keep the roads free from savage beasts and safe for travellers, both those making an honest living through trade and those with more light-fingered tendencies. Followers of the god will make an offering to Piagus before embarking on a new venture – this usually takes the form of a bottle or two of wine drunk in his honour. The god's favourite pastimes of drinking, carousing and generally having fun make him especially popular with halflings and gnomes, who often serve as priests in his temples and in his roadside shrines along the Via Bathura. Clerics of Piagus wear white woollen togas and a wreath of vine leaves.



## Soranus, Lord of the Underworld

N god of death

**Domains:** Death, Glory, Knowledge, Protection, Repose

**Favoured Weapon:** morningstar

**Symbol:** bronze owl

**High Priest:** Stauracius (N male human cleric 9; page 124)

**Temples:** Sacristy of Soranus (Forest of the Dead)

Ruling over the Underworld where the souls of the dead go to be judged, grim-faced Soranus carries out his duties with immeasurable gravitas. In his eyes death is an unavoidable fact of life and – for all but the wicked – dying should be seen as a new beginning, not an ending deserving of pity. Followers of Soranus attend the bedsides of the dying to provide comfort, prepare bodies for burial and perform funeral rites. They are forbidden by their god to raise the dead – once someone has passed into the Underworld,



it is a sin to bring them back to life again. Undead are anathema to Soranus, and his priests and holy warriors are expected to oppose these foul creatures and any mages who practice necromancy. They watch carefully for cults of Hekebet and the demon prince Orcus, ready to strike them down should they appear in Parsantium.

Soranus is represented as a tall, gaunt man with pale skin and long black hair, dressed in dark robes, with a bronze owl perched on his left shoulder. Priests of Soranus wear black robes inside the sacristy, donning black plate armour and wielding morningstars when they go into battle against the living dead.

## Themicia, Lady of Justice

LG goddess of honour, justice, nobility and protection

**Domains:** Good, Law, Nobility, Protection, War

**Favoured Weapon:** longsword

**Symbol:** dragon's head

**High Priest:** Ruthva (NG female dragonkin cleric 14; see page 70)

**Temples:** Celestial Bastion (Grand Ward)

Themicia is the eldest daughter of Helion and Lycilla, and the sister of Martek, Voltan and Zana. She is widely worshipped across the lands of the former Bathuran Empire and is especially popular with knights and nobles in Parsantium's Imperial Quarter. Like Martek she is a valiant warrior, but is more focused on bringing evil-doers to justice than military conquest for its own sake, and always fights honourably, eschewing any kind of trickery or deception. Themicia's clergy and followers are protected by the Platinum Knights (see page 140), a holy order of paladins and knights who follow a strict chivalric code of conduct and who battle evil wherever they find it. Themicia's worshippers are expected to protect those weaker than themselves and to always act with honour.

The goddess is a frequent subject for icons, where she is shown as a valiant warrior clad in plate armour, holding a downward-pointing sword in her right hand and the scales of justice raised aloft in her left hand,

or riding her silver dragon mount, Domentziolix, into battle. Her clerics wear blue robes embroidered with silver thread, and many are dragonkin due to the goddess's association with dragons. Several priests of Themicia are in attendance each day at the Courthouse in case their spellcasting services are needed to ensure justice prevails.

## Voltan, the Smith

NG god of craftsmen, fire, the forge and smiths

**Domains:** Artifice, Earth, Fire, Good, Strength

**Favoured Weapon:** warhammer

**Symbol:** anvil

**High Priest:** Bofrim Ironbeater (LG male dwarf cleric 6/expert 3)

**Temples:** House of Forge and Hearth (Harbour Ward)

The younger son of Helion and Lycilla, Voltan is the epitome of hard work and skilled craftsmanship, toiling day and night in his workshop to make incredible keen-bladed swords and invulnerable armour for his older brother Martek and his sister Themicia, or a new chariot for his father. He inspires artisans and smiths everywhere to produce work of excellent quality, and is held in high esteem by Parsantium's guilds and its dwarves. Voltan is said to be short and stocky in appearance, which could explain why the dwarves love him so much, speaking of him as the father of their race. Voltan's followers seek to glorify their god through the items they make and the structures they build – he teaches them to constantly strive for perfection in everything they do.

Voltan is most often depicted as a dwarf, but is sometimes represented as a short, muscular bearded man, with long jet black hair tied in braids. Either way, he is always shown stripped to the waist, forging a blade on his anvil, or else standing with hammer in hand. Voltan's clerics must be skilled in a craft and dress in leather aprons over plain robes in colours corresponding to the livery of the guild they belong to.



