

THE STRANGE™



SWORDBREAKERS
AN ELITE ORGANIZATION OF THE STRANGE
BY BRUCE R. CORDELL

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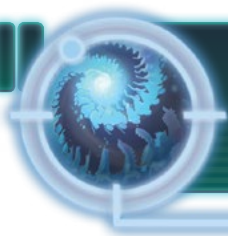
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Dedicated to our Kickstarter backers Andrew Cotgreave, Brian Hickey, Federico Franceschi, and Andrew Brereton



INTRODUCING THE SWORDBREAKERS



Swordbreakers: An Elite Organization of the Strange gives players and game masters a close look at a select group of NPCs active in various recursions, but especially Ardeyn.

As a GM resource, *Swordbreakers* introduces a crack team of NPCs for players to ally with, fight, or even aspire to join, along with the history, goals, and short description of the group's main base. In addition, this Fractal also includes several adventure seeds, a location (Swordbreaker Keep), and artifacts (the [Soul Gem of Zeal](#) and its various [fragments](#), plus boots of the Strange).

As a player resource, *Swordbreakers* potentially provides a special focus ([Embraces Swordbreaker Zeal](#)), patrons (or sometimes allies) in the form of the NPCs, and an affiliate organization for those who want to expand their horizons. It's up to the PCs. Will their characters oppose, ally with, or join the Swordbreakers?



Throughout this adventure, you'll see page references to various items accompanied by this symbol. These are page references to *The Strange* corebook, where you can find additional details about that item, place, rule, NPC, or creature. It isn't usually necessary to look up the referenced items in the corebook; it's an optional way to learn more about the situation and provide additional information to your players. The exception is if a cypher or creature stat is referenced, in which case you'll want the corebook nearby.

Soul Gem of Zeal,
page 10

Swordbreaker Zeal
fragment, page 15

Embraces Swordbreaker
Zeal, page 14





MANIFEST ZEAL (FOR THE GM)



*Prime Element,
page 201*

Ardeyn, page 160

Recruited out of an already-elite team called the Prime Element on Earth, Swordbreakers are among the best of the best. They can acclimate to almost any recursion, environment, or situation. But their primary mission is facing threats that arise in the recursion of *Ardeyn*.

To that end, the Swordbreaker Alpha Team spends most of its time in the Land of the Curse, operating out of a fortress called Swordbreaker Keep. (The Swordbreaker Bravo Team is made up of recursors who include the PCs, but only if the characters join the organization.)

Symbol: Exploding sword

Motto: Bravery, Honor, and Sacrifice

SWORDBREAKER ALPHA TEAM

The four principals of the group, plus their commanding officer, are detailed below. Each member of the Alpha Team focuses on one or two areas where they particularly excel, though they're all deadly with weapons, cunning, and, because they work as a team, hard to kill.



*"Really, you didn't already know that?
How . . . interesting."*

—Federico Franceschi, Swordbreaker





ANDREW COTGREAVE "GREAVES"

Andrew Cotgreave, commonly called "Greaves" by his teammates, is a former Navy SEAL. Andrew is a brash man of few regrets and fewer friends. Mostly, only other Swordbreakers have warm feelings for him (and not all of them, and none of them all the time). Despite his sometimes harsh bearing, flaring temper, and fiery language, Greaves is a man of honest feelings and the kind of person you want in your corner. As your friend, Greaves will never let you down. As your enemy, he will never stop looking for you until you've paid for whatever you did to piss him off in the first place.

Like any sane resident of Ardeyn, Greaves is concerned about Lotanic cultists, but he has a special dislike for dragons, who once served as the mounts for Lotan's ancient army. Even though most dragons in Ardeyn have no obvious remaining connection with what burns in the **Heart Core**, Greaves retains a nigh-unstoppable hatred for the creatures that seems unlikely to ever be tempered.

In Ardeyn, Greaves is particularly adept at hunting and killing dragons, which puts some of the fear of him into dragons that dragons normally instill in others.

ANDREW COTGREAVE STATS

ON EARTH

Level: 5

Tasks related to planning combat tactics as level 6

Health: 25

Armor: 1

Long-range pistol attack that inflicts 6 points of damage



IN ARDEYN

Level: 5

Health: 25

Armor: 2

Lance attack that deals 7 points of damage (10 points to creatures more than twice as large as him)

Carries Swordbreaker Zeal fragment



wounds he received, most people would have given up. But Condar vowed to live. He crawled 10 miles back to base in what can only be called a superhuman effort. He's a man of his word, and not just to himself. If Condar promises something, he won't stop until he does what he swore he'd do.

Condar Freed's indomitable will is what first allowed him to fend off the fear that besets most people who deal with ghosts, spirits, and necromancy. Despite the real possibility that a bodiless spirit could "sour" and become wrathful or demonic, he recognizes that those who have passed into the spirit realm should be protected, respected, and, when possible, saved from a fate of irredeemable evil.

In Ardeyn, Condar Freed gains the ability to command spectral spirits.

