

Dragon Kings®

New DUNE marauders

by Timothy Brown

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New DUNE marauders

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New Dune Marauders is an adventure for a small group of characters who are relatively inexperienced with the wider world of Khitus. As they play through the adventure, different aspects of the Dragon Kings world will present themselves,

game stats

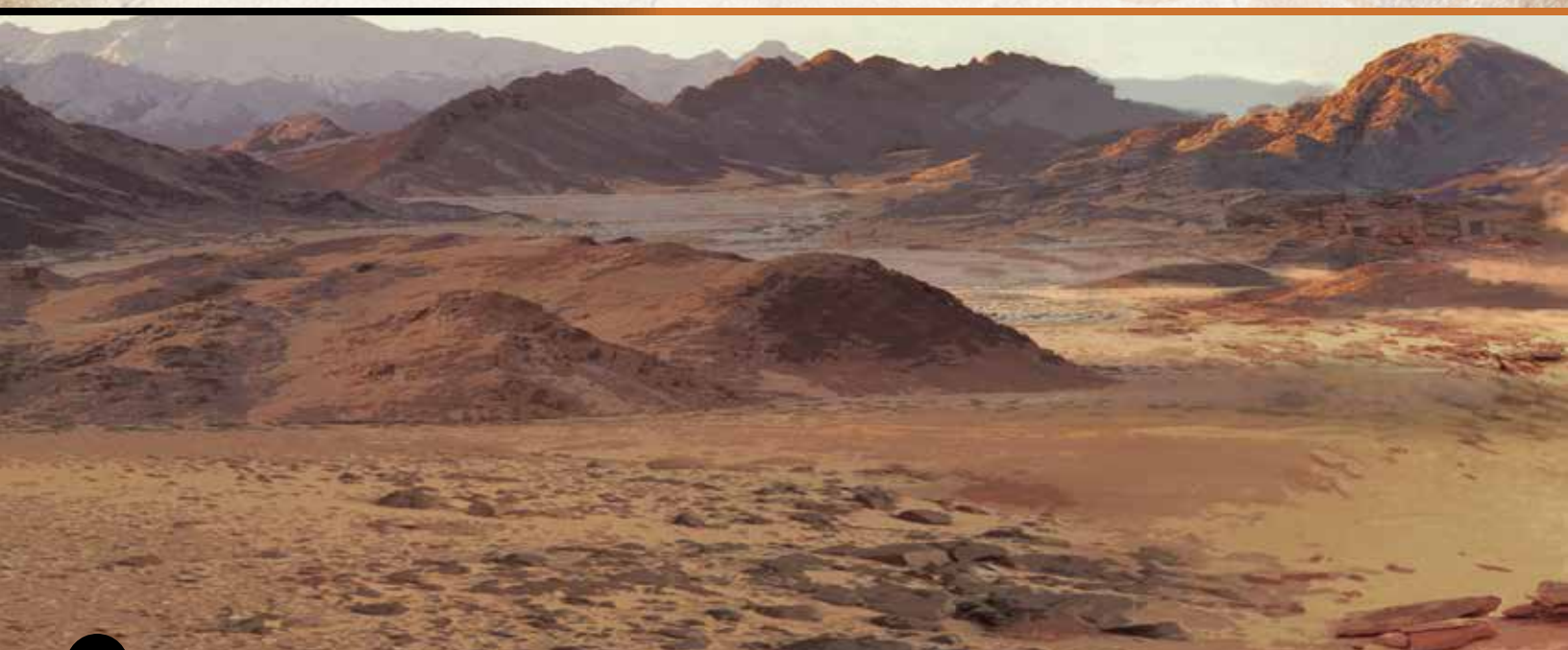
New Dune Marauders is an adventure for the Dragon Kings role-playing setting. It can be played with any fantasy role-playing game rules; game stats for several popular role-playing games, including Pathfinder, Savage Worlds and 13th Age are available as free PDF downloads:

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many for the very first time. The characters will not only face the rigors of the harsh desert realms, but also confront several emerging political groups, all vying for power over the world. The decisions the characters make during this adventure, especially with regard to the positions they take either for or against these several pernicious factions, may set the stage for their lives on Khitus as they unfold for years to come.

The characters for New Dune Marauders are humans, either natives or current residents of



Rhojess. Previous relationships between the characters should be established at the start of the adventure, assuming there are any. Those with immediate group affiliations will know each other, at least casually; Gare Attesa know their local brethren, as do members of the Trakeen and Shadazim, who also know their worshipers. Spell casters from the same magic colleges will know each other, at least by reputation. The characters can be related by blood or tribe, as they wish; Rhojess's humans are mostly from the Makadan tribe. The players can establish these previous relationships with guidance from the Game Master.

Starting Equipment: Whatever equipment and personal possessions the characters have in the city of Rhojess must be accounted for. There is a good chance that anything besides simple personal equipment will be left behind over the course of the New Dune Marauders adventure. However, they may want to come back to reclaim their possessions at some later time, assuming it has not been not plundered or otherwise stolen in the meantime. If they are clever they may find a way to bring some of their gear along with them even in the meager capacity available to them over the course of the adventure. Food and water are extremely limited; any character who wants more than a meager store of either at the start of the adventure must establish that with the Game Master, and pay dearly for it. Also, any steel weapons or armor are especially

valuable and liable to draw the eye of Rhojess's desperately poor citizens and ambitious thieves.

For whatever reason, the characters are all in Rhojess when the general call for conscription to help protect the city's few remaining wells is issued. The characters should create rationales for their presence in the city. If native, they should establish where they live and where they keep the bulk of their possessions. The same should be determined for more transient characters, including their most recent accommodations, means of support, current employment, if any, and so on. Unless they decide otherwise, the characters all dwell in the same few blocks of previously abandoned houses in the southern part of town.