## Zana, the Maiden

CG goddess of hunting, nature and the woodlands

**Domains:** Animal, Chaos, Good, Plant, Travel

**Favoured Weapon:** longbow

**Symbol:** deer antlers

**High Priest:** Allysha Wildthorn (CG female elf cleric 4; page 70)

**Temples:** shrine in Cedar Park (Grand Ward)

The youngest daughter of Helion and Lycilla, and brother to Martek, Themicia and Voltan, Zana is the virgin goddess of the forest. Zana is a loner, wandering through the wild places of the world, accompanied by her two hunting dogs. She teaches her followers to live in harmony with the wilderness, taking only what they need, to hunt for food and not for sport, and to protect the forests from evil humanoids, greedy loggers and others who seek to destroy the woodlands. Her worshippers are mostly rangers, elves and other forest folk, but she is also revered by the centaurs of the Great Grass Sea.

Zana is portrayed as a youthful maiden with delicate features, pointed ears, green eyes and long golden hair, dressed in a short tunic and hunting boots and holding her trusty bow, with a quiver slung over her shoulder. Her open-air temples are usually located in forests and other wilderness locations, although there are sometimes small shrines to Zana in rural villages. Zana's clerics wear green and russet brown tunics decorated with gold thread and carry sturdy wooden staves and bows.

## The Dark Gods

The three gods listed below are part of the Bathuran pantheon but their worship in Parsantium is outlawed and limited to small cults, usually based in secret temples in the Hidden Quarter. Their influence in the city is insignificant when compared to the Cult of the Black Mother, but their priests and followers make good antagonists for the PCs.

## Malephar, Lord of Hell

LE god of domination, greed and tyranny

**Domains:** Charm, Evil, Fire, Law, Trickery

**Favoured Weapon:** spear

**Symbol:** taloned hand

**High Priest:** Parjol Dekroth (LE male tiefling cleric 6)

**Temples:** cult shrines in the Hidden Quarter

Malephar was once the tyrannical and cruel Lord of the Gods, until he was overthrown by his son Helion and the death god Soranus. Defeated, Malephar was cast down into the fiery pits of Hell, where he now rules over the devils and their lords, and plots his return to power over the other gods. To regain his former status Malephar needs more mortal worshippers; he serves as the patron deity of the hobgoblins that live on the fringes of the civilized lands and is revered by some tieflings, but he needs to win over the more numerous humans to have any chance of success. As well as providing the hobgoblin tribes with fiendish foot soldiers to aid their ambitions of conquest, he uses his diabolic servants to tempt mortals into making infernal pacts where they offer their souls in exchange for temporal wealth. Malephar has got his claws into the devil-worshipping House Tzittas (see page 148) but his hobgoblin followers were dealt a massive blow when the Great Crusade kicked them out of Parsantium. Malephar is a shadowy figure, but is usually depicted as a fiendishly handsome man with dark red skin, two impressive curling horns and a goatee beard.

## Okkidor, Prince of Demons

CE god of destruction, slaughter and war

**Domains:** Chaos, Destruction, Evil, Strength, War

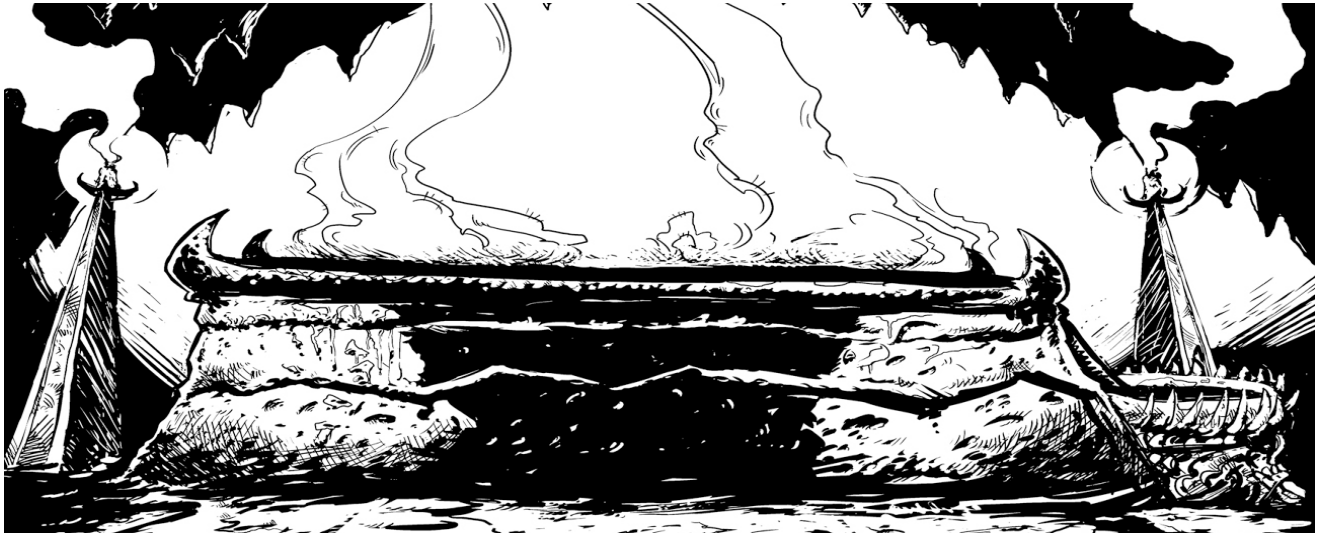
**Favoured Weapon:** greataxe

**Symbol:** cloven skull

**High Priest:** Volokskyr (CE male gnoll cleric 3)

**Temples:** cult shrines in the Hidden Quarter

Okkidor is the demonic god of the gnoll and orc tribes who threaten Parsantium's borders. He delights in mindless slaughter and destruction, seeking to kill



