

VOR RUKOTH

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Coyote's
Refuge

Sample file

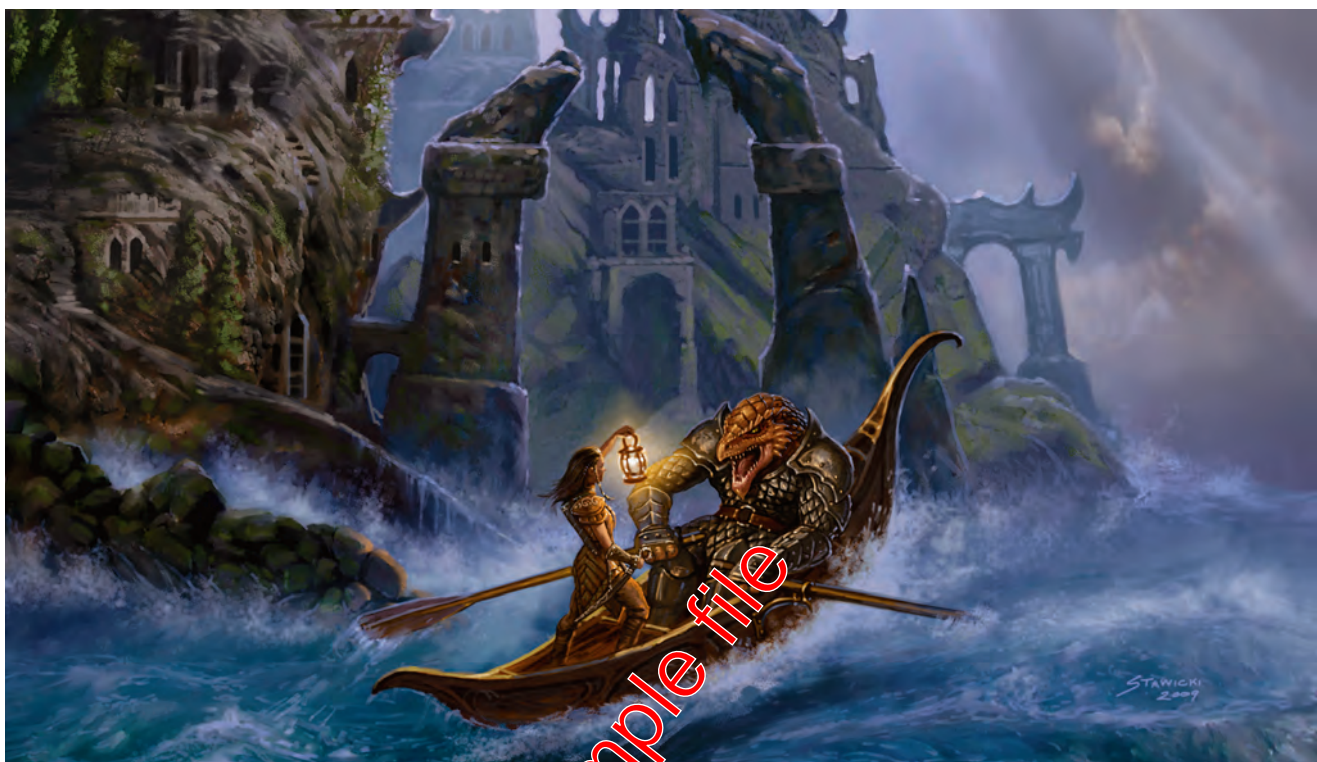
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VOR RUKOTH™

An Ancient Ruins Adventure Site

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Sample file

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9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

First Printing: July 2010

ISBN: 978-0-7869-5549-7

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INTRODUCTION

Vor Rukoth™: An Ancient Ruins Adventure Site is a book for Dungeon Masters that explores the crumbling ruins of a once-great tiefling city of the empire of Bael Turath. It is not intended to present a cohesive adventure path, but rather, dozens of locations and hooks that you can weave into an existing adventure or campaign setting.