Getting Started: All's Not Well in Rhojess

Rhojess, is a city besieged both from without and within. Marauder attacks against the city's crumbling walls are more and more frequent, and the constant fighting has depleted the City Guards until their numbers are inadequate. Most families have felt the direct impact of the marauders upon their loved ones and homes within the past year. Even still, the four secluded merchant prince



families, who still hold sway over Rhojess, vie with each other for power over the dwindling, dying city. They send assassins against each other, hoard goods, and manipulate prices in the open stalls and the black market. For their part, the common citizens have all but given up on the corrupt, ineffective civil authority propped up by the jealous merchant prince families. The populace turns willingly to the emerging Raetann, the Water Guild, or to Trakeen or Shadazim, who claim connection to higher powers. Those who don't are left to fend for themselves. Many flee into the desert every day to instead take their chances there. At its height, Rhojess was home to tens of thousands of citizens, but now barely one tenth of that number remain.

Basic Layout: Rhojess was once a port city. Indeed, the Port Gate still leads out to the ruins of the old harbor. Its many bone-dry docks and the hulks of long-abandoned ships stick up out of the dusty runs where the water long ago retreated. The City Guard barracks, with their stores of weapons and arrows, are located near the city walls. The central citadels and estates of the Four Families show obvious signs of neglect but remain in use. The Raetann maintain their fortress-like towers nearby. The Market Quarter is now home to the black market and a haven for skulkers and renegades. But still, much of Rhojess is abandoned, with whole blocks of crumbling brick buildings blown over with dust and brush.

Remaining Authority: The City Guard mans Rhojess' walls and keeps order among the remaining citizens, but they are a depleted force. City Guards are typically armed with spears (*shtukeel*), bronze helmets and round shields, and are identified by their red knee-length tunics. One unit in ten are short-bow armed archers. The Guard ostensibly take their orders from the Four Families, but in these desperate times they have become largely autonomous in their role as the defenders of the city.

Food and Water: Rhojess's once rich farmlands are now dried and ruined. Only a few meager plots remain outside the city walls. This output is supplemented by whatever people can grow

and protect independently, combined with meat from a dwindling number of scrawny animals or by hunters who brave the nearby wastelands. At game start, a simple meal from street vendors costs four times what it normally would, and after the call for conscription that price doubles again. Water is still in adequate supply, drawn from three wells inside the city and three more just outside its walls. At the start of the adventure, the City Guard watches over these wells, allowing anyone to draw whatever they can carry, but the Raetann (Water Guild) bureaucrats monitor all six as well.

Commerce: Food can be purchased from street vendors, though these dwindle in number as the adventure progresses. Other items and information can be sought in the Merchant Quarter, where people still gather at dark taverns. Almost anything can be bargained for there, though there may be a day or two delay in delivery as the merchant arranges for its theft from somewhere else in the city.

Makadan Traditions and Terminology: Rhojess is a Makadan city, though many of its tribal traditions wane in the face of desperate times. Still, they tend to accept fellow Makadan more readily than other tribes. Reactions to non-Makadan humans are subsequently more guarded and negative, and the populace hates the Qath Manhar (suspecting all marauders to be part of that order) and the insect Krikis.

A City Guard commander is its *Kapetan*, who controls one or more ten-man *Narpal* squads; their long spears are the traditional Makadan *shtukeel*. All City Guard follow the Kod military philosophy, and are skeptical of any who do not. The heads of the Four Families are titled *Ahapsht*, and their related underlings are often referred to as *Opshto*.

Timekeeping: Events in the adventure proceed quickly from its first day, referred to herein as Day One. Keep track of passing days to time different events, such as the marauders' increasing demonstrations and the wells' declines.

Part One: Conscription

The call goes out through the city that all able-bodied citizens must report for duty to protect the wells that lie outside the walls. The characters hear the mandate and must decide how to deal with it.

The day in Rhojess begins as most others, with the relentless sun rising unwelcome into the morning sky to scorch the parched city. Most hide away during the day, preferring to go about their business – what there is of it – during dusk or cooler darkness. A meager meal can be bought or bartered from street vendors: rat or manju meat and dried fruits for those who have the means, smashed bug paste and a handful of millet for those with less. Cisterns near the city’s last three working wells inside the walls are surrounded by City Guards who keep hushed order over the people filling skins and urns with their daily ration. At the three main gates one can find similar scenes, where water is brought in by bucket brigade from the three working wells outside the walls. Children scurry through the ruins searching for bugs and scraps. People trade heirlooms for a simple luxury or a bag of grain. Gloom hangs in the air as the day progresses toward an uncertain future.

Rumors: Rumors of pending conscription into the City Guard for all citizens begin to circulate in earnest on Day One. Traders share it with each other and with their customers; fathers share it with their sons. The news is met with a growing concern, but little panic, as this is not the first time such rumors have run through the city.

The actual notice of mandatory conscription is heralded by town criers who circulate through the city about midday.

“Attention! Attention! By order of the provisional government under control of Ahapsht Mandrake and as supported by consensus of the Four Families, all able-bodied citizens are ordered to report to their nearest city gate no later than the first hour following dawn tomorrow for conscription into the City Guard. Conscription is

mandatory! Dereliction will be punished by death! Long live Rhojess! Long live the Ahapsht!”

Ahapsht Mandrake is the noble leader of one of the city’s ruling Four Families, a little seen but widely respected authority; the City Guards still follow his direct commands. The nearest gate to where the characters live is the Port Gate.

More Rumors: Other rumors follow that the characters hear shared among the nervous townspeople through the evening:

An army is being raised to hire out as mercenaries in some distant northern war against Krikis invaders [Or some other threat]

A massive marauder army is gathering even now to overrun and take over the city of Rhojess entirely.

The Four Families are gathering strength just to turn on each other in some useless civil war.

On the plus side, it is said that the City Guard coffers of food will be opened up to the new conscripts, so there may be a few good meals in it, if nothing else.

In the midst of such widespread uncertainty, this is an ideal time for Shadazim or Trakeen to proselytize, spread words of comfort and faith, and gather followers among the townspeople.

