

Slavers of the Southern Rim

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Salimar of the House of Gelesh watched his host with an intent stare. Despite all his attempts to the contrary, he found that he just couldn't help but watch as the Imrian ate. He observed with glittering, cold eyes as it slurped down another wriggling leech, washing the juices from its gaping mouth with a swig of stale, rancid brine. On the outside Salimar's slate-grey features were impassive (he doubted the creature could read expressions anyway), but beneath the veneer he found himself recoiling in disgust. His host was named Slurfew and was actually one of the worldlier of the Imrian Slavemasters that the House of Gelesh traded with. For instance, although the creature insisted Salimar climb up to the stilt house to conduct 'negotiations', it had not offered to share its repast with him, something for which Salimar was most thankful. Silently and not for the first time, the Farad cursed the superiors that had insisted he make the journey to this despicable isle.

Once the amphibian had finished eating, the 'negotiations' began. Unfortunately, it was well known among the Farad that the term negotiation was a rather poor description of dealings with Imrians; on occasions such as this there was no discussion, no battling of wits, the creature simply demanded a price. The price was high, very high, but Salimar knew from the experiences of others in his House that attempting to bargain the Imrian down to a more comfortable level would prove fruitless. It seemed these slavers did not comprehend the idea of haggling. Besides, time was of the essence. As he had left his vessel he had spied a ship from Zandu on the horizon making a final approach to the Island; the competition would be here soon. Once again Salimar bemoaned the futility of his visit to this sweltering, Avar-forsaken Island. But immediately he corrected himself, the golden god had not forgotten these lands. There was real wealth here - the goods he had travelled all this way to purchase on behalf of the House Gelesh.

Having demanded its price the Imrian escorted Salimar to the viewing pens to look over his potential purchases. From its manner Salimar got the impression that the Imrians did not see the point in such activities, but they had sufficient intelligence to note that presenting slaves to perspective buyers, especially these particular slaves, almost guaranteed a sale. They were beautiful, each and every one of the Batrean females, simply stunning. To find such jewels in the sweltering, stinking, insect ridden squalor of Kragan was like finding a glittering jewel in a pile of Equus dung. Amazing. Salimar found himself lost in the beautiful blue eyes of a particularly fine Batrean female. Such beauty.... Shaking his head as if to free himself from reverie, Salimar selected his goods, including the blue-eyed maid, paid the price and ordered them led to the coracles that would transport them to his waiting ship. The powerful forms of the Imrian guards shoved the slaves on ahead of them. It seemed the amphibians had no eye for beauty.

Two days later they were at sea, hugging the coast to their left and making slow progress back toward Farad. Salimar was nervous. Tonight was a special night. Since bringing the blue-eyed Jeleana on board, Salimar found himself unable to clear her image from his mind. She haunted his thoughts, waking and sleeping, her whispering voice promising delights beyond his wildest imaginings. So tonight, despite his better judgement, Salimar was preparing to welcome Jeleana to his cabin. As darkness descended over the seas a polite knock at the door informed Salimar that the Batrean had arrived. Ushered into the cabin by the studiously impassive guard, the maid joined Salimar for his repast.

As the night progressed Salimar found himself further captivated by the Batrean. Distant warnings issued by his superiors went unheeded, washed from his mind by the rich and fragrant bouquet of the woman. She was enchanting, wonderful, and beautiful. The meal,

though of the finest quality, tasted stale and dry in her company. Pushing the food aside Salimar prepared to feast for the second time that night, his hunger awoken by the slave's presence. But at that moment, a loud call from the deck rudely intruded on the merchant's reverie. It came again, the night watch calling shrilly of a vessel's approach. Muttering his anger and pushing the now impassive Jeleana aside, Salimar left his cabin to join the captain on the deck and investigate the source of the commotion. By the time he arrived, all was in disarray.

A black ship now stood beside the Farad vessel, barely a man's length away. As Salimar reached the deck the light of many lanterns was suddenly revealed on the other vessel, driving back the darkness. In the wan orange glow of the lantern light countless figures could be seen, a flamboyant and patchwork collection of men and women. They were clearly pirates of Gao Din and the wicked edges of their blades gleamed evilly. Normally noted for their honour, in any other circumstance Salimar would perhaps have felt a slight relief that it were not Mangar Corsairs that assailed them, but there was one thing that was known to incite the most aggressive passions of the sea-rogues – slavers, and those that dealt with them. As the battle began Salimar rushed to the far side of the boat, hoping to escape the pirates who swung onto the deck from their rigging. As he cowered on the far side of the deck Salimar watched his soldiers being cut down by the ferocious sea rogues. A lantern fell onto the deck of the Farad vessel, the oil igniting and the flames licking hungrily over the wood. Staring at the flames with round eyes, Salimar grabbed an empty barrel resting on the deck and with barely a thought leaped over board into the inky darkness. Two figures caught his eye as he did so, the Gao Din captain swinging onto his vessel, her long hair streaming behind her, and another figure making fast the other way, clearly Jeleana. An hour later Salimar watched the burning hulk of the vessel slip beneath the waves as he floated away, the victorious songs of the pirates drifting toward him through the darkness.

The next day Salimar struggled to remain afloat, desperately hugging the barrel to his chest. He fought against fear – not of drowning, but of the monsters that were known to infest such waters. But then at around midday as the sun rose to the zenith a welcome sight presented itself – a ship on the horizon. Salimar waved furiously, spluttering in his haste whilst mentally preparing a story to explain his predicament. As the vessel neared he stopped waving, a fresh knot of dread clutching his stomach. Yes, he could see them clearly now, three giant sightless Kra drawing the coracle on. Oh well, he thought, no use fighting his fate. Detachedly he wondered who his new master would be as he waited for the Imrian slavers to arrive.

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The sweltering jungles of the island of Imria are not a destination of choice for most Talislantans. It is not the thick canopy of jungle harbouring strange and dangerous beasts that keep outsiders away, nor the towering form of mount Talus belching smoke and ash into the sky, or even the demon-infested waters and deadly reefs that surround the island. No, these dangers are not unusual amongst the wild lands of the Southern Rim. It is rather those beings that claim the island as their home that dissuade the civilised folk of other lands from stepping on the white beaches and penetrating Imria's mysterious heart. The amphibious Imrians are brutish, uncivilised and aggressive, and they are slavers, a practice long held abhorrent to the folk of more civilised realms. Indeed, for any but the most unscrupulous merchant, a trip to Imrian means only one thing – a life of slavery with little hope of escape.

But there are secrets hidden on the mist-shrouded slopes of the island and beneath the blue lapping waves. Ancient ruins lie ripe for discovery, their secrets hidden since the forgotten age. And the Imrians themselves are a strange and mysterious folk, guarding the secrets of their past with surly belligerence. Truly for those souls brave enough to venture to the Southern Rim; the isle of Imria holds riches enough to satisfy even the most jaded rogue, warrior or scholar.

Come now, the jungle awaits...

The Imrians

The amphibious humanoids known as the Imrians have lived on their remote isle in the Azure Ocean for as long as records have been kept. Whether they called this island off the coast of Mog their home in the forgotten age or came to the island from other climes is unknown to Talislantan scholars. But now these beings have become synonymous with the land they call home, building their lone stilt-city of Kragan in the waters of a lagoon deep within the island's interior. Tall, with muscular frames and damp, scaly yellow skin; most Archeans find these creatures unpleasant to look upon. Worse still are their cultural habits, for the Imrians are slavers. While it is true that the sale of other commodities supplements their wealth, such as the export of exotic beast from Imria's heartland and the trade in rare narcotics from the depths of the island's jungles, slaves are the primary source of Imrian income. All manner of races can be found in the slave pens of the Imrians, from such denizens of the Southern Rim as Mogroths, Jhangarans and Moord-Wan to exotics like the folk of Chana and even to races from further a field, such as those of the Seven Kingdoms. Indeed, representatives of the majority of the kingdoms of the continent have graced the slave pens at some point. Recently, the slave stock has been much bolstered by the enchanting females of the isle of Batre; a land recently annexed by the Imrians and now a source of rich trade with Farad, Zandu and other less scrupulous lands.

The Imrians are aggressive and uncommunicative, considering themselves far superior to the 'land worms' that make up the majority of the peoples of Talislanta. They have no regard for any other peoples, and have proved capable of either enslaving or trading with anyone willing (or of course, extremely unwilling) to do so. They revere no gods or creators, and consider such views as expressed by outsiders as foolish and 'barbaric'. They regard their King to hold the highest attainable position on all of Talislanta. Consequently, most of the folk of the continent consider the Imrians are an immoral and ultimately alien race. However, to those willing to dig a little further beneath the surface the unusual ancestry of the amphibians may be uncovered. And perhaps to those who wish to combat the amphibians and end the slavers' reign of terror on the Southern Rim, such knowledge may be of infinite value.

Physical description

The Imrians' slope-shouldered, muscular forms are well suited to existence both in and out of water. Their tough, yellow green hides are formed from many small interlocking scales, each of which conceals a tiny pore capable of exuding slimy mucus. Out of water the mucus forms a thin layer of damp slime that serves to protect the skin from drying effect of the sun. Imrians have an imposing physical frame and are capable of moving at speed in water, movement being aided by the tough webbing that stretched across their clawed hands and feet. Their heavy frames are however ungainly on dry land, giving them a lumbering, awkward appearance. Facially, the amphibians have small, black, deep-set eyes and wide leering mouths containing a double row of small sharp teeth. Possessing both lungs and gills, the amphibians can breathe both in and out of water, and are equally at home in salt or fresh water. When out of water they breathe through small holes in the centre of the face, whilst a flange of bony, barbed cartilage protects the gills used for respiration underwater. A ridge of tough skin strung between bony horns runs from forehead over the skull and down the back of the head, which is fronted by a single small, curved horn in the centre of the forehead. Overall most Talislantans consider the slavers to present a fearsome and alien appearance. Reading emotions on such a face is counted as an extremely difficult task to most civilised folk. Whether the Imrians are in turn able to read the facial expressions of other races is unknown.

Imrians reproduce at the waxing of the moon Jhang. On such nights the males retire to the birthing pools set back from the city of Kragan before the day ends, each male contesting with

his peers for those pools that occupy the choicest sites. The most powerful and aggressive males win pools that are placed near to the city; while the younger and weaker males are left with the pools set further back. As the twin suns sink Imrian females leave the city and head for the birthing pools, like the males contesting among themselves for those placed nearest to Kragan. They then attempt to win over the resident males, who pick and choose partners according to their status in Imrian society. Once the females have successfully wooed a mate, they enter his pool and produce a large number of eggs that the males then fertilise in a writhing confusion of water. Once fertilisation is complete, the Imrians females return to Kragan, their potential offspring forgotten. Imrian males mate indiscriminately and depending on a male's position in Imrian society, he could have several visitors to his birthing pool during the course of the night. In any case the males stay throughout the night and return to the city at dawn, staying for as long as possible in the hope of further encounters.

At daybreak as the males depart the tiny, fertilised eggs hatch into the small water-breathing newts that are the first cycle of Imrian life. These tiny creatures, each no bigger than a thumbnail, must flip and wriggle from the sterile, sustenance lacking pools overland to the Kragan lagoon. A hazardous journey of several hundred meters, the majority of the young are either devoured by hungry Avir or fall victim to other predators of the jungle out for an easy meal, and many simply lose their way and expire in the heat of the sun. Those hatched nearer the city stand more chance of survival, hence the desire of the larger, more aggressive and socially successful Imrians to breed in pools nearest Kragan. It should be noted that the Imrians view the idea of giving birth to their young within the confines of Kragan both distasteful and ridiculous. After all, the current generation of adults had to make the journey to the lagoon when they were born, so why shouldn't the next batch of youngsters?

Once within the confines of the lagoon, the newts subsist of scraps dropped or discarded into the water by their elders. Growing quickly, they become soft-skinned miniatures of their parents, complete with working lungs, by the eighth year. Once they have reached this stage, the infants are able to leave the water and fend for themselves. This is also a trying time, for the Imrians have no developed sense of parental duty. Indeed, the belligerent males have been known to grasp up the wriggling forms of the youngsters and consume them, for no apparent reason other than whim (and, presumably, hunger).

Personal Habits

If there is one thing that all travellers to Kragan can agree upon, it is that they find the Imrians deeply unsettling. Although they have many unpleasant habits (as detailed below), perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the creatures is the silence that accompanies them. The amphibians rarely speak, and when they do their slurping, liquid speech is ghastly to hear. They are also one of the most 'alien' of the intelligent races of Talislanta, with a physical form that many find deeply unnerving. Their readily apparent strangeness can test even the most travelled individuals. Even if the Imrians displayed the most refined habits of the civilised lands they would still be unwelcome strangers at any table.

The personal habits of the Imrians are unpleasant to say the least. For example, the slimy mucous layer that covers the hide of these creatures and allows them to operate out of water for extended periods is produced by glands hidden beneath the scales on the Imrians' skin. However, after prolonged periods out of water the pores slowly close and the Imrian's scaly hide becomes hardened and dry, an unpleasant and potentially life threatening condition. To counteract this drying effect, Imrians never travel overland without a Lurm Slug, a creature almost as repulsive to outsiders as the Imrians themselves. The habit of vigorously scraping and abrading scales is also common among the Imrians and acts to keep the scales and mucus glands in good order. This practice is normally carried out on dry land to encourage the mucus to flow, and is sometimes carried out in groups. Such activities can present a most

disconcerting sight to the uninitiated traveller, with the Imrians scraping against each other in a seeming frenzy of writhing limbs and slime.

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The Lurm slug

This small fist-sized invertebrate exudes a powerful, sticky and mildly odorous slime when threatened, a slime that serves perfectly to ‘freshen up’ an Imrian’s own mucous layer. It is a common sight on land in the Southern Rim to see an Imrian, mucous membrane tightening in the sun, rubbing it’s body vigorously with the Slug, the helpless creature mewling terribly as the Imrian pinches and nips it to draw forth the soothing excretion. Safely handling the slug is a tricky skill. Although seemingly helpless, the creature can deliver a powerful bite. Imrians learn from a young age how to carry one, though many adults are missing fingers having learnt of the dangers of the slug the hard way. The slime itself is pungent, with a faintly bitter, acidic aroma.

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Eating habits are equally unusual. An Imrian’s preferred meal of worms and leeches is repulsive to many, as are the stale salty liquors that accompany the meal. Only the worldliest of Imrians recognises that guests may not share the same gastronomic requirements, and even then the concept of fresh food may be taken a little too far. Eating with Imrians is not for the squeamish.

Imrians sleep in tubs of stinking brine. Everyday in their city of Kragan, they hoist up buckets of ‘fresh’ lagoon brine in which to spend the night (usually eating any newts they happen to find residing in the water). Peculiarly, Imrians are known to ‘snore’ as they sleep. Their rudimentary lungs draw in water while they rest (breathing through their gills). As the water moves in and out of the lungs it generates a whooshing, sloshing sound. Such can be the volume of noise generated by this motion that those unfortunate enough to have to spend a night with an Imrian would be doing very well to get any sleep at all. By the light of the moons Kragan resonates to these penetrating, eerie sounds.

