



Volarn was intrigued, though, reading and rereading to learn all he could. He shared his findings with his closest colleagues. With their support, he turned the entire temple to the task of recreating the ancient experiment. Those who disagreed vanished, so those who harbored doubts learned to keep these misgivings secret.

It took a decade, but the Kaorti completed the device described in the scrolls, constructing a massive orrery, a clockwork machine that marks the passage of dominions as they travel unseen and unending paths through the Astral Sea. All was ready as described in the Scrolls of Tیرهon, but nothing worked.

Volarn realized the orrery needed a power source so he used the *Tear of Ioun*, placing it in the heart of the machine. As he pulled his hands away, the orbs shuddered, rotating around the shining artifact. They accelerated, and an arc of light lanced forth from the stone only to vanish into what seemed to be a fold in time and space. Volarn and his fellows donned their gear and stepped into the squirming hole, thinking themselves more than prepared.

The rift's corruption bathed the *Tear of Ioun*, which began to gather the loosed power of the Far Realm. As the orrery picked up speed and the gateway appeared, black fissures crawled across the *Tear's* surface. Its light ebbed as the last of the Kaorti stepped through the portal, tumbling into the Far Realm.

A moment later, the eldritch power failed, and the *Tear's* weird movements snapped shut the hole in reality. It did so with such force it blew apart the orrery, sundering the tower and sealing the reckless scholars in the Far Realm.

Mild curiosity evolved into unhealthy obsession as Volarn learned more and more. The writer, Tیرهon, an eladrin mystic, created a pinhole into the Far Realm. What Tیرهon saw filled him with dread, so he sealed the wound with potent wards. However, a diminutive creature slipped free—something like a tadpole, but fleshier and with numerous tentacles. When it touched Tیرهon's flesh, it burrowed inside, awakening strange sensations and hallucinations, filling Tیرهon's consciousness with a way to erect a permanent portal. Whether Tیرهon succeeded, none can say. His writing drifted deeper into madness until it became incomprehensible.

KAORTI REBORN

The explorers, trapped and adrift in a churning sea of nameless horror, found ghastly tendrils burrowing inside them, polluting them with the dreadful effect of the Far Realm. One by one, their forms bloomed bizarre corruptions. As time passed, the Kaorti bore torment after torment until their minds snapped, their identities lost in a storm of madness. Only one goal remained true within them: They yearned to return to the mortal world and share the “wonders” of the Far Realm.

MALACHI'S DREAMS

Centuries after the Kaorti vanished, Nerath collapsed into ruin. The *Tear of Ioun* passed into myth, and no one remembered the Kaorti or the purpose of the ruined tower in the heights of the nearby mountains. Although the passing of years concealed ancient sins, not all were done with them. In the wastes, the alienist conjurer Malachi dreamed.

Malachi did not know he was the last living scion of Volarn. To his imprisoned ancestor, Malachi was the last hope of Kaorti escape. Touching Malachi's mind while he slept, Volarn reached beyond the planar gulfs to coax his descendant with the Far Realm vistas and bounteous power. Volarn seduced Malachi, luring him to the brink of insanity to make the perfect pawn.

Volarn demanded Malachi construct a new orrery to release the trapped Kaorti from their prison. Malachi set out to follow in his ancestor's steps, using slaves and servants to complete the task, but he knew he lacked the *Tear of Ioun*. Thus, Malachi sent his servants forth to recover the stone.

ENTER THE STORMCROWS

Malachi's servants scoured the land for the hidden relic. Of these agents, Cylus proved both the most cunning and the most craven. He found the Kaorti stronghold not far from a small town named Wellspring. Rather than pluck the stone from the tower himself, he hired a band of mercenaries—the Stormcrows—that had a reputation for taking any job for which the pay was ample. Gold blinded them to the risks, and they set out to retrieve the item.

The Stormcrows found the tower, fought its inhabitants, and located the *Tear*. However, the stone's corruption overwhelmed them, warping their flesh and rending their minds. Elomir, their leader, decided to serve the stone and protect it. There the Stormcrows remained, worshipping the *Tear of Ioun* as if it were a god. As blood sacrifices filled the stone with hideous evil, the *Tear* called to the darkness, luring more horrors from beyond to pay it homage.

UNEXPECTED THIEF

Back in Wellspring, Cylus waited for the Stormcrows' return, unaware of what had happened in the mountains' heights. As he rested, delighted in his own cleverness, he had the singular misfortune to encounter Shathrax, a mind flayer. The vile creature had been plotting to enslave the human population and make servants of them all. As Shathrax sank its tentacles into Cylus's mind, it learned of the *Tear* from the memories it consumed. Shathrax became aware of the item's powers and connections to the Far Realm, and the mind flayer knew the *Tear* presented an excellent opportunity to put diabolical plans in action.

The mind flayer sent its own mercenaries to recover the relic. Creeping into the tower, they slipped in and snatched the artifact. The stone wailed in outrage, causing the place to erupt. Though most of the thieves died, one managed to escape with the *Tear* and deliver it to Shathrax.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The Stormcrows, responding to the psychic cry from the stone, dispatched a force to retrieve it. The attackers descend on Wellspring, slaughtering and destroying in the search for their treasure. PCs can come to the town's defense and repel the horde. A priestess of Ioun then turns to the heroes to find the item the monsters were seeking.

From the recovering town, the heroes cross the wilderness to the Kaorti Temple. The trail ends at a ruined tower overlooking a deep ravine. Inside the tower, the heroes must overcome the terrible creatures in their search. In the end, they find the relic has been stolen.

