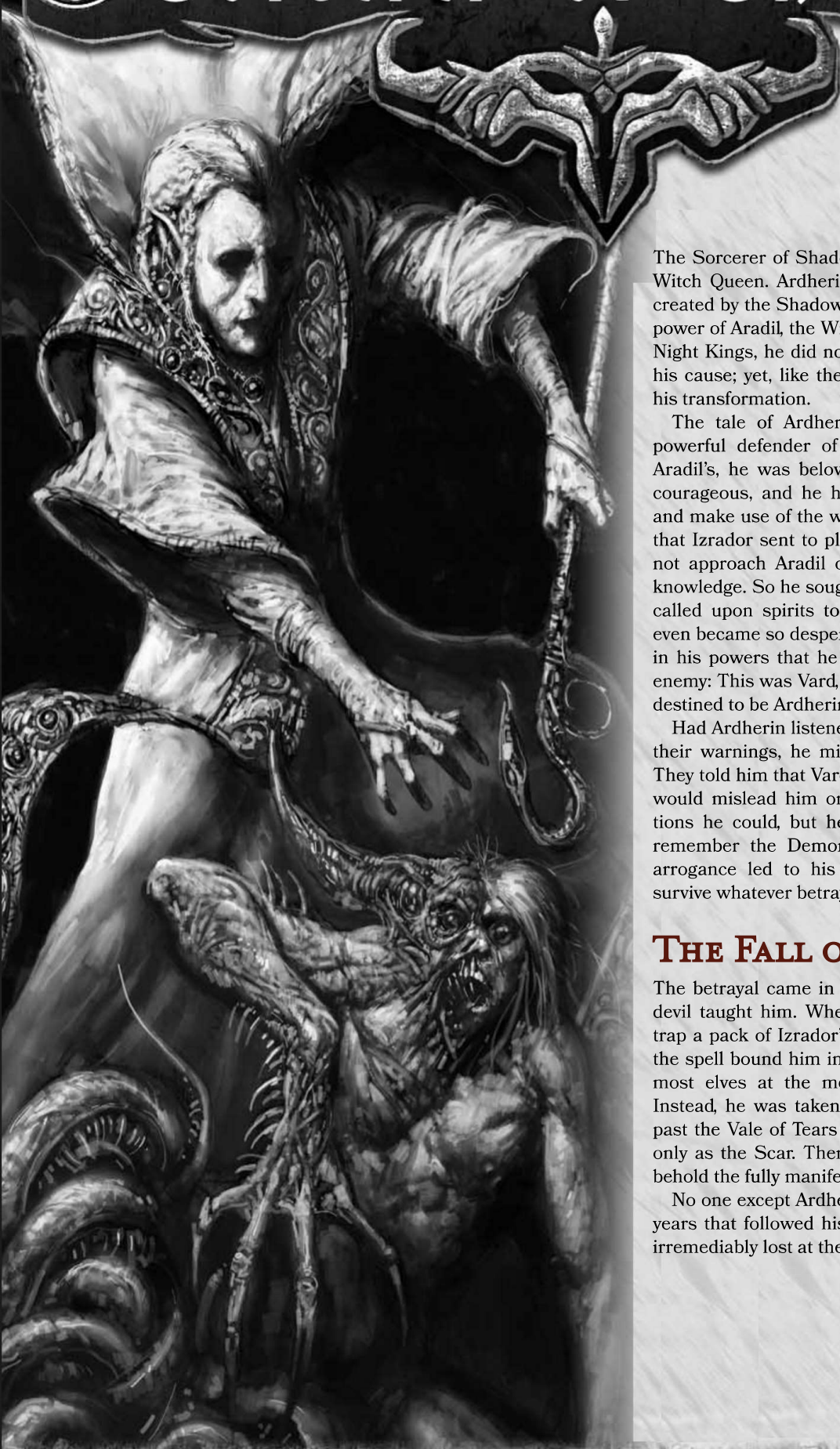


# Sorcerer of Shadow



The Sorcerer of Shadow. Bane of Erethor. Betrayer of the Witch Queen. Ardherin is Izrador's master of the arcane, created by the Shadow in the North to balance the magical power of Aradil, the Witch Queen of Erethor. Like the other Night Kings, he did not knowingly seek out Izrador to join his cause; yet, like them, he cannot be held blameless for his transformation.