Refusing Service and Flight: Chatoon, the nearest city, is five days march across the harsh open desert, along the lip of the bone-dry Sunken Sea, and is a fell place beneath the shadow of a dark sorcerous. Patnu is further directly west, and in all other directions there is only endless wasteland. A journey to escape Rhojess is fraught with peril, and death a distinct possibility.

Despite this, in the night preceding mandatory conscription, watchful characters can witness many Rhojess citizens escaping into the desert. Most get away freely, though some are captured and executed on the spot. With the dawn of Day Two, the heads and bloodied torsos of many who attempted to flee grace pikes placed prominently around the city walls for all to see.

Characters who wish to escape the city during the night might come across a detachment of the City Guard who may: deter them, drive them back into the city after a desperate fight, chase them out into the desert, or even separate them. The City Guard will not pursue more than a few hundred paces beyond the city, though.

It is also possible for characters to simply hide in the city and avoid service in the City Guard. Patrols will circulate to find deserters, but these will be infrequent. Informants will prove more dangerous. Word gets around that water and food are being doled out for information about derelicts and potential escapees. Any enemies the characters have may accuse them – rightly or wrongly – just to get the rumored bounty.

It is entirely possible that the party may be split by dawn of Day Two, with some escaping the city, others hiding and the rest reporting for duty as instructed. The latter should decide what equipment they want to bring with them – no specific instructions were given to bring weapons or armor – and how they will secure the rest during their uncertain absence. Those who choose not to report must seek their refuge, prepare to live in their new circumstances either within or just outside the walls, and make provision for how they will keep in touch with their companions who elect to serve in the City Guard.

Joining the City Guards (Day Two): Those who accept conscription embark upon a strange new existence journey.

By the first hour after dawn a large crowd of citizens is gathered inside the Port Gate. Some have brought their own meager weapons, though most have nothing. A handful of City Guards stand on duty upon the walls, monitoring the commonplace comings and goings of water bearers trekking in and out through the gate to the well beyond. The hour of assembly comes and goes without fanfare or further instruction, and the throng begins to grumble discontentedly. Rumors spread in whispers among the assembled men and women, as time passes slowly.

None of the regular City Guards on duty know anything useful. The characters hear any rumors they have not already heard as the impatient crowd grows increasingly restless. Three hours pass before a Kapetan of the Guard arrives to begin organizing things.

Hours pass without any direction or word. The grumbling increases as the shadows grow long around the Port Gate while the young guardsmen cluster together nervously. Finally, just before the crowd turns from ugly to violent, a troop of City Guards with a festooned, grey-bearded sergeant appears down the market street, parting the crowd before them. From atop the gate the sergeant bellows. “Failure to obey instructions will be punishable by death!”

Rough Organization: The conscription process itself turns out to be fairly simple. Each conscript must give his name and present residence or neighborhood, if any, and is then assigned a number – one, two, or three – that is painted in red with a fat brush upon their forearms with the admonishment “don’t wash this off!” No explanation is given. Next, the new recruits are arbitrarily bunched into groups of ten; the characters can easily position themselves to be bunched into the same group or into separate ones, as they wish. All this information is written down by a blue-robed Gare Attesa who attends the Kapetan’s every movement. Infractions at this point – refusing instruction, talking back, leaving the ranks – get punished with a clout to the jaw.

Unless the characters take specific action to avoid it, one of them will be chosen by the passing City Guard Kapetan to be their group’s leader. Alternately, the first character to speak gets assigned as leader of the group and threatened with the responsibility of making sure everyone shows up for each day’s service.

This is largely disorganized process affected upon untrained, undisciplined citizens – close 500 in all – and takes the entire day. At dusk, the conscripted soldiers are dismissed.

“Listen up! Report back here at the first hour past dawn tomorrow. Deserters will be gutted and put on pikes! Dismissed!”

Care for Personal Equipment: The characters may want to hide their valuable personal weapons rather than have them potentially confiscated by the City Guard; exactly how weapons will be handed out to the largely unarmed conscripts is not made clear, and rumors run rampant around the city. Rewards are also promised to any who turn in conscripts who hold back weapons from the cause, encouraging further betrayals; punishments are rumored to be severe.

Reporting as Ordered (Day Three): On reporting for duty at the Port Gate, the characters find themselves milling about with just a couple hundred of other conscripts, a greatly depleted number from the previous day, which begs the question how many people remain in Rhojess and how many have fled rather than continue to serve in the City Guard.

The characters can easily make certain they are all in the same militia group, or divide into several different ones if they so choose. Even after dividing into ten-soldier groups, organization is so lacking that individuals can move between them without much notice. However, leaders have no such freedom to move between groups. The character's group is designated Militia Group Five and is ordered to report daily to this spot outside the Port Gate at dusk for assignment.

On that first day of duty (Day Three), no attempt is made to confiscate weapons, nor are any provided to the weaponless conscripts among them. They are held well into the night as the available City Guards move among them, take the measure of the group as a whole, and bark out loud orders among themselves. No attempt is made to discover if conscripts have magical or other valuable skills, and if offered up these are summarily ignored. All the assembled conscripts will be employed as infantry and nothing else so far as the City Guard Sergeant is concerned. Just before they are dismissed carts are pulled up and each militiaman is given a long spear, a small round shield, a bronze helmet, and the red tunic of the City Guard. The conscripts are not drilled or given any other instructions than to assemble here again the next day (Day Four), and are then dismissed.

At this point in the adventure, the characters are all either conscripts in Militia Group Five (with one of them that group's appointed leader), in some other Militia Group assigned to the Port Gate, or they may have escaped duty to hide inside Rhojess or in the open desert country nearby. Approaches to the city are patrolled, but getting over the crumbling, dune-drifted walls is fairly easy if the characters need to communicate with each other. The stage is set for the next part of the adventure.

Part Two: Defending the Port Well

Militia Group Five is just one of several that will participate in the defense of the Port Well outside Rhojess's city walls. The characters will aid in the disbursal of water to the thirsty citizens there over several days, culminating with an attack by a powerful marauding band.

