

THE ELITE OF KERN

Since the fall of the Lich King, Kern has become a “Regency” with a council of seven of Jarek’s most influential lieutenants sharing power and control of the kingdom. The very notion of a regency is a polite fiction, since Jarek had no designated heir, nor was there any order of succession for a tyrannical, unliving monarch. Thus the “regency” is really just acknowledgement that the alliance of the so-called “Shadowed Seven” is ultimately temporary, until one of them gains the upper hand and finally manages to overcome or destroy the others.

THE SHADOWED SEVEN

Colloquially known as the “Shadowed Seven,” many of the Regents have ambitions of ascending the throne, others of at least securing their future position within the kingdom, so alliances and maneuvering for power have become commonplace. As the most ambitious Regents are also ageless unliving creatures, it may be that their struggle for power will take some time. The greatest pressure on the Shadowed Seven, other than their own rivalries, is the possibility of open rebellion in Kern, or further attacks from Aldis or Jarzon, looking to take advantage of Kern’s weakness.

LADY TALIS

COMMANDER OF THE KNIGHTS OF THE SKULL

The leader of the Knights of the Skull was second only to Jarek as the most feared creature in Kern. Lady Talis was the sword of Jarek’s wrath and enjoyed missions which brought utter dread to the people and slaughtered Jarek’s enemies in gruesome ways. A vampire, it is said she enjoyed the terror of her victims almost as much as their blood.

Lady Talis was Jarek’s closest ally from the beginning of the Shadow Wars. Her only loyalties were to herself and the Lich King. She sent knights on suicide missions without a moment’s remorse and met appeals for mercy with grim laughter. Her contempt for the living was legendary. One of her favorite tactics was to drink her captives’ blood, turn them into her thralls, then send them against their former allies and loved ones.

Lady Talis was an early favorite to seize power following Jarek’s destruction, but the vampire knight was very nearly destroyed herself. By the time she recovered and returned, Talis discovered others had dug-in their positions, so she agreed to the Council of Regents as a means to buy time and assess her options. She has never quite regained the ground she lost in those first nights. General Vale hates and opposes her, and efforts to win over the fickle Kurgik or the fanatical Senira Rhal have been unsuccessful in securing Talis the arcane resources she needs.

One asset Lady Talis does have is the disgraced Lord Sayvin of Aldis, a former noble and son of the previous Sovereign, whom she keeps in thrall. Sayvin fell prey to Shadow and betrayed his homeland to the Lich King, only to see his new master destroyed at the hands of his hated

rival, Queen Jaellin, the blessed chosen of the Golden Hart. Most of the Regents consider Sayvin useless now that Jarek’s schemes have ended, but Talis recognizes his potential value, both as someone intimately familiar with Aldis and its court, but also as a formally-trained and fairly capable adept.

MINISTER KURGIK

SCHOLAR OF SCIENCE AND THE OCCULT

Formerly Jarek’s chief of alchemy, medicine, experimentation, and arcane advancement, Kurgik is a self-aware white howler possessing incredible intellect. Whether he is a mutant, the subject of an experiment, or another consciousness inhabiting the powerful body of a white howler is unknown. Kurgik is famed for his ruthless pursuit of forbidden knowledge above all else and is known across Kern as “Jarek’s monster-maker.” This nickname isn’t a boast or exaggeration. Many of the monsters stalking the Bitter-Fang caverns are the products of his experiments, bred in his fortress laboratory there.

Kurgik is a distracted but dangerous Regent, and any servants, subordinates, or workers who outlive their usefulness often find themselves subjects for any number of horrifying operations or tests. Under him, Kern would become a land of surgical and occult horrors. He is currently seeking alliances with one or more of the Seven as he has no desire to rule Kern directly, instead wishing only ample opportunities to pursue his craft. Unfortunately, Kurgik’s ego is such that he wishes to be “first among equals,” whose experiments and studies would take precedence over all other concerns— a fact that makes it hard for him to secure permanent allies.

WORKMASTER THARG

LORD OF THE BRAND AND THE LASH

Head administrator of the work gangs under Jarek, Grovan Tharg was a work ganger who clawed his way up to oversee and beyond by betraying, exploiting, and abusing his peers. Surprising to those ignorant of his history or disposition, Tharg is a human. Since Jarek’s defeat, he has maintained control of most of the country’s workforce, and all the most skilled and productive gangs and their masters serve under him. This power gives him remarkable influence, especially over Kern’s infrastructure and rebuilding efforts.

Tharg still bears the scars of the whip and burns of the brand from his time in the work gangs. He wears these old scars as a shield to criticism that he knows nothing of the pain he inflicts on Kern’s slaves. The truth is Tharg knows these pains quite well—he simply doesn’t care. He figures he was tough and dedicated enough to pull himself up by his own chains, and if others were so motivated, they could do the same. That Jarek allowed him to advance from slavery and despair only so he could have a better tool for keeping others down is lost on him.