everything in his path in as brutal and bloodthirsty a way as possible. His Abyssal servants are the demons of the six elements known to Parsantine philosophers (air, earth, fire, water, aether and underground) and he leads great hordes of these fiends into battle against the well-drilled armies of his hated enemy Martek.

Okkidor is depicted in what little orcish art exists as a feral-looking giant orc with rippling muscles, great tusks and a huge double-bladed axe, who rides into battle in an iron-bladed chariot pulled by fiendish dire boars. There is no gnoll art to speak of but gnoll shamans teach their followers that Okkidor has a hyena-like head and fights with a pair of razor-sharp battle claws, which he uses to rip his enemies' hearts out before devouring them hungrily. Unsurprisingly, Okkidor expects human (or humanoid) sacrifices from his clerics and plenty of them. Victims offered to the god should die as painfully as possible.

### Hekebet, Queen of Sorcery

NE goddess of magic, the moon, necromancy and witchcraft

**Domains:** Darkness, Death, Evil, Knowledge, Magic

**Favoured Weapon:** dagger

**Symbol:** crescent moon

**High Priest:** Katernya (NE female human cleric 5/witch 2)

**Temples:** cult shrines in the Hidden Quarter

Hekebet is the half-sister of Soranus and his bitter foe, presiding over dark magic and necromancy. Most of her worshippers are witches and warlocks, although she also has clerical followers. The Queen of Sorcery teaches the faithful that magic is the key to obtaining power and riches, and they should not be afraid to unlock its true potential by using lore that other arcanists believe to be evil or forbidden. Hekebet's temples are usually in remote places far from the bright lights of civilization – a ring of standing stones in a dark, haunted forest or a hidden island deep in a murky swamp. In Parsantium, her followers meet at a crossroads in the Hidden Quarter tunnels to hold their clandestine ceremonies, watched over by mindless undead guardians.

Hekebet is represented as a stunning red-headed woman, dressed in black robes and wearing a silver circlet decorated with skull motifs; she is usually accompanied by a ghostly hellcat. Her clerics wear midnight blue robes, often adorned with silver stars and occult symbols.



# Gods of Sampur

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The Sampurans worship a large number of deities – this section details the most important ones for a Parsantium campaign. These gods are loosely based on those of Vedic and Hindu mythology, adapted for fantasy roleplaying, and are in no way intended to be an accurate representation of any real world religious belief.

According to Sampuran faith, its many deities are all different aspects of one Absolute Truth, the supreme universal spirit known as the Brahman. Brahman is difficult to define precisely but is the divine essence present inside all things – deities, humans, nonhumans, monsters, animals, plants and rocks. Each being is given life by a soul-like spirit called the Atman (or “inner self”), which is one tiny part of the Brahman.

Reincarnation – rebirth after death – is one of the key religious beliefs of all Sampurans. By following the tenets of karma and dharma, an individual can affect the nature of his or her reincarnation. Karma is the belief that good deeds lead to a good outcome and, conversely, bad deeds lead to a bad outcome. So, a person leading a good life will reborn into a better life when they are reincarnated, perhaps returning in a higher caste (see page 15), whereas someone who committed evil might be reborn as a beggar, a goblin or even a rat.

Dharma is the duty and behaviours that come with a person’s station in life, whether this is as a priest, a soldier or a farmer. Following your dharma and performing the duties expected by your caste leads to good karma in the next life. Again, the opposite applies – not following your duty results in bad karma and potentially a lower station after reincarnation.

Individuals who dedicate themselves to the good of others and to spiritual pursuits, eschewing all vices and worldly possessions, can sometimes succeed in uniting their Atman with the Brahman and break free of the cycle of rebirth, experiencing a state of perfect happiness, known as Nirvana.

## Vishnu, the Preserver

LG god of mercy and light

**Domains:** Glory, Good, Healing, Law, War

**Favoured Weapons:** chakram, mace

**Symbol:** lotus

**High Priest:** Laksminath (NG male human cleric 12; page 102)

**Temples:** Vishnu Mandira (Temple Ward)

Vishnu is the beneficent supreme god of the Sampuran pantheon, governing and sustaining the entire universe. He has many avatars which he sends forth when needed: to eradicate great evils, such as the rakshasa god Ravana, and to free enlightened mortals from the endless cycle of death and rebirth, allowing them to achieve Nirvana. Vishnu is widely worshipped throughout Sampur and his temple in Parsantium is well-attended by the residents of the Old Quarter seeking his favour – the god is known for helping his followers as best he can, sometimes sending a marut or even one of his avatars if a devout worshipper is in mortal danger.