There is very little to tell male and female Imrians apart. In their society they are not differentiated by sex and seem wholly uninterested in each other outside of the mating period. However, every full swelling of the moon Jhang, the Imrians are overcome with the desire to breed. It would be unwise for any foreigner to be within the precincts of the Kragan birthing pools at this time, as the violent passions of the Imrians are not for the fainthearted. The next morning the pools swarm with the small newts that will grow to become the next generation of Imrians, providing of course that they survive that long.

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Imrians and foreigners

Considering their disregard of the ‘land worms’ that populate the rest of the continent, it is not surprising that most Imrians feel no need to alter their personal habits to accommodate the whims of foreigners. Of course for the most part the foreigners in question are (or will soon become) slaves, so the mores of polite social conduct are not high on the agenda. However, when ‘entertaining’ possible clients, some of the more worldly Imrians have learnt not to eat in front of their guests (or at least not to offer food), and to avoid the use of the Lurm slug if possible. In fact, many have concluded that the best way to get a good price for the slaves they offer is not to drag out the trading discussions any longer than is absolutely needed, a view which certainly suits their taciturn nature and most of their trading partners.

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Origins and Beliefs

To study the origins of Imrians is generally considered an unpleasant task at best. Uncommunicative, surly and with a host of odious and aggressive personal habits, a scholar would have to travel the length and breadth of Talislanta to find a more disagreeable (or some would say more repulsive) subject of study. However, the warlike nature of the amphibians and their constant raiding into other lands, including historically those of the Seven Kingdoms, has made any investigation into their motivations a more pressing concern. For those scholars wishing to make a name for themselves at the Arcanum, or at least to ingratiate themselves with the Council of the Seven Kingdoms, dedicating a little scholarly time to the study of far off Imria and it's mysterious people could do no harm at all.

Unfortunately for the earnest investigator, precious little useful or reliable information about Imrian culture can be gained from questioning the amphibious people themselves. Even if one somehow manages question an Imrian and avoid the slave pens, the creatures are soon found to be uncouth and belligerent, making poor subjects for scholarly enquiry if willing to talk at all. It is generally agreed among scholars that have attempted to communicate with these beings that there is only one subject they are willing to elaborate upon when questioned in any great detail, and that is their superiority to the rest of Talislantan life. When probed on this subject they become almost talkative, stating that they are descendents of the First Race, the wellspring from which all other life began, a fact they consider in its self enough to raise them above the other 'land worms' that populate the rest of the continent.

Needless to say, such claims are held in scant regard amongst the wise of more civilised lands. It is the considered opinion of such notable scholars as the great Thystram that the Imrians are descended from the Batrachians, ancient aquatic people even more mysterious in origin. Others believe that the Imrians are the remnants of another lost aquatic race that vied with the Batrachians for control of the oceans. Either way, it is unlikely that the amphibians themselves will shed further light on the subject.

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Currently there are two popular theories that permeate the hallowed halls of the Arcanum regarding the origin of the Imrians. The debate still rages back and forth (in the rarefied terms of scholarly discourse) on this mysterious people, and all would agree that the matter is far from resolved. The following individuals are the main proponents of the two opposing views, which have been reproduced here for the sake of completeness.

Professor Nostos – 'Nymandre and others show woeful knowledge in this matter. All serious scholars know that the Imrians are descendents of the Batrachians. When the repulsive tentacled Nautiloids invaded their realm, they were forced to flee onto land and the peace loving race degenerated into the amphibious forms we see today.'

Nostos has many admirers among the student population of the Arcanum, being charismatic, knowledgeable, highly personable and also an ex-student of the facility. He has his detractors however; many of who secretly believe he simply recycles the theories of others. It is true that the estimable Thystram first put forward this particular point of view, though on what evidence it is based is a matter of conjecture, being seemingly only backed up by legends and hearsay. According to proponents of this theory the Batrachians were a highly intelligent aquatic race that ruled much of the oceans of Archaeus. Highly intelligent, it has even been suggested that they possessed the ability to visit other watery spheres. Their Empire lasted many hundreds of years before falling into decline. Proponents of this view state that recent research has shed some light on causes of the eventual demise of the Batrachian Empire, the Batrachians being forced to leave their homeland and undertake some vast, undersea exodus by the appearance of a highly aggressive race of tentacled beings. Nostos and others believe the now amphibious Imrians are all that remains of this once great race.

Professor Nymandre – ‘Alas Nostros is misled, either by his vanity or perhaps by simple ignorance on the subject. The Imrians are not the descendants of the Batrachians. The Imrians are ignoble, unintelligent and aggressive, and these are not the traits of the ancient Batrachians. The simple truth of the matter is that the Imrians are descended from a fully aquatic race that once competed with the Batrachians for land. Finding that they could not win such a competition, they were forced to find other lands, eventually seeking shelter on dry land.’

Nymandre is a magician of certain skill who harbours ambitions to become the Director of the Lyceum Arcanum. He is stern, unfriendly and overbearing, making him deeply disliked among the students. As a result he does not receive as much credit as he deserves for his work at the Arcanum, mainly due to his aggressive and demanding character. He and his followers firmly believe that the Imrians are not related to the Batrachians but instead are the last vestiges of an unidentified competing race, forced to adapt to land after losing in conflicts with their aquatic neighbours. Certainly, it is easier to imagine the Imrians being descendants of a warlike undersea race rather than the Batrachians, who were thought to be peaceable in nature.

Unfortunately, the uncommunicative and aggressive nature of the Imrians ensures that the origins of the creatures cannot be firmly established. Such is the nature of these unpleasant beings that the situation is unlikely to change.

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Unfortunately for the rest of the continent, the beliefs of the Imrians are pragmatic in the extreme. The Imrians worship no god and they recognise the values of no other people. Quite simply, they consider themselves the very pinnacle of civilisation. They apparently reason that as they are descendants of the First Race, logic dictates that they must be the greatest race on Archaus, certainly the most important and civilised race in Talislanta. To the Imrians all other races, or ‘land worms’, are simply lower forms of life and no better than animals.

If one were to acknowledge this point of view it is perhaps just a short step for the enlightened scholar to understand why the practise of slavery is so ingrained in the heart of Imrian life. To the amphibians, it is simply that no other lifeform is worthy of being considered as an equal. To the Imrians, the only worth all the other peoples of the continent can have is as commodities. It would seem that the only beings that the amphibians consider free of this fate are those that are willing to buy such commodities. To the amphibians it seems the world has a very simple structure. If you are not an Imrian, then you are either a slave or someone who wants to buy slaves. The choice is yours.

It might be thought that with such a bleak outlook as regards the other cultures of the continent the Imrians would pose a great threat to civilised lands. While it is true that their actions plague many of the southern realms, the Imrians are lazy and unorganised and have yet to mount a serious threat to civilisation, except to the peaceful inhabitants of the island of Batre (as detailed later).

The Imrians find it difficult to produce many items that require great craft or skill; instead they buy these items by trading slaves with some of the less salubrious races for considerable profit. They have traded with many less scrupulous individuals and peoples, but as ever the mercantile and immoral merchants of Farad are their greatest customers, particularly since they successfully annexed Batre. The peoples of Aaman and Zandu also have a history of trade with the Imrians, along with the Rajans. These mercantile practices give the Imrians access to goods they are unable or too lazy to provide for themselves. They also deal in drugs and other intoxicants and export of the many wild and dangerous beasts of the coast and the interior of Imria.

Culture and Customs

The Imrians are an insular and uncommunicative race. Most speak low Talislantan in gurgling, slurring voices, but their 'own' language is Piscine, the ancient tongue of all sea creatures which predates the Great Disaster. They are not known for their talkative nature, even when alone among others of their kind, and their silence does little to ease their unnerving appearance to foreigners. The Imrians do write, employing a crude symbology which they claim is descended from the first written language of Talislanta, but those scholars who have studied Imrian writings conclude that it is nothing but a hodgepodge of script stolen from other tongues. The amphibians have no known native art and are seemingly completely unresponsive to beauty in any form. Some do sport the 'shrolk' brass rings (see below) through the bony ridges on their faces, but these appear to be symbols of status in Imrian society rather than ornamentation. The currency of the island, the 'shrolk', is usually transported as small brass rings. This currency is only used internally among the amphibians; those foreigners who trade with them typically either barter for their goods or in rare instances use gold lumens, which the Imrians can in turn use to purchase foreign goods such as food and weapons.

Scholars know little of the workings of Imrian culture and society; the main sources of information being freed slaves who have an unfortunately clouded view on their previous 'owners'. Most Talislantan scholars would agree that the culture and society of the Imrians' is primitive at best, and certainly none of the rarefied social graces of the Seven Kingdoms or other civilised lands can be found in city of Kragan. It is well reported that the trade in slaves and other commodities is an important part of Imrian culture. For this reason (despite the apparent crudity of the Imrians) there is a growing interest amongst scholars in the workings and stratification of the culture of Imria, especially in the light of the past attacks against the Seven Kingdoms. Scholars hope that by studying the amphibians, they may gain insight into the motivations that drive the creatures so strongly to become the slavers of other races.

It has been noted that in Imrian society, both sexes appear to be treated equally. It is thought that this equality has come about because the urge to reproduce only occurs at the swelling of the moon Jhang. At all other times the amphibians show absolutely no interest in procreation, the creatures seeming to register no attraction whatsoever for members of the opposite sex. Amazingly, some scholars have even thrown into doubt the sex of the Imrian 'king', though the term queen is never used.

Several magicians have also observed that the amphibians seem to have no natural ability with magic, and appear unable to comprehend the power of magicians from other lands. Even the slightest magical abilities seem to throw the Imrians' into confusion. The tide of many a seemingly lost battle against the amphibians has been turned by the subtle use of magic.

In truth Imrian society is based on a strongly stratified and hierarchical feudal system. At the top of the system is the Imrian king, an individual who commands tyrannical power within Imrian society. It is the king who makes decisions regarding the policies of the race (what little of those are required), and who gains the most reward. The current king, Rullerg, was responsible for the decision to annex Batre, something that has made him popular amongst his subjects. Generally speaking the position of king is held by the most aggressive, most belligerent and most cunning of the Imrians, and is neither voted upon nor hereditary (unsurprising considering the Imrian's reproductive habits – it is simply impossible to prove any one individual is related to another!). Should any wish to challenge the king's authority they must first gather support amongst the more powerful members of the populace, principally the Slavemasters and Captains (see below). This is traditionally achieved by the use of promises of riches and power to those that the challenger wishes to have as backers. Once greed has brought a sufficient number to the cause, an official challenge can be made.

Should the pretender to the throne have the majority of the power brokers of Kragan on his side, the king will be swiftly deposed and replaced. If the current king and the challenger are find themselves with roughly equal support, a fight to the death ensues, the survivor being either named or reconfirmed as the king. If the challenge is issued without sufficient support, the unlucky individual is unceremoniously fed to the sea demons. The system seems clear but in reality the particulars of royal succession are as murky and muddy as the lagoon of Kragan. Petty politics and power games are rife in the city, but tend to be of the most dim-witted and transparent kind. Imrians don't have the capability to grasp the complex courtly processes that blossom in more civilised lands.

The king is officially responsible for administering justice and hearing the particulars of each case, before passing judgement as whim takes him. In reality, all figures of authority carry out the task of trial and sentencing (usually ignoring the 'superfluous' trial stage). Given the cruel nature of Imrians, it comes as no surprise that for most crimes a sentence of death is the traditional punishment. This is usually achieved by throwing the criminal from the flanks of Mount Talus into the waters below that seethe with sea demons, a most abhorrent death. Particularly unruly slaves such as those that try to escape or attempt to aid their comrades in such escapades also find themselves as the midday meal for the aqua demons.

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In the court of the king

The idea of a 'king' is something the Imrians have apparently copied from the more civilised lands of the continent. The king of Imria resides in the tallest stilt hut on the island (see the description of the city of Kragan for more about these rather unusual dwellings). This lofty position affords the king a view over all of his subjects and serves to confirm and reinforce his superiority over those that look up to the hut from below, giving the appearance of power so crucial to tyrannical rule. The king's hut is larger than the rest and kept in slightly better repair, but it is by no means a palace. Within, the largest space is given over to the throne room, if such a term can be used to describe this rather spartan space. Here the king sits on his ancestral throne of intricately carved coral, depicting pale nymphs cavorting in the waves of a frozen sea. Though still highly beautiful the chair is in very bad condition, but any scholar given time to study it would soon discern that it is exceedingly old. The carvings are also far superior to anything the Imrians could muster should they be inclined to the arts (which they are not). The antecedence of the throne is unknown, but it is abundantly clear that it is not an Imrian creation. Rullerg, the current king of Imria, spends most days perched on his throne issuing decrees to the Slavemasters via messengers and lackeys. Surrounding by a sea of guards and menials, the king's life is one of (relative) luxury. Rullerg is also somewhat better off than many of his predecessors in that it was he who made the bold decision to annex Batre, an act that has brought the Imrians great wealth. This act has kept him on the throne for far longer than is normally the case. An audience with the king is a rare 'privilege' for foreigners; only the Imrians' most important customers would ever receive such an honour. The king is not particularly keen on winning over 'land worms', leaving such odious tasks to his subordinate Slavemasters.

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Beneath the king in power are the Slavemasters. These individuals are so named because they have direct control of the slave trade that brings the Imrians wealth. This includes all aspects of slavery, including sending out expeditions to acquire new prisoners, finding new sources of 'goods' and the arduous task of dealing with those foreigners that always seem willing to pay for such goods. It is the Slavemasters who also co-ordinate the lesser trades in narcotics and wild jungle beasts that the Imrians use to supplement their economy. As most members of the race do not interact well with outsiders, the Slavemasters hold powerful positions in the eyes of the king. Forming a close-knit community, new members are specially selected by the king from amongst the ranks of society. Logic would suggest that the monarch make his choice of

Slavemaster based upon what he perceives as being the most admirable and useful skills for the trade, including the rather debasing ordeal of dealing with free 'land worms'. Needless to say, this is rather a subjective view, and many kings have used somewhat less ideal approaches to making appointments. However, it would not be entirely incorrect to say that such is the importance of the slave trade to the amphibians that a king who repeatedly chooses replacement Slavemasters unwisely is unlikely to remain king for long.

Next in the hierarchy of Imrian society beneath the Slavemasters come the Captains that command the Slavers' coracles. These highly trained individuals are responsible for commanding the vessels at sea on the numerous slaving trips undertaken each month and also oversee the rearing and training of the Kra the Imrians employ to draw their coracles. Captains have fairly powerful positions in Imrian society as it is they who actually go forth and do the work of capturing slaves, thereby asserting Imrian superiority over the many other life forms that inhabit Talislanta. Each of the Captains personally selects and commands the sailors, Kra tenders and soldiers that make up a typical coracle crew (see below). Each Captain is also loosely affiliated with one of the king's Slavemasters, taking direction from them. Beneath the Captains the working crews of the coracles make up the privileged majority of Imrian society, being considered of reasonable social standing in Kragan. Even so, there is considerable social stratification amongst the coracle crews and the military forces then transport.

Under the coracle crews come the dregs of Kragan society, those with little influence in the affairs of the city. This includes all domestic workers such as those who catch and prepare food, carry out the somewhat infrequent cleaning duties required around the city and perform the myriad other menial tasks associated with Imrian life. The best these folks can hope for is to be promoted to the military or positions onboard coracles, as these are the only routes to social power. Since these positions are filled by the strongest, most aggressive and most belligerent Imrians, even the lowliest Imrian muckraker would be an opponent not to be underestimated if he were to harbour any hope of advancement.