Routine: Beginning with the midday assembly of Militia Group Five at the Port Gate on adventure Day Four, its members will be ordered to do so daily for a 12-hour duty period each day. While orders are given out by City Guard Kapetan Luratka (they learn his name eventually) and the other guards at the gate, none of these accompany the militia outside the city to the well beyond; Militia Group Five and its chosen leader are expected to execute their orders independently. Over the next several days, a routine develops: the group assembles, receives vague orders, marches out to the Port Well and its stockade, stays through dusk and all the way to midnight, and returns into Rhojess via the Post Gate when it is relieved by another militia group.

This routine extends indefinitely, until other circumstances of the unfolding adventure render it impossible.

Dwindling Ranks: Each day one or two of the non-player character conscripts in the character's group fail to appear for service, and some of the supporting militia groups are also absent. Every other day, one or more of the missing men's heads appears on a pike set high on the walls of the Port

Gate. The message is clear: desertion still costs a conscript his life, and the City Guard and its informants are clearly vigilant in hunting down offenders.

The Port Well and Environs: The Port Well lies 1,000 yards beyond the Port Gate, and 1,000 yards from the dried wrecks at the edge of the old port town. Each day's trek from the gate to the well and then back again takes between 10 and 20 minutes along a well-worn dirt track that gets easily overblown with silt. From the well and its stockade, the arid land rises gradually another 1,000 yards away from the town to create a wide ridge. Marauder attacks against the city, this well, and the two other external wells still operating on the further side of the city, have generally come from that direction, where an approaching band can maneuver unseen behind the gradual heights.

The well is a simple one-and-a-half cubit hole in the ground surrounded by a waist high pile of white stones. A 5-gallon hide bucket on a thick rope must be tossed in and laboriously hauled back out, an exhausting process that is accomplished over and over again by the Water Guild's indentured servants: pathetic wretches with scarred backs, permanently humped shoulders, and rope-raw hands. The Guild's representatives at the Port Well are a pair of well-fed, humorless overseers who watch over their charge in shifts, mainly keeping an eye on the rabble so no one takes more than their ration back down the track to Rhojess.

One thing is clear, though: the well is under the control of the City Guard, who take their orders from the Four Families. The Raetann representatives only monitor the situation.

Outside the Port Gate lies the remains of the old port town, now decayed, abandoned, and plundered virtually into nonexistence. The sea retreated gradually away from Rhojess over the course of a few decades before finally turning to mud and disappearing entirely, which rendered the port completely worthless. Its wharfs and buildings were long ago chopped up and hauled back into the city to make slums and shacks. Most of the port town is now nothing but dunes, rocks, and occasional weather worn timbers. Where the deep water finally retreated the hulks of several

sailing vessels now remain. They have rotted almost completely away, broken hulls laying on their sides, masts sticking up bent and broken out of the dusty ground.

The Sand Rats: Most people in Rhojess think the old port town is abandoned, long ago stripped of everything valuable, a place too dangerous by night to risk even visiting. It is that general impression that best serves the motley collection of orphans and urchins who reside there: the Sand Rats. They are the forgotten outcasts of difficult times: abandoned children, escapees from workhouses and abusive apprenticeships, orphans of parents starved or slain. A surprisingly large group of them – a couple of hundred or more – huddle together here among the broken, forgotten ships, themselves forgotten, watching out for each other in a simple, survival-based society.

The Sand Rats range from toddlers to young adults, with the majority between five and 12 years old. A handful of pre-teens make all the decisions, ruling by virtue of size, primarily, lead by Jaysara, a young girl of remarkable compassion, wisdom, and strength. She directs their scavenging and hiding, the care for the small and sick. Anyone who seeks the Sand Rats must deal with her firm suspicion.

Only a concerted search of the old port ruins turns up the Sand Rats, they are so adept at hiding. Jaysara wants to be left alone, and she can enforce her will with a hail of stones coming from seemingly every direction to drive intruders away. She can be bargained with, and the participation of the older Sand Rats might even be secured if it means food or further protection for the youngsters. They are not warriors, but a handful could make a nuisance of themselves, help create a diversion, and so on.

Jaysara and the others nurture a special hatred for a couple of City Guards who watch the Port Well on the night watch, brutes who have taken to withholding the water the Sand Rats used to steal freely and unnoticed by night. Since the threat of marauders, they have had to trade for the water they take with the night watch, dealing with a pair of despicable, lecherous City Guards with unspeakable demands. For the sake of the young Sand Rats, a few of the older girls have reluctantly

obliged. Jaysara wants nothing more than to extract painful revenge upon that wicket pair.

Instructions: For the first three days, the instructions give to Militia Group Five are always the same:

Organize your men to keep a constant watch on the ridge and raise the alarm if you see any approaching dangers. Keep order among the people who come out to the well for water.

No instructions are given to improve the stockade or create other defenses.

Each day when Militia Group Five arrives at the well there is another 10-man group already there. There may be familiar faces from around Rhojess among these other militia, but they are otherwise an unremarkable and hapless lot of conscripts.

All day long, citizens plod out through Port Gate to the well to draw water. The well-dressed agents of the merchant house families bring thakal laden with heavy jars; they haul away as much water as they desire. City Guards and officials are similarly favored. Meanwhile, the more numerous rabble, who are restricted to just a gallon each, must wait patiently. Occasionally, a ragged young boy or girl gets a nod from the sneering Water Guild overseer and is allowed to take a double ration, belying repayment for some dark favor. Coins slip from hand to hand all through the day, such is the corruption that occurs around Rhojess's remaining wells. By dark, though, the daily stream of water seekers becomes just a trickle and then stops entirely, leaving the militia alone, to man the stockade and guard against stealthy attack.

Stockade: The existing stockade is little more than piled brush and small stones, scanty deterrent to those who would come out of the desert to take the well and its precious water for themselves. Every strong wind blows much of it away. The stockade circles the well at a distance of roughly 15 yards, with a circumference of roughly 100 yards, roughly 2 yards 'thick.' Fully manned by 10 militia, that gives each soldier a 12-pace frontage to defend.

