

The Legion of Paupers



Smiling thinly, stretching forth their empty hands, they stand before you: the Paupers, ruled by the bitterly jovial Beggar Lord. The Paupers are the mongrels of the Legions of the Iron Kingdom, the rejects, the clowns and the hopelessly clueless. Imagine an army of darkness composed primarily of all the people who got picked last for kickball on the playground. Many of them can't even claim the dignity of knowing how or why they died, though most of them claim not to care.

As one might expect, they're lying.

For centuries, the Paupers have been among the lesser of Stygia's members, the rare handfuls among the throngs who serve the other Deathlords, but they're a very close group, bound by a mysterious loyalty. Standing in the shadows of Stygia, the Paupers are united by strange demises and the shared fear of a Shadow who begs for an end to the mystery.

The Paupers

Members of the Legion of Paupers are primarily known as victims of Mystery, those who died under mysterious circumstances. It's enough of a burden being dead, but not knowing why it happened can make it even worse. Still, "Mystery" is a loose guideline at best – most Paupers have no idea what they're doing in the Underworld, who they're with or what to do next. Identity, for them, is where they find it.

While the victims of Mystery make up the single largest group of wraiths who call themselves Paupers, they don't make up the totality. The rest of the Beggar Lord's subjects are leftovers from the other Deathlords' tables, groups so small that there's little need for separate classification – those who steeled themselves to choose suicide over starvation or torture; those who succumbed to progeria, a disease which causes rapid aging in its victims; and the almost insignificant minority of people who are crushed beneath toppled vending machines every year. Tiny segments of other Legions have been willfully donated to the Beggar Lord, and this is the only way that his subjects have remained large enough to continue to qualify for the designation of Legion. The Legion of Paupers is the most chaotic, hodgepodge collection of souls in the afterlife. They fit no single archetype; they defy simple description.

It's no wonder that the Legion of Paupers is considered by many other wraiths to be populated by the stupid and the unfortunate. As the second-smallest Legion to involve itself in Stygian politics (the smallest overall being that serving the Ladies of Fate), and without any common denominator to bind its members together, this Legion is seldom considered a threat to the plans of other wraiths. However, as do all Legions, it has an Anacreon in every Necropolis and Legates in every corner of the Shadowlands. Because of this, Paupers are everywhere and yet frequently overlooked, seemingly harmless and yet full of venom over the price they've paid to Mystery.

The oldest and wisest wraiths will say you should neither speak too loudly around Paupers nor assume they can do you no harm. After all, you don't think the Paupers' master has survived this long on sheer charm alone? Even though it's widely known what sort of people are thrown into the Legion of Paupers, its most prominent members seem to be intelligent, well-socialized, and strong-willed individuals. They're a little strange perhaps, but nothing that far outside of normalcy. So why the less-than-sterling reputation? It's common knowledge that this Legion is fueled by the lesser wraiths of other Legions – but like any group, the victims of Mystery have their shining examples.

On the Nature of Mystery

The Beggar Lord's most cherished servants are those who came to him directly, the souls who left the Skinlands under genuinely mysterious circumstances. Mystery, by its very nature, is a vague concept. Many wraiths consider this Legion to be a catch-all category for the unusual, but some fairly stringent rules for membership must be followed to satisfy the other Deathlords (most of whom suspect the Beggar Lord's ranks to be much larger than he lets on).

A Mystery to Whom?

First, mystery is all in the perspective. Death must be a mystery to the victim – deaths which are mysterious only in the Skinlands, and not to their victims, do not add to the Beggar Lord's holdings. In the past, the wraith's perspective has been the overriding qualifier, although sometimes strange deaths have a mystery all their own. Someone who'd been in a car crash might assume she died in the crash, but if she was killed by an incompetent anesthesiologist, then her death gets filed under "Mystery," and she joins the ranks of the Paupers.

So: first and foremost, there must be an element of uncertainty in the wraith's death, though the mystery many not seem immediately obvious to the *Enfant*.