Underneath all these layered positions come the lowest of the low, the young. Until Imrians are old enough to work for the king in whatever capacity found for them, they are worth nothing. Aggressive males occasionally consume their young, an act that raises not a single comment from other members of the race. Newts are simply not worth considering. Unsurprisingly, slaves have no place in Imrian society. These unfortunates are considered property and commodity, nothing more. To illustrate the unusual thought processes of Imrians, it need only be noted that to the majority of the populace of Imria 'land worms' are seen as being fit for nothing but slavery. The concept of trading partners is particularly difficult to grasp. To the average Imrian, all foreigners are nothing but potential slaves.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

Foreigners in Kragan

The vast majority of foreigners who enter the city of Kragan are of course slaves. These are held within bamboo cages in a specially segregated region of the city. Other 'land worms' that are within the lagoon for commercial reasons are also kept segregated in a large hut very close the water level (at the bottom of Imrian hierarchy, down with the water-breathing newts). Only merchants are allowed within the city, their bodyguards, sailors and other hangers-on must remain in the ships that are kept moored off the island's shore. Imrian 'mud soldiers' constantly guard the hut, and the amphibians do not allow visiting merchants to move through the city without an escort. All of the merchants are kept in the same place, which can lead to uncomfortable situations when certain merchants are in residence (typically the Rajans). Still, considering the personal habits of the Imrians, most merchants are happy to share!

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The Imrians do have a number of unusual customs that pepper the yearly calendar. Mating is a biological imperative linked closely with the moon Jhang. Why this should be no one is sure, but it seems that only the waxing for this particular celestial body excites passions in the amphibians. They also mark the swelling of the moon dark moon Zar. During those nights when Zar fills the night sky the Imrians are particularly belligerent, and they have been known to carry out some of their most aggressive actions at this time. The attack that led to the annexation of Batre and also the unsuccessful conflict with the Thralls and the pirates of the city of Gao Din took place at this time. Foreigners are not allowed within the walls of Kragan when Zar is ascendant, which is probably for the best.

Coracles and the Kra

One of the more unusual and noteworthy sights of the southern oceans, the Imrians' coracles are the only vessels except perhaps the sleek black ships of the Savants of Nefaratus that willingly range away from the comforting sight of the coast and out over the open sea. Commanded by Ships' Captains, these vessels are constructed from the hide and bones of the monstrous Kra, the sightless eels that dwell in the undersea caves and inlets surrounding Imria. These fearsome beasts are also employed to provide propulsion, their normally aggressive tendencies curbed by ingestion of prestigious quantities of drugs. The coracles range far and wide across the Southern Rim, sometimes even straying further afield in the search for slaves. For anyone who values their freedom it is indeed a worrying sight to see one of these awkward looking but deadly vessels coming over the horizon.

A typical coracle is a long, thin barge-like vessel of relatively simple construction. The main body of the ship from is formed from tough, leathery and watertight Kra skin, with the rib bones and backbone of the beast acting as the main struts to support the superstructure. The largest vessels have fore and aft castles constructed in the same way. The deck is boarded with thick fibrous lengths of woven reed. Although quite clumsy in the water, coracles are somewhat flexible, a useful attribute when facing rough seas. A mast, typically a single, flexible beam of wood, juts from the centre of the deck, with the ribbed sail of woven reed an added source of propulsion for use when the Kra are resting or injured. Normally, two or three Kra are harnessed to the vessel to provide propulsion. A higher number than this, although advantageous for increasing the speed of the vessel, is deemed too dangerous as neighbouring eels would then run the risk of bumping together, leading to the creatures fighting in their drugged confusion and possibly maiming or killing each other.

The large size of the coracles means that close approach to land is difficult, especially since the Kra cannot be induced to go back-up and the massive, ungainly ships has a fairly wide turning circles. For this reason any forays on to dry land, typically on a slaving missions, are carried out in smaller oar-driven reed boats that are towed behind the main vessel. These boats are also employed to transport any newly acquired slaves back to the coracle, bamboo cages being used for the purpose of holding the prisoners.

Specially trained Imrian handlers, the second most important members of the crew after the Captains, tend to all aspects of maintaining the Kra. Each eel is assigned a handler who grooms the beast, feeds it, and is solely responsible for the preparation of the toxins used to subdue it. The drugs are produced using ancient recipes, closely guarded secrets of the amphibians. The Imrians use a powerful toxin to mellow and confuse the giant Kra, allowing them to be harnessed to the coracles to provide propulsion. Known as Slurl Broth, this powerful intoxicant is fed to the Kra along with the rotting flesh and slave remains that are their staple diet. The Kra themselves are reared from young in special flooded caverns located around the lagoon of Kragan. The Slurl broth needs to be very potent to subdue the adult Kra, but in a wild Kra such a dose would prove far too toxic. By rearing the Kra from young and introducing them slowly to increasing levels of Slurl, the Imrian handlers ensure that each Kra

builds up a sufficient resistance to the toxic effects of the drug while maintaining full efficacy.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

Slurl Broth

A thick, yellow and foul smelling broth, this powerful intoxicant is fed to the Kra to temper their most aggressive tendencies making them easy to control and relatively pliant. The liquor is produced by combining the inky extractions of the Bullin crustacean, harvested from the sea floor, and the blood of a number of the fish that are native to the coastal regions of Imria. Meat, the Kra's principle food, is dunked in the broth before being dropped into the gaping mouth of the eel. Although toxic to the giant eels, the broth renders them compliant and manageable. The Batractians rendered the Imrians compliant in the same manner.

A few Talislantans 'land worms' have been known to accidentally consume some of the Broth. The coma that results from ingestion of even a small quantity is long and deep, with the toxins within the Slurl typically causing sweats, spasms and the swelling of limbs. Thankfully consumption of a small amount of the broth is rarely fatal. Exposure to larger doses is somewhat more of a problem.

Handling and grooming the Kra

Harnessed by the Imrians while in the subdued state brought on by the Slurl broth, the sightless Kra are docile and lazy. To spur them into motion their handlers agitate the sensing horns that protrude from the top of each eel's skull using thin lengths of woven cord. In the kra's natural environment these protrusions are utilised to detect the emanations emitted by all living creatures. In the eel's drugged state, the manipulation of the horns by the handler induces a sensation similar to that caused by the presence of nearby prey. For a Kra even in a drugged state the desire to feed is a very powerful stimulus, enough to cause the beast to surge forward in search of the imagined meal. In doing so the beast drags the coracle along behind it, thereby providing propulsion. Careful manipulation of the port and starboard horns allows a practised handler to steer the Kra, and by working in a team all the handlers on board a coracle can coordinate their actions to ensure the vessel moves smoothly. It has been noted by the sea rogues of Gao Din that the best way to immobilise an Imrian coracle is to either kill the Kra (no easy task) or to eliminate the handlers for this very reason. In their drugged state the Kra will keep moving as long as the feelers are manipulated, so the handler has to constantly check the state of the beasts to ensure they do not exhaust themselves.

Unfortunately in their stupefied state the eels are rather prone to infections from cuts and abrasions and to water-borne diseases. The most difficult and potentially dangerous aspect of handling the beasts is to enter the water near the resting Kra and inspect the long, sinuous bodies for damage, applying tincture and salves where necessary. Given the danger inherent in this activity, it is not surprising to learn that the Imrians often employ the more agile of their slaves for this purpose.

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Despite the awkward appearance of the coracles and their relative lack of manoeuvrability in the water compared to the vessels of other seafarers such as the pirates of Gao Din, Imrian coracles and their crews are not to be underestimated. The Kra can produce a quite impressive burst of speed when properly impelled by their handlers, as high as 20 mph for short periods although a more typical cruising speed is around 8 mph. The amphibious nature of the Imrians, being at home both in and out of the water, also makes them dangerous opponents whilst at sea. A typical tactic of the Imrians when engaging enemy vessels in water-borne combat is for several of the 'mud soldiers' to slip into the water and swim strongly beneath the surface, hoping to come at the enemy ship unawares and gain access by climbing up the wooden hulls with their long sharp claws and powerful arms. At the same time, the coracle

approaches the other vessel at full speed, acting as a distraction. Just as the coracle comes within range of bowshot the warriors emerge over the sides of the enemy ship, throwing all into disarray and swinging the engagement in the favour of the Imrians. It should be noted that the amphibian 'mud soldiers' are not overly brave and will disengage from any fight they sense they are unlikely to win. The ships of Gao Din are known to be powerful enemies whom the Imrians would prefer not to attack, as the cunning of the pirates is almost legendary among the amphibians. The vessels of other nations are however considered fair game.

Slavery and the Slave Trade

The Imrians first raided the lands of the Dark Coast in the year 97, and have been doing so regularly since that time. Slavery is ingrained in both the Imrian mindset and in their society. Any creature is fair game, sentient, civilised or brutish, as long as there is a market. If there is demand for a particular being, then the Imrians will try to fill it. Unfortunately, there are always clients - whilst some more civilised realms such as those of the Seven Kingdoms have banned slavery, there are still many less-scrupulous lands where slaves are still bought and sold without compunction. Most of these peoples will deal with the amphibians.

Groups of Imrians sequestered under the auspices of one of Kragan's Slavemasters are responsible for catching slaves. The Slavemasters are socially powerful individuals and are responsible for the choice of destination and target, all under the careful eye of the king. Once a suitable destination for a raid has been selected the Slavemasters send out their Captains and their crews in search of likely prisoners. The coast and islands of the Southern Rim are the most popular targets, but other, more far-flung destinations are also occasionally on the itinerary, especially if there is demand for a particular species.

A fully loaded coracle will carry about fifty to sixty Imrians, which includes the Captain himself, his seamen, the Kra handlers and a large contingent of 'mud soldiers'. When raiding the Imrians draw the coracle close to the shore and drop an anchor constructed of Kra bone to secure their position. The Kra handlers, Captain and a small number of the warriors remain on board while the remaining Imrians take the smaller reed boats that are towed behind the coracle and paddle toward land. If possible, the amphibians try to find a suitable river mouth that will allow them to penetrate far inland without having to leave the water. In the wild lands of the Southern Rim, river travel is far easier than overland travel.

Raids tend to be fast and silent. The main tactic that is generally employed is to use the advantage of numbers to overwhelm small pockets of opposition, and then to beat a hasty retreat with prisoners before the victim's peers can raise the alarm. The taciturn nature of the amphibians helps in this regard, even in combat the creatures tend not to cry out or shout. It is very common for the associates of the victims not to manage to raise the alarm until the slavers are safely down river.

The amphibians employ several specialised pieces of equipment for the purpose of capturing slaves. Strong nets woven from thin, fibrous vines and weighed down with stones are used to entangle and trip victims. The same use is put to Imrian barbed bolas (also known as the oc). These devices are composed of a collection of barbed spheres linked by lengths of tough cord. They have the unfortunate tendency to become hopelessly entangled and so must be held in wooden cases, but when thrown by a skilled user they have the potential to bring down even the strongest opponent at a considerable distance. Capture poles are employed to restrain victims. These are long wooden shafts that have a jointed pair of pincers attached to the end, usually made of Kra bone. Pulling a cord that runs the length of the haft closes the pincers tightly. The normal method of use is to silently approach a target from the rear (perhaps during a melee with a fellow Imrian), slip the pincers around the victim's neck and pull the cord tight.

Powdered alchemical concoctions are also employed to stun and disorientate victims, the recipes for these weapons being of Batrachian origin. Typical alchemical weapons include analogues of Morpheus powders to induce sleep, and a native variety of noxious Smoke powder. These alchemicals are held in small earthenware vials that are carried on a cord around the neck, in combat they can be snapped free and flung either at opponents or at the ground, releasing the toxic agents within as they break.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

Slaving tactics

The Imrians' preys upon an extremely wide and varied number of races and they often are forced to modify the basic 'smash and grab' tactic to account for cultural and physical differences between these creatures. Listed below are some of the methods employed to enslave a selection of the races the Imrians typically encounter.

Ahazu

The warlike Ahazu are dangerous opponents, especially the warbands that occasionally march across the jungle to attack their hated enemies, the Mud people. The Imrians have learnt to leave these groups well enough alone. Instead the amphibians enter Ahazu lands in strong bands of fifty or more warriors, driving on a group of Moorg Wan slaves before them. The Mud people are the hated enemies of the Ahazu, who themselves cannot resist a chance to attack their sworn foes. While this melee takes place the Imrians wade in with capture poles, nets and alchemical concoctions, a dangerous and unpredictable tactic to say the least! The Imrians persist despite occasional heavy losses as the Ahazu are strong and agile and make capable bodyguards, and what is more they have a peculiar code of honour that ensures that once they have been subdued they will never attempt to escape. The difficult part is to get out of the jungle before a larger force of frenzied Ahazu can attack!

Green Men

The Green men are very profitable slaves, being employed as gardeners by a number of races such as the Zandu and Farad. They are also physically very weak and will surrender immediately if cornered. However, they are not the easiest beings to catch. Their intimate knowledge of the jungles and influence over some of the more deadly flora such as stranglevine make them dangerous opponents, and they set many traps, snares and pitfalls among the trees to catch or injure would be captors. Despite these dangers the Imrians do raid in search of the Green men, usually by approaching the area of interest as quietly and quickly as possible and then sending in large numbers of 'mud soldiers' to catch the Green men unawares, before they can set any traps and melt away into the jungle. These tactics meet only mediocre success but given the profits involved they are still considered worthwhile.

Moorg Wan

The Mud people are aggressive and warlike, but also slow and not especially clever. Imrian tactics with this race is to silently paddle upriver in their small reed boats until they chance upon a Moorg Wan. They then quickly subdue the creature before it can escape, using nets and capture poles. Although physically strong, the Mud people fear the Imrians and are easily cowed when caught. They are sold as brute labour, and are often employed by the Imrians as soldiers or labourers.

Batreans

The Batreans from the island of Batre are extremely popular and lucrative slaves. Slaving practises regarding these people shall be discussed later.

Other races

The Imrians will happily enslave members of any race they come upon. Other beings from the nearby lands, such as Mogroth and the Chana witchfolk are occasional residents in the slave pens, as well as far more exotic species from all over the continent. Ever the opportunists, the amphibians will attempt to enslave anyone they encounter who looks weak enough to overcome.

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Apart from those they enslave, the Imrians also have dealings with other foreigners - those immoral merchants and traffickers that purchase their goods. The Imrian Slavemasters, under the auspices of the king, carry out these interactions, setting the prices for their wares and negotiating with foreign merchants. The Imrians will deal with anyone, but considering that the majority of talisnantans regard the practice of slavery to be abhorrent, there are only a few races that the amphibians deal with on a regular basis. Even among the representatives of these realms, dealing with the amphibians is not an easy or pleasant task. The story of the Farad merchant who attempted to trade with the islanders without the proper introductions and found his weakly defended vessel overrun and he himself in the slave pens is not apocryphal. Typically, one deals with the Imrians by first approaching the island with a force of such significance that the amphibians will not attempt to make slaves of you! Once you have their attention, negotiations can then begin. The Slavemasters like to deal with the same people on successive trips, so for those willing to make the trip to Imria and ingratiate themselves to the king, the rewards can be great. Many powerful Farad merchant houses have rose to prominence through this route.