Vishnu appears as a blue-skinned man with four arms, holding a lotus flower, a chakram (a disc-like weapon), a conch and a mace, and riding his mount, the half-man, half-eagle Garuda, King of the Birds, into battle. His priests are expected to fight evil wherever it lies, showing mercy to their vanquished opponents if they repent. They wear white robes or silver chain mail and mark their faces with two parallel lines of white earth from the hairline down to the bridge of their noses.

## Agni

CG god of fire

**Domains:** Chaos, Fire, Good, Protection, Sun

**Favoured Weapon:** battleaxe

**Symbol:** flames

**High Priest:** Dheeraj (CG male human cleric 6)

**Temples:** Agni Mandira (Temple Ward)

Agni, the benevolent god of fire and twin brother to Indra, acts as an intermediary between mortal worshippers and the gods, accepting the sacrifices burnt on altars and taking these offerings to the heavenly realms. With absolute power over fire, he is able to create and control fires anywhere in the world. He is red-skinned with two heads, seven hands, three legs and seven fiery tongues that he uses to lick sacrificial butter, and is usually depicted riding a ram or in a chariot pulled by fiery parrots. Agni's orange-robed priests must keep a fire burning in their homes at all times and are expected to administer to the poor and needy.

## Brihaspati, Lord of Prayer

LG god of wisdom

**Domains:** Charm, Good, Healing, Knowledge, Law

**Favoured Weapon:** longbow

**Symbol:** quill and scroll

**High Priest:** Tannistha (LG female human cleric 7)

**Temples:** House of Learning (Temple Ward)

Brihaspati is the teacher of the gods, passing on his wisdom to gods and mortals alike. In the early years of Dhak Janjua, Brihaspati sent an avatar to advise

Vrishabha, in an attempt to teach the rakshasa rajah how to rule well, sadly without success. The god has golden skin, seven mouths, a pair of horns and a hundred wings, and carries a bow which fires arrows of blinding light. Brihaspati's priests serve as teachers in the Old Quarter, instructing Sampuran children in reading, writing, history and religion.

## Hanuman, the Monkey God

CG god of luck and trickery

**Domains:** Chaos, Good, Liberation, Luck, Trickery

**Favoured Weapon:** mace

**Symbol:** monkey

**High Priest:** Yashodhan (CG male vanara cleric 4)

**Temples:** Monkey Temple (Temple Ward)

Much loved by Sampurans for his many daring exploits, Hanuman is the god of good fortune and Lord of the Vanara. He was born to the monkey-folk under an auspicious moon, which marked him out to be destined for great things, and was given magical gifts by the gods: Varuna granted him protection from water, Agni made him invulnerable to fire, Surya taught him how to change into tiny and giant-sized forms, and Yama gave him the power to defy death itself. Hanuman is renowned for his unlikely adventures, sneaking past terrible she-demons by shrinking down to the size of a kitten, lifting up an entire mountain while giant-sized to fetch herbs to save Vishnu's dying avatar, and setting fire to Ravana's ornate palace with his tail after slaying dozens of his rakshasa servants.

Hanuman is represented as a blue-furred vanara wearing a loincloth, a gold crown and a necklace of red beads, and carrying a bejewelled mace. In the early days of Dhak Janjua, his priests were persecuted by Vrishabha and his temples razed after the brahmin rebelled against the rakshasa rajah. In revenge, Hanuman sent a monkey riding a white elephant to answer the prayers of his priest Srivatsa; this messenger brought him the magic bow and arrows he needed to slay Vrishabha. Since that day, Hanuman and his monkeys have been greatly honoured in Parsantium.



## Indra

CN god of battle and thunderstorms

**Domains:** Air, Chaos, War, Strength, Weather

**Favoured Weapon:** longbow

**Symbol:** thundercloud

**High Priest:** Raivat (CG male human cleric 3)

**Temples:** shrines in the villages around Parsantium

Indra is the powerful god of battle and thunderstorms, the twin brother of Agni. From his home in the heavens he controls the weather, and is widely worshipped by farmers in the villages around Parsantium who make offerings to him in return for the rains they need. Indra is an arrogant, swaggering warrior, who enjoys fighting almost as much as he likes drinking wine. Sometimes he answers his followers' prayers and sends his avatar into battle on their behalf – old tales still speak of a mysterious warrior on a flying white elephant who rode to the defence of the village of Kishali when it came under attack from a fierce gnoll tribe.