CONDAR FREED STATS

ON EARTH

Level: 5

Attacks with pistol as level 6, tasks related to engine repair and explosives as level 6

Health: 20

Long-range pistol attack for 4 points of damage



IN ARDEYN

Level: 5

Health: 20

Accompanied by level 3 spirit accomplice that serves as an asset to any one attack or defense task each round

Shamshir (scimitar) attack for 4 points of damage

Carries Swordbreaker Zeal fragment



FEDERICO FRANCESCHI

Federico Franceschi is a hacker/tech genius. Seriously, he's the smartest man you'll probably ever meet. His memory is supernatural, he grasps difficult concepts with ease, and his wit is beyond compare. In fact, some would say he's so cutting that he's cruel. That goes double for people who demonstrate a willful ignorance regarding any topic important to Federico. Some say he deserved to win a national "computer hacker" championship, but his open contempt for the event organizers got him disqualified from the final match. He plays it off when the topic comes up, but the slight is something that bothers him to this day.

More than just his wit is cutting—Federico is a master with the blade. His great intelligence gave

Greaves Summary:
foul-mouthed, loud, doesn't (seem to) give a rip

If Greaves were a PC, in Ardeyn his focus would usually be Slays Dragons, unless he Embraces Swordbreaker Zeal.

Slays Dragons, page 77

Dragon, page 267

Heart Core, page 186

Embraces Swordbreaker Zeal, page 14

Condar Summary:
quiet unless provoked, intense, given to staring impolitely

If Condar Freed were a PC, in Ardeyn his focus would usually be Shepherds the Dead, unless he Embraces Swordbreaker Zeal.

Shepherds the Dead, page 76

Federico Summary:
cutting humor, knows more than you

If Federico were a PC, his focus in Ardeyn would usually be Wields Two Weapons at Once, unless he Embraces Swordbreaker Zeal.

Wields Two Weapons at Once, page 82

CONDAR FREED

Condar Freed is a mechanic/demo specialist. Only his closest friends know that he was born Brian Hickey. But like so many other things, he resolved to leave his old life behind. He became Condar Freed in mind, body, and will. It's his resolute nature that saved him when he was injured by an IED on a patrol across Syria. Given the terrible



Andrew Summary:
jolly, friendly, ready with a joke

If Andrew were a PC, his focus in Ardeyn would usually be Abides in Stone, unless he Embraces Swordbreaker Zeal.



Abides in Stone, page 51

him not only the capacity to study the techniques of old masters but also the mental agility to incorporate moves of newer teachers, including those located in a “mere” recursion like Ardeyn. Federico appreciates how the near-boundless computing potential of the dark energy network precipitated Ardeyn’s retroactive history, making it almost as real and relevant as actual history on Earth. That history is also much longer, and blade

techniques in Ardeyn have had much more time to develop.

In Ardeyn, Federico studies and improves his blade technique with as much intelligence and attention to detail as he applied to mastering computer code and related technology on Earth.

ANDREW BRERETON

Andrew Brereton is a tough palooka type, ready to take on anything that comes his way. That’s because he’s truly jovial and never lets anything get him down too long. That good nature extends to his comrades. Andrew is always ready with a quip, a play on words, or a comedic expression to ease the strains of everyday life—or, in the case of the Swordbreakers, the vicissitudes of the occasional grueling mission. In fact, Andrew is in many ways the glue that holds the Alpha Team together. Internally, his near-endless supply of good cheer is something that other Swordbreakers have come to rely on, even if they never admit it. Moreover, without Andrew to put a pleasant face on Greaves’s foul mouth, Federico’s cruel wit, and Condar’s intense silence, the Swordbreakers would probably have a much different reputation than the fairly positive one they enjoy in Ardeyn.

FEDERICO FRANCESCHI STATS

ON EARTH

Level: 5

Tasks related to computer use and hacking as level 6

Health: 20

Scimitar attack for 5 points of damage



IN ARDEYN

Level: 5

Health: 20

Armor: 1

Two shamshir (scimitar) attacks as a single action for 4 points of damage each
Carries Swordbreaker Zeal fragment





Andrew had a tough childhood, one in which his father was something of a bully and an avid proponent of corporal punishment. Rather than pull into himself, Andrew looked outward for peace and happiness in other parts of his life. And he was rewarded in spades. In Ardeyn, where jokes are less common, he applies himself to riddles. In the city known as **Citadel Hazurrium**, he sometimes presents himself not as a member of the Swordbreakers but as the celebrated Golem Riddler, whose riddles are as hard to penetrate as his stony hide is. (On the rare occasion he translates back to Earth, it's usually to attend an "open mic" night at a comedy club.)

When Andrew translates to Ardeyn, his body becomes stone like a golem's, which is incredibly useful when his jokes fail to impress servitors of Lotan, the Betrayer, or invading Strangers.