Mysteriously, the Imrians have also dealt with the Black Savants of Nefaratus in the past. In the year 350 coracles from Imria entered the Forbidden Straits around Nefaratus, eager to find a direct passage to the Quan Empire, ambassadors of which had expressed a desire to purchase slaves. The route was required because the Quan were at the time reluctant to allow their impassive Ispasians to choose appropriate slaves for them, but would not even countenance a trip to Imria themselves. Eager to exploit this new market, the Imrians changed their usual policy of selling only from Imria and had therefore set sail for the Empire.

The Black Savants were quick to enforce their ownership of the waters. Their sleek, deadly vessels attacked the coracles, sinking several of them in the ensuing skirmish before the amphibians could beat a hasty retreat. After licking their wounds the Imrians repeated the incursion later that year, with even more vessels, but again the black ships of the Savants easily destroyed them with powerful magics. Keen to open the route but fearful of the obvious might of the Savants, a very unusual Slavemaster called Pssurk made an ambassadorial trip to Nefaratus himself. As a result of his dealings, the Savants opened a route of safe passage through the straits for the Imrian coracles. It is not known what the amphibian offered in exchange for this favour, but there can be no doubt that the price was very high indeed. The slave trade with the Quan started after this agreement was struck. In recent years however the Kang have showed no such pickiness regarding their slaves, preferring labourers rather than concubines, and the Ispasians have become relatively frequent visitors to Imria.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

The following races have been known trade with the Imrians on a regular or semi-regular basis:

The Farad – these immoral merchants will trade with anyone for anything as long as there is a profit in it, as demonstrated by their selling of wind-ship secrets to the Rajans. They are the Imrian's most value and regular trading partners, buying Batrean concubines, Ahazu bodyguards and Moorg-Wan labourers.

The Rajans – a race with no qualms about employing slaves, the Rajans purchase Batreans and just about anyone else the Imrians have on offer. They are particularly fond of the more exotic slaves that the amphibians capture from time to time, such as citizens of the Seven Kingdoms and others from the many lands considered the enemies of Raj.

The Zandir – these decadents are not averse to trading in slaves. However, considering the immoral nature of the Farad and the cruelty of the Rajans, a slave whose destination is Zandu might thank her lucky stars. Principally it is the Batreans that win favour with members of this race, who see only pleasure in the winsome forms of the females.

The Kang Empire – before the silent insurrection, the Quan Empire also bought a considerable number of slaves from the Imrians. Now however that the Kang are the rulers of that vast realm, the trade with the amphibians has somewhat lessened. The Kang do however occasionally send Ispasians to Imria to purchase labourers and some of the exotic beasts that the Kang enjoy so much in the gladiatorial arena.

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Imria and the Seven Kingdoms

Before the foundation of the Seven Kingdoms in the year 222, the Imrians controlled a large region of the jungle lands of what is now Taz and the swamps of Mog and regularly took slaves from this area. The Thralls, though fierce and intelligent warriors, were frequently preyed upon as they made excellent bodyguards and pit fighters for the Quan (who at that time ruled what is now the Kang empire). From Taz the amphibians also made frequent raids into Astar to capture the beautiful and peaceable Muses, the females of which command a high price among the decadent Paradoxists of what would become Zandu.

With the formation of the Seven Kingdoms, the Imrians found the already fierce Thralls augmented by Cymrillian magicians, Aeriad scouts and Gnomekin warriors. Gradually these combined forces drove the amphibians out of Taz and down through Mog in a series of concerted and well-organised skirmishes. The slavers, more used to hit and run raids rather than pitched battles, could not cope with the organised forces that opposed them and eventually deserted the mainland altogether and retreated to their island stronghold. Since then, they have not attempted to occupy the Seven Kingdoms or Mog, instead choosing to launch swift raids to capture slaves.

The largest of these raids took place in the year 570, when a large slaving party entered Mog. The Slavemaster in charge of this operation was the aggressive and ambitious Sullup. Keen to impress the king with his exploits (and perhaps gain the throne of Kragan himself), Sullup personally oversaw the raid. It was Sullup who overruled his Captain and against his best advice took a fleet of small vessels up river to raid Astar for the more valuable Muse slaves. Unfortunately for Sullup, spies in Mog had reported his earlier attack to the council of the Seven Kingdoms, and instead of easily subdued Muse slaves Sullup and his warriors found a fully prepared Thrall battle formation lying in ambush. Fleeing down the Axis River, Sullup lost over half his men and all of his new slaves before he sighted the Azure Ocean. Returning to Imria in disgrace, he was summarily fed to the sea demons.

The Seven Kingdoms are not the only lands to have suffered the depredations of the Imrians. In the same year as Sullup's disastrous raid into Astar, the Imrians launched a major offensive on the island of Thaecia. However although seemingly weakly defended, the powerful magics of the Thaecians were used to great effect and the invading force was easily repulsed. No Imrian has dared to repeat the exercise. The sea rogues' city of Gao Din was the target of a concerted attack in 267, but the vastly superior fighters and far more manoeuvrable ships of the city repulsed the invasion. The enmity between the races remains however and the sea rogues will harass Imrian coracles at any given opportunity.

Secrets of the Ancient Isle

The island of Imria lies in the Azure Ocean, off the coast of Mog. For a traveller approaching the island from the sea, the first indication that there is dry land ahead comes from the smeared plume of smoke stretching far up into the sky. This sulphurous cloud issues from the volcanic summit of Mount Talus, a slumbering giant of the south. As one draws closer, the boulder-strewn and foreboding crags of the volcanic mountain come into view, streaked with yellow emissions and shimmering in the heat haze. Upon seeing the barren heights of the volcano most seamen would already be attempting a hasty retreat; for by the time the jungle-bedecked flanks of the island come into view it is already too late to escape unnoticed. Only those who seek dealings with the amphibians would dare approach closer, and even then only with the utmost care. Much of the coastline is formed from impenetrable crags and inlets, lined with sharp teeth of stone and treacherous currents that seem eager to rip a ship to pieces; it is a brave captain that attempts to land at the island unguided. Nearing the breakwaters that surround Imria the jungle looms thick and impenetrable on the rapidly rising flanks of the island, and the foreboding air that surrounds the isle makes the few scattered stretches of white sand that lay nestled between the inlets and cliffs seem watchful and hostile.

Although as one draws closer it may appear that the island is deserted, this is unfortunately far from the case. The Imrians mainly dwell inland away from the coastline, but their eyes and ears are everywhere, in the jungles that rise above the shores, in the surrounding breakwaters, and in the many inlets, beaches and coves that make up the coastline. Dangerous and exotic beasts dwell beneath the cool canopy of trees, their strange cries echoing about the forests. The slavers insist that no foreign vessel approach the shores of the island, all who come to trade must remain moored just off the coast. Only the amphibians own coracles are permitted to approach the hidden city of Kragan. The amphibians ferry any new slaves or prospective traders inland using these ships, keeping guests blindfolded and the slave cages covered with tarpaulin so that the safe route to the city is never revealed. The secret passage to the city of Kragan actually lies through a tight and twisting maze of inlets that winds between shards of broken stone. Almost invisible from the sea, the passage is guarded diligently by Imrian mud-soldiers and their most faithful and aggressive slaves. Attempting reach the city through the inlet against such a number of fierce warriors would be tantamount to suicide.

Negotiating the narrow channels and allowed finally to view the surroundings, the visitor would find himself in a wide, open lagoon of azure blue waters, deep and cool. Surrounding the lagoon around the southern entrance are tall walls of smooth rock, with bamboo watchtowers perched on top. On the far side of the lagoon the water shallows and a peculiar city is built upon the lagoon. Innumerable stilt huts rise above the water, with the liquid stained somewhat darker and dirtier by the Imrians' filth. The huts rise to many different heights but one hut soars high above the rest. Around the buildings swarm Imrians about their daily tasks, entering buildings via steep ladders of lashed bamboo.

This is Kragan, home of the Imrians, and the final destination for most visitors awaiting sale. But there are other secrets on the island, some of which even the Imrians are not aware. To adventures brave or foolhardy enough to venture to Imria, forgotten secrets may yet be revealed.

History of the Island

In the forgotten age the landmass that is now the island of Imria was a peninsular, an outpost of the continental mainland connected to the rest of Talislanta by a narrow and high-backed causeway of broken stone. This land bridge was difficult to cross but could be negotiated with

care and over thousands of years many beasts of the southern lands used the route to make their way to the peninsular. The cataclysms of the Great Disaster destroyed the land bridge and drastically affected the structure of the peninsular, creating the island that is now known as Imria. As a result, several unusual creatures can be found trapped on the island that are not known on the mainland. Relatively speaking the landmass has not been part of any of the great empires that have straddled more central lands, and many scholars consider that the island has been in the hands of the Imrians since the forgotten age. Certain ruins hidden on the isle hint at a richer, undiscovered past, but these remain undisturbed (except perhaps by the Imrians themselves) and are unknown to the people of the continent.

Geographically the island is volcanic in origin. The still-smouldering mass of Mount Talus dominates, the volcano – relatively quiet before the Great Disaster – has now re-awakened. The distinctive cone-shape of the mountain can be seen from far out at sea, along with the plume of ash and smoke that escapes the summit. The very peak of the mountain appears as a flat plateau from sea level, but in fact hides a large smouldering crater that cuts down to the heart of the mountain. Unlike the lower reaches of the island the volcano summit is both hot and dry, a condition the Imrians find extremely unpleasant. Consequently this is one of the few places on the island where the amphibians will not tread. In recent history the volcano has erupted on a number of occasions, raining boulders and hot ash down on the Imrians and spouting lava flows that run out sea.

Numerous reefs surround the bulk of the island, hidden just below the water level. These coral growths make the waterways extremely treacherous, navigable only by those who know the safe routes or are masters of the sea. Needless to say, the Imrians work hard to ensure that only a few trusted merchants are able to steer a safe course through the reefs and approach the island. Large numbers of sea demons infest the waters close to the island, but strangely they do not molest the safe passages used by the Imrians and their trading partners.

The coast itself is a mixture of high and rugged cliffs, snaking inlets and reef-strewn shallows broken up with the occasional sandy beach. Several isolated and sheltered coves provide some moorage, but only if one can negotiate the treacherous waters that lead to them. Most of these inlets do not wind far into the interior of the island and are steep sided, providing no access to the interior of the island. The Imrians and their slave warriors closely guard these passages through the cliffs, watching for the appearance of would-be invaders. The few beaches that dot the coastline come under close scrutiny, with the seemingly quiet jungles that fringe the sands bristling with islanders ready to repulse or capture the uninvited.

Shrouding the sides of the mountain to within a thousand feet of the cone are thick and near-impenetrable jungles of tall trees and tangled vines. From within the depths come the cries of many strange beasts, some common to other lands on the Southern Rim, some isolated on Imria when the land bridge collapsed and now found only of this remote isle. The jungles run down from the summit toward the coastline, a thick blanket of verdant growth. To the uninitiated the forests seem thick and impenetrable, a veritable wall of strangled growth. However paths do cut through the greenery, traditional routes used by those Imrians and slaves that have been charged with watching the waters that surround the island. Most who walk the forest paths do so in groups of at least five, as the jungles give shelter to some fearsome creatures. The Imrians occasionally travel into the undergrowth to set traps for some of the exotic beast that are considered valuable to outsiders, often baiting them with live slaves. However, despite the value of such creatures travelling into the jungles is not without considerable danger and so the amphibians do so only when there is a strong mercantile incentive.

The city of Kragan sits at the northern end of a large lagoon, the topaz waters glittering like a blue jewel in the green forests of the interior. Nestled beneath the towering form of mount Talus, the lagoon is bathed by day in hot sunlight, the depression capturing the heat of the day

and becoming intensely humid and hot, which is a condition that the Imrians seem to enjoy. For foreigners, the oppressive heat can be most trying. The city lies in the shallows at the northern end of the water, the stilt structures rising far above the water level. The southern end of the lagoon is composed of a rocky wall of stone, surmounted by watchtowers and guard posts.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

The Great Disaster

The cataclysm of the Great Disaster had a drastic effect on the landmass that was to become Imria. The narrow land bridge was destroyed, isolating the land far out to sea. The whole landmass was lifted and tilted, tipping to the side as the hidden lower depths seethed and reformed. The central volcanic mountain, quiet for many centuries, roared back into life, spewing lave and pyroclastic flows down toward the sea and darkening the skies for many months. The heat and flames destroyed many creatures and much of the native jungle was stripped away to reveal the tortured, pitted rock below.

Since those black days life, inevitably, has returned to Imria. Rich, impenetrable jungles now cover the lower flanks of the volcano and many beasts and birds have returned to the island. Surprisingly, a fair number of the creatures that first travelled to the landmass over the land bridge survived the cataclysms and can still be found in the forests and mountain slopes, some of which are unknown elsewhere in Talislanta.

[[[END BOX TEXT]]]

The City of Kragan

Kragan is the only permanent settlement on the island of Imria. Situated at the northern end of the lagoon, where the water shallows significantly, the city has been in existence for hundreds of years. To outsiders, the settlement has a barbaric, almost animalistic appearance. The Imrians build huts are constructed from mats of woven reeds and vines lashed to lengths of wood cut from local trees, all coated in layers of thick mud dug from the edge of the jungle. These structures are raised above the level of the lagoon on wooden stilts of a distressingly flexible nature, with the larger buildings requiring fairly sizable numbers of stilts to provide an adequate level of support. All the buildings are very similar, being distinguishable only in terms of size and more importantly (to the Imrians) elevation above the water. It is the elevation of a property that denotes the position of the owner in Imrian society – the higher the hut, the higher the owner's social status. This no doubt stems from the fact that in Imrian society the lowest of the low, the young, dwell in the lagoon itself. Getting away from the lagoon's waters elevates and Imrian above these social outcasts. The amphibians make no attempt to decorate or otherwise visibly improve their properties, each building having the same colouration as the rest; that of off-white mud baked in the hot sun. Large rope ladders of woven vines grant access to each building, even the king scrambling up to his large abode. The city is in a constant state of flux, the structures of the Imrians are not durable and the current settlement rests on the decayed mass of earlier dwellings, hidden beneath the muddied lagoon waters. As a consequence building work is constantly underway; the lash of the slaver's whips providing suitable encouragement for the slave work gangs. The stilt structures are lowest in the outer precincts and gradually rise as one travels further toward the centre of the city. The largest structure, the king's dwelling, is situated in the centre of the city. There is no wall to the city; the closely guarded lagoon and hidden access provide adequate protection from would-be assailants. The numerous watchtowers on the cliffs to the south side of the lagoon provide additional security.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

A Typical Dwelling

Imians live alone in their huts, having no family bonds. A typical hut is roughly square in shape and around fifteen feet to a side. The walls are constructed of woven reeds coated in thick baked mud dug from the jungles. The roof is usually peaked and made by lashing mats of woven reeds to a central beam of flexible wood cut from a native tree species. Simple drapes of cloth made from woven bark fibres cover the doorway and the small square windows situated in each of the walls. The whole structure is raised above the water level of the lagoon by a collection of stilts. These are constructed from poles of bamboo lashed together with vine, and provide support in a seemingly haphazard fashion.