The Mystery is "How"

As shown above, the most basic sort of mystery that brings a wraith to this Legion is simply not knowing what finally brought death knocking. Sometimes a death is so strange, or has so many different parents, that its actual cause is muddled. If too many forces contribute to a person's death, then that soul goes to the Beggar Lord. It's a neat way of avoiding conflicts between the Deathlords.

Finding someone on the other side of the Shroud who might be able to clarify a wraith's mystery is perfectly acceptable behavior for Paupers, so long as it doesn't interfere with their duties. Also, the Beggar Lord's Anacreons collect stories of strange deaths, trading valuable goods for tales, in the hopes that someday they might help resolve a soul's mystery. With the percentage of people who become wraiths being very low (not counting those whose souls end up as coins in hand), odds are against it. Fortunately, members of the Legion of Paupers know all about weird odds, and try to remember strange death stories as best they can.

So: a wraith unequivocally belongs to the Legion of Paupers when she herself does not know how she died. A wraith also becomes a Pauper when his deathmarks are dramatically different from what he believes his cause of death was, or he has three or more radically different deathmarks

The Mystery is "Why"

Then there are deeper mysteries, like wraiths who may know how they died, but not why. The exact nature of these deaths – which may have been directly caused by Violence, Pestilence, or any other killing force that would normally fall into the realm of another Deathlord – might be crystal clear, but the reason for the death may be vague to the level of absurdity.

For example: A woman is killed in her apartment. It could've been a burglary, or it could've been someone sent by her husband to cash in on her insurance policy. If there's an important motivation behind a death that the victim doesn't know about, it falls under the bailiwick of the Beggar Lord. (Occasionally, when the waters are muddy, it's easier for the wraiths working the Necropoli to sign someone over to the Beggar Lord and be done with it.) Also, if one of a wraith's Passions is **Find Out Who Killed Me**, or **Find Out Why I Died**, she is typically classified as a Pauper.

So: A wraith is assigned to the Legion of Paupers when the cause of her death might not be known, but it is related to other events outside the person's awareness (as reflected in her deathmarks).

Option D – All of the Above

Generally, even if a wraith doesn't know exactly how she died, she can hazard a pretty good guess. The tire tracks across the Corpus, the bullet hole leaking plasm – the signs are often there. There are a few wraiths who are the true victims of Mystery, who really don't know what the hell happened. These are the souls who have the hardest time reconciling the fact that they're dead in the first place. Understandably, for these wraiths, service to Stygia is a secondary consideration.

To sum up, if you're not sure how you died, or your deathmarks contradict your memories, or there were greater forces at work which you weren't aware of, or you really didn't see the truck coming – then you're definitely a victim of Mystery.

Table Scraps

Even with these guidelines in place, depending on who's counting the souls, "nudges" are frequently made to favor one side or the other. Particularly troublesome souls may be assigned to the Legion of Paupers for no better reason than to keep them from "contaminating" the loyal forces of other Deathlords. Similarly, when a powerful soul who *might* qualify as a Pauper passes through, errors tend to be made to favor the other Legions – unless the person doing the counting is also a Pauper.

Concessions

A major source of souls for the Beggar Lord are concessions granted in exchange for political favors. When the Laughing Lady and the Quiet Lord can't come to terms on who should get a group of souls, rather than fight over it they occasionally just sign the lot over to the Legion of Paupers and be done with the matter.

People who've been given to the Beggar Lord as concessions are generally less than pleased with their fates, and don't get along well with other Paupers. Such "secondhand" Paupers don't know why they were singled out, but they're not happy about it. Shadows of these wraiths tend to see such discontentment as a weak spot, and start gnawing there first.

Freaks

Then there are the wraiths who have normal Fetters and Passions, but who were freaks in life and whom dying hasn't changed a bit. Poorly socialized wretches who manage to make it to the Shadowlands and stand on their own two feet are still wretches, but if they're genuinely useful then it's better for everyone to see them logged in as Paupers than going Heretical or Renegade. The Beggar Lord has a good reputation for accommodating the strange.

Unfortunately, such off-kilter souls have a poor grasp on anything resembling objective reality, and tend to have weak wills toward resisting their Shadows. Paupers' Shadows have convincing arguments, and the more freakish of the Paupers have a hard time not listening to their blandishments.