Indra appears as a heavily muscled man firing lightning bolts from his great bow fashioned from a rainbow. His white elephant steed, called Airavata, is said to be the sire of the elephant Srivatsa who rode into Dhak Janjua. Indra's priests wear multicoloured robes and have shaved heads; they are competent warriors, ready and willing to fight to defend their villages.

## Kali, the Black Mother

CN goddess of creation and destruction

**Domains:** Chaos, Darkness, Death, Destruction, Healing

**Favoured Weapons:** rimal (garotte), scimitar

**Symbol:** skull

**High Priest:** Chandrika (CE female tiefling cleric 12; page 101)

**Temples:** Deul of the Black Mother (Temple Ward)

The Black Mother is a complex deity. Dark and violent, Kali delights in killing and destruction, but also presides over creation as a mother goddess – albeit one who eats her own children – sometimes aiding women

in childbirth. She is depicted as a voluptuous blue- or black-skinned woman, naked apart from a necklace of 108 skulls and a skirt of severed hands, carrying in her four arms a sword, a trident, a severed head and a bowl to catch the head's blood. Often, she is shown standing on the body of a vanquished male foe. Kali is worshipped both by mothers and by a cult of assassins called the thuggee (see page 128), who kill their victims in her name.

In Parsantium, Kali's faith has been infiltrated by shapechanging serpentfolk who have perverted her worship so that their deity, the snake goddess Manasangra, is the one being honoured, unbeknownst to many of Kali's followers. See Manasangra, below, and the Cult of the Black Mother on page 127 for more details.

## Manasangra, the Snake Goddess

CE goddess of the serpentfolk

**Domains:** Chaos, Destruction, Evil, Scalykind, Trickery

**Favoured Weapon:** kukri

**Symbol:** cobra

**High Priest:** Vishaka (CE female serpentfolk cleric 15; page 122)

**Temples:** Temple of the Black Mother (Hidden Quarter)

Manasangra is the black-hearted, deceitful goddess of the kundali. Deep in the jungles of Sampur, the deity is worshipped in impressive pyramid temples and honoured with frequent and bloody human sacrifices by the shapechanging serpentfolk. In Parsantium she is venerated by a small number of faithful worshippers living far below the streets, who dream of enslaving the inhabitants of the city above.

These serpentfolk use the Cult of the Black Mother to hide their loathsome faith behind the mask of the goddess Kali, sacrificing virgins to Manasangra in the hopes that her sleeping incarnation will awaken. See the Cult of the Black Mother on page 127 for more details.



## Puchan

NG god of relationships and travellers

**Domains:** Community, Good, Healing, Protection, Travel

**Favoured Weapon:** lance

**Symbol:** golden lance

**High Priest:** Dharmesh (NG male halfling cleric 6; page 89)

**Temples:** Temple of Puchan (Caravans Ward)

A benevolent god who controls the proper relationships between things, Puchan acts as a helpful guide to mortals. He watches over travellers, steering them away from monsters and bandits, tells farmers the ideal place to graze their cattle and merchants the best routes to wealth, guides souls to Yama's realm, and presides over marriages. Puchan hates Kali and her worshippers, believing her existence disturbs the correct order of the cosmos. Neither is he fond of Rudra, since the malevolent god broke all of Puchan's teeth in a fight over a sacrifice.

Puchan appears as an old, simply dressed traveller, leaning on a golden lance, or in his goat-pulled chariot. His priests perform many Old Quarter weddings and funerals, and in the past have taken a stand against corrupt and unjust rulers who they see as working against the proper order of things. Some of these brahmin became martyrs when their actions led to their deaths.

## Ratri, Queen of the Night

CN goddess of night and thieves

**Domains:** Chaos, Darkness, Luck, Protection, Trickery

**Favoured Weapon:** shortsword

**Symbol:** female silhouette

**High Priest:** Chaya (CN female half-elf cleric 5)

**Temples:** Deul of Shadows (Temple Ward)

Ratri is the Queen of the Night, watching over the darkness and all the deeds that go on when Surya is asleep. She is the sister of Ushas, lifting the clouds of darkness each morning so that the goddess of the

dawn can unlock the gates to the sky for Surya and his sun chariot. Ratri is not an evil goddess, but thieves, assassins and adventurers up to no good at night will make offerings to her (often stolen items or other valuables) in the hopes she will conceal their activities. Those who choose to rest instead pray to her for safety during the hours of darkness and renewed vigour when they wake up. Ratri appears as a Sampuran woman with black eyes and dark hair, dressed in black, hooded robes. Her priests wear dark grey robes and ring their eyes with kohl.