Within the hut, there is but a single room. The wooden floor is covered with palm leaves, giving the hot interior a resinous smell. Imrian wares are crude and purely functional in design, aesthetics is not even a vague consideration. A large rectangular tank occupies one side of the hut, constructed from wood and sealed with sap from the Tritka, a jungle tree. A bucket of the same manufacture lies by the foot of the tank with a long line of twisted vine tied to the handle. This tank is the overnight resting-place of the amphibious occupant of the hut; the bucket is used to hoist up fresh lagoon water each night. To the side of the tank is a crude wooden table and stool. In the opposite corner of the hut are several earthenware jars. These are used to store the grubs, leeches and worms that are the Imrians' favourite food. The seals on these jars fit poorly and it is not unusual to see escaped occupants crawling across the floor or up the walls. The items that indicate the hut owner's position in Imrian society stand by one wall; capture poles, weapons and nets. The crude loincloths characteristic of the amphibians lay discarded about the floor.

[[[END BOX TEXT]]]

The following structures are perhaps of the most interest to those unfamiliar with the city of Kragan. Visiting any of these destinations (should one manage to enter the city not as the occupant of a bamboo cage) is difficult – the Imrians do not let foreigners move about the city and 'guests' are restricted to only one or two areas outlined below.

The king's hut – Rising high above the rest of the buildings of Kragan, the imposing if not exactly grand hut of the king is easily seen from the lagoon. Over twice the size of the other huts that make up the city, the King's hut is the ruler's residence as well as serving the numerous other functions befitting a seat of power. However, apart from elevation, size and the large number of slaves, menials and guards about the place, the hut has little of the trappings of power. Even the most generous of visitors to the city would be hard pressed to accept that the building was a palace, despite what the king and his subjects feel on the matter. Most of the merchants honoured with an audience within the structure find praising the glory of the king's residence with suitable flowing speeches tests their imaginative skills to the limit.

The king's treasury – A second hut rises high above the rest, nearly rivalling the king's hut in prominence. Heavily guarded by Imrian warriors, only the king has access to this chamber. Here are stored the few broken coral slabs that have been recovered from the Batrachian library (see later). The king (and the rest of the amphibians) have absolutely no interest in the scholarly worth of these artefacts, only keeping them as a sign of Imrians superiority over other 'dry skin' races. The king allows no foreigners to view the slabs, merely pointing out the treasury to merchants honoured with an audience as a demonstration of his power and prestige.

Slave pens – The heavily guarded slave pens are to be found at the edge of the lagoon to the east of the main city area. Large imposing cells constructed either from bamboo or from more permanent woods of the forest are set around a large courtyard area. Jetties run out into the lagoon, suitable for loading and unloading goods brought by coracles. Simply constructed

cranes and pulley systems allow the larger cages to be lifted from the vessels and brought to the pens. In the centre of the courtyard is a raised area that the amphibians use for displaying their goods. Although most of the Imrians see no need to show off the slaves to prospective merchants, the Slavemasters have learnt that they can demand better prices if the merchants have seen the wares beforehand. This is especially the case with the Batrean slaves, although the amphibians do not know why the females of this species have such an effect on the merchants who see them 'in the flesh'. The slave pens are heavily guarded by Imrians, they do not allow their slave warriors to patrol this area.

Merchants' quarters – The merchants are kept in a large hut set on the opposite side of the city to the slave pens. Only merchants are allowed within the city, their retainers must remain moored at sea near the coast. The Imrians bring the merchants to Kragan themselves, keeping them blindfolded such that the route to the city remains a secret. The hut sleeps around twenty men in small but private rooms, each barred from the outside. Merchants wishing to deal with the Imrians have to make do with these unpleasant conditions. Imrian guards stand at the two doors and regularly patrol around the structure, which is separated from the city by a wall of bamboo. Amphibian warriors accompany the merchants on all their dealings with the Slavers and any visits to the slave pens.

Breeding pools – Hidden behind the city at the edge of thick jungle, the breeding pools lie in a clearing of bare stone beneath a dense canopy of trees. They are series of natural hollows in the volcanic rock of the island, formed from the dissolution of a particularly weak pumice. Dissolution was caused by the formation of strongly acidic waters just after the great disaster, which rained down, from mount Talus. Each pool is circular, roughly ten feet in diameter and five feet deep and is filled with rainwater. The rock surrounding the pools are bare of vegetation, for this small area of stone is rich in many exotic and toxic chemicals from the volcano that serve to inhibit plant growth. As a result, the waters of the pools are also sterile and lifeless, hence the need for Imrian newts to flee to the relatively nutritious waters of the lagoon. The Imrians have chosen to breed in these pools for untold years, unbeknownst to them some of the chemicals that leech into the pools from the rock stimulate their breeding instinct.

Kra caves – The Kra that are harnessed to draw the Imrians' coracles are born and raised in a large natural cave system formed in the cliffs at the southern edge of the lagoon. The caves can be accessed either from the lagoon by a series of underwater entrances or from on top of the cliffs where several deep well-like shafts, guarded by bamboo towers, allow drier access. Those entering underwater must negotiate the tightly twisting and convoluted flooded passages, just big enough to accommodate adult Kra. From the cliff top steps have been carved into the shafts to allow access to the depths. Within the system, a series of connected and half-flooded caves are used to house Kra of varying sizes, from the juveniles to the fully-grown specimens that are harnessed by the Kra handlers. The creatures are captured using harpoons and nets just after mating when they are drowsy and sleepy. Netted and dragged to the lagoon, the beasts are led into the caves and reared within, being fed meat from the jungle (and the occasional slave of course) and the low dosage of the Slurl broth that is required to develop their immunity to the poison. As a result of this toxic diet, most of the beasts are rather languid and docile, at least in comparison to their wild cousins. The caves are dank, dark and very dangerous. Numerous side passages curl off into the darkness, and it is well known that the system is very extensive and unexplored. The amphibians make considerable use of slaves to carry out the menial feeding and grooming tasks in the caves. And if one should slip into the waters, well, it's just an unscheduled meal for the Kra.

Warfare and Defence

In general Imrians do not make good soldiers. They are typically undisciplined, unruly and usually find the long moments of inactivity followed by frenzied fighting that make up a

typical day on the battlefield difficult to get to grips with. For this reason the amphibians have not fared well in combat against well-organised formations of opponents with concerted tactics, as shown by their lack of success against the Gao Din and the Thralls. However when it comes to the defence of their homeland they are not to be underestimated. There are several factors the Imrian's rely upon to ensure that Imria is never considered a suitable target for a possible invasion.

The island itself is an isolated and rather deadly place. Lined with reefs and sharp, jagged cliffs and festooned with a thick jungle swarming with unpleasant beasts, Imria is a potentially deadly location to visit notwithstanding the presence of the Imrians. The amphibians make much use of these natural dangers, carefully ensuring that only they know the safe routes through the reefs, the inlets and the depths of the jungle. Should such an unlikely event ever occur, it is quite likely that an attack from a force using overwhelming numbers would be left unmolested by the Imrians, the dangers of the island being allowed to take their toll while the amphibians wait out the attack in the safety of Kragan. The coracles of the Imrians coupled with the amphibians natural abilities in the water are also put to good use guarding the island, ensuring that no vessel's approach is unobserved. The seas around the island are also home to an unpleasantly large population of sea demons. How the Imrians manage to avoid conflict with these beasts has been a subject of conjecture for some years.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

The sea demons

Some of the apparent routes through the reefs surrounding Imria seethe with sea demons, whereas others are apparently free of such menace. Why do the demons infest some waters but not others? This bizarre arrangement has puzzled scholars for many years. It has been speculated that many of the demons found within close proximity to Imria may have been spawned from undersea gates or rents in the dimensional fabric. The source of these rents remains a mystery. It would seem however that the sea demons are only about to enter certain regions of water, thus leaving safe shipping lanes isolated by patches of deadly water. Long ago the Imrians mapped the safe routes and now use them to approach the island, leaving possible invaders unfamiliar with the routes to risk disaster. Ominously, some scholars believe that the areas of water occupied by the demons are expanding, something that both learned scholars and travellers on the Azure Ocean find extremely worrying to say the least!

[[[END BOX TEXT]]]

The Coral Slabs

One might think that apart from the obvious need to learn more of the Imrians in the hope of quelling their activities in the southern oceans there was little of interest on the island of Imria, unless you were a naturalist of unusual bravery. However, one subject does occasionally draw comment in the hallowed halls of the Lyceum Arcanum. It is well known among scholars that the Imrian king claims to own a large number of ancient coral slabs, which are cited by the amphibians as evidence of their ancestry and supposedly date back 20,000 years. The exact nature of these tablets is unknown, but the Imrians claim they hold thousands of these tablets. Furthermore, evidence that the claims may be true has recently come to light. Needless to say, scholars from all over the continent would be extremely keen to study these records of the forgotten age.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

Purported excerpt from the journal of the wizard scholar Quizzerlain (recovered floating on the sea by a travelling merchant on route to Phantas) now stored (and forgotten) at the Arcanum.

...escaping from the cage I swam across the lagoon, away from the sounds of my repulsive captors mating by the light of the moons. Truly I had no idea where I was heading, and if it

wasn't for the ceaseless aggression of the Sult, the Thrall I shared a cage with, and the obvious distraction of the guards on this night I would never have thought of escape. My Thrall companion set off for the pools to claim vengeance, but I swam for freedom. The water was dark and cold in the moonlight and I struggled to swim. I had no idea where I was heading, simply aiming to get as far away from the city as possible. Suddenly, cliffs reared above me, black and silent. I trod water, confused and panicked in the dark. Then I felt a current tug at me, pulling me toward the cliffs. As I neared the current grew stronger, gripping my weakened limbs. Despite my flailing efforts the current dragged me down beneath the waters and into darkness...

I awoke surrounded by impenetrable black. I was lying on stone, water lapping on my feet. Echoes sounded around me, water dripping onto water, magnified a hundred times. I was in a cave of sorts, large by the sound of the noise. Struggling to my feet, I uttered the phrases of the globe of light and holding the arcane illumination above my head in my right hand. I saw that I stood in no a scum-filled chamber, the walls dripping with brine and encrusted with the detritus of the sea. Scanning the walls it could be seen that several tunnels left the chamber. I made my way over to one of these, hoping to find an exit. As I did so I tripped and disturbed the weeds on the floor. Looking down I noted a curious sight – it appeared that I had tripped over weeds that covered a piece of unusual pink stone. Kneeling down and clearing the spot, I discovered a paving slab of pink, translucent material. And most interestingly, it appeared to be covered by some sort of script. Curiosity piqued, I worked to clear the slab.

Alas my interest was short lived. The seething of water heralded the appearance of my amphibian captors and I was imprisoned once more. These events transpired last night. Now, however it seems a worse fate than mere slavery is reserved for me. As I write these words I await the trip high up Talus and a brief sojourn with the sea demons. Such is the fate for those who defy the Imrians.

[[[END BOX TEXT]]]

That the slabs exist there seems little doubt – the Imrian king mentions them often, apparently bragging. However, their origins are entirely unknown. The consensus among scholars of ancient times is that the slabs were created by the mysterious ancient Batrachians and contains the summed knowledge of that ancient people. The content of the slabs is unfortunately entirely unknown for two reasons. Scholars suspect that script that covers the slabs is an ancient written form of Piscine, the language of all aquatic creatures that was apparently used by the Batrachians. Beautiful to behold but exceedingly complex, deciphering the code of the text appears to be beyond modern scholars. Secondly, the Imrians do not allow foreigners to view the slabs, even those they trade with. It has been noted previously that the written form of the Imrian tongue is in fact a hodgepodge of writings stolen from other languages, and despite the claims of the Imrian king the amphibians most believe that the amphibians have not been able to decipher the complex script. However, this does not overly concern the Imrians, they have no interest in written art forms, history or magic, seemingly content with their own aggressive ways.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

Secrets of the slabs

Although no one knows what is written on the coral slabs, that fact has done little to stem the dreams of scholars and treasure seekers. The suggested contents include a complete history of the Batrachian people; information on the apparent centuries that some believe the Batrachians spent wandering after the invasion of their land; maps of undersea gateways to other realms and accounts of their travels to such places. Others state that maps of the ancient city of Batrachea are sure to be found, while still others claim that secrets of Batrachian Aquamancy are waiting to be discovered. Needless to say, arguments among scholars on the

contents of the coral slabs are rife, despite the lack of any evidence whatsoever. Such is the nature of academic research!

[[[END BOX TEXT]]]

Unknown to the rest of continental Talsilanta, the coral slabs were uncovered by the Imrians in a hidden chamber situated beneath the caves in which they rear their Kra. The amphibians have no idea of the origins of the slabs, but assume they must be relics of their ancestors. They certainly have no way of deciphering the text. The remains of the coral slabs cover the surfaces of the chamber. Set deep under the cliffs on the southern end of the lagoon that houses Kragan, the chamber is accessed by a torturous rent passing through a fissure in the cliff face, below the water line and the level of the entrance to the Kra caves. Strong and unpredictable currents rush through the fissure and bubble up through a vast rent in the floor of the chamber before sinking deeper underground. Such is the force of the current that vessels in the lagoon are kept well clear of the undersea opening. The chamber itself is dry, though evidence that the chamber was once flooded is clear. Scum and weed cover the walls and crustaceans and other undersea denizens cling to the stone. Roughly square in shape, the chamber slants alarmingly, evidence that the whole mass of the island having been tilted during the upheavals of the Great Disaster. Approximately half of the chamber is choked with fallen rubble where the roof has fallen in. It appears that a long tunnel, possibly natural in origin, gave access to the library from the sea, but this entrance has long been choked by fallen boulders.

The coral slabs are set into the surfaces of the chamber, although they are greatly obscured with undersea growths. Several openings exit the chamber, leading to smaller rooms again covered in slabs. Removing the slabs has not been possible; they appear to be set into the walls with powerful magics. Despite much labour the Imrians have not been able to wrestle the slabs from their homes. The slabs that are stored within Kragan are those that were broken and lifted from their beds by the furies of the great disaster.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

Artefacts within the chamber

The origin of the chamber is unknown – the Imrians are unconcerned with historical enquiry and no other more enlightened scholars have had the opportunity to inspect the room. However, several items within the chamber may provide some clues to the enquiring mind.

Carved spines – Curiously shaped spines approximately one foot long lay scattered about the floor. Ribbed and shaped in intricate designs, it is uncertain whether the spines are natural or constructed. Even so, they are very beautiful.

Coral disks – These items can also be found hidden beneath the weed. They are made of pink coral (like the slabs) and are also covered in the same intricate script. Approximately half a hand in size, it is possible that these objects could have been some form of money. Certainly, to collectors they would fetch a high price as they have been found nowhere else on the continent.

[[[END BOX TEXT]]]

The Imrians regularly visit the library and jealously guard what they see as their heritage. Also, the tunnels and rents that lead to the chamber are very dangerous – those who are unfamiliar with the currents could soon find themselves dragged into fissures deep under the earth. Any foreigners who accidentally find their way into the chamber (including slaves) are promptly fed to the sea demons. The amphibians are keen to keep the location of the slabs secret at all costs.