ANDREW BRERETON STATS

ON EARTH

Level: 5

Tasks related to diplomacy, persuasion, and detecting the lies of others as level 6

Long-range pistol attack for 5 points of damage



IN ARDEYN

Level: 5

Health: 25

Armor: 3 from stone form

Melee fist attack for 8 points of damage

Carries Swordbreaker Zeal fragment



energy (which shines blue-white). In this guise, the Swordbreakers' commander comes across as a no-nonsense leader with little time for niceties or distractions. That may be her true personality, though because she has a limited period while in simulacrum form—usually no more than an hour at a time—she just might not have time to act otherwise. When she is not communicating through the Soul Gem of Zeal or present in the Swordbreakers' base as a spirit energy simulacrum, where she resides remains a secret.

ZANOUSHA STATS

AS ENERGY SIMULACRUM

Level: 6

Health: 30

Armor: 3 from Zeal energy

Long-range Zeal energy attack that inflicts 7 points of damage and ignores Armor

If destroyed, reappears 24 hours later

SWORDBREAKERS BACKGROUND

Zanousha Nazari wasn't the first Swordbreaker. When the Quiet Cabal formed the organization, the group first picked **Gordon Galbraith** to lead the team. He immediately set the Swordbreakers on a quest to find and destroy something called the Soul Gem of Zeal. According to Galbraith, the power accumulating in the soul gem was like a time bomb, and the longer it was allowed to resonate, the more certain Lotan's eventual freedom would become.

To destroy the soul gem, the Swordbreakers had to find it. Thanks to the efforts of **Condar Freed** and his ability to question spirits, the soul gem was finally located in a bastion in the hollowed-out center of a massive stone monument along the eastern Borderlands of Ardeyn. The bastion was defended by several golems, but Andrew Brereton convinced the creatures that the Swordbreakers were allies, not enemies. The team slipped into the inner sanctum, where the soul gem rested in an elaborate cradle. Its potent guardian, a creature of brilliant spiritual energy powered directly by the Soul Gem of Zeal, emerged to face them.

Citadel Hazurrium, page 166

Zanousha Summary:
terse, focused, sometimes wistful

A Stranger is the term for any creature native to the Strange, rather than Earth or a recursion.

Gordon Galbraith, page 13

Lotan, page 162

Condar Freed, page 5

ZANOUSHA NAZARI

The true identity of the Swordbreakers' commander is secret, but her code name is Zanousha Nazari. She apparently resides in Ardeyn, but the team members have never met her in person. She sends them mission updates via the Soul Gem of Zeal whenever official Swordbreaker services are required.

In rare circumstances, a simulacrum of Zanousha forms for short periods, composed of Zeal spirit



"There's no time to feel sorry for the victims. If that makes me a bad guy, too bad. The Lotanic cultists who did this don't feel bad, for fuck's sake. So we need to toughen up and go after them right now, not sit around wringing our hands."

—Greaves, Swordbreaker



Quiet Cabal, page 199

Ruk, page 190

Karum, page 200

Prime Element, page 201

Ardeyn, page 160



THE QUIET CABAL AND THE PRIME ELEMENT

The organization called the **Quiet Cabal** in Ruk has a covert arm pledged to protecting Earth from various Strange-related dangers. They believe that if Earth were destroyed, Ruk would be as well. Much of the Quiet Cabal's assets are tied up in countering another faction in Ruk called the **Karum**. To help fight the Karum's recent upsurge in activity, a special force called the **Prime Element** was created. The Prime Element is made up of Earth humans recruited from military units, security companies, and related situations. For a while, the Quiet Cabal was content with leaving **Ardeyn**-only conflicts to the Estate, its sister organization on Earth. But that eventually changed, and the Swordbreakers was born.



Andrew Cotgreave, page 5

Federico Franceschi, page 5



Seven Sentinels, page 182

Age of Myth, page 162

Qephilim, page 163

The “creature” named itself Zanousha and seemed unstoppable until **Greaves** plunged his lance into the soul gem itself. Although this attack didn't destroy the gem, it did splinter off several fragments and dissipate Zanousha's form. Galbraith stepped forward and began smashing the remaining Soul Gem of Zeal into so much powder. As he bashed the relic, **Federico Franceschi** finally put together all the clues that Galbraith had accidentally provided. With his impressive intellect and knowledge of Ardeyn history to draw upon, Federico realized that the massive monument in which they stood likely represented the ruins of one of the missing **Seven Sentinels** of Ardeyn—which meant the soul gem that Galbraith was hammering away at was a sentinel's heart or engine. Given that the Seven Sentinels were supposedly set to guard against Lotan's release, it occurred to Federico that destroying a sentinel's heart might be unwise.

At the precipice, the four team members turned on their commander. It was touch and go, but they prevented Galbraith from utterly destroying the soul gem. However, he managed to escape. He remains somewhere at large to this day, plotting his revenge and sending trouble the Swordbreakers' way every now and then.