Reinforcing the Stockade: The characters may take it upon themselves to improve the stockade,

initiative that is noticed by the Kapetan and encouraged. To reinforce it, additional stones and brush can be gathered, and aged wood can be secured at the among the port's old wrecks. All the most easily gathered stones within 50 yards of the well have already been scavenged. More can be dug out of the ground provided the militia have picks and levers of some kind to manage the work; weapons and spears would be irreparably damaged during the process. Large rocks are available further out in the desert's surface, but are heavy and difficult to move; the characters would need to slowly roll them back toward the camp unless they can secure a thakal-drawn cart or sledge, none of which are available from the City Guards. Any number of planks and sticks can be gathered from the port's wrecks, but this takes time to break them free and dray them back to the well; again, tools such as saws and the help of unskilled labor ease this task. Tiny treasures might be uncovered among the wrecks, tidbits as yet un plundered and taken back inside Rhojess's walls; the characters may come across brass fittings and even the occasional steel nail that once held these great ships together, any of which fetch a good price on the black markets. Similarly, digging among the hulks it is easy to find hidden, dark spaces beneath the ground, long-forgotten ship's holds now dry and vacant, possibly hiding places for fleeing militia or their unseen companions who may want to linger near their friends manning the well's stockade.

As they find it, the stockade offers some concealment but little actual cover against attack. Any additional stones, brush, and wood that can be gathered can improve that cover. Concentrating newly gathered materials can make a more formidable defense in selected areas of the stockade, such as in the direction of the dune ridge.

Back and Forth to Town: The adventurers are free to return to their domiciles in Rhojess when not on duty, to mingle with each other there, seek new equipment and food, and otherwise rest. If they do not already live near each other, they can easily find accommodations among the city's many abandoned homes to draw closer together. Alternately, if so inclined, they could eventually find the walled home or estate of some wealthy

family now long departed that they could take over and call their own. Such a place could be further protected and barricaded, watched over by civilian acquaintances or by the followers of any Shadazim or Trakeen who begin to accumulate. Food and water can still be obtained in Rhojess, at least for the time being, but only in subsistence quantities, though the right number of coins can solve that problem. The characters can use their free time to seek items from the black market, listen for new rumors or spread new ones of their own, and otherwise prepare.

The Thief: The people of Rhojess are desperate, even those in the militia. One of the non-player characters in Militia Group Five is one such fellow, hungry and without means, an anonymous wretch who sees the characters as rich targets.

The thief, a non-descript young fellow named Petyurl, sets his sights upon the character who displays the most valuable piece of personal equipment while on duty around the Port Well. Perhaps a warrior who brings along a steel sword, or someone who keeps a purse of coins or some personal jewelry close at hand while on duty. Whatever that most valuable item is, Petyurl takes notice. After duty one day he follows the owner to discover where he lives, then hatches a plot to snatch the item later that very night.

Petyurl is not a particularly good thief, though, and he will probably be foiled in his attempt to sneak in and steal the item while its owner sleeps. If not, he notes some other item and attempts another robbery each night until he is finally caught.

Petyurl's plan and motive is simple: steal valuables, sell them at the black market, and buy food that he shares with his young sister Ayara who lives with him in a hovel near the merchant district. He might be captured and forced to confess all this, or possibly tracked on his various errands.

If offered any kindness, both Petyurl and Ayara will accompany the adventurers and serve them in any capacity, welcoming any protection. Ayara will eventually start coming out to the Port Well every day, where she becomes a complication during the Riot and Marauder Attack.

Innocents: Despite being drastically reduced in number, Rhojess's citizens are in many ways now more closely connected to one another. Those who remain believe, on some level, in their city, its leaders, its future. They expect to persevere. The characters who remain in the city cannot help but be caught up in that spirit, as well, and caught up with those people. Ragged families dwell nearby to where characters live. They trade for food and water with the same vendors. Innocent civilians gather around the characters, encouraged by their strength and organization, or drawn to the proselytizations of their Shadazim or Trakeen, if they espouse the power of future or returning beings.

These innocent followers tend to multiply over time as the characters stay in Rhojess. Friends tell friends, and rumors of an autonomous group of motivated heroes spread. Before long, their numbers become troublesome, with dozens of new mouths to feed and people to shelter. They begin following the characters to their duty station at the Port Well or on other errands, invited or otherwise. The innocents are not combatants, though they could be trained in the rudiments of fighting, or enlisted as unskilled labor. They are willing to serve the characters they see as welcome leaders.

The Riot: An unwelcome development arises on the morning of Day Five:

What you thought to be nothing more than a typical argument among the water-gathers turns to desperate and terrified shrieks. "The well is going dry!" goes the call through the assembled citizens, shouted back down the line quickly all the way back to those just emerging from the Port Gate, where wide-eyed people rush toward the well. Sure enough, they are right. Tossing and retrieving the buckets again and again from the well's depths confirm that its pace has indeed slowed. The fill of a bucket that once took a few moments now takes several more, and requires a few more feet of rope than just the day before.

This has happened before (as confirmed by the panicked citizens and the ever-present Raetann henchmen); the well has suddenly declined in output a half dozen times in living memory, and while it usually regains some capacity it never fully

recovers. Word spreads quickly back down the line and back into Rhojess, until the gathered crowd around the well swells to a grumbling mass of one hundred or more. Keeping order becomes difficult, people budge ahead in line, shove each other, and a few fist fights erupt.

The Raetann henchmen waste no time taking advantage of this sudden change in mood around the Port Well. Until now they have been relatively quiet, content to watch Militia Group Five and other City Guards administer the well, but now they spring into action. They move close in to the well and take charge of the head of the line, making sure no one cuts in line (without a bribe, that is). They quickly announce also that water draws beyond a single clay jar or skin require a tithe to the Water Guild of one copper coin – water drawn from the city wells has always been free to this point. The Raetann henchmen take these actions with impunity and continue to do so until challenged by the characters or until the Kapetan arrives.