The Hunting Lodge

As well as the mysterious chamber housing the coral slabs, a second ruinous structure is located on Imria and has remained undisturbed for many years. The structure can be reached by a single tunnel located in the shady depths of the jungle at the foot of Mount Talus; the rotting remains of a portcullis half blocking the entrance. The tunnel runs back into the rock before curving steeply upwards, though with occasional horizontally sections running for short periods. On the steeper sections the remains of crumbling steps climb upwards and near the top of the route, where the shaft is near vertical, a winding and precarious stairway spirals upwards for many hundreds of feet. Occasionally the decayed and rusted remains of torch brackets can be seen set into the walls.

This tunnel leads to an ancient hunting lodge situated within the cone of the summit of mount Talus. A great deal of the building was destroyed during the Great Disaster when the volcano became much more active, but much of interest remains. Luckily, the main outpouring of lava from the volcano during recent eruptions has exited the crater through a breach to the east of the lodge, sparing the ruins the worst effects of the intense heat. The Imrians have not discovered the lodge due to the dangerous dry heat of the volcano at this level, not to mention the lava and pyro demons that infest the upper regions of mount Talus. Approaching the upper regions of the volcano the tunnel comes close to the magma tube and becomes dangerously hot (the volcano was originally far less active before the great disaster). This intense dry heat has stopped the Imrians from exploring beyond the top two hundred feet of the tunnel, as they cannot keep their hides moist under these conditions.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

The Great Hunt

In the hedonistic days of the forth millennium, many Archaens occupied their time with a wide variety of pursuits. Most, of course, were of the cerebral and highly decadent kind, but some were rather more physical in nature. In particular, a small section of the high society of the sky-city of Aeon developed a taste for hunting, especially of the larger and more ferocious beasts that lived in those times. The hunting lodge was built for pursuits of this kind. The Archaens had noted that the Sub-men that swarmed across the continent had yet to reach the peninsular that was to become Imria (though the Imrians were no doubt in residence), and so the landmass was therefore a reasonably good place for the Archaens to come down from their sky-city. The hunting lodge was constructed principally as a safe (and picaresque) place for a Windship to be docked. The tunnel then led down from the mountain to the jungles, giving the Archeans access to the wild beasts they sought.

[[[END BOX TEXT]]]

The lodge originally took the form of an open-roofed stone box set into the side of the volcano's lava cone. Approximately one hundred feet square and constructed of stone; the floor of the lodge was of polished marble. The walls were also of marble and were lined with crystalline tiles. Periodic openings on the outermost walls gave views down into the volcano's heart. The roof was open, allowing access to the skies. The tunnel from the jungle opened out in the floor of the temple. Dominating the wall against the side of the volcano's cone was a large bas-relief of a fearsome and now extinct beast, displaying an alarming array of claws, fangs and mandibles. In times long past this creature was the chief target of the hunting parties. A winch set onto the floor tethered visiting vessels in place.

Since the great disaster, much of the lodge has been damaged. The outermost wall closest to the centre of the volcano's cone has fallen away, taking a third of the floor with it, leaving a melted and blackened edge of jagged rock. The carving of the beast has been severely damaged; the original form is now barely guessable. The floor is scattered with boulders and

debris. Plumes of acrid smoke drift over the structure, occasionally engulfing the walls, and pyro demons occasionally prowl the lodge. However, many of the crystalline tiles are still visible. Since the great disaster, no sentient beings have entered the lodge.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

Artefacts within the lodge

Sadly, many of the wondrous devices that the Archaens left within the lodge have long since been destroyed by the turbulent action of the volcano. The large bas-relief in the centre of the back wall has been very badly damaged, only a rough approximation of the original carving now remains. A few other items of interest can be found in the temple and these are listed below:

Ivory pendant – Lying in the dirt and debris of the temple is a small pendant of a fabulous avian beast, carved from a chunk of marbled ivory. The pendant is exquisitely made and very beautiful. Should the pendant be strung on a necklace and worn, the device has the ability to calm winds in a half-mile radius of the bearer, the effect lasting as long as the owner concentrates. This effect is very powerful, and can even create an aura of calm and peace amid a raging storm. The pendant was originally used to ensure that the Windship carrying the wearer was blessed with good weather.

Ceremonial urn – This great vessel of brassy material stands at the back of the temple. Over four feet high, the container is very heavy, and would require about three men to lift. Rather a plain and utilitarian piece, the urn actually served a very useful purpose in the temple. Magically enchanted, the urn is always full of water, the level of which never seems to fall no matter how much is removed. Furthermore, the water is fresh and sweet to drink. The Archaens used this water to refresh themselves when returning from the hunt. Although undoubtedly very useful, a note of caution should be raised. If the urn is tipped onto its side, roughly one hundred gallons of water will pour out before the magic is exhausted and the urn broken. Should the urn be placed on a vessel and accidentally upended, the results could be disastrous.

[[[END BOX TEXT]]]

Beasts of Imria

The jungles of Imria and the surrounding coasts are home to a wide variety of dangerous and deadly beasts, many of which are outlined in the Talislanta Menagerie. These include such creatures as Kra, Alatus, Crag spiders and Swamp lurkers. However these are by no means the only creatures that can be encountered on the island. There follows a description of some of the other less well-known inhabitants of Imria, all of which are found only on the island.

Glow Eels

Found in the depths of the lightness caves and inlets that surround Imria, Glow Eels are so named for the intense light they generate. Resembling smaller versions of Kra but with tiny, beady black eyes, the skull of the Glow Eel is surmounted with a large multi-faceted crystal. Using this stone, Glow Eels are able to generate light in a dazzling array of colours. Reds, blues, greens and delicate shades of azure are all possible, as well as a bewildering array of patterns and forms. The Eels use these colours to send complex messages to other members of their species, including potential mates. They feed on smaller sea creatures, which they stun at close range with a bright burst of intense light. They use the same technique as a defence mechanism, painfully blinding predators that come too close. Unfortunately for the Glow Eels, these techniques are of no use against the larger, sightless Kra. The Imrians make practical use of Glow Eels. When killed, the Eels continue to give off the deep red glow, warning other Eels of danger for several hours. This makes them excellent sources of illumination for those

wishing to explore the lightness depths. Their hacked off heads can sometimes be found bound to the capture poles of Imrians required to work in the dark Kra caves.

Size: 6-8", 30-40 lbs.

INT -7 PER +2
WIL 0 CHA -12
STR +2 DEX 0
CON 0 SPD +8

Ability level: 1-5

Attacks/damage: Bite, DR 3

Special abilities: When threatened the Glow Eel can generate an intense flash of light. Any sighted creatures that pass a perception attribute test are blinded for three minutes.

Armour: Tough skin, PR 1

Hit points: 8

Armour bugs

Armour bugs are an unusual species of insect that may be found in the jungles of Imria and on the upper slopes of mount Talus, especially near the traditional hunting grounds of the Simiax (see below). Approximately an inch long, these black bodied beetles are exceptionally tough. Their exoskeleton is almost preternaturally strong, such that even a good blow from a hammer is unlikely to break the casing and damage the softer parts hidden within. The price the insects pay for this armour lies in their mobility – they are slow on the ground and cannot fly. They also have very poor senses and are unable to detect the proximity of other creatures, even those within a few feet of them. Being carnivorous, this lack of speed and senses would normally render the bugs very poor as predators. However, the insects have instead developed a highly unusual symbiotic method of hunting. Armour bugs have developed a close relationship with the Simiax (see below). These creatures allow the Armour bugs to climb upon their bodies, gripping the shaggy coats to form a thick layer of insects. In doing so, the armour bugs give the unarmoured Simiax a layer of tough exoskeleton that is able to absorb even the most punishing physical damage. This covering allows the Simiax to hunt larger, more aggressive prey without fear of injury. As soon as a kill is made, the Simiax feasts and the Armour bugs slowly swarm over the carcass, eating their share. As a result the creatures are rarely found alone, and the combination of aggressive and nimble Simiax with the tough covering of armour bugs is not to be underestimated. The Imrians steer clear of the Simiax' hunting grounds on the bare upper slopes of mount Talus for this very reason. However, they are of the opinion that once Armour bugs are boiled in brine for two hours and the shell weakened sufficiently to crack, the innards can be most tender.

Size: 1-2", 1-4 oz.

INT -15 PER -5
WIL -9 CHA N/A
STR -10 DEX -4
CON -8 SPD -5

Ability level: 1-2

Attacks/damage: Bite, DR 1

Special abilities: The Armour bug has a PR of 3, however any creature with a good covering of these insects is afforded an effective PR of 6.

Armour: Tough exoskeleton, PR 3

Hit points: 1

Simiax

On the higher slopes of mount Talus, where the jungle thins and open areas begin to appear the Simiax hunt and fight. These powerful apes are slender quadrupeds that walk on hands and feet. Skinny and agile, the Simiax have a nasty habit of ramming any creatures that move

with their thick, bony skulls, usually persisting in such endeavours until the target of such attention is dead. Fiercely territorial, the Simiax are carnivorous and will eat anything, even creatures several times their size. Normally, such overtly aggressive behaviour would severely limit the life expectancy of the creatures, especially given the deadly beasts that range about the island. However, luckily for the apes, they have struck up an unusual symbiotic relationship with the Armour bugs. Male Simiax are almost always accompanied by a contingent of the insects knotted into the long dense hair that covers their hides. Males frequently clash heads over feeding grounds and, more importantly, mates. Surprisingly considering the actions of the males, the females of the species are much more delicate beasts, seemingly content to let the males do the fighting and hunting. It has been speculated that the female Simiax are actually far more intelligent than the males and may have developed a crude form of speech. The Imrians steer clear of the upper slopes of Talus, as the presence of the Simiax (along with Pyro, Lava and Smoke demons) makes the area a place best avoided.

Size: 5-6", 180 lbs.

INT -10 (males), -3 (females) PER +5

WIL +3 CHA -5

STR +3 DEX +6

CON +2 SPD +6

Ability level: 1-12

Attacks/damage: Ram, DR 10

Special abilities: Females have a crude form of speech. Males often found with an accompaniment of Armour bugs.

Armour: PR 6 (see Armour bugs).

Hit points: 15

Mossback

Whenever the Imrians have to venture deep into the jungles, the Mossback is a constant danger. So named for its large, hairy flat back, this powerful biped is a mass of teeth and powerful digging claws. An ambush predator, the Mossback uses its large, clawed spade-shaped front limbs to carefully dig a hole in the ground, usually on jungle trails and paths. Crouching down in the hole and wriggling the loose earth in either side, the beast waits with only the hairy back showing, sometimes for several days. The thick, wiry hairs are green and brown in colour and resemble nothing more than a patch of moss. Any creatures that step onto the 'moss' trigger the beast's attack. Launching itself upward the Mossback attempts to throw the victim into the air, giving the beast sufficient time to exit the hole and seize the dazed animal, rend it limb from limb and then gorge on the remains. The Imrians are fairly adept at spotting Mossbacks, but fatalities are still common, and the slaves sent into the forest are easy pickings for these ferocious brutes.

Size: 6-8", 250-290 lbs.

INT -10 PER +3

WIL +6 CHA -10

STR +6 DEX +3

CON +10 SPD +1

Ability level: 1-20

Attacks/damage: Claws, DR 10, Bite, DR 12

Special abilities: Hides in holes dug in the ground, requires a Perception test to detect.

Hit points: 25

The Stolen Land

To the east of Imria, another island stands in the tropical waters of the Azure Ocean, the tiny isle of Batre. Situated off the coastline of the realm of Mog, this island has a far less intimidating aspect than its larger neighbour to the west. Where Imria is crowned with the rising slopes of Mount Talus, Batre is low lying and unimposing. Where the coastline of Imria is broken and harsh, composed of rocky cliffs, dangerous inlets and deadly reefs, a ring of golden sand surrounds the island of Batre and the waves lap peaceably throughout the long summer days. Where Imria's steamy jungles seethe with deadly predators, diseases and biting insects, those of Batre are cool and inviting, promising shelter and respite from the heat of the sun. Batre is indeed a paradise, and for this reason alone would be a welcome resting place for voyagers on the dangerous waters of the southern seas. For many centuries the island has however exerted a more tangible draw to those seeking pleasures in the warm lands of the southern rim, more than pure yellow beaches and sparkling waterfalls would warrant. The cause of this interest has been the native Batreans, one of the more unusual races of Talislanta.

The males of the species are completely uninteresting, being stoop shouldered, boorish and ugly, certainly all unattractive qualities (if somewhat less threatening than those of the amphibians to the west). However, the female Batreans are renowned throughout Talislanta as arguably the most beautiful creatures on the continent. Even in the cities of distant lands where the names Mog and Imria are more legend than established fact, the name 'Batrean' is synonymous with beauty and grace. In Zandu, the cities of Faradun and those of the now defunct Quan Empire, Batrean concubines were commodities to be desired and grasped with greedy, lascivious fingers. Originally acquired as slaves, many of these resourceful and capable women have gone on to earn positions of considerable power and respect in foreign lands, using their beauty as a perfect foil to complement their keen and resourceful minds.

However, Batre is no longer the paradise it once was. Eager to consolidate their power and the financial security, the Imrians under the command of their king Rullerg have annexed the island. Now it is the Imrians who rule Batre with a fist of iron, killing many of the males and breeding the females into a life of slavery. Despite this act of wanton aggression (and the monopoly on concubines it promises), the most civilised lands of Talislanta have done nothing to help the oppressed islanders. Now many of the Batrean females who find themselves in positions of some influence on the continental mainland are pressuring for the emancipation of their race and homeland. Perhaps now is the time when Batre will once again be free?

The Batreans

The Batreans are an unusual race of humanoids only to be found on the island that bears their name. Truly a remarkable people, the male and female Batreans display a mental and physical disparity so startling that it is hard to believe they are members of one and the same race. The males are large, hunched and boorish, with ugly irregular features and coarse habits. The females on the other hand are numbered along with the Sawila and Thaecians as being amongst the most attractive beings to be found on the continent of Talislanta. This bizarre juxtaposition of the physical beauty and heightened mental prowess of the females and the near-bestial features and slow wits of the males places the Batreans amongst the most intriguing species on the continent. How the race came to show such extreme differences between genders has been a topic of periodic debate at the Lyceum Arcanum, especially among the more adventurous (and amorous) members of the faculty. In fact these respected scholars occasionally declare themselves willing to travel to Azure Ocean to uncover the intriguing origins of the Batreans, in the name of science of course! Sadly, unlike these learned scholars, the majority of the visitors to Batre in recent times have been solely

interested in the more physical aspects of the females, especially since the males have been happy to sell their women for gold, something they seem to find far more attractive.

Batrean males are marginally intelligent, and converse in their own tongue consisting of grunts and throaty barks. They can speak low Talislan but are generally uninterested in conversing with members of other races, when they have to they prefer to communicate using their large spiked clubs. They are lazy and work shy, seemingly happy to laze about during the heat of the day and gamble with bone dice. The males do none of the work required to maintain their settlements, leaving such arduous tasks to the females. Instead they spend their time lazing about, arguing, fighting and snoozing. When roused however they can become quite aggressive, especially when their harem of Batrean females are threatened. Seemingly completely uninterested in the physical allures of their mates except during the week long mating season, gold entices and entrances them, such that they have often been known to sell members of their harems to those offering the glittering metal in return. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the females have been quite happy with the prospect of being sold.