Misfits

Just as there are freaks in the Underworld, there are those who don't fit in anywhere, who resist all molds and force their way out of every stereotype. Out of personal pride or spite, these wraiths refuse to fit in. This doesn't make them useless, though it does make them squeaky wheels. The Beggar Lord has a good rep for dealing with squeaky wheels, and since he's always bemoaning the fact that he's the weakest of the Deathlords, the others are glad to dump their misfits on him as it silences two whiners at once.

Misfits in the Legion of Paupers are really no different from the gifts and the freaks, except for their strong feelings of wanderlust, coupled with senses of perpetual frustration. Misfit's Shadows are constantly nagging at them, whining in discomfort at every situation.

Attitudes

The Legion of Paupers, while made up of widely disparate individuals, is bound together by its love of individuality. The Legion tends to be the most tolerant of radical perspectives, much to the chagrin of some of the more conservative Deathlords, and the most accepting of strange sorts. Its members aren't reputed to have any genuine sense of tact, although none of them would ever be so rude as to point out another person's oddities or strange behavior.

Seldom fazed by anything, Paupers have a sort of humor, bitter though it may be. They have a hard time keeping a smile from becoming a sneer, and they extract a cruel delight from the reactions of the more sensitive by saying the most tactless things at the most inappropriate times. Most Paupers defend their behavior as extracting the smallest bit of entertainment from an uncaring universe, a universe which is obviously entertaining itself at their expense. On the other hand, most don't even make that much effort.

In addition to being victims of Mystery, Paupers are generally up to their ears in it. A blasé attitude toward strangeness gets them caught up in the weirdest plots imaginable. Paupers adore things that are more warped than themselves. Many actively seek to resolve Skinland mysteries, telling stories of “what really happened” as a way to claim control over their own mysterious destinies. For instance, a gang of Paupers living on the outskirts of the Memphis Necropoli have spent two decades giggling over a Thrall they claim is Elvis – then again, several of the Circle show the hallmarks of high skill with Moliate, and, well, that's just the sort of story one would get out of this Legion, so no one's taking the matter too seriously.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Most members of the Legion weren't all that happy with their lot in life, and focus themselves on living their afterlives with as much energy as possible. In the best case, Paupers are able to push away most thoughts of the Skinlands, at least those above and beyond maintaining their Fetters and Passions, and serve the Iron Kingdom well. The environment might be oppressive and menacing, but life itself was bad enough. Death, they think, certainly can't be any worse.

On the other hand, Paupers often grow more and more self-absorbed as they continue to reflect on their mysterious ends. Many gradually lose interest in anything else except the resolution of their mysteries. The Beggar Lord's loose hand of authority gives his rebels enough room to express themselves, and thus his rate of attrition to Renegades and Heretics is lower than that of any other Deathlord – but when Paupers go bad, they go spectacularly bad. Some of the most implacable Spectres to threaten the New York Necropolis in the last hundred years were Paupers who gave in to their Shadows. On several occasions, various factions (sometimes other Paupers) loudly decried the poor psychological state of many of this Legion's members, but action is seldom taken to rectify the matter. The Beggar Lord's desperation for souls has given new meaning to the old chestnut: “Beggars can't be choosers.”

Non-Military Life

The sort of confusion typical of Paupers is common among densely packed metropolitan areas, like New York City, which is home to some of the most powerful servants of Mystery.

The majority of the Beggar Lord's servants take bureaucratic roles in Stygian government, shuffling the endless reams of ghostly papers from one desk to another. For obvious reasons, their Deathlord enjoys seeing his servants in charge of the disposition of new souls.

Military Life

The wraiths who serve with Stygian steel beneath the banner of the Beggar Lord are always anxious to change the minds of those who consider the Legion of Paupers to be the runts of the Underworld. After all, plenty of the fiercest warriors disappeared from the Skinlands under mysterious circumstances, even entire armies. From souls who marched through the Alps following Hannibal's lead to victims of the Bermuda Triangle, these wraiths fight all the more strongly because they have something to prove. General George Patton is one of the Beggar Lord's most notable wraiths, and after almost 50 years of serving the Hierarchy he will tell anyone in no uncertain terms that the Legion of Paupers is one of the richest in terms of courage and willpower.