SENIRA RHAL**SPEAKER OF SHADOW**

While Jarek's relationship with the exarchs was one more of alliance than worship, he understood the value of keeping such powerful beings appeased. To this end, he allowed and even encouraged cult-like worship of the exarchs within Kern among the elites. In addition, he also kept a priestess of the exarch cults as an advisor, both as a matter of respect and pragmatism.

Senira Rhal is a fanatic, the scion of a powerful vata'sha clan of cultists who worshipped the exarchs with enthusiasm and devotion far in excess of most in Kern. Her loyalty to Jarek was fear-based and minimal. With his death, she sees a great opportunity to turn Kern into a glorious theocracy devoted entirely to the advancement and return of the exarchs. Senira is an adept of great power and is especially skilled at divinatory arcana. She dangles the potential knowledge of her visions in front of the other Regents like a lure.

MISTRESS BELLIN**THE MEWLING DARKNESS**

Jarek's spymaster, Bellin is a rhy-cat who fell into Shadow and corruption two centuries ago. Kept alive through occult means, she now appears as a hairless, twisted mockery of the sleek and noble creature she once was. Lamenting her lost beauty, Bellin is rarely seen in public except in disguise or behind the thick silk curtains of her palanquin. She served as Jarek's minister of information and intelligence, coordinating and commanding nearly all the Lich King's spies and assassins—save those few he kept secret even from her. She worked closely with Dame Trecel during Jarek's reign and the two share what passes for mutual respect in Kern. The ghoul is the closest thing to a friend Bellin has.

Bellin's psychic abilities are quite strong, even for a rhydan. She is able to communicate with her operatives and allies over great distances, allowing her to maintain a network of agents and informants unrivaled in the known world. She is never without her attendants: four blind and deaf servants she treats as little more than puppets, connected in a twisted perversion of the traditional rhy-bond. Bellin harbors an unwavering hatred of rhydan, seeing them as a reminder of how she once was—pathetic weaklings unwilling to impose their will on others.

LORD GENERAL ATRIX VALE**HIGH COMMANDER OF THE ARMIES OF KERN**

Jarek's greatest general and warlord, Atrix Vale was the iron-shod boot to Lady Talis' bloody sword. While the vampire knight and her followers were the elite warriors of Kern, Jarek realized long ago Talis lacked the talent or interest in large-scale strategy or soldiering. To serve these needs, Jarek appointed Vale High Commander of his armies and used his powers to transform him from a night person into a living wraith bonded to his

enchanted armor, ensuring he would serve the Lich King for as long as he wanted.

General Vale has a brilliant and ruthless military mind capable of coordinating and commanding forces that include everything from darkfiends to unliving to slaves. The only reason he hasn't conquered Kern in Jarek's absence is his inflexibly in all things non-military and the current fractured state of Kern's forces, plus his own lack of skill in the arcane arts (apart from the powers bestowed upon him by his unliving state). His fellow Regents keep him in check through a careful combination of sabotage and intrigue, making sure he has enough to defend the land and battle their enemies, but not so much that he can destroy them and claim the throne for himself.

DAME TRECCEL**COMMISSIONER OF JUSTICE**

Once human, Jarek transformed Dame Trecel into a flesh-eating ghoul when she was promoted to head of the Lich King's secret police. She spent nearly a hundred years feeding on the flesh of the people of Kern, both literally and figuratively, until the Lich King fell. Since Jarek's defeat, Dame Trecel finds herself a favorite target of rebels and dissidents seeking revenge. For her own protection, she resides in various lavish underground safe houses across Kern. She never stays in the same one for long and is never without several bodyguards. Trecel is a master of torture, counterintelligence, and intimidation, whose ghoulish form grants her superior physical abilities and great recuperative powers. Her elite guards are lesser ghouls that share some of these powers.

Trecel considers herself a sophisticate, and even her ghoulish impulses are exercised with the trappings of high society. She maintains a private chef in her entourage and considers herself a connoisseur of cannibalistic cuisine. To Trecel, her affectations elevate her above other unliving and are indicative of her superiority. They are also useful tactics of terror and intimidation. She has increasingly enjoyed the rites of Yungo and In'nassi, and while not quite a fervent convert, is certainly the favored of the Cult of Yungo in Kern. An invitation to join with the Commissioner of Justice "for dinner" always carries a terrifying double meaning.

THE CRIMSON GUARD

While the Kernish people fear the Shadowed Seven, their far more immediate concern is the Crimson Guard, the nation's "police" force. Most of the members of the Guard are bloodthirsty and cruel. While on duty, the Crimson Guard wear their signature red leathers, which do not show blood as easily as other garb. The Crimson Guard are also known to employ informants and undercover agents, investigating crimes and keeping watch for any hints of rebellion. The most skilled agents detain people and use arcane disguises to impersonate them to gain greater access to the inner workings of a community.

The fact that anyone could be an agent of the Crimson Guard in disguise increases the paranoia of the populace