The female Batrean is the polar opposite of the male. Lithe, sensual and charming, Batrean women are intelligent, articulate and compassionate. Left to tend their communities and adept at all the mundane tasks that are involved in such an endeavour, such as cooking, gathering and fishing, Batrean women are extremely resourceful. Many who have been sold into slavery by their mates and thus made it off the island have managed to secure for themselves positions of some power and respect on the continent. Unlike the males, Batrean women converse in their delightful, musical voices using the language Chanan (whether the males grunting tongue is related to this language is unknown), but most also speak low and high Talislan and many of the other languages of the continent, having learnt them from passing sailors.

The origins of the Batreans are unclear. It is thought that they are the remnants of a people who survived the great disaster and fled to the island that is now their home when the fabled lost continent sank below the ocean waves. This ancestry they are thought to share with the people of Oceanus, and many scholars believe that the two races are closely related. Since the great disaster the Batreans have lived on the island in relative peace, foraging among the jungles and fishing off the beaches for sustenance. Never a particularly numerous race, the Batreans constructed two settlements on the island, one on the southern side and the second near the centre of the island, named Lal-lat and Domal respectively. Each settlement was little more than a collection of mud huts surrounded by crude defences, typically just a few rows of stakes set in the ground and lines of cultivated thornwood trees. Despite the crudity of the dwellings Batre has been a pleasant place to stay, with the inviting shade of the jungles and long golden beaches a marked contrast to the perilous atmosphere of the tropical island of Imria to the west.

Slavery has long been a way of life among the Batreans. Outsiders have always coveted the females and the males have been happy to sell 'their' women for gold. Considering the boorish nature of the males and the obvious intelligence of the females, it is perhaps more surprising that the majority of the women have not left the island of their own accord, and it must be said that many of the females who find themselves sold by their males do not seem upset by the prospect of a life of slavery. In truth the females remain on the island, with their uncouth husbands, partly out of a feeling of loyalty to their race and partly out of a love of their home. The women realise that they hold the destiny of their people in their hands. Without them, the males would surely struggle as they seem unable to tend for themselves, and of course the race would dwindle and fade without newborns. The females seem to hold the continuation of their people as a sacred duty that they must honour, even if some of their number leaves to seek their fortunes in foreign lands. Some scholars have commented that perhaps this feeling of almost maternal duty toward the males and their race as a whole is

linked to the unusual duality of the species. Unfortunately for scholars the continent over, the women seem unwilling to discuss such matters.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

‘It was a hot, balmy night. Our ship way anchored just off shore, and I could see the mast swaying with the waters from where we lay. Truly, I don’t know why that girl was with me, her, a beauty the like of which I have never seen before or since, and me just a poor sailor. Still, I wasn’t going to argue. We lay on the beach, resting after our tumble, her in my arms, me staring at the stars. She didn’t speak, and that was good with me. I wouldn’t know what to say anyway, she was a quick-witted one.’

‘Anyway, as we lay there, the waves lapping upon the beach, a strange thought came into my head. A mad thought. I knew I should’ve held me tongue, but I couldn’t help it. So I started to talk. I told her of my home, of the sea and the ship. And then before I knew it I was talking of us, her and me, sharing a life together, getting somewhere with my meagre savings. I was rambling like the fool I am but she listened to it all until I was done. Then she just sighed, a sad, lonely sound. She said she loved me – can you believe that? She, a beauty of the isle, loved a poor sailor like me. But she said she couldn’t come with me. She said it was her duty to stay with that monster that was her husband. She said she owed it to him. I asked her why, and she was silent for a while. Then she said it was her fault, why he was like he was, or at least the fault of the women, that they were to blame for the boorish ways of the husband. I asked her why, and she said it was something from long ago and would say no more. We lay a while longer, and then she rose, saying that she must go back to tend to the fires. I asked her if I would see her again. She shook her head, the darkness hiding her features. I swore I would return to free her, to claim her. She smiled at this, shaking her head, and turned to leave, slipping back among the trees. ‘Men’, she said. I never did get back to the island.

‘True story, that. Here, pass me the ale.’

Tale of Master Taltus as heard in the ‘Waves Crest’, Tarun docks.

[[[END BOX TEXT]]]

Although already considered beautiful, intelligent and resourceful creatures, it seems the women of Batre have yet another power at their disposal that they can use to influence male foreigners that come into contact with them. When in close proximity to members of the opposite sex, Batean women exude a powerful pheromone that can addle and confuse even the most disciplined mind. It is thought that this aroma is produced subconsciously, exuded as a sweet smelling air that seems to accompany the Batrean wherever she goes. This pheromone acts to make males in the vicinity of the female open to her suggestion, and is perhaps one of the reasons why Batrean women taken from their island homeland as slaves often manage to work themselves into positions of power and influence. It has been noted that the allures of the females have no effect on the males of their species, and unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately for the Batrean!) the pheromones seem ineffective against the Imrians, whose amphibian biology is apparently completely unaffected.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

Notable Batrean females

Away from their island homeland, several female Batreans have since grown to prominence in foreign lands. As examples of this most resourceful sex, the following women hold considerable influence in their new homes.

Jalisha – A captain of the sea rogues of Gao Din, this brave and adventuresome woman feels keenly the pain of the loss of her homeland to the Imrians. A fervent anti-slavery supporter, Jalisha regularly attacks Farad vessels that she suspects of carrying a cargo of slaves. So far

she has freed many of her kind, but lacks the resources to attack the Imrians to any great effect. She dreams of the day she will lead a fleet of vessels to free her homeland.

Amrotha – Originally bought by her ‘master’, the Faradun merchant Holdaz of the House of Hallurz, Amrotha soon became the most favoured concubine of her master. As she shared his bed slowly and surely she gained his confidence, and such were her insights that it was only a matter of time before her owner began openly discussing many of his business dealings with her. With keen acumen and sharp mind Amrotha was adept in matters of commerce, and her advice was something Holdaz utilised to great effect. Over the passing years Amrotha has managed to become almost indispensable to Holdaz and by proxy to the house of Hallurz. She lives a life of luxury and is in all but name the power behind the growing business success of the house. Recently she has been using her influence to build support for the emancipation of her homeland, using the dislike the Farad feel for the Imrian monopoly in Batrean slaves as leverage. She has to tread carefully however, ever fearful that the Farad will move against the slavers only to claim the isle for themselves.

Falossa – Imrians sold Falossa to a Zandu merchant, however on the voyage back to Zanth the vessel that carried her was wrecked off the coast of Jhangara. Through much hardship she made her way to Taz and from there to Cymril and the court of the seven kingdoms. Now free, she has become a vocal activist for the emancipation of Batre. The scars that line her face, marks of the dangers she faced alone in the swamps of Jhangara, act as a powerful counterpoint to her beauty. Her constant petitioning of the Council of Kings has so far heeded no results, but it is only a matter of time before her denouncement of slavery (and her beauty) win widespread support.

[[[END BOX TEXT]]]

The Annexation of Batre

Perhaps with the wisdom of hindsight the annexation of Batre by the Imrians was entirely predictable. A valuable and reliable source of income, the amphibians had been raiding the island for many years. All that was needed was a suitably resourceful and insightful king to make the decision to claim the island. Rullerg, the present king, was such a leader. Irked by the fact that the amphibians were not the only race to prey upon the hapless islanders (the Farad and Quan also paid regular visits in the search for concubines), Rullerg decided steps had to be taken to secure this valuable resource. In the year 602 Rullerg rallied the Slavemasters to his cause and ordered a fleet of coracles to set out for the eastern island.

Although the Imrians were known to be poor combatants when faced with the organised forces of Taz and Gao Din, when the attack came Batre offered no such concerted resistance. The two settlements on the island, Lal-lat and Domal were poorly protected, with mere rows of spike and thornwood trees being the only defences. The males (although aggressive) were disorganised and easily overwhelmed and the females were unable to halt the overwhelming number of attackers. The whole process took just a single day. Once the land was claimed, the Imrians wasted little time. Lal-Lat was deemed to be poorly positioned near the coast and was therefore raised to the ground. All of the inhabitants were transported to Domal. The defences were reinforced with ditches and watchtowers, and the sexes were segregated for ease of control. Most horrifically, the majority of the males were slaughtered, a much-reduced number being spared to act as breeding studs. In less than five days Batre was transformed from an island paradise to a prison camp.

Since the annexation, things have gone from bad to worse on the island. The Imrians keep their slaves in appalling conditions, especially the males that have no direct commercial value. The females are kept in bamboo cages and transported to Imria for sale. Male young are killed unless new breeding stock are required, in which case they are separated from their mothers and kept in isolation. Young females are kept with the rest of the ‘stock’, and sold

once they reach puberty. Some of the women are forced to farm for the islanders, as the Imrians are keen not to bring in other slaves for these duties. Escaping the island has proved very difficult. The Batreans females who have gained the continent since the annexation are typically slaves who have been sold on and since worked their way to freedom.

A contingent of one hundred mud soldiers are stationed on the island, and at least two coracles constantly patrol the waters surrounding the isle, allowing no foreign vessels close. Several watchtowers have been built in and around Domal, these can be seen from out to sea poking just above the greenery of the jungle. So far the Imrians' invasion of the island has not been contested by outside forces. The Gao Din look very unfavourably on the situation, but lack the organisation and numbers to mount an effective attack. Still, the amphibians are watchful and would prove difficult to dislodge, especially if given sufficient warning to dig in.

[[[BOX TEXT]]]

'They came in the night. We were completely unprepared. I was cooking; my gambling was fighting with the other males as usual. The children were being cared for my Brissa, my sister. It was a clear night, the moons were high. I remember now that Zar was riding high in the sky, a bad sign. They came silently out of the water and swarmed upon us with their cursed nets and poles. We struggled, but it was rather pathetic in the end. Even the males, for all their posturing and roaring, were easily overcome. Several were killed in the brief fighting that took place, including my husband. It ended there. We were slaves. Me? I was sold some weeks later, to a Rajan. I expected death. But the pirates of Gao Din freed me when they attacked the ship, they hate the Rajans. Now I am making my way toward the Seven Kingdoms. I heard from a merchant that some of my people are trying to raise a force to free our people. I will help. We don't deserve this, and my husband, boorish, uncouth slob that he was, did not deserve his fate.'

Lysail, Batrean adventurer.

[[[END BOX TEXT]]]

Tales from the Southern Seas

The islands of Imria and Batre offer rich possibilities for many exotic and varied adventures on the Southern Rim. Warriors, merchants, scholars and pirates, all have reason to travel the waterways of the Jade Ocean. Although exploration, mercantile, military and piracy campaigns are the most common adventures characters will encounter on the Southern Rim, two key themes are likely to permeate these scenarios. Both themes neatly characterise the inhabitants of and locales of Imria and Batre, and therefore permeate all campaigns on the oceans of the Southern Rim.

Exploration – the isle of Imria is a mysterious place. Much remains unexplored by people from the more civilised lands of the continent, mainly as a result of the rather unpleasant locals. Of course, for scholars and hunters of antiquities, the stories of the coral slabs of the Imrians are both intriguing and enticing. Should they be discovered, the Batrachian temple and library complexes would be riches beyond measure. Although it is unlikely that player character could (or indeed should) discover all the secrets of these ancient sites, perhaps a mere glimpse of these places could serve to illustrate the rich and largely unknown history of Talislanta.

Slavery – to many of the inhabitants of Talislanta, slavery in any form is abhorrent. Unfortunately, for those of the Southern Rim, slavery is simply a fact of life. Whether it manifests in clashes with the insidious Imrians, battles to free slaves in the muddy realm of Mog or more subtle campaigns raising international support for Batre, the fight against slavery is both compelling and difficult to ignore. Due to their interactions with other races

the Imrians could be construed as representing as clear an embodiment of evil as any characters are likely to meet on the continent, making for some rich adventuring possibilities.

To further help the games master, there follows some adventure nuggets and a campaign outlined set around the realms of Imria and Batre, and in these scenarios slavery and exploration feature heavily. These adventures can be fully fleshed out to provide many hours of gaming, or could be used to provide inspiration for the inventive gamesmaster to design their own adventures on the Southern Rim.

A night of storms

This adventure works well with character groups who find exploration and discovery exciting, and can begin in any of the realms of the southern part of the continent. During the characters' journeying, perhaps when they are struggling with unpleasant terrain or being pestered by local wildlife, they observe a windship coming over the horizon. Drawing closer, the vessel finally settles directly above the characters, floating serenely fifty feet in the air. A man leans over and introduces himself a Parcellus, a Phantasian dream merchant. He asks if he can be of any assistance....

Parcellus is a dream merchant from Phantas, but recently he has become sick of his life travelling the continent alone. This state of affairs has been brewing for some time, but a recent dependence on Aquavit certainly hasn't helped. In any event, Parcellus is seeking company and is perfectly willing to transport the characters wherever they wish, as long as they will talk with him of their adventures for a while. This is a heavier price to pay than first anticipated as Parcellus is an incredible bore who delights in regaling the unsuspecting with tales of his own journeys – the characters will be lucky to get a word in edgeways.

During the journey, a vicious storm blows up, bearing the ship in its arms like piece of driftwood. Riding the storm for the entire night (or longer depending on where they started the journey), the vessel finally crashes into a vast wall of stone that veers up amid the storm's fury. The characters are thrown from the vessels and knocked unconscious. Dawn brings a fresh surprise. The characters and Parcellus are wrecked on the side of Mount Talus! The levitationals are smashed and useless, the only way back to civilisation lies down the side of the mountain. The Phantasian suggests a swift departure, before the Imrians come to investigate...

This adventure gives characters the opportunity to explore much of the wildlife of the Imria, dodge the inevitable pursuits of the amphibians and try to escape the isle. Plenty of merchant vessels moored at sea give the hope of escape, but getting to them is an entirely different matter...

Key to the past

This adventure suits parties who enjoy seeking ancient treasures and searching out links to the ancient past of Talislanta, as well as a hefty amount of subterfuge and combat. Again, the adventure could start anywhere, but Cymril would be an ideal location. A scholar from the Arcanum, Tyserias, has discovered an interesting curio lost in the libraries of the institution. It is a scrap of paper, reportedly from the journal of a wizard who found himself in Imria and made a rather interesting discovery (see the Imria section above), before meeting an unfortunate end via the sea demons. Apparently, the note hints at the providence of the fabled 'coral slabs' of the Imrian king, tablets that are reputed to contain a wealth of lost knowledge. If samples of these artefacts could be removed from the Imrians' control and returned to the Arcanum, then Tyserias would be famous the continent over. Accordingly, Tyserias is seeking a party of accomplished adventurers to accompany him to the slavers isle to locate the slabs, uncover their secrets and hopefully secure one. In return he offers adventure, discovery

(admittedly most would consider these poor rewards!), as well as a share of the fame and fortune that will accompany their success (somewhat more tempting...!).

This is obviously no mean task! Getting to the Southern Rim is an epic journey (though a gamesmaster wishing for a quicker journey could make a windship available to the characters). Gaining access to the island is not a simple matter, unless one is caught by the Imrians (in which case transport to the island is free). However, Tyserias has paid a greedy Farad to stow them away on board so they can at least get close to the island, just as long as the vessel's captain doesn't discover them. Navigating the reefs to the beaches by night with a rowboat and gaining access to the jungles is comparatively simple. And then, there's just the matter of finding the undersea cave entrance... Tyserias is an optimist, which is perhaps for the best.