## Ravana, Lord of the Rakshasas

LE god of intrigue, lies and rakshasas

**Domains:** Charm, Evil, Law, Magic, Trickery

**Favoured Weapons:** claws, longbow

**Symbol:** veena (a stringed musical instrument)

**High Priest:** n/a

**Temples:** personal shrines only

Cruel and greedy, Ravana is the dark god of the rakshasas and the legendary founder of that race. Revered during the time of Vrishabha, he is no longer widely or openly worshipped in Parsantium, although there are several ruined temples to him beneath the city streets, including one that now serves as the base of the Golden Scimitars (see page 119). The imprisoned rajah's rakshasa followers do pay their respects to the god, though – both Avishandu and Aurius Kalothese have ornate personal shrines to Ravana hidden behind panels in their dining rooms, allowing them to make bloody sacrifices in his honour at mealtimes. Ravana hates Hanuman for killing his rakshasa servants, for setting fire to his palace, and for his role in the death of the god's loyal servant Vrishabha. Because of this, he expects his followers to kill any monkeys they come across. He also hates Vishnu, who created several avatars to wage a great war against him, ultimately defeating the rakshasa god. Ravana is usually depicted with ten heads and two dozen arms, wielding a terrible longbow capable of firing arrows that transform into venomous snakes. His clerics are always rakshasas.



## Rudra, the Archer

NE god of disease and storms

**Domains:** Air, Animal, Evil, Healing, Weather

**Favoured Weapon:** longbow

**Symbol:** bow

**High Priest:** Loknath (N male human cleric 4)

**Temples:** Mandira of Solace (Dock Ward)

Rudra is the frightening, malignant god of storms and disease – two things that bring misery to mankind. He stalks the land, spreading deadly disease by firing arrows from his dreaded black bow at hapless men and beasts or destroying their homes and lands with terrible storms. Equally capable of curing disease, he rarely does this, although his priests are all expert healers, and some of the remedies in the Pharmacopoeia of the Solemn Order of Apothecaries are said to have come from Rudra himself. Rather than beseeching their god for help, Rudra's priests spend their time performing rites designed to keep the god away and their congregations safe from harm. Loknath, priest at the Mandira of Solace in the Dock Ward, tends to the poor folk living in the slums of the Dock Ward, trying to keep them healthy and will sacrifice a cow to Rudra to appease him when needed. If the sacrifice is followed by a thunderstorm, this is a sign the god has heard. Rudra is depicted with red pock-marked skin, a blue neck and braided hair, carrying his black bow as he walks among the slain, feeding on their corpses. He is served by the maruts; these fearsome golden-armoured thunder spirits claim him as a father.



## Surya, the Supreme Light

LG god of the sun, morning and evening

**Domains:** Air, Glory, Good, Law, Sun

**Favoured Weapons:** chakram, mace

**Symbol:** sun

**High Priest:** Sudhish (LG male human cleric 7)

**Temples:** Temple to the Solar Gods (Temple Ward); shrine in the Vishnu Mandira (Temple Ward)

Surya is the resplendent god of the rising and setting sun who each morning brings night to an end by driving his sun chariot, pulled by a seven-headed horse of rainbow hues, from the eastern sky across to the west. Sampurans worship him at dawn each day by performing a ritualized salutation in gratitude for his life-giving rays of sunlight.

Surya appears as a man with dark red skin and long golden hair; he has a third eye in the middle of his forehead, four arms, and is usually depicted crosslegged. Like Vishnu, he holds a lotus flower, a chakram (a disc-like weapon), a conch and a mace. His priests are expected to rise each day at dawn and work through to sunset, tending to the poor and needy. They wear red robes and have shaved heads.

## Tvashtri, the Chariot Maker

CG god of artifice and invention

**Domains:** Artifice, Chaos, Community, Earth, Good,

**Favoured Weapon:** dagger

**Symbol:** wheel

**High Priest:** Gurdayal (CG male gnome cleric 5/expert 3)

**Temples:** Chariot Shrine (Artisans Ward)

The father of Surya, Tvashtri is the ingenious artisan god who built the heavenly realms of Yama, Varuna and Indra from fragments of the sun. He also created weapons for the gods, including Indra's and Rudra's bows, Kali's sword and Hanuman's mace, and is immune to all of them, meaning he has little to fear from the other deities. As the patron of architects, inventors and craftsmen, he is popular among the



journeymen and masters of Parsantium's guilds, vying for favour with the Bathuran god Voltan. He loves clever clockwork devices and ingenious inventions, and has been known to appear and lend a hand to an artificer who is struggling to get their contraption to work properly. Tvashtri appears as a shaven-headed priest in gold robes. His priests wear green robes and are expected to help their communities with building and crafting projects.