The Raetann announcements are met with grumbling and wailing among the assembled citizens.

If the Guild gets hold of this well, we'll never see another drop from it!

A copper? This water's free, the Four Families promised us so!

The Four Families control this well! You City Guards – do something!

After half an hour, four more Raetann henchmen emerge from the Port Gate and make their way down the now-crowded track toward the well to join their associates. Once they have these reinforcements, the henchmen are willing to engage in a shoving match and fistfight with anyone who challenge their authority, including Militia Group Five, though they never draw weapons.

If the characters have not already done so, the Kapetan arrives with a large contingent of City Guards an hour later and chases the Raetann away from the well. Harsh words are exchanged.

The outer wells are under our control, Guildsman! Mind your place!

For now, perhaps, Guard, but that will soon change, mark my words. You will be remembered!

In fact, any who opposed them at the well, including the characters, are noted by the Raetann henchmen for future retribution. Regardless, the day ends with the Port Well still under the supervision of the City Guards. Anguish turns to despair among the citizens drawing water, as the well's reduced output continues and shows no signs of recovering.

The Kapetan issues orders that no Raetann are to be permitted near the well again; they should be discouraged and arrested if they do not comply.

By this time there may be several innocents following the characters out to the well every day: the fervent followers of any Trakeen or Shadazim, their families and friends, even the thief Petyur!s young sister. They cling to the Militia Group's protection. Of course, some of these become embroiled in the difficulties around the well, further complicating any dealings with the Raetann henchmen.

The Marauder Attack: By Day Eight, the rumors that a large marauder army approaches the city of Rhojess prove to be true. They make their presence known by harrying the city's walls by night for several days and making threats before mounting a major assault.

Late on Day Eight, in the hour before sunset, smoke can be seen rising from beyond the ridge rising far to the west of the city, and rumors bubble up quickly among the citizens at the well.

Marauders! The marauders have arrived!

It's a new rift in the world, a volcanic vent from which demons will spill into the world!

Wild dragons assemble there! Some sorcerer has summoned wild dragons for the defense of the city!

The Port Well is closest to the ridge, and anyone who travels to it can see the marauder camp beyond – hundreds of marauders with thakal mounts.

They appear to be settling in for an extended stay. Anyone who keeps careful watch on the camp may notice the comings and goings of a handful of cloaked spies, making their way in the darkness between the camp and Rhojess (messengers with the Raetann, see below)

Beginning during the night of Day Nine, the marauders send bands of 8-12 thakal riders armed with bows and javelins against the three outer wells – including the Port Well – to make harassing attacks. They approach loudly, slamming their weapons together and yelling, poking their lizard mounts to make them bellow, shouting threats.

We'll cut all your throats! We'll burn this city to the ground, and anyone we don't roast we'll sell for slaves!

To emphasize their point, the marauders ignite flaming arrows and shoot them over Rhojess's crumbling walls and into the Port Well stockade. The dry tinder the arrows ignite flares up easily, but can also be easily put out. Smoke rises from glowing fires that can be seen within the city, but these are soon extinguished. The point is made, though, that with a concerted effort the marauders could dangerously ignite the tinderbox that is Rhojess.

The marauders ride haughtily around the Port Well stockade, as well, shooting a few arrows and tossing a few javelins. One or two may even drive their thakal beasts through part of the stockade to knock it asunder and make a brief attack before heading off. Some might come close enough to be killed before their brethren are driven off (allowing a thakal to be captured, valuable both as a mount and as a carcass of meat for the starving people of Rhojess). As always, any innocents on the scene end up more embroiled in the conflict than they ought to be.

Principally, however, the marauders spend the next several evenings making these harassing attacks to panic the remaining civilian population while they secretly negotiate with the Raetann traitors in their midst.

Comings and Goings: Astute characters may notice the stealthy messengers clandestinely

entering and leaving through Rhojess's porous walls and glean their purpose.

The messengers are marauders who have abandoned their thakal beasts for these secret trips into the city. They wear nothing that makes noise, carry only knives, and paint themselves ochre to better sneak around in the darkness. The messengers generally move back and forth to their encampment between the Port Well and the North Well, keeping as far from prying eyes as possible. Rhojess' walls are easily crossed, having many cracks and fissures, in places virtually overblown with dunes, so the trek across poses no impediment to the marauders.

If Militia Group Five has set up any sort of perimeter patrol around their stockade, they have a good chance of noticing one of these messengers making his way either to or from town. Otherwise, it will be more difficult as they approach no closer than several hundred yards from the Port Well. Common camp warnings, like lines strung with bells or distributing brittle, easily snapped twigs may also be effective in rooting the messengers out. The messengers only travel by night and can easily scurry off to hide in the darkness.

The messengers carry communications between their overlord, a towering Chindi warrior named Harrock, and the Raetann administrators who hide now within their Water Guild compound in the city center. None of these messages are written down, simply memorized and passed along verbally. The messengers would have to be harshly coerced to betray their content. For the most part, the missives reveal the willingness of the Raetann to betray the Four Families and Rhojess so that they and the marauders both get what they desire: the former want control over the city's six remaining wells (three inside the walls, three without) in order to effectively take control of Rhojess, and the latter desire a consistent base of operations so they can range across the Old Countries and plunder it more effectively.

Some of the messages include:

Yes, the Raetann agree to restrict water access should the marauders set part of the city ablaze.

No, the marauders are not satisfied with a single well outside the city, but would settle for two.

Harrock's chief Shadazim, Rodyn Zem Jyta, a priest of Alyut the Split Serpent, will use magic to poison all the wells unless his demands are met.

The full assault against Rhojess's north wall will occur on the night of Day Twelve.

The siege equipment – catapults and battering rams – are lagging behind the marauder army, but will arrive by Day Fifteen

Once noticed, the messengers can be tracked between their encampment, the walls, and all the way into town to where they slip through back alleys into the Water Guild compound. It is high walled and adequately protected by mercenary guards who patrol the surrounding streets. The best way inside is either through the abandoned city storm sewers, or by stealthy sneaking over the rooftops. Once inside, messengers can be witnessed delivering and receiving missives that expose their terrible plans. Anyone captured by the Raetann inside their walls will be imprisoned there and soon put to death.