In the aftermath, the team members were chastened by how they'd been rooked into doing the opposite of their charter. They pledged to make amends, gain vengeance on Galbraith, and work against Lotan's servitors and other threats to Ardeyn. In this work, they found a new ally and eventual leader: the same guardian entity they'd first defeated upon attaining the soul gem chamber, **Zanousha Nazari**. Due to the partial destruction of the soul gem, Zanousha can manifest physically for only a limited time. Even when not manifest, she can still communicate as an image on the Soul Gem of Zeal, or to anyone carrying a fragment of the gem that broke off during the conflict. (Zanousha never explained her lack of a physical body or her association with the soul gem, despite being asked many times.) Besides allowing communication, each Zeal fragment serves as a power conduit artifact to the main soul gem. These days, an outsider might know a Swordbreaker by the soul fragment he carries or the bluish-white glow of Zeal that shines like a faint nimbus around him.

SWORDBREAKER GOALS

Though individual members have their own motivations, as a group under the command of **Zanousha Nazari**, the Swordbreakers are consumed by two desires. One is to track down Galbraith and exterminate him and every other Lotanic cultist in Ardeyn. The second is to explore the mysteries of the **Age of Myth**, especially those that pertain to the **Seven Sentinels**. This includes learning the fates of the many artifacts and magic objects that bedecked the **qephilim** cities of old.

Individual Swordbreakers are free to pursue secondary concerns, as long as those do not interfere with the organization's goals. For instance, **Andrew Brereton** occasionally attends comedy clubs on Earth (and performs during “open mic” nights) and later goes out drinking with friends who have no idea of his secret life in Ardeyn. If he does so on a night before a major mission, however, there's friction between him and other team members.

When the Swordbreakers deploy on missions related to their primary goals, they usually plan ahead, develop fallback contingencies, and pull the trigger only when they're reasonably confident they know all the facts (the history of their founding still leaves a psychic scar on the original members).





SWORDBREAKER KEEP

Located on a free-floating skerry in the Borderlands east of Lornvale is a mass of broken stones. Thrusting up from the center is Swordbreaker Keep. The “keep” was once a stupendously large humanoid statue, but to naive eyes, it now appears like a particularly tortured natural mesa. The skerry that hosts the keep is part of the demolished original sculpture, one of the lost Seven Sentinels. A heavy mist usually swirls about the area, which further conceals the true nature of what the place once was.

KEY FEATURES

Swordbreaker Keep is essentially a series of tunnels and rooms carved into the core of a defunct Sentinel. The chambers are spread across several levels.

DEFENSES

One of the keep’s best defenses is its relative isolation. Enemies who find it must contend with a handful of exterior golem guards that stand watch at equidistant points across the skerry. If a golem notices unannounced visitors, it booms out a warning that echoes across the entire chunk of free-floating landscape.

CROSSING THE GAP

Moving between free-floating skerries in the Borderlands is difficult for creatures that can’t fly. That counts as one more defense that Swordbreaker Keep enjoys, but it also limits the ability of well-meaning petitioners to approach and ask for aid. To help alleviate this gap, the group recently built a transfer tower on the very edge of Ardeyn. From it, the mist-swaddled mote of Swordbreaker Keep is visible several miles in the distance, right where the atmosphere begins to fuzz and give way to the Strange. A group brave enough to enter the cage at the top of the tower and pull the rusted iron lever labeled “Pull for transfer” is slung like a bullet from a ballista on an arcing trajectory that deposits them on the shore of the skerry holding Swordbreaker Keep. Travelers who fail a difficulty 3 Speed defense roll take 4 points of damage from a hard landing. A similar tower on the skerry can provide return passage.

Borderlands, page 178



Golem, page 270



*Bravo Team
Swordbreakers, page 14*



*Qephilim Free
Battalion mercenary,
page 284*

All told, about a dozen golems (including the golem watchers on the exterior) remain active enough to respond if invaders appear at the keep's gate. They don't automatically attack visitors; those who aren't obviously Lotanic cultists, servitors of Galbraith, or otherwise deemed to be enemies are escorted under heavy guard (two golems) through the keep gate and into the audience chamber (see below).

Besides golems, the Swordbreakers, including the manifest simulacrum of Zanousha, defend their keep if it comes under attack. In addition to the Alpha Team, **Bravo Team Swordbreakers** (if any) also respond to an alarm. Because each member carries a Soul Gem of Zeal fragment, communication between them is usually well coordinated.

Finally, several level 3 **qephilim Free Battalion mercenaries** serve as general staff for the keep. They clean, cook, repair, and do other needful tasks. They also defend the keep when necessary.

VISITING THE SWORDBREAKERS

Guests are first escorted to an audience chamber. Banners showing a symbol of an exploding sword decorate this large hall. Comfortable seats and a long table fill most of the room; foods from a connected kitchen are laid out when visitors arrive. Guests are usually accorded the opportunity to talk to a senior Swordbreaker. Visitors are in luck if they get Andrew Brereton, but not so lucky if one of the others is on diplomatic duty, especially if it's Greaves.

What the Swordbreakers do with guests after the initial greeting depends on why the visitors have journeyed to the keep. If they bring dire news, all the Swordbreakers are eventually summoned, including the simulacrum of Zanousha.