HOOKS

Since the adventure begins in the town of Wellspring, you need to come up with a reason for why the player characters are there in the first place. You can use any one of the following adventure hooks or come up with one better suited for your campaign.

Between Adventures: Wellspring is an ideal place to purchase supplies, train, and relax. The town is also large enough for the PCs to acquire needed ingredients for rituals or to research other mysteries involved with past or future adventures.

Rumors of Adventure: Situated as it is on the frontier, Wellspring is a place from which adventurers can mount expeditions into the Harrow Wood and the Kadagast Mountains. Rumor holds that old portals to the Feywild still stand in the forest, and portals to darker and stranger lands lay in the mountains. In addition, the peaks are home to ruins of more than one empire—Nerath and Bael Turath.

Holiness: For the worshippers of Ioun, Wellspring is a holy site. At this location, Estered received the blessing of the goddess and founded an order dedicated to protecting her gift. As a result, pilgrims come to Wellspring to pay homage to the saint at what they believe is his tomb at the center of town. A servant of Ioun among the PCs might receive a vision about the evil growing in Wellspring, or one of Ioun's servants might visit the PCs and task them with uncovering the meaning of similar visions.

WELLSPRING

Wellspring nestles in a valley, astride a river known as the Chill and between two arms of the Kadagast Mountains. The town's folk are farmers and fishers. Cultivated farmland surrounds the community. Less than two miles away is Kord's Tankard, a deep lake fed by runoff from the mountains. A Nerathi road winds down from a northern pass, heading south and splitting into a westward arm. Paved with cut stone, the roads still see caravans from the north.

The most common travelers, though, are pilgrims devoted to the deity Ioun and her saint, Estered. Each year brings another band of devout to the town's center square. They pay their respects under an

SNOOPING AROUND

Before setting out, the adventurers might want to look around town and do a bit of investigating. Each of the following entries corresponds to a different skill. When a character makes a successful check, the following information is revealed as well as all information from lower DCs.

NPCs of WELLSPRING

If you prefer to roleplay the search for information in more detail, you can expand them into interactions with any of the following NPCs or characters of your creation. Encounters with locals give the PCs a chance to forge alliances, gain additional information

for future adventures, develop minor quests, and so on. If the PCs need help, one of these NPCs might be able to help.

CROETUS

The Wizard of Wellspring is an accomplished hedge mage and well versed in matters concerning spells and magical creatures. He lives in the Low District, in a round house with a conical roof.

Occupation and History: Croetus came to Wellspring five years ago after fleeing a southern city for a scandalous tryst with a merchant prince's wife. He has kept a low profile in the town ever since, watchful for assassins he's sure lurk behind every shadow.

Physical Description: Croetus is a tall, thin human male with short salt-and-pepper hair and a long mustache drooping down either side of his mouth. He has big eyes and a hawkish nose. Always fashionable, he wears a black silk shirt and matching breeches held up by a wide leather belt with a silver clasp. Croetus twirls his mustache when thoughtful or nervous.

Values and Motivations: Croetus is a shameless flirt and lecher. He dotes on ladies of any race or age. In spite of this failing, he is good at what he does. Croetus is more inclined to help any group that has one or more female members.

History

DC	Result
10	Founded centuries ago, Wellspring is a bright point of civilization in an otherwise untamed wilderness.
15	Many of the older families can trace their lineage to Nerath, the dead empire that once claimed these lands.
20	Estered, a particularly famous mage and theologian, lived and worked in Wellspring long ago. All that remains of his legacy in Wellspring is the statue raised in his honor. It's said that Estered worked out of a secret laboratory in Wellspring.
22	The lands around Wellspring were once part of the ancient empire of Bael Turath, a powerful and long-dead civilization brought low by its filthy pacts with devils.
25	An old legend relating to this region deals with a cabal of mystics and mages who tore open reality to unlock the secrets of the Far Realm.
30	Those mystics were the Kaorti.

Nature

DC	Result
10	Wellspring sits in a small valley created by two arms of the Kadagast Mountains. Moisture trapped by the peaks keeps the valley vibrant and green, with summers wet and winters mild.
15	The Harrow Wood is home to bands of half-orcs who tolerate Wellspring. These folk occasionally trade with the locals, bringing pelts, woodcarvings, and the occasional strange relic. Wellspringers call these people Harrowfolk.

Religion

DC	Result
15	Worship of Ioun has deep roots in these parts, dating to well before the rise and fall of Nerath.
20	The Kaorti were a sect of Ioun worshippers tasked with storing relics and knowledge.
30	The Kaorti fell from grace by toying with twisted knowledge. They destroyed themselves in a misguided experiment.

Streetwise

DC	Result
5	The monsters struck a few outlying farms before invading Wellspring.
10	People have been disappearing for weeks. The missing citizens include Reese, a baker; Jurival, a friar; and Simon, a young son of local merchants. (This clue provides dead-ends for now, but "Depths of Madness" explores this rash of vanishings in detail.)
15	A few weeks ago, a group of mercenaries known as the Stormcrows set out for the mountains. The group included five people: an elf, an eladrin, two humans, and a dwarf. They asked many questions about the region and its history, especially about the ruins in the mountains.
20	The Stormcrows are "money for might" sellswords. No job is too low if the price is right. Their members are Elomir, a male elf swordsman, Garen, a male dwarf cutthroat, Shantaira, a female eladrin fire mage, Denva, a female human soldier, and Klaus, a male human wilderness scout.