To free a stolen land

The following outlines briefly describe a series of linked adventures that could be run in succession to form a story-arc describing the emancipation of Batre. These episodes cover a range of themes including diplomacy, adventure and combat, making for a varied and interesting campaign.

Episode one – The adventure begins with the adventurers either in or to the south of the Seven Kingdoms. Whilst travelling, the characters come into contact with Lysail, a beautiful Batrean adventurer. She is heading for Cymril, to lobby the Council of Kings. Preferably, the meeting should involve the Batrean helping the characters out of a difficult position, such as an encounter with dangerous local fauna, and Lysail should be presented as a determined woman of strength as well as beauty. At the end of the meeting, the characters should feel indebted to her. If they meet her some other way, any males in the party will probably be feeling the chivalrous need to help her anyway! Hopefully, they will at least agree to escort her to Cymril.

Episode two – Journeying to Cymril, Lysail describes the plight of her people. Most of the characters should have heard of Batre, if for nothing more than the beauty of the inhabitants, but they will most likely be unaware of the actions (or maybe even the nature) of the Imrians. Hopefully, players with strong moral principals should feel compelled to aid Lysail and the Batreans in their plight. Lysail explains that she is hoping to gain an audience with the Council of Kings and seek their aid. Once at Cymril, she intends to lobby the council and attempt to rally the people of the city to her cause. Hopefully, the characters will decide to help her in these activities.

Assuming the characters and Lysail are successful, they will be granted an audience. Unfortunately, the Council is famous for being rather fractious and unashamedly partisan. The characters and Lysail will discover that the kings are unable to agree on anything of import, and instead waste their time arguing petty issues. Lysail's entreaties go entirely unnoticed and the audience ends in confusion and disappointment. It is clear that nothing is to be gained in Cymril. Although this episode has a negative outcome, it does allow the characters the opportunity for social interaction with a wide spread of city folk, including some from fairly high up the social ladder.

Episode three – Just when all seems lost, a mysterious stranger approaches the characters and offers to aid them in their quest. Representing certain undisclosed 'interested parties', the stranger, a Kashmirian called Abn al Katah, offers to aid the characters financial aid in freeing Batre. To this end, a considerable sum of money will be put forward from the Kashmirian's clients for the purpose of hiring sufficient mercenaries to launch an attack on the Imrians that hold Batre. However, for undisclosed reasons, the Kashmirian's backers cannot hire the mercenaries directly, instead the characters must act as intermediaries. The reason for these

clandestine activities is that the Kasmirian's employer is none other than the Batrean Amrotha, working to aid her homeland with funds she has 'secured' from the House Hallurz. Keen to emancipate her homeland, Amrotha is unable to get directly involved due to her fear of being caught with the stolen funds and, even worse, of inadvertently directing greedy eyes from Faradun toward Batre, which could result in Imrian slavers simply being replaced with new masters. This has forced her to seek others who could act on her behalf and the characters and Lysail are perfect for the task. Abn will arrange for the characters and Lysail to meet a veiled and incognito Amrotha at a merchant's house, where she will explain her plan (see episode 4). During the meeting, the party becomes aware that the house is being watched – clearly others are interested in Amrotha's plans (these are agents of a rival Farad house, again see episode 4).

Episode four – The first task in Amrotha's plan is to raise a mercenary force to aid the invasion of the island. Abn al Katah suggests a force of Thralls, who are experienced at fighting the Imrians and powerful warriors who also have a clear abhorrence of slavery. For this purpose a journey into Taz is in order. Asking at the fortress of Tor for suitable candidates, the force of one Captain Gar is often mentioned as an ideal mercenary outfit. Apparently, this Thrall has no love of the Imrians, having once been a slave herself, and is an extremely competent commander. She is currently engaged training her troops in the jungles of the southern borderlands of Taz.

However, as the journey progresses it becomes apparent the characters are being tracked. One of the other great mercantile Houses of Faradun has discovered Amrotha's schemes, House Fakan. Seeking time to manoeuvre politically into position to hijack Amrotha's plan and gain control of Batre, this House has dispatched a contingent of hunters to waylay and if possible eliminate the characters. Where better to carry out such a task than the thick jungles of Taz? Meanwhile, when the characters encounter Gar she demands a demonstration of their competence in combat before she will join them for any fee. As such she requests that the party hunt down an Exomorph that has been threatening the area. The hunt is on.

Episode five – Of course, having a force of foot soldiers is one thing, but raiding the island is entirely another matter. Clearly, transport to Batre is required, preferably by able seamen who know the waters and command swift ships capable of outwitting Imrian vessels. Where else are such ships to be found than the pirate city of Gao Din? While Gar rallies and prepares her forces, the characters and Lysail must make haste to the old Phaedran outpost to hire ships to transport the Thralls. Many vessels will be required, and of course, persuading the pirates to undertake such a hazardous mission will be no small task, even with the vocal support of Jalisha. A further demonstration of the seaworthiness and trustworthiness of the characters may be in order – perhaps they could help raid a slave-laden Farad vessel returning home from Imria...

Episode six – Finally, once the vessels are secured and the Thralls have been brought aboard, the assault itself must be planned and executed. Only one hundred Imrians are actually ashore, but as soon as the attack is underway and the alarm is raised many more will be summoned from Imria. To make matters worse, once the Thralls have secured the island, the Farad force of the House Fakan arrive with their soldiers, eager to claim the now 'unowned' land for Faradun. However, hope is at hand, for once word of the Thralls employment had reached the continent the Seven Kingdoms despatch a fleet of their own to ensure the emancipation of the island. Can the characters stop this tense situation from spiralling into out and out warfare? Will Batre finally be free of occupation?

Archetypes

Below are listed some additional archetypes that further detail some of the characters from Imria and Batre. Some of these archetypes are not suitable as player characters (the Imrians), but are presented as suitable NPCs for the gamemasters.

Imrian mud soldier

STR +4 DEX -3
CON +3 SPD -2*
PER 0 CHA -4
WIL +1 INT -2

CR +5 HP 30 MR -3

Skills: Capture Pole +1, Oc +3, Spear +4, Survival +3, Stealth +7, Swim +8, Piscine (native), Low Talislan (basic)

Special abilities: Amphibious; SPD +5 in water; hide provides 1 PR of armour; claws inflict DR 2+ STR; immune to Batrean's females' beguiling scent; slime coating allows survival out of water (up to one week when refreshed with the Lurm slug, half this time in hot, dry climates).

Appearance: 6'-6'6", 200-280+ lbs. Yellow-green scaly skin, coated with translucent slime, webbed hands and feet, double row of sharp fangs, muscular, sloping shoulders.

Equipment: Loincloth of Kra hide, necklace of brass-ring currency, Oc (barbed bola), Spear, water-skin filled with brine, 20 gold lumens in various currencies, and 15 gold lumens in Imrian brass rings.

'I fight, I kill. You, you are now a slave.'

Once you were nothing, but you were strong, you were vicious, and so now you are a Mud soldier. You fight, you kill, you capture they land worms for your masters. Your people are a warlike race. Others, the land worms, they are only worthy of subjugation. Many have fallen to you in combat; still many others have become slaves with your help. The Slavemasters decide who will be enslaved and who will die. You do not care either way. Some of the land worms try to get you to fight in the open lands, facing off with them as if you were equal. But no, your superiors resist, they know you would rather fight on you own terms, in the swamps and jungles, on the water, where your superiority of obvious to all. So you fight and kill. Amongst your peers you are working your way up the ladder, earning respect, earning privilege. One day you will be the Slavemaster and others will fight for you. Who knows, one day, you might be king.

Imrian Kra handler

STR +3 DEX -2
CON +1 SPD -2*
PER +1 CHA -4
WIL +1 INT -1

CR +3 HP 25 MR -3

Skills: Capture Pole +3, Animal handler +5, Merchant + 3, Oc +3, Survival +4, Stealth +5, Swim +8, Piscine (native), Low Talislan (basic)

Special abilities: Amphibious; SPD +5 in water; hide provides 1 PR of armour; claws inflict DR 2+ STR; immune to Batrean's females' beguiling scent; slime coating allows survival out

of water (up to one week when refreshed with the Lurm slug, half this time in hot, dry climates).

Appearance: 6'-6'6", 200-280+ lbs. Yellow-green scaly skin, coated with translucent slime, webbed hands and feet, double row of sharp fangs, muscular, sloping shoulders.

Equipment: Loincloth of Kra hide, necklace of brass-ring currency, Oc (barbed bola), pouch of Slurl ingredients, water-skin filled with brine, Scrappers for Kra cleaning, 20 gold lumens in various currencies, and 15 gold lumens in Imrian brass rings.

'Scrape the scales, dose the worm.'

The Kra are strong and deadly, and just like everything else, they have their uses. They can be used to pull the mighty ships that your people use to rule the waves – the land worms may be afraid to sail the open seas, but not you – and they are good way of disposing of disagreeable slaves. But the worms must be handled correctly; they must be fed, cleaned and dosed with Slurl, tended and cared for to be effective. A dead worm is no good for anything but food. So that is your task, you ensure the worms live. It is a position of some standing, above the common soldiers and sailors. You are a valuable resource in your master's coracle, and that can only be a good thing.

Batrean lobbyist

STR -2 DEX 0
CON +1 SPD 0
PER 0 CHA +6
WIL +3 INT +4

CR +1 HP 18 MR +2

Skills: Natural magic <2 modes of choice> +2, Weapon <choice> +3, Dance +4, Seduce +6, Lip reading +2, Stealth +3, Barter +3, Etiquette +4, Oratory +5, Cultures +3, Chanan (native), Low Talislan (native), High Talislan (fluent)

Special abilities: Beguiling by scent; males (other than Batrean and Imrian) must make a Willpower roll to resist and suggestion made by a Batrean female.

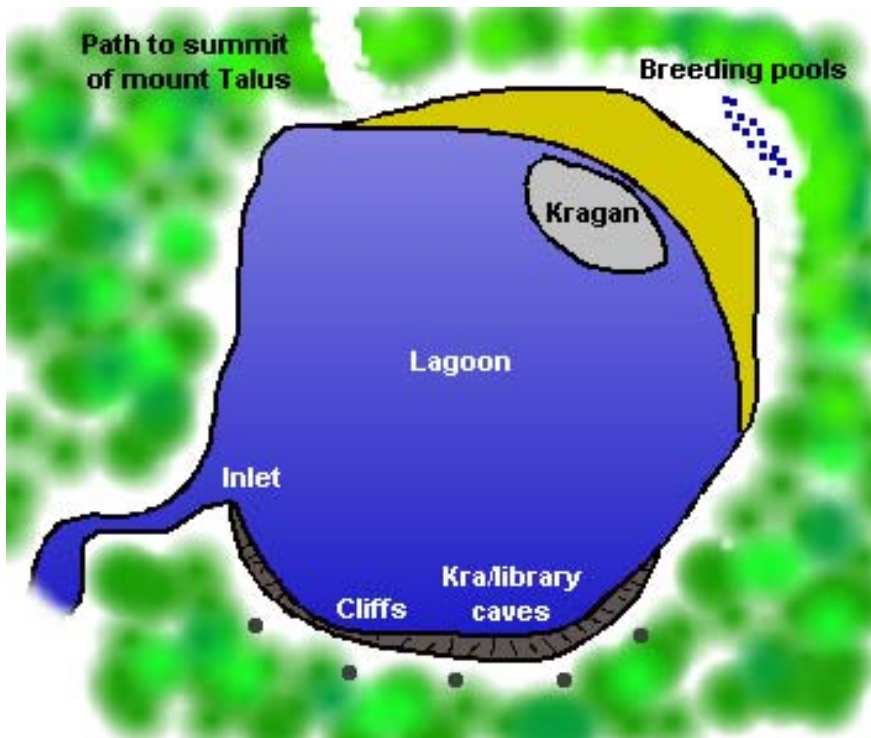
Appearance: 4'6"-5'6", 80-110 lbs. Ivory-skinned, hair dyed or emerald (naturally a pale green).

Equipment: Simple garments for travel, pouch (for dyes, herbs etc), Weapon of choice, 40 gold lumens in assorted coins, various accompanying males.

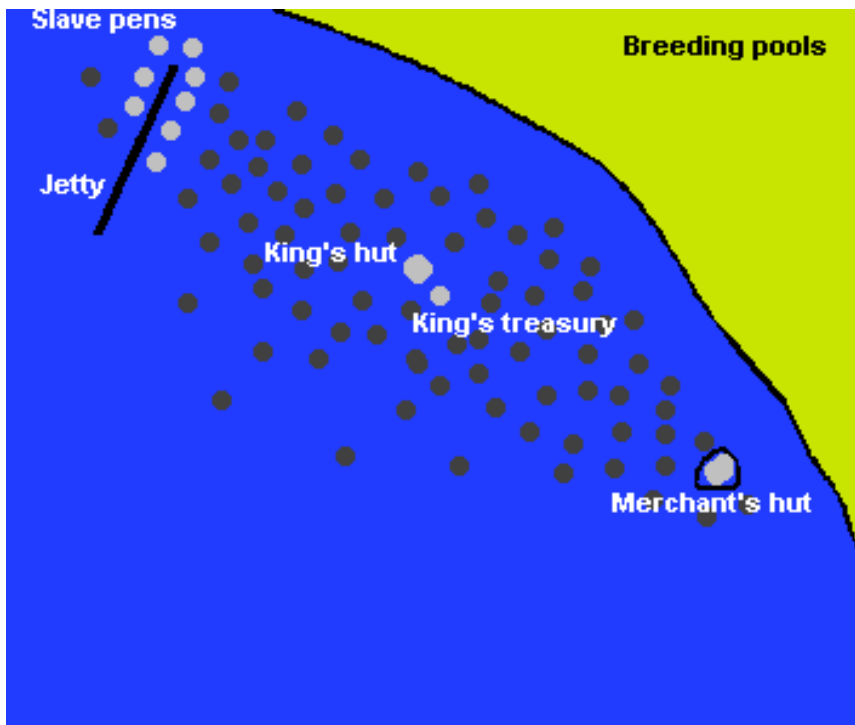
'No, you must listen. My people are slaves, commodities, nothing more. You simply cannot ignore this. Please.'

Yes, I know why you listen to me. You cannot help it. I see it in your eyes. Men! But I am not here for the simple pleasures that are mine for the taking. Such innocent days are over. I need something more from you, something lasting, and for that I must sway you with words, not appearances. My homeland, that was once such a carefree paradise, is dying. The cursed Imrians came from the sea and stole from us the one thing that we did have, our liberty. True our men are boorish and domineering and seemed to oppress us long before the amphibians came, but they are slow and dim and we have always had ways of dealing with them. Besides, whatever they may be, they are of our blood. Now they are mostly dead, killed for no good reason but a lack of commercial worth. And now the slavers sell my sisters to all who can

afford the price. This is no way for a people to live. And yet on the continent, in the so-called 'civilised' lands, nothing is done. We are deserted. This cannot go on. I am here to persuade you, to entreat you, to help my race, my people. We must be set free, or we will die.



Lagoon



Kragan