The tale of Ardherin's fall is known by few. Once a powerful defender of Erethor, and indeed a consort of Aradil's, he was beloved by the elves. He was incredibly courageous, and he had an intuitive ability to determine and make use of the weaknesses of the demons and devils that Izrador sent to plague the woodland fey. Yet he could not approach Aradil or many of her council in terms of knowledge. So he sought to learn as much as he could, and called upon spirits to supplement what lore he had. He even became so desperate for information and so confident in his powers that he captured and kept a servant of the enemy: This was Vard, a supposedly "lesser devil" who was destined to be Ardherin's downfall.

Had Ardherin listened to the council of his peers, heeded their warnings, he might yet defend the forest's borders. They told him that Vard was too dangerous to keep so near, would mislead him or betray him. He took what precautions he could, but he did not destroy Vard. Those who remember the Demon Bane of Erethor would say that arrogance led to his downfall, the belief that he could survive whatever betrayal Vard had in store.

## THE FALL OF A HERO

The betrayal came in the form of a binding spell that the devil taught him. When Ardherin performed it, hoping to trap a pack of Izrador's demon minions, the elf found that the spell bound him instead. He was not slain, however, as most elves at the mercy of demons would have been. Instead, he was taken north, past the Northern Marches, past the Vale of Tears itself, into a rent in the world known only as the Scar. There he became the second elf to ever behold the fully manifested form of Izrador.

No one except Ardherin knew what happened during the years that followed his abduction, but his former self was irremediably lost at the hands of the dark god...



## THE FAILURE OF EVIL

At the time of his rebirth, Ardherin's potential for destruction seemed nearly infinite. Not only did he have intimate knowledge of the elven defenses, he also had the trust and respect of hundreds of both the Trapped and the mortal elven officers who were integral to those defenses.

After controlling and directing the Shadow's Trapped during the invasion of Erenland, Ardherin was instructed to fulfill his true purpose: to destroy Erethor. As the least magically inclined of the elves, and the closest to his breeding pits and the orc warrens placed under his command, the Erunsil were Ardherin's first targets.

For two decades he used his knowledge of elven ways and of the forest's magical wards to cause destruction and distrust throughout the north.

He alternated between frontal assaults, brutal raids, and devious misdirection. The elves never knew who commanded the forces arrayed against them... or so Ardherin thought.

But the Witch Queen was no fool. Ardherin's hatred of his prior self and of his homeland appeared like a burning brand to the spirits of the wood. His every move was countered from afar by Aradil or in the north by one of her avatars. It is possible that Ardherin knew this would be the case, and let himself be revealed, perhaps hoping for death at the hands of his lover. Or maybe his new twisted self could not conceive that his connection to the Witch Queen, his former love for her, could act as a connection that would allow her to sense his presence and predict his movements.

Regardless, the Witch Queen's subtle misdirections and the snow elves' resilience grated at Ardherin and, urged by Izrador's growing displeasure, he gathered his most powerful minions and led an assassination attempt on Aradil herself. At least one balor, one pit fiend, and a host of other Trapped and channelers traveled the secret ways of the forest to attack the Witch Queen. They were detected long before they approached the Elder Tree, however. Somewhere near the westernmost elbow of the Gamaril River the force was ambushed. Hundreds of elven warriors fell in the defense of their queen, as did many of her avatars, but at the cost of nearly all of the Shadow's most powerful Trapped servants and channelers. Ardherin himself, wounded and wretched, escaped back into the forest and made his way through the elven villages back to the north.

Aradil was left with a terrible choice. She could send word that he had become a traitor, and that any elves to see him should either apprehend him or send word of his sightings. Doing so, however, might spell death for hundreds more elves, as well as act as an incredible blow to her people's morale, as they learned that one of their favored heroes and her chosen consort had been seduced to the side of evil. Alternatively, she could let the traitor go, spreading the untruth that he was going forth into the north to do battle with the sudden influx of orcs from the Highhorns, and thereby allowing the elven folk to keep at least the memory of their champion. She chose, perhaps as much out of sadness and love for Ardherin as out of concern for her people, to let him go. If she had known what he had truly become, she doubtless would not have. With every elven death at his hands or as a result of his manipulations since then, she has regretted the decision.