Special Orders

Beyond the ranks of standard Hierarchy bureaucrats and beat cops, the Legion of Paupers contains many wheels within wheels. It should be no surprise that the Legion composed of victims of Mystery enjoys shrouding its activities from others in layers of subterfuge, acting as double-agents to double-agents.

Legion of August

The melancholy souls of the Legion of August are those Paupers who are most troubled by their Shadows, and who are sent out to the countryside with wraiths belonging to other Legions in an effort to change their darkened hearts. Members of this Legion patrol the land surrounding their Necropoli, hunting Spectres and confronting their own personal demons.

After a period of service, usually no less than five years, a dutiful member of the Legion of August may petition the Beggar Lord for a yearlong sabbatical during which he may attempt to resolve the mystery of his demise. Whether or not he's successful, the wraith is expected to achieve a sense of closure as regards his death. When his sabbatical is over, he may either return to the Legion of August or be reassigned to a traditional Hierarchy post – but he must push aside all concern for his personal mystery and focus on the here and now, forever.

Legion of the Onyx Tear

Those Legionnaires who belong to the Legion of the Onyx Tear are the Beggar Lord's most trusted souls, his personal bodyguards and confidants. A wraith who serves this order knows where all the bodies are buried, metaphorically speaking. There are never more than 25 Paupers serving in this Legion at any one time, but they're impossible to miss. They wear tall, black masks, with stylized weeping eyes and laughing mouths.

Legates of the Onyx Tear are never allowed to gather in a group larger than six at a time; sources are divided on whether this is to prevent them from being wiped out in a single attack, or to prevent them from getting together in a large enough group to put together their master's secrets.

As the Beggar Lord's bodyguards and representatives, they almost never leave Stygia. Instead they act on their master's behalf in the courts of other Deathlords and on the streets of the City of Eternal Death. Members of this Legion are privy to most of their Deathlord's schemings. This is dreadful knowledge, though, and there's generally at least one vacant slot among the ranks of those who wear the masks of the Onyx Tear.

Legion of Revelations

It's not known by anyone, outside the Deathlord who commands it, how many wraiths belong to the Legion of Revelations. Few wraiths know it exists, which is how it's preferred; it's responsible for handling the Beggar Lord's covert actions.

These wraiths are the hands of the Legion of the Onyx Tear in the Shadowland, uncovering some mysteries and further obscuring others. They even meddle in the affairs of the Skinlands for their master, doing so with greater and greater impunity in the decades following Charon's disappearance.

Noteworthy Paupers

There are plenty of members of the Legion of Paupers who were famous in the Skinlands. Think of all the mysterious disappearances and deaths you've ever heard of – there's D.B. Cooper, Marilyn Monroe, JFK – and that's just recently.

For whatever reason, few celebrities have achieved the same heights after death as they did in life.

The Beggar Lord Himself

"I'm afraid I just don't share your perspective, Lady. I do not feel as though your interests align enough with those serving under me."

The Ashen Lady bared ghostly teeth behind her mask.

"Perhaps," she said as calmly as she could muster, "if your ranks were to suddenly include those who choked to death on stale fruit after the age of 90?"

Both of them? the Beggar Lord chuckled to himself.

"Certainly," he replied, standing to leave. "Someone as generous as yourself may rely upon my vote tomorrow."

One soul at a time, he reminded himself, although two will never be refused.

The beggar Lord himself, with so few charges relative to his peers, enjoys playing a personal role in his subordinates' afterlives. As such, Paupers who distinguish themselves are frequently called to his

chambers to suffer his idle conversation. These invitations are eagerly sought – once. No one who’s endured an hour or two in the Beggar Lord’s company has any interest in repeating the experience.

Note: The Storyteller should play up the Deathlord’s bitterly strange manners, ranging from childishly flippant, in the hopes of inspiring a personal bond of mutual disdain with his servants, to agonizingly formal in the most patronizing of fashions.

His Politics

The Beggar Lord, were anyone to ask him, would loudly decry the noisy nattering of politicians and curse the shameful