There's always the chance that none of the Alpha Team are present, in which case a Bravo Team member (if any) or a qephilim meets with guests and determines what's to be done.

SOUL GEM CHAMBER

PCs on the road to becoming Swordbreakers (or those who have already joined the group) are eventually ushered into the presence of the Soul Gem of Zeal, which is in a chamber at the heart of the complex.

The chamber is spherical and large. A complex cradle about 10 feet (3 m) in diameter lies at the center. Within the cradle floats a massive, glowing, bluish-white crystal gem. Despite the cracks that run through it (and the broken-off fragments that orbit the gem like tiny moons around a planet), the object radiates palpable power. It is, of course, the Soul Gem of Zeal. It once served as the heart of one of the Seven Sentinels. Now it is the heart of the Swordbreakers.

The feminine visage of Zanousha forms on the gem's surface, or steps out as a fully formed humanoid simulacrum of bluish-white energy, to greet visitors or fend off attackers. If someone new is accepted into the ranks of the Swordbreakers, Zanousha gifts them with a fragment of the soul gem, which functions as an artifact known as a Swordbreaker Zeal fragment. (Despite not being completely physical, Zanousha enjoys the benefits of wielding a fragment herself, one she never needs to renew while the Soul Gem of Zeal remains intact.)

The Soul Gem of Zeal is a level 9 object suffused with magic power. How and why Zanousha Nazari became so intimately associated with an object of Ardeyn's extrapolated history remains mysterious to say the least. Being asked about that association is one of many topics that Zanousha will not entertain, instead leaving by simply dissipating her visage or simulacrum.





ADVENTURE SEEDS

These adventure seeds provide the GM with several additional ways to use the Swordbreakers in her campaign.

WHO ARE THESE GUYS?

A den of Lotanic cultists is operating out of a nearby secret base (a hidden cave beneath a tower). Despite periodic cleansings of such ilk by various agencies, new dens keep popping up. But that doesn't make shutting down a Lotanic cultist den routine by any means. Although each den draws from the same playbook of kidnapping, human and qephilim sacrifice, and sometimes even demon worship, most dens also offer something surprisingly dangerous.

Getting the PCs Involved: This adventure seed is well suited for PCs who have had only limited exposure to the Swordbreakers or who have never heard of the group. The PCs are pursuing their own mission in Ardeyn, which might be completely unrelated to Lotanic cultists (such as following up

on *The Curious Case of Tom Mallard* or tracking down the *Mouth of Swords*). On the other hand, their mission might be to find the offending Lotanic cultist den and clean it out. Either way, the characters become involved because they're initially mistaken for Lotanic cultists by two Swordbreakers who have come to investigate the same site that the PCs are exploring.

Complicating Factor: If necessary to end a conflict between Swordbreakers and PCs, the location where the two groups encounter each other suddenly reveals itself to be a trap. The floor gives way, and both groups fall 30 feet (9 m) into a maze of tunnels thick with *spirits of wrath*, *umber wolves*, and *sark*.

"Boss" Fight: The Lotanic cultist den is made up of four level 3 members. However, they are being led by nothing less than a *soulshorn*. The PCs are likely to need every bit of help the two Swordbreakers can provide to put the Lotanic soulshorn down.