## ACTIVITIES & GOALS

The Sorcerer of Shadow hunted down and bound new Trapped spirits to his master's will in order to repopulate those elite forces lost to the assault on the Witch Queen. As spirits continually escape or are destroyed in the assaults on the fey, this task has become never ending. The speed at which Ardherin performs it varies with the likelihood that the creatures will be useful to him in the future... or the likelihood that they might be used against him!

The Sorcerer of Shadow controls a huge portion of the elite creatures used against the Shadow's enemies.

### MASTER OF THE SHADOWSPAWN

Ardherin also began to experiment with the creation of corporeal, more mundane servants. He soon declared himself master of the breeding pits from whence came the many magical beasts and monstrous humanoids known as shadowspawn. His favor toward these monsters has steadily grown over the decades, especially as they can be bred with far less independence and mobility than the Trapped, and thus are more easily corralled and bent to the Sorcerer's service. They have also proven themselves quite useful to Jahzir as a supplement to his orcish forces, but the Sword of Shadow is hesitant to rely overmuch on the elf's creations; after all, it is highly likely that Ardherin instilled a loyalty to himself in his creations, a loyalty that could conflict with Jahzir's ultimate goals.

### MASTER OF MAGIC

Of all of the elf's current tasks, the one Izrador stresses as the most valuable is his locating and harnessing of undiscovered arcane nexuses. Without such places, the dark god's priests cannot create magic arms, armor, or other items. Additionally, should the day ever come when there are no foes left to fight, the nexuses will be essential for Izrador's final draining of all magic from Aryth. This mission of Ardherin's often conflicts with the goals of the legates. Whereas the Order of Shadow tries to uncover as much magic as possible to fulfill their master's mighty appetite, Ardherin seeks to turn found magic to the war effort. The Shadow may eventually consume the relics or sites he locates, but Ardherin wishes to delay or prevent this whenever possible, and uses the justification that they must be used to crush his master's enemies first. Presumably, Izrador is either deceived by or in agreement with the rationale, given the number of nexuses and recovered magic items that Ardherin snatches from the grasp of the Order without reprisal from above.

Now, nearly 100 years after his initial failure, Ardherin is still seen as the least influential of the Night Kings. His use of arcane magic in the name of Izrador makes him a living paradox, and Devout and Cabal alike join Sunulael in their distrust and hatred of him. Likewise, his supposed cowardice does not endear him to Jahzir or his commanders, despite the usefulness of his bound servants and bred creations. Even the orcs dislike him, given his dual status as an elf, hated by their whole race, and a Night King, who presume to usurp the authority of the kurasatch udareen. Beset by rivals and enemies even among his supposed allies, Ardherin is often overlooked as a wretched, spiteful, and paranoid being...



## RESOURCES

Ardherin has multiple strongholds, a slew of powerful minions, and equipment not normally found among the general populace, or indeed even many armies. Ardherin and his minions have access to more magical items than most individuals in Eredane. The availability of these resources makes the Sorcerer of Shadow more powerful than he might otherwise seem.

### STRONGHOLDS

Ardherin has several small strongholds, one in each Shadow District in addition to his headquarters of *Arydian Avielehrius*. He keeps each well-stocked and well guarded with shadowspawn, Trapped, and corrupt channelers, even when he is not present, such that there is little exterior change when he is in residence.

Aside from their guards, Ardherin's apartments have another common feature: extravagance. All are stocked with food and wines, have opulent and comfortable furnishings, and are populated by mortal and spirit performers, servants, and consorts.

## ARYDIAN AVIELEHRIUS

*Arydian Avielehrius*, elven for *Quicksilver Tower*, rises more than one hundred feet from the snowy slopes of the foothills of the Highhorns. It is a thing of strange beauty, apparently made from ice and lit from within by shifting streams of oily purple, pink, and silver light. Opulent furnishings within compliment walls that look like purple flame caught in an instant of time.