## Ushas

LG goddess of dawn, light, locks and watchfulness

**Domains:** Air, Good, Law, Protection, Sun

**Favoured Weapon:** quarterstaff

**Symbol:** rising sun

**High Priest:** Ratnapriya (LG female human cleric 3)

**Temples:** Temple to the Solar Gods (Temple Ward); shrine in the Vishnu Mandira (Temple Ward)

Ushas is the bright and youthful goddess of the dawn and the sister of Ratri. Each morning she brings the dawn by unlocking the eastern gates to the sky, allowing Surya to pass through in his sun chariot. Her appearance drives away the evil spirits that wander the earth at nighttime, banishing them to their shadowy lairs again until dusk. Ushas is represented as a dark-haired, light-skinned young woman riding in a golden chariot pulled by seven red sacred cows. Her priests are always women with shaven heads, dressed in red and gold robes. They greet the dawn each day with joyful songs and music.

## Varuna

LN god of cosmic order, oceans and rivers

**Domains:** Community, Healing, Law, Sun, Water

**Favoured Weapon:** spear

**Symbol:** waves

**High Priest:** Chandipati (LN female human cleric 6; page 115)

**Temples:** Floating Temple of the Sapta Sindhu (Flotsam); shrine in the Vishnu Mandira (Temple Ward)

Varuna is the god of water, oceans and rivers, and the most important of the seven river gods of the Sapta Sindhu who are honoured in Flotsam during the Festival of Flowers (see page 36). He is also responsible for maintaining the proper cosmic order and is the protector of oaths, punishing those who fail to follow their dharma or break their solemn vows, particularly those in authority. Varuna is shown as a tall, handsome, but otherwise normal man armed with a mighty black spear, riding on Makara (a unique sea creature that is half-dolphin, half-crocodile).

The dedication of Varuna's priests to the true order of things sometimes leads them to serve as judges in the Courthouse or join the City Watch. Watch Captain Attalus of the Poor Ward is keen to get rid of **Karunakar** (LG male human cleric 2), a particularly sanctimonious brahmin and watchman who is making it hard for him to turn a blind eye to the activities of the gangs.

## Yama

LN god of the dead

**Domains:** Death, Healing, Law, Repose, Rune

**Favoured Weapon:** mace

**Symbol:** red mace

**High Priest:** Narsimha (LN male human cleric 3)

**Temples:** shrine in the Forest of the Dead

Yama was the first mortal to die and after his demise was given the role of god of death by the other gods. He is the Judge of the Dead, deciding what form a man's soul will take when it is reborn into the next life. The most wicked are punished by being sent to the Seven Hells of Naraka for their sins to be expurgated before they can be reborn, almost certainly returning to earth as a slug or other low animal.

Yama is depicted as a green-skinned male deity with copper-coloured eyes. He wears red robes, wields a noose which he uses to pull the soul from its corpse, and rides a huge black water buffalo adorned with gold cloth and jewellery. When shown sitting on his throne of judgement in Naraka, Yama often has a pair of giant hellhounds at his feet. His shaven-headed priests wear red robes and copper jewellery.



# The Aqhrani God

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## Amur, the Sky God

LG god of the Aqhrani

**Domains:** Air, Good, Law, Nobility, Weather

**Favoured Weapon:** scimitar

**Symbol:** cloud

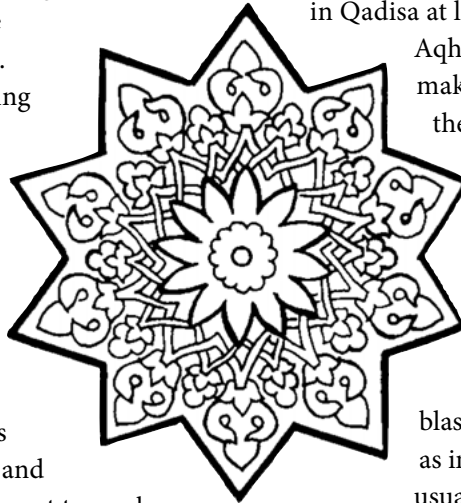
**High Priest:** Imam Efrat (NG human male cleric 15; page 102)

**Temples:** Golden Mosque (Temple Ward)

Unlike the other human cultures in Parsantium, the Aqhrani people worship only one deity – Amur the Sky God, who brings the life-giving rains and floods needed to grow crops in the hot desert climate of the Caliphate.

Amur is a benevolent god, promising his worshippers an afterlife in the Seven Heavens if they follow his creed, consisting of six tenets: honouring Amur, hard work, alms-giving, prayer, self-denial and pilgrimage.

For the first tenet, followers of Amur must honour and worship Amur, and Amur alone, as the One God. Farmers, merchants and craftsmen alike all share a commitment to work hard, believing this will lead to prosperity, and it is also the duty of everyone to help those less fortunate than themselves, giving a proportion of their monthly income to the most needy. Those who have little or no money are expected to do good deeds for others to fulfil this obligation.