The Curious Case of Tom Mallard, page 386

Spirit of wrath, page 292

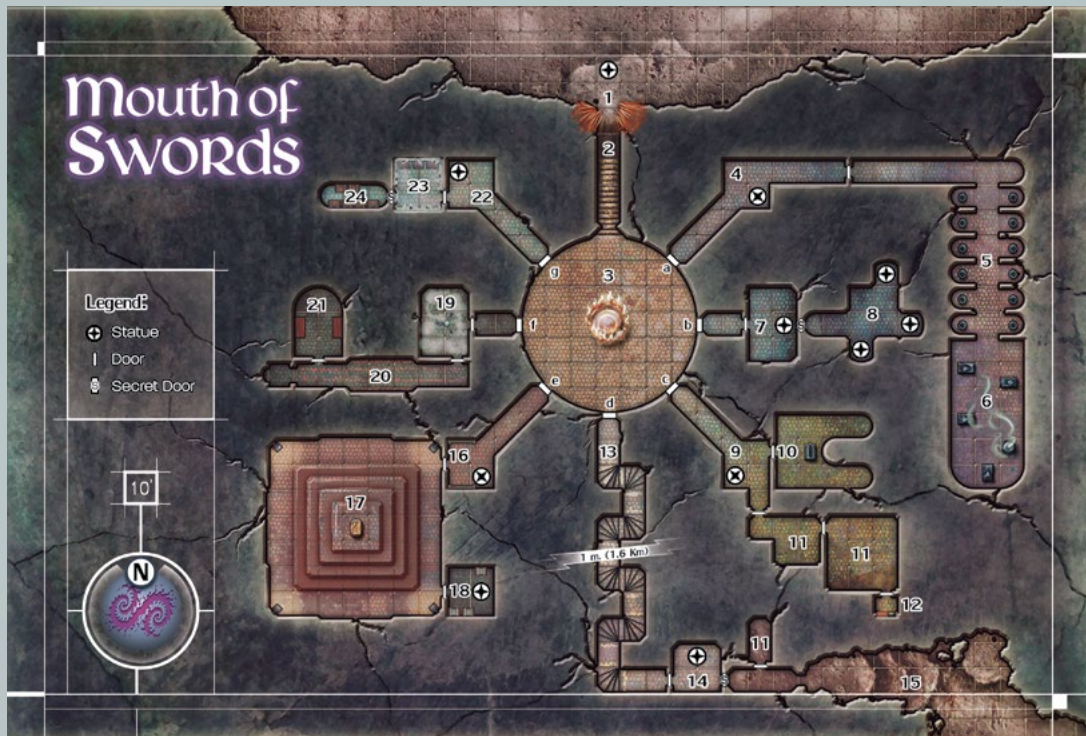
Umbur wolf, page 295

Sark, page 288

Soulshorn, page 291

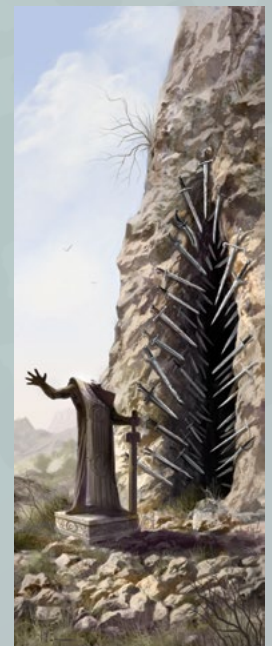
MOUTH OF SWORDS

The Mouth of Swords is an ancient *qephilim* burial place full of treasures from the Age of Myth. A crazed spirit of wrath called the Myth Keeper guards the stored items on behalf of their original owners. The secure underground complex is also guarded by lesser spirits, traps, and sorcerous wards. Its treasures have lured more than one adventuring company to its doom.



Qephilim, page 163

For additional information on the Mouth of Swords, see *The Dark Spiral*, page 47.





Shalmarn, page 169



Green Wilds, page 170



Age of Myth, page 162



Seven Rules, page 162

Fallen Star: level 6; health 21; Armor 2; can fly a long distance each round; long-range beam of burning light inflicts 8 points of damage (loses this power in sunlight); see *The Strange Bestiary*, page 53

PROVE YOUR WORTH

Something bad is happening in the city of **Shalmarn**. Residents in random neighborhoods wake to find their eyes are missing. The only clue regarding the nature of the eye thief is that a pearlescent slime remains behind in the otherwise empty sockets of victims. With investigation, a residual slime trail leads to previously unknown entrances to the abandoned qephilim ruins and mines that the city of Shalmarn is built over. (In fact, many of the buildings are converted remnants of structures first built during the **Age of Myth**.)

Getting the PCs Involved: This adventure seed is well suited for PCs who wish to join the **Swordbreakers** as part of the group's **Bravo Team**. The mission is suggested as a quest. If the PCs bring the eye thief to justice, they prove themselves and are invited to join the **Swordbreakers**. Alternatively, they discover what's going on when a screaming, eyeless victim runs into the street one morning with goo leaking from her sockets.

Complicating Factor: A group of seven level 3 brigands, who call themselves the **Dethroned**, have their lair in the abandoned ruins, and the residual slime trails lead right through it. The brigands attack anyone who discovers them. Though uncooperative, a captured brigand who is persuaded to talk explains that sometimes a "burning star" shoots up from the lower tunnels. The **Dethroned** don't mess with it, and it doesn't mess with them. If pressed further, the captive may admit that when the silvery star appears, the brigands recite the **Seven Rules** over and over, which seems to placate it.

"Boss" Fight: Characters who get past the brigands and follow the residue discover a vast, dark crack leading even deeper. Within the gulf, motes of silver light burn. One such mote grows larger and larger as it approaches. The spherical mote seems to transform (or perhaps it sheds an illusory guise) and is revealed as a winged qephilim who describes itself as a "fallen star." This particular **fallen star** has developed an unholy appetite for eyes.

LOCATE ANOTHER SOUL GEM

A trading caravan attempting to find new routes discovers a potential location of one of the missing **Seven Sentinels**. The site is deep in the **Green Wilds**, and according to the stories of the surviving traders, it is overrun with flesh-eating vines, spiders the size of houses, and sark.

Getting the PCs Involved: One of **Zanousha's** longstanding goals is to locate the remains of the **Seven Sentinels**. Every so often, rumors of a potential new site come to light, and **Zanousha** sends the **Bravo Team** to investigate whether there's





any truth to the story. Alternatively, the PCs hear the tale of a massive, vine-strangled statue in the heart of the Green Wilds from a drunken trader down on his luck in a nameless dive bar. Either way, the characters learn enough to travel to the general location where the lost Sentinel supposedly rests.