With *Vor Rukoth*, you can put together narrative threads as you see fit, forming a tapestry that produces a campaign or providing a series of short, one-shot quests. Characters might visit Vor Rukoth occasionally, searching for lost lore, valuable items, or ancient magic. The numerous quests and hooks described here can also be the basis for lengthy adventures in and around the ruins. For example, a rich patron might send the adventurers to the city to recover an item, but in the process of retrieving the relic, they might run afoul of the Blackwhips slavers. After they deal with the slavers, one of the freed captives might ask the heroes for help in searching for a relative who went missing in the ruins.

Vor Rukoth is suitable for characters from 1st to 15th level. It assumes you have the *Player's Handbook*®, *Monster Manual*®, and *Dungeon Master's Guide*® core rulebooks. It makes reference to various other books, but they are not necessary for play.

BACKGROUND

Vor Rukoth was one of the jewels of the empire of Bael Turath. Sometimes called the City of Forges, it was ruled over by the emperor's sister, a human named Lady Najala. During the long and violent war with the dragonborn empire of Arkhosia, the powerful humans of Bael Turath—nobles, wealthy merchants, spellcasters, and priests—underwent a sinister transformation through diabolic pacts. Among the first to swear the oaths to devils and become a tiefling was Lady Najala. Seeing her power and influence grow as a result of her oaths, many of the other nobles of Vor Rukoth lined up for the opportunity to participate.

As the threat from Arkhosia grew more imminent, Lady Najala became suspicious of everyone and began scouring Vor Rukoth's population for traitors. She called out those nobles who had refused to take infernal oaths, believing they conspired against her, and she erected a gate to Hell to ensure her hold on power. Ultimately, it proved her undoing. As a dragonborn host marched on the city, she desperately threw open the portal to any creatures that would aid her. On what came to be known as the Day of Devils, legions of fiends spilled out from the Nine Hells. They repelled the dragonborn host on the outskirts of Vor Rukoth, but they also slaughtered the thousands who inhabited Vor Rukoth. Najala's victory meant little, for the city was shattered and left a ruined vestige.

THREE THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT VOR RUKOTH

Three features define Vor Rukoth as a unique adventure site.

1. NAJALA'S GATE

Deep in the bowels of the city, infernal forces stir. Like a toxic fog, corrupt energy from the Nine Hells creeps through Vor Rukoth, permeating every crevice. None can escape its influence. Long-abandoned weapons still burn to the touch. The stench of brimstone stings the nostrils, and the crackle of flames is heard where no fire burns. The source of this evil is Najala's Gate, a yawning archway that maintains a thin veil between the world and the Nine Hells.

During the final mad years of Najala's reign, she commissioned the building of the gate to give her unlimited access to diabolic forces. Once its construction was complete, she had its architects executed, ensuring they would take the secret of its location and power to the grave. Najala went one step further to secure her control of the gate. From a spellcaster named Inyarral (see "The Deep Pits," page 29), she learned the ritual to become a lich. She modified the ritual, though, for she had discovered how to instill her soul into a much larger object than a normal phylactery. She placed her soul within the gate, giving her control over its flow.

On the Day of Devils, as rebellion sparked within Vor Rukoth and Arkhosia's forces marched on the city, Najala desperately turned to the gate for power. Manipulated by her advisors, many of whom were devils, she threw open the portal and called upon an infernal host to defend the embattled city. In the Nine Hells, the gate shone like a beacon, calling devils to it. As the diabolic hordes poured from the portal, Najala briefly lost control.

After the dust had settled and the blood had soaked into the streets, the gate closed again, but its malign influence persisted. Devils occasionally emerge from it, either by their own power or at Najala's behest. Hellish corruption remains rife within the walls of Vor Rukoth, and any adventurers daring to remain in the city for long are likely to draw evil to them unless they destroy the gate or surrender to its malevolence.

2. LIVING CITY

Although Vor Rukoth lies in ruins, it remains a city alive with iniquity. Devils in the guise of maidens lure hapless travelers to their doom. Slavers funnel their captives through the city to eager buyers. And bandits and murderers find refuge in the dark recesses of shattered buildings.

Vor Rukoth is a constantly changing environment. If one group loses its grip on power, another rises to fill its

EXPLORING VOR RUKOTH

place. Zealous heroes might wipe out a group of slavers, only to return weeks later to find that one of the prisoners they freed has turned the former slave den into a pit for betting on beast fights.