Every day, the cries of the muezzin can be heard throughout the Old Quarter, calling Amurites to prayer from the minarets of the mosques at dawn, noon, dusk and an hour before midnight. Worshippers should wash beforehand, using a small bowl of water, and prostrate themselves on the ground, facing in the direction of Qadisa, capital of the Caliphate of Aqhran. During the month of Aprilis, Amurites give up luxuries, including wine, coffee and meat, and instead focus on prayer and repentance. Finally, every able-bodied worshipper of the god is expected to make a pilgrimage to the Grand Mosque in Qadisa at least once in their lifetime. The last few

Aqhrani sultans of Parsantium failed to make this pilgrimage and many believe that the Kabir dynasty lost Amur's blessing as a result, thus allowing the city to fall to Corandias, its Bathuran conqueror.

There are no representations of Amur in his mosques – Amurites believe that since no mortal could possibly do justice to his divine form in a painting or sculpture, it would be blasphemous to try. Amur's priests, known as imams, can be men or women, and are usually human, although there are a few half-orc imams in Parsantium's Poor Ward. All wear sky blue djellabas and gold holy symbols; the men have turbans while the women cover their heads with a blue scarf. Imams perform charitable deeds and educate local children who come to the mosques for religious instruction and more general teaching.



# Gods of Tiangao

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Tiangaons view the Heavens as working like a great bureaucracy, with each deity responsible for a specific aspect of life. Junior gods report in turn to more senior gods, each of whom governs a “ministry” and ensures that every task is carried out correctly. At the top of the pyramid, overseeing everything, is Shang-Ti, the Jade Emperor and Supreme Ruler of the Universe. His word is law to the other gods and goddesses, and he is not afraid to promote or demote them based on how well they are fulfilling their divine roles.

There is a vast number of gods in the Celestial Bureaucracy, but the three Tiangaon gods described here are those with the strongest following in Parsantium.

## Qian Lao, the City God

NG god of wealth

**Domains:** Community, Good, Healing, Law, Travel

**Favoured Weapon:** quarterstaff

**Symbol:** abacus

**High Priest:** Wang Jin We (NG male human cleric 9; page 104)

**Temples:** Temple of Qian Lao (Tiangao Town)

Like many of the gods of Tiangao, Qian Lao was once human. As a wily merchant, he grew rich by daring to trade across the extent of the Empire during the turbulent Years of Jade and became renowned for his many crazy escapades. He is said once to have hoodwinked a ki-rin into believing he was of good moral character, persuading the creature to whisk him away on its back to avoid almost certain death at the hands of a tribe of fearsome bakemono. Qian Lao was the first man to cross the deserts and the Great Grass Sea from Tiangao to Parsantium centuries ago, and is

worshipped here as the city god, as well as the god of wealth, by its Tiangaon residents. Qian Lao is depicted as a fat, jovial-looking Tiangaon man dressed in simple robes and riding on a splendid ki-rin with a gold coat and a golden-pink horn and hooves. The god’s priests wear jade green robes and have shaved heads.

## Kuan-Ti

CG god of battle and protection

**Domains:** Chaos, Good, Nobility, Protection, War

**Favoured Weapon:** greatsword, unarmed strike

**Symbol:** chariot

**High Priest:** Dai Feng (CG female human cleric 3/ fighter 1)

**Temples:** House of Heavenly Peace (Tiangao Town)

Another god who was once mortal, Kuan-Ti was a tofu seller as a young boy but studied hard, reading many books on the art of war. He became a soldier, rising rapidly through the ranks until he was promoted to general. His many victories on the battlefield led to his divine ascension after death, when he became the god of war, sworn to protect the people of Tiangao from evil spirits and demons. Kuan-Ti never starts wars, doing everything he can to preserve the peace and relying on diplomacy to resolve conflict. If war is inevitable, he will support whichever side is most worthy and just.

Kuan-Ti is represented as a heavily muscled man with red skin, wearing emerald green lamellar armour and wielding a greatsword, and riding in a black chariot pulled by pegasi. His priests are always highly skilled warriors and martial artists, ready to defend the weak and downtrodden if need be.



## Sung Chiang

NE god of thievery

**Domains:** Charm, Evil, Knowledge, Luck, Trickery

**Favoured Weapon:** shortsword

**Symbol:** silver bracelet

**High Priest:** n/a

**Temples:** n/a

Sung Chiang, also known as No Cha, is the many-armed Tiangaon god of thieves, honoured by the tongs that control crime in Tiangao and beyond. Originally a notorious mortal thief, he was sent to Feng Du (Hell) after his death to be judged by Yen-

Wang-Yeh, the god of the dead. His list of crimes was extensive but Sung Chiang claimed it paled into insignificance when compared to the corruption of the bureaucrats running his province. The thief then proceeded to name names, providing a long list of evidence that was used to convict the guilty. In gratitude, Sung Chiang was pardoned and elevated to godhood, becoming the patron of thieves. He is shown with three heads, eight arms, silver skin and blazing red eyes. His priests are proficient in thievery as well as religious duties and divine spellcasting; they wear silver hats and tunics furnished with plenty of concealed pockets and pouches.



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