Complicating Factor: PCs who get past the *sark*, the *flesh-eating vines*, and the *very large spiders* (which are only the size of well-fed humans) find someone else who heard the same stories and came to investigate: *Galbraith*. Characters who are part of the *Swordbreakers* may eventually realize that *Galbraith* was the name of the original traitorous leader of their team, and that he wants to find soul gems so he can destroy them. *Galbraith* is allied with several *Lotanic cultists* as well.

Whether the site is just the ruins of a very large statue or the location of another Sentinel is for the GM to decide. Either way, the PCs learn one thing while fighting *Galbraith* or investigating the area: the soul gems that once served as the hearts of the Seven Sentinels were not native to *Ardeyn*. Somehow, and against all common sense and causal linkage, soul gems are artifacts of the *Strange*.

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ARTIFACT: BOOTS OF THE STRANGE

Level: 1d6 + 3

Form: Pair of boots inlaid with swirling fractals

Effect: When the boots are activated as part of a move, the wearer can walk across empty air for a long distance each round for up to one minute. If used in the *Strange*, the boots decrease the difficulty of any *Chaosphere navigation* or *fractal surfing* task by one step.

Depletion: 1 in 1d100

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Sark, page 288

Chaosphere navigation, page 215

Fractal surfing, page 215

Flesh-eating vine: level 4; immediate-range attack deals 2 points of damage to *Speed Pool*

Very large spider: level 4; short-range web-strand attack holds victims in place for a round if hit; mandible attack deals 5 points of damage

Galbraith: level 6; *Armor 1*; long-range flesh-decaying attack against one target inflicts 5 points of damage; short-range death spell attack (usable once per minute) moves one target who fails an *Intellect* defense roll one step down the damage track; wears an artifact called boots of the *Strange*

Lotanic cultist: level 3; health 12; *talwar* (great sword) attack inflicts 6 points of damage





SWORDBREAKING (FOR PLAYER CHARACTERS)



The Estate, page 148

The Swordbreakers are an elite group dedicated to hunting Lotanic cultists, and they don't hand out memberships to just anyone. If the PCs wish to join, they'll have to be invited and, what's more, meet the entry requirements.

SWORDBREAKERS BRAVO TEAM REQUIREMENTS

The first requirement, of course, is that the GM introduce the Swordbreakers into the campaign, then determine whether it will remain an NPC-only group or recruit for a Bravo Team that includes characters.

If the PCs come to the attention of the Swordbreakers in a positive fashion, they may later be invited to join. Joining imposes a few requirements, as follows.

Initial Quest: The PCs must successfully accomplish a mission set by the Swordbreakers, such as the one described under "Prove Your Worth," or another quest provided by the GM.

*Prove Your Worth,
page 12*

Dues: The initiation fee is a one-time payment of 100 crowns. Annual dues are also 100 crowns, but the real cost of membership is a commitment to destroy a few Lotanic cultists or dangerous Strangers each year. Members set their own limits, but each limit is publicly displayed for all to see, so members are held accountable.

Availability: A Swordbreaker must respond to urgent summons from any member of the Alpha Team or Zanousha. Swordbreakers on the Bravo Team who enjoy an affiliate status (those who don't reside in the keep, which probably includes most PCs) aren't bothered for routine missions—they are summoned only if something of particular importance is afoot.



SWORDBREAKERS BRAVO TEAM BENEFITS

PCs who become members are either affiliate or core members. Core members are those who stay in the keep full time. They are sent on missions far more often than affiliate members.

Affiliate members (likely the status of most PCs) have their residence elsewhere and can more easily maintain other affiliations, such as with the Estate. A Bravo Team affiliate member gets room and board whenever she visits the keep, if desired.

In addition, the Swordbreakers provide the following benefits to all members.

Swordbreaker Zeal Fragment: Bravo Team members gain an artifact referred to as a fragment of the Soul Gem of Zeal.

Embraces Swordbreaker Zeal: Bravo Team PCs gain access to a special focus called Embraces Swordbreaker Zeal.

Reasonable Aid: A Bravo Team member can expect aid from the larger organization, though usually only on matters that are directly related to Lotanic cultists or Strangers.

SPECIAL FOCUS: EMBRACES SWORDBREAKER ZEAL

This special focus is available only to members of the Swordbreakers Bravo Team in Ardeyn. Once gained, the focus can be chosen as an alternative to the character's regular focus any time she is in Ardeyn and activates a Soul Gem of Zeal fragment that is not depleted. When a character gains this focus, whatever other focus she had goes into abeyance, though her equipment remains constant between her normal Ardeyn focus and Embraces Swordbreaker Zeal. If the character's Soul Gem of Zeal fragment is depleted, Embraces Swordbreaker Zeal immediately goes into abeyance and can't be made active again until the fragment is renewed.

Empowered by a relic from the Age of Myth, you fight for Ardeyn. When you call upon the Soul Gem of Zeal, you gain a power over the evil of Lotan and that which lies beyond the Borderlands.



You keep whatever equipment is provided by your normal Ardeyn focus. However, when Embraces Swordbreaker Zeal is active, you can display a faint bluish-white nimbus (or not, as you desire).