Storm Tunnels: In better days, rains fell upon Rhojess and its verdant fields regularly, in such abundance that storm drains were necessary to channel the excess away from the neighborhoods and quarters and out to the bay. Few remember that these even exist, and like most of the city, they lay in crumbled ruins from neglect. Smaller conduits that could just accommodate a couple of laborers crawling abreast reach to every city block, all feeding to larger tunnels many yards in diameter. They are overrun with rats and bugs, a handful of vagabonds and some deserters who would rather hide than serve their city, but these only know the immediate environs of their personal hideouts. Few realize that the storm tunnels offer access to the entire city.

Characters seeking access to other areas of Rhojess may notice, remember, or be given directions to the storm tunnels. Finding access to them is difficult enough, the few entrances are forgotten or were built over years ago; a concerted search will be necessary to find one. Once inside,

the tunnels present a barely navigable maze that is often blocked with loose bricks and collapsed stones. Generally speaking, a quest to find tunnel access to a particular location is routinely blocked at several points upon its path, requiring several hours to clear. Even when exposed, a tunnel path is suitable for only lightly armed travelers, and it may collapse and become blocked again at any time.

The Marauder Army: This particular band of brigands has only recently gathered its reputation in and around the Old Countries. They do not even have a commonly accepted name, though their new leader insists that they be known as Harrock's Marauders. Only time will tell if that moniker sticks.

Capturing Thakal: The marauders' thakal mounts might become riderless during their forays against the city walls and the Port Well. A skilled handler has a chance to round up a lone animal; those with no skill might get lucky and get one under control. They are already semi-domesticated, broken, and used to being used as mounts. A skilled rider can use one immediately, or it can be harnessed as a draft animal. Further, a thakal that turns out to be troublesome or those that are wounded or killed are ready sources of valuable meat. Though not the tastiest animal, desperate citizens have learned to hold their noses and eat whatever becomes available. A single thakal carcass can provide for many people for several days, and as such, draws meager offerings of coins and the notice of thieves.

Part Three: A General Assault

By Day Twelve, Harrock's Marauders have concluded their negotiations with the Raetann inside Rhojess, deliver their ultimatum, and make a concerted attack against its walls and wells.

The Ultimatum: Thakal-riding marauders demonstrate against Rhojess's walls just before dawn on Day Twelve, but this time their assault is quite different. Coming close either singly or in pairs, they shoot arrows over the walls with crudely scrawled messages upon papyrus tied

with strips of hide or hairs, each subtly different but delivering the same missive:

“Surrender the city or die in its flames!”

“Tonight we burn Rhojess to the ground!”

The messages get passed around the city quickly, and the citizens erupt in panic. Some assemble around the compounds of the Four Families, others around the Water Guild enclosure, where they are restrained. Many more either scramble to hoard what food and water they can gather, or flee to the desert east and south of the marauder encampment, an almost certainly suicidal move.

The Attack: Harrock sends his marauder army against Rhojess one hour after nightfall in a three-part sortie in concert with his newfound Raetann allies within its walls.

The primary assault, consisting of the main force of 400 marauders, assaults the wall just west of the North Gate. That portion of the wall is in disrepair, and the sands have blown up against it so that mounting its heights is not difficult. As the main body approaches, word goes up for the able bodied to gather in support of the City Guards at the North Gate to hold off the enemy. The battle ensues: upon the walls, in the desert just beyond and the city just behind. Raetann-employed mercenaries make their presence known and join the marauders to help them enter the city. No fires are purposefully set in this area, as Harrock hopes to take over at least this portion of Rhojess as a shelter for his increasingly desperate horde. Even if the marauders are wildly successful, they have insufficient force to occupy entire city.

Harrock personally leads part of the north wall assault, surrounded by torchbearers and banner-carriers to bring attention to his feats even in the darkness. This heartens his marauders considerably. Nearby, Rodyn Zem Jyta, a tall, bald man stripped completely naked, admonishes the marauders to greater ferocity, all the while bathed in an entirely different light, as if enormous glowing serpents twine between and around his limbs and then up into the night sky like massive kite tails. He stands alone, as no warriors, not even the marauders, dare come too close to him.

Observant characters may notice that riderless thakal – those whose riders have fallen in battle – all make their way obediently toward the naked Shadazim where they wait patiently around him (Rodyn has used his animal control abilities to secure these valuable beasts rather than allow them to run off into the wastelands).

Simultaneously with the attack against Rhojess’s north wall, Harrock directs the rest of his marauders to charge against all three outer wells in force, including the Port Well. Unless the characters have taken some action that changes their duty schedule, those in Militia Group Five will be on hand when that attack comes, though perhaps barely in time after the call to the North Gate. In fact, other than the characters and whatever innocent bystanders may be on hand, there are no others available to defend the well. Characters can take advantage of any preparations they have made, use whatever weapons they have on hand, and take position behind the stockade in whatever condition it is in. The marauders attack the Port Well with 15 thakal-mounted warriors, but abandon their fight after even a third of their number have fallen. All the while, the battle rages against the north wall, just barely in sight across the dark, windswept ground. Torches light the scene, and the distant sounds of death and battle reach the characters.

Unless the player characters have taken some specific action to significantly bolster the defenses at the other two outer wells, they fall to superior marauder strength by midnight on Day Twelve, their defenders slain, captured or scattered. It is completely up to the characters if the Port Well remains under their control, and therefore that of the Four Families of Rhojess, or falls into the hands of the marauders.

