

## CHAPTER ONE

# City at the Crossroads



## City Overview

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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.

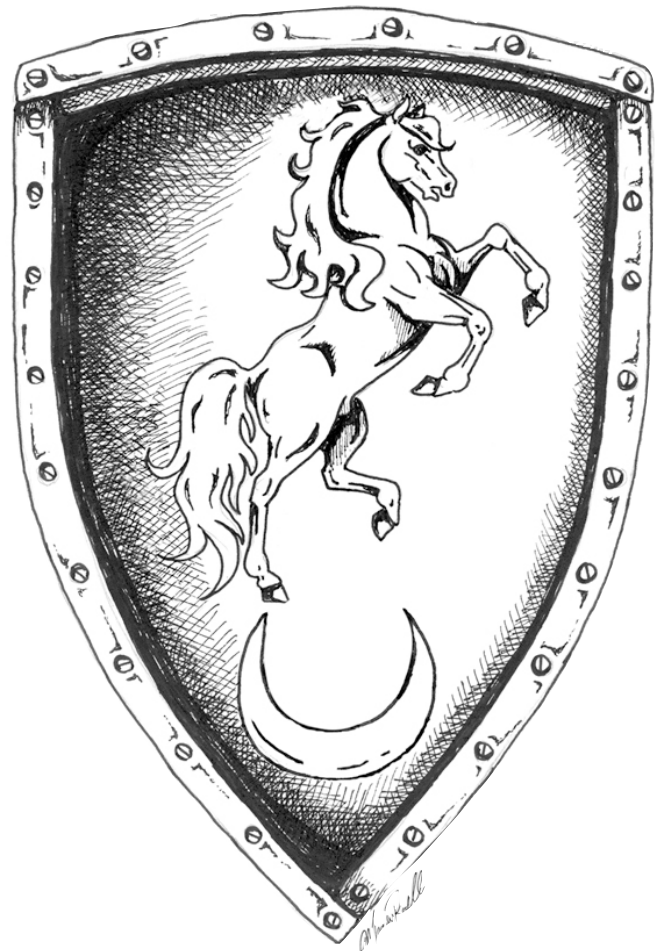
On the north side of the strait, the Imperial Quarter is where you will find the Great Palace of the Basileus, the Holy Basilica of Helion, the Hippodrome and many of Parsantium's other important buildings. It is also home to the wealthy and decadent noble class, many dwarves and dragonkin. Many of the 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.





# History

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## 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		



# 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





## 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,





# 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.





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

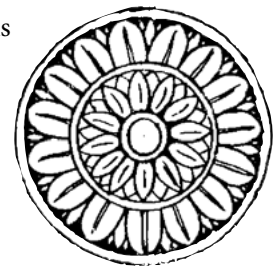
The Lamplighters were originally a group of private guards that guilds and craftsmen would hire to protect their premises and goods from thieves and to defend their members from rivals. Over the years, the Lamplighters gradually moved into racketeering, demanding protection money with menaces and smashing 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.



## 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.