Swordbreakers are commonly vectors, but paradoxes and spinners also join the group.

Connection: This is never a PC's starting focus.

Equipment: As provided by your normal Ardeyn focus.

Minor Effect Suggestion: Bluish-white energy blazes from you and partially blinds your foe for one round, increasing the difficulty of all its actions by one step.

Major Effect Suggestion: Bluish-white energy blazes from you and fully blinds one or more foes for one round.

Tier 1: Find the Lotanic Cultist (1 Intellect point).

You sense the presence of the nearest creature (including living cultists) within immediate range who serves or has been touched by Lotan. If the Lotanic cultist has taken special precautions to hide her identity, determining her presence or true nature is an Intellect-based task whose difficulty is equal to the target's level or the level of the effect employed. Action.

Minor Zeal. You gain 1 point from your soul gem fragment that you can spend when you spend points from any Pool for any reason. This is a difficulty 2 Intellect-based task, but each time you use it again before your next ten-hour recovery roll, the difficulty increases by one step. In addition, you must make a depletion roll for your soul gem fragment. For example, if you use Find the Lotanic Cultist, you can use this ability to pay the cost instead of spending 1 point of Intellect. If using another ability that costs more than 1 point, you can use Minor Zeal to pay part of the cost. Enabler.

Tier 2: Flame of Zeal (2 Intellect points). You emit a bluish-white beam of energy that deals 5 points of damage to a target within long range. Alternatively, you can use this ability to enhance a melee weapon, causing it to inflict 1 additional point of damage. The weapon continues to burn with the flame of Zeal until the next time you use this ability or any other special ability from this focus. Action.

Tier 3: Swordbreaker Grace. You are trained in using a weapon or an attack in which you are not already trained. Enabler.

Tier 4: Weaponbreaker. When fighting a creature touched by Lotan (including living cultists) and you roll a 16 or higher on a successful attack, the

physical weapon held by the target breaks. This effect supersedes the minor or major special effect you'd gain for rolling a 19 or 20. If the target isn't holding a physical weapon, the difficulty of all actions attempted by the target is increased by one step for one round. If the weapon held by the target is an artifact, it does not break unless you succeed on a Might-based task whose difficulty is equal to the artifact's level. Enabler.

Tier 5: Improved Swordbreaker Grace. You are specialized in using a weapon or an attack. If you are already specialized in that weapon or attack, you instead deal 2 additional points of damage with it. Enabler.

Tier 6: Amazing Zeal. When using Minor Zeal, you draw 2 points from your soul gem fragment instead of 1 point. Enabler.

Blinded creatures act as if in complete darkness.

Darkness, page 111

Embraces Swordbreaker Zeal GM Intrusions: *The cultist has allies. A scene of horrific sacrifice and torture is uncovered. A demon of Lotan attempts to possess the character.*

Demon of Lotan, page 265

ARTIFACT: SWORDBREAKER ZEAL FRAGMENT

Level: 5

Form: A crystal fragment, usually set in an amulet, a staff head, a weapon hilt, or a ring

Recursion: Ardeyn

Effect: Someone with this fragment who has personally renewed it (see below) gains access to the following abilities. Anyone else with this fragment can use only the Repel Enemies function. Each use requires a depletion roll unless otherwise noted.

Speak: The user can broadcast to all the other fragments and the Soul Gem of Zeal for about a minute. If more than one fragment bearer does this simultaneously, it enables real-time communication between them. Action to initiate.

Shift Focus: The user can change her normal Ardeyn focus to Embraces Swordbreaker Zeal, or change it from Embraces Swordbreaker Zeal to her normal Ardeyn focus. Switching foci is a difficulty 1 Intellect-based task. Action to initiate.

Repel Enemies: If the user makes an attack of any kind against a Stranger, a demon of Lotan, a creature that employs spells provided by Lotan, or Lotan himself, the difficulty of the attack is decreased by one step; this effect does not require a depletion roll. If the attack succeeds, the artifact bearer decides whether to activate the following additional effect (which does require a depletion roll). If activated, the fragment flares with Zeal, and the attack inflicts 4 additional points of damage (ignores Armor). Enabler.

Renew: Once a fragment's energy has been depleted, it can be renewed if it is pressed against the Soul Gem of Zeal by someone who utters the Swordbreaker Oath: "I vow to quench the fires of Lotan, to stand as a bulwark against Strangers, and to break the swords drawn against the sanctity of Ardeyn. By the Seven, I so bind myself with bravery, honor, and sacrifice." Action.

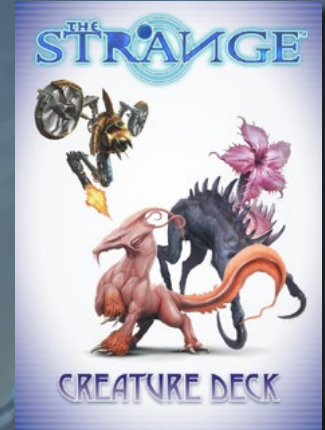
Depletion: 1 in 1d20

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