The third portion of the marauder attack upon Rhojess involves skirmishing thakal riders who approach the city along its other walls just to fire flaming arrows into its midst. This is a comparatively disorganized effort, involving just a couple of dozen riders operating independently. Still, those few manage to fire several hundred flaming arrows over the walls in a matter of a few hours, setting several terrible blazes among the dried, abandoned buildings, all within 50 to 100 yards of the city’s outer edge. By midnight fires

rage out of control over many blocks. Citizens are pressed into service fighting the fires, but little can be done until they burn out in the morning. Characters within the city may be similarly pressed into service.

Other Observations: Even during the battle there are messengers sneaking back and forth between Harrock's camp and the Raetann compound. Characters may notice them making their way through the darkness during the battle, picking their way carefully to get past the fighting to deliver their missives. Observers around the Raetann compound also witness entire wagons of arms and armor – mainly spears, javelins, and shields – issuing forth almost unnoticed during the confusion, lead by Water Guild-employed mercenaries to the battle lines and turned over directly to the grateful marauders there. Many more mercenaries have appeared from within the Raetann compound, close to 200 men, far more than were in evidence before the fighting. They have been gathering surreptitiously and keeping a low profile behind the compound's walls.

Aftermath: By morning, unless the player characters have intervened so decisively to obviate it, the marauders emerge in control of two (or possibly all three) of Rhojess's outer wells, and a large portion of the city's north wall and several neighborhoods just inside those. They do not, however, have direct access to their allies in the Water Guild compound, which is isolated from them by a half mile of city still controlled by the Four Families and the City Guard.

Part Four: The Shift in Power

Day Thirteen sees several significant changes around the Port Well as the political factions take the measure of their new positions and the loyalties of those around them.

The Last Well: A comparative flood of people comes out to the Port Well, fretting wildly that the other two outer wells are now owned by the Water Guild and the marauders. The citizens are not sure

if those wells are off limits, but none have chanced going out there, coming to the Port Well instead. The crowds press up to the well more desperately than ever before. Their tensions higher and tempers shorter. Scuffles and arguments rule the day, demanding the City Guards' attention to keep order.

Desertions: To that end, half of the non-player character members of Militia Group Five simply do not show up the next morning (rounding up). Speculation among the citizens and other guards runs the gamut: those absent may have been killed or wounded in other fighting in the city, gathered and reassigned during the desperate fighting, or as is whispered more widely, they may have gone over to the other side.

By later in the day, rumors reach the Port Well that support the latter conclusion:

Criers move quickly from corner to corner, saying that the Raetann have done what was necessary to save the city. The Four Families betrayed the city and must be rooted out! The Guild and marauders are one, and they have food and coin for any who join them.

Hundreds of city guards have discarded their red tunics and swell the Water Guild's compound.

The Four Families have fled the city!

Tattooing: By the end of their shift, City Guard Kapetan Luratka makes his way out to the well with a grim-looking group of guards. Several are lightly wounded and all appear to have not slept.

Without saying a word, one soldier upends a wicker basket and dumps a severed head onto the ground. It's one of their militia group who failed to report for the day. Then the announcement is made:

City Guards will bear the black 'x.'

Ink pots and needles emerge from pouches. No time is allowed for debate or escape. Everyone in Militia Group Five is tattooed with an 'x' on the left side of the neck, crudely and painfully done. The grim Kapetan brooks no argument. Disobeying meets with immediate execution.

The message is clear: deserters to the marauders or Raetann will be easily recognized and end like their comrade here: tortured and beheaded.

A Change of Encampment: Harrock dismantles his desert camp immediately the next morning, and moves his entire force into the neighborhoods of north Rhojess that they control. Anyone who has traveled out in the wastelands understands this perfectly; stone walls and roofs, even those long-neglected and crumbling, are far preferable to tents and bedrolls on the wind-blasted rocks. From there, the marauders control the northern approaches to the city and the ground between themselves and the other two outer wells, where they begin to entrench and fortify. Harrock and his retinue, including his Rodyn Zem Jyta, take residence in a run-down but easily defended nobleman's estate.

New Dispositions: Once the tattooing is accomplished, Kapetan Luratka allows himself a moment to rest and shares some of what he knows with the guards around the Port Well. He knows that the other two outer wells were lost to the marauders, and that they are in league with the Water Guild, who remain isolated in their compound.

It's a stalemate, lads! The Water Guild rats are cornered in their compound, us and the Four Families all around them, and the marauders have the north of the city and the other two wells. There will be no quarter given, I think. Blood's been shed on both sides. Either the Raetann will wipe out the Four Families or the other way 'round. The citizens are afraid – many saw that Alyut Shadazim fighting alongside the marauders. They fear the Split Serpent is against us. I fear they may be right.

When the Kapetan leaves, he replenishes Militia Group Five with the men he can spare, bringing its

numbers up to 20, including whatever conscripted characters are still on hand. He expects there to be an assault against this last well (he is correct, though the nature of the attack is not what he expects), and so orders the reinforcement of the stockade with all haste. His instructions are simple: protect the well, and whenever possible patrol toward the north edge of the city and harass any marauders, Raetann, or reinforcements traveling there.

Regelth Attack: Unable to wrest the Port Well from its stalwart defenders, the Water Guild and marauders turn to more sorcerous means. They call upon the powers of their Alyut Shadazim to draw a massive stone worm out of the wilderness to destroy the well and those around it.

Once Militia Group Five settles back into a routine for a couple of days, the regelth digs its way up from beneath the well to make its attack. The ground shakes and rumbles, and the loud tumbling of stone rises up from the well. When the regelth emerges, it unleashes an uncaring attack upon any who would stop it, directing its massive suction against the rubble, the stockade, and all enemies and civilian bystanders. The stone worm leaves behind a much larger hole where the well was originally, and as an unexpected consequence greatly increases its water output for whoever comes to control it after the assault. It also leaves behind many valuable red tears for those brave or foolhardy enough to seek them out.

The regelth's primary objective – as dictated by the Rodyn, is to kill or drive off the defenders so the Raetann and marauders can move in and take it over. Should the defenders keep the well from even the mighty regelth, they will have achieved a tremendous victory and secured their reputation throughout Rhojess, among their friends and enemies alike.