Quicksilver Tower is often the target of Erunsil raids, but few have even made it within sight of the frozen tower. The lands for miles surrounding it are patrolled by Shunned Mother orcs accompanied by the occasional ice devil and erinyes, while the tower itself is manned by Ardherin's usual compliment of guardians. Should any manage to fight through to the tower, they would find a place of arcane beauty, tempered by decadent horror.

### THEROS OBSIDIA

Ardherin keeps two floors of apartments in Theros Obsidia Major for those times when he is called to meet with the other Night Kings and the Shadow himself. These apartments are decorated in a decadent elven style and staffed by an army of servants, who are largely left to their own devices when Ardherin is not present. Ardherin's apartments serve primarily as comfortable lodging, as he keeps all of his important plans and research at Arydian Avielehrius, far away from prying eyes.

## LE SORCIER DE L'OMBRE

Ardherin d'Erethor fut un sorcier aux pouvoirs exceptionnels et à l'érudition remarquable. Il était aussi un conseiller respecté d'Aradil, la Haute Reine des elfes, et pendant plus de trois cents ans, il fut même son époux adoré. Pendant la plus grande partie du Troisième Âge, Ardherin fut le grand allié de la Reine Sorcière. Il jouissait de sa confiance, de son amour, et il lui était entièrement dévoué.

Ardherin était passé maître dans l'art dangereux de la convocation et il se dévoua à la protection de son peuple face aux forces démoniaques qui s'étaient alliées à l'Ombre et qui hantaient la Grande forêt. Il était souvent appelé pour chasser les démons les plus redoutables et se trouvait donc fréquemment confronté au mal sous sa forme la plus absolue et la plus dangereuse. Il fabriqua aussi de nombreux dispositifs magiques destinés à protéger les grandes cités d'Erethor, et, en raison de sa puissance magique et sa vigilance constante, le peuple elfe le considérait comme un héros vivant.

En l'an 890 TA, alors qu'Izrador s'apprêtait à réapparaître, les intrusions de démons dans la forêt d'Erethor se multiplièrent. Durant l'une de ses parties de chasse avec les esprits, Ardherin captura un démon mineur dont il fit son serviteur. Il l'enferma au centre d'un pentacle de protection, dans son laboratoire. Le démon s'appelait Vard, ce qui signifie « le serviteur » en langue noire. Avec le temps, Ardherin affirma son contrôle sur Vard et s'habitua de plus en plus à sa présence.

Pendant son temps libre, il conversait avec la créature pour en apprendre plus sur lui et les siens.

Vard paraissait faible et peureux, et il livra de nombreux secrets en échange de la promesse qu'il ne serait pas détruit. Mais Vard n'était pas ce qu'il paraissait. Capturé, il se soumit docilement à l'emprisonnement et au contrôle de l'invocateur elfe. Avec le temps, la familiarité d'Ardherin à l'égard du diabolin se transforma en complaisance, et non seulement le sorcier cessa de se méfier de la créature mais il en vint à estimer ses conseils. Vard gagna sa confiance en lui révélant des connaissances qui lui permirent de capturer ou de détruire des dizaines de redoutables esprits. Malgré les avertissements de ses confrères et d'Aradil elle-même, Ardherin décida de ne pas détruire la créature. Cela allait le conduire à sa perte.

En 895 TA, Izrador envoya un groupe de douze puissants démons dévaster la Veradeen. Ardherin consulta ses pairs, ses notes et ses grimoires, puis le serviable Vard, avant de partir vers le nord d'Erethor pour affronter cette menace. Il tendit un redoutable piège magique à la horde de démons, s'aidant des runes que Vard lui avait enseignées. Mais quand le magicien elfe voulut sortir du dispositif magique, il se trouva lui-même pris au piège. Il était devenu une créature convoquée, et comme les démons qu'il avait si souvent piégés, il était captif d'une puissance supérieure : Izrador lui-même.

# THE ARTERIES

It's one of the darkest pits on Aryth. It's a nest of vile and tortuous hosts, a horrible den of suffering, the lair of the greatest anguish a living channeler can know. It's the most precious secret of the Shadow's campaign in the north. It's called the Arteries, and it's the secret weapon of the Night King Ardherin, the Sorcerer of Shadow.