Even the old influences in Vor Rukoth are not diminished. House Varrik was the greatest of the noble houses to stand against Najala—now called the Queen of Roses—and still seeks to unseat her (see “Varrik Estate,” page 17). The self-styled queen, meanwhile, is attended by many devils, even centuries after the city’s fall. She is a major player in the politics of the region, offering power to those who flatter her and offer tribute. Warlords, pirates, tribal chiefs, and necromancers are among her beneficiaries.

Over the course of their adventures, the characters might confront a number of villains who have received the support of Queen Najala. Alternatively, they might be forced to visit Najala’s court and request her assistance to resolve a problem. Vor Rukoth is a tightly knit web of alliances and enmities, in which a single action can ripple through the factions in and around the ruins. Ultimately, Najala is an evil figure, but if you want to run an intrigue-filled adventure or campaign, help your players understand that confronting her is not as simple as they might believe.

3. DIVERSE ENVIRONMENTS

Vor Rukoth’s unique geography lets you run a game with a variety of moods and in an array of terrains. Seismic activity, possibly resulting from the imprisoned volcanic dragon Kaxhar (see page 20), has made the city geologically unstable. The events of the Day of Devils caused water from the nearby Midnight Sea to rush in, flooding part of the city. For an aquatic adventure, the characters can explore the waterfront and the drowned Lost District. To quest in the Underdark, they can delve into the Blood Grounds or the catacombs below Najala’s Ruby Court. Or, for a Feywild excursion, they can visit the city’s gardens and swamps. The geography of Vor Rukoth is continually changing, whether spontaneously or through the characters’ actions.

The way that Vor Rukoth is parceled out among different power groups also allows for quick visits. Adventurers can enter the city, tackle a few encounters, and then escape without too much effort. As an adventure site, Vor Rukoth can be used for consecutive encounters or spread across several sessions. If you want it to become the scene of a larger-scale storyline, its geography also caters to that. Because entry points are limited—and because the city is surrounded by sheer cliffs and treacherous water—just to get into or out of Vor Rukoth might be an adventure. Refuges exist within the city, but even these are not without peril. And the city’s environment can change without warning, whether as the result of external events or the actions of the characters.

For centuries after its fall, Vor Rukoth remained lost to civilization, inhabited only by wrathful spirits, monstrous beasts, and devils trapped by ancient bonds with its undead queen. The human empire of Nerath came and went, never realizing the potential wealth that lay within this remote ruin.

Then, a couple of decades ago, a company of halfling explorers discovered the remnants of an ancient road. They followed it to the ruined city and began exploring, discovering much wealth but also many dangers within. Only one survived. This halfling, who later came to be known as the Coyote, established a small outpost just beyond the gates of Vor Rukoth. He spread the word of the ancient city and helped guide others there. The highway leading to it came to be known as the Ruby Road, both for its crimson cast and for the wealth it brought to those who managed to pull treasures from the ruins.

The halfling’s outpost was called Coyote’s Refuge (“the Refuge” for short), and it attracted all manner of folk. Adventurers came in search of treasure; divine agents sought to cleanse the ruins of their evil; criminals came looking for a base of operations, and outcasts came to find sanctuary and solitude. Coyote’s Refuge became a jumping-off point for anyone entering Vor Rukoth, supplying the essentials to those with the audacity to venture within.

COYOTE’S REFUGE

Coyote’s Refuge is a tent city, so it is constantly changing. Only a few permanent buildings rise above the tents, because the Coyote—for reasons he won’t explain—doesn’t allow the construction of new structures. People around the Refuge tell stories of a group of dwarves from the city of Turak-tol (see page 7) who tried to build a tavern without the Coyote’s permission and all ended up buried in its foundation. Some of the tents are small, providing scant shelter from the glare of the sun and the cold breath of night. Others are large and complex, with lavish furniture and cordoned-off chambers.

The few permanent buildings in Coyote’s Refuge include the following locations.

The Watchtower: The Coyote resides in the remnant of a tower that once kept watch over the plains surrounding Vor Rukoth. The tower was torn apart in the battle between the infernal forces and the dragonborn army, but the halfling had it rebuilt with mismatched stone taken from the wall that once surrounded Vor Rukoth. From its top, he can see for miles around, from the Midnight Sea to the south all the way to the Horned Hills to the north and the Skull Fields to the west. The Coyote keeps watch over everyone entering and leaving the Refuge.



The Dancing Lizard: This is the only tavern in Coyote's Refuge, owned by the dwarf Terris Halfjaw. Terris runs the establishment with the permission of the Coyote, who occasionally deigns to descend from his tower and share a drink with guests in the Refuge. Like the Watchtower, the Dancing Lizard is built of stone taken from Vor Rukoth's walls. The tavern's drinking hall sits aboveground, where it grows hot from the beating sun and the masses of people that crowd it during the day. The bedchambers are built underground, allowing them to stay cooler. The Dancing Lizard has only eight of these, and they are almost always occupied. Rarely does a tenant check out, leading some to murder for the chance to secure a coveted room.

The Canteen: This general store is owned by the Coyote, but he rarely takes a hand in its operation. The halfling is more interested in who is coming to the store and what they are buying. The store is managed by a female tiefling named Inferna. A fastidious shopkeeper, Inferna takes inventory regularly and keeps detailed records of anyone who enters or leaves the shop, whether or not they buy something.

The Canteen is a large, cavernous structure without windows, and on hot days, it becomes an oven inside. Most of the perishable goods are kept in chambers below ground, safe from the heat and from intruders. A secret corridor connects its basement to the Watchtower.

The store is the only source of water in the Refuge, so unless travelers carry in their own or have a magical way to produce it, they invariably show up at the Canteen. The water is expensive and tastes terrible, so some adventurers prefer to survive on wine and ale.

PEOPLE OF THE REFUGE

Few people are permanent residents of Coyote's Refuge. The cruel heat of day and the bitter cold of night, along with the unscrupulous characters who lurk in the shadow of Vor Rukoth, make it an unwelcoming home. Those who do live there have a saying: "To stay in the Refuge, you either hate yourself or are hated by everyone else." Still, those who remain help to keep Coyote's Refuge thriving.

The Coyote: This elusive figure is in fact not a halfling at all. The real Coyote is trapped in a magical prison shaped like an ordinary die. He found the object, a crystal cube with a small figure carved in the center, when his adventuring band first explored the ruins. When he escaped, he brought it with him and rolled the die habitually. Unbeknownst to him, the object contained an imprisoned creature called a raavasta, a snake-like entity born of the Abyss. When the halfling rolled the cube's sixth side three times in a row, he became trapped in the object, freeing the raavasta. The treacherous and cunning fiend has an uncanny ability to change its appearance. It assumed the guise of the Coyote and bent the Refuge toward its own purposes.

Hook: The Coyote contracts adventurers and monitors the flow of goods out of Vor Rukoth in search of one particular object. Although he collects many different items of power, what he really seeks is a map to the Athenaeum, the temple in the capital city of Bael Turath where the first infernal pacts were spoken.

Terris Halfjaw: This male dwarf has a surprisingly friendly, personable facade, given the cold metal that completes half his lower jaw. Terris might laugh and carouse with adventurers, but he is in fact a cruel, calculating murderer. The dwarf spies on his tenants for the Coyote, who in exchange allows him to keep the Dancing Lizard as an implement of revenge.

NO REFUGE?

When you place Vor Rukoth within your game, you might decide that you don't need Coyote's Refuge. If the characters have already established a base of operations, you might prefer to use that location as a jumping-off point for exploring the ruins. A word of caution, though: Vor Rukoth relies on its many factions and nonplayer characters to drive the adventure hooks and quests that make it feel like a living city. If you're going to place the ruins next to an existing location, make sure there is adequate reason for those inhabitants to be there. Otherwise, you risk it becoming simply a treasure destination that the characters quickly tire of.

Hook: Terris was once a member of an adventuring party, but when one of its expeditions went terribly wrong, he was infected with mummy rot and left for dead. He survived the disease, though it left his jaw horribly maimed. Since then, he has been searching for his former companions with little success. Figuring that Vor Rukoth is a premier adventuring site, he set up the tavern as a trap for them. The bedchambers are rigged to lock and flood with sand, ensuring a terrifying death.

It has been many years since Terris saw his erstwhile companions, so he and they both look different. He might mistake one of the characters for a former ally, or he might attempt to hold them hostage, believing they have information on his old companions. Perhaps a character was indeed part of that ill-fated party and left Terris behind only because the dwarf appeared to have perished.

Inferna: This female tiefling has a fiery temper that ignites at disorder and sloppiness. Although she serves the Coyote, she bears him no loyalty. She has also come to suspect that he is not a halfling and is searching for something in particular. The tiefling has her own reasons for being in Coyote's Refuge.

Hook: Inferna is seeking information about her lineage, for she is a descendant of House Rexia (see "Rexia Estate," page 18). Some members of her family survived the fall of Vor Rukoth because they were not in the city at the time. She has several items passed down from her ancestors that are draconic, and she hopes to find out the truth about her family. She could be a useful source of information to characters who help with her quest, or at least, offer a little dignity and cleanliness in an otherwise dirty and unsophisticated place.

VOR RUKOTH ENVIRONS

Nearby Coyote's Refuge and Vor Rukoth are several notable geographic features that could present other possible adventure sites.

Hammerfast and the Dawnforge Mountains: Northwest of Vor Rukoth lies a mountain range containing the bustling mercantile town of Hammerfast (refer to the *Hammerfast*™ supplement for more information on this location). Hammerfast lies along the Trade Road, so adventurers heading to Vor Rukoth are likely to pass through the town on their way. The Dawnforge Mountains contain many perils, including goblins, orcs, giants, and trolls. They trouble travelers along the road, but few ever make it as far as Vor Rukoth.

Skull Fields: The Ruby Road veers south from the Trade Road, taking travelers through a great open scrubland where few plants grow. Eventually, at the edge of the scrubland, the Ruby Road briefly disappears as it passes into the Skull Fields. Nothing grows in this vast wasteland, filled with blood rock (*Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 67). Arkhosia and Bael Turath fought numerous battles here, and the dead are still restless.

Once a year, phantom soldiers rise up to repeat the decisive battle that allowed the dragonborn army of Dhuryan Flamebrow to march on Vor Rukoth.

Horned Hills: The hills to the north of Vor Rukoth rise like jagged horns toward the sky. The whipping of wind and sand has carved out the stone, giving the hills a gruesome visage. Savage tieflings—remnants of Bael Turath—still live in the hills, guarding treasures looted from the ruins of the fallen empire. Attempts to negotiate with the savages might be rewarded with access to secrets and treasures, or they could lead to a deadly battle.

FACTIONS

Several groups have significant power in Vor Rukoth and the surrounding territories. Some are loose organizations that share a culture or mutual interest, while others have a clear, unified objective. Any one of these factions could become allies or enemies to characters interested in exploring the ruins.

SCIONS OF THE HORNED EMPIRE

Although the personal ambitions of the tieflings in this group vary, the organization's overall goal is to restore Bael Turath to its former glory. Some strive for power, others hope to redeem their race, and still others want to bring light to an otherwise dark world. Members of the Scions seek magical objects, ancient records, and relics of historical importance. They purchase such items or hire adventurers to recover them. On the surface, the organization seems benign, but certain circles within it operate covertly to acquire the objects of their desire through any means necessary. Specifically, they seek weapons or knowledge that will unlock the power of Bael Turath and allow them to destroy their enemies.

Most members openly display their affiliation, proudly showing the Scions' symbol of two crossed horns. They inhabit several large tents within Coyote's Refuge, and a few of their members also lurk within the ruins of Vor Rukoth. They are always eager for new recruits, but few of them are not tieflings. They advertise for adventurers to go on quests, but they usually fail to mention the dangers involved. Should characters acquire a coveted relic and refuse to sell it, the leaders of the group don't hesitate to send thieves to steal the object or assassins to eliminate its owners.

For quests and adventure hooks related to the Scions of the Horned Empire, see pages 20, 26, and 28.

Sample file