## A PRISON OF PAIN

Some of those channelers carried off for execution by legates are being spared the mercy of death and brought instead to the Arteries for torture, examination, and worse. They are brought in secret—hidden in nighttime caravans or masked by magic—to the unknowably dark, natural tangle of tunnels that leads from daylight to cells deep in the earth. To the outside world they are dead. No prisoner brought to the Arteries has ever left. None ever will.

Ardherin devised the Arteries as the ultimate stronghold for sorcerous captives of the Shadow. There specially trained legates break and torture captured channelers to learn more of the resistance against the Shadow, uncover new and unknown spells, and glean any new information about the Witch Queen and her plans—this especially interests Ardherin. Since Izrador provides the legates with whatever magic they require, the interrogators have little reason to exercise mercy and have little patience with their prisoners. Subjects who are difficult to break are simply destroyed. Izrador's legates can, after all, compel even the dead to speak.

## A RESERVOIR OF POWER

The awful justification Ardherin gave to his dark master for keeping captive channelers alive was power: the prisoners of the Arteries are used as individual sources of arcane energy. Together they turn the Arteries into a grotesque power nexus fueled by living channelers. In the short-term, their power is used to craft magical objects for use by the agents of Shadow. In the end, every prisoner will be executed so that his arcane essence can be absorbed by the dark god. While other power nexuses remain undiscovered or unconquered, Ardherin can rely on the Arteries as an energy reserve untouchable by Aradil and her followers. When the final days come and Izrador's ultimate goal is met, Ardherin hopes the Arteries will be the great ceremonial gift—the final deliverance of arcane power that returns Izrador to his seat in the celestial realm.

The arcane energy in the Arteries is constantly changing. The whole cavern was once a power nexus itself, and facilitates the harnessing of power from the prisoners. The power of the Shadow within the caverns chokes and suffocates the might of the individual channelers and spellcasters within. Of course, legates are unaffected by any such ebbs in energy.

## THE SITE

The entrance to the Arteries is less than 100 miles west of Highwall on the north coast of the Sea of Pelluria. At the edge of a wide shore of sharp rocks and water-worn stones, where the Northlands break off into the sea, is a towering span of cliffs. From the sea they appear as wrinkled stone, like the cloth of the earth was wadded up on shore. Cut into this folded stone is a recessed spot of rock, unadorned except for four stone columns and three arched openings. Each holds a deep darkness that stretches unnaturally close to the mouths of the Arteries; each leads to the chaotic mess of irregular passages beyond.

Inside, the Arteries are utterly black, cold, and humid. From front to back, each chilly stone is wet with slime and rough with mold. Loose stones shift and crunch underfoot. Jutting slabs of rock slice at passing arms. It's an orderless place of narrow cracks and wide, low caverns.

Some tunnels end in tiny nooks blocked by iron bars. Contained within may be brown bones, moldering flesh, or a desperate and hopeless prisoner. The largest caverns contain clusters of cells consisting of nothing more than walls of bars from floor to ceiling. The metal that contains the prisoners of the Arteries is an unearthly black said to have been forged by greater legates from the very essence of Shadow. Those bars help contain the channelers and their power.

All manner of horrible creatures—some of them transmuted prisoners—lurk in the darkness, scrambling between the cages, eager to devour groping hands or straying feet. Legates live in the Arteries, sleeping in their own dead-end passages and using puddles of blood drawn from prisoners to sully on the outside world. The captives themselves are sometimes used to spy with arcane eyes on their own former comrades and friends.

Legates take possession of individual prisoners and become solely responsible for interrogating or executing those subjects. Only the most powerful, intriguing, and unusual spellcasters live longer than a few weeks, and none are better off for it.

Arcane knowledge, spells, and secrets of the resistance given up by prisoners are recorded for delivery to Ardherin, who rarely visits.

Though some channelers brought to the Arteries are so completely crushed by the experience that they become willing servants of Izrador, no prisoners are ever allowed to leave, living or dead. So far as Ardherin is concerned, everyone in the Arteries is already dead; their corpses are simply being searched and examined lest some important bit of insight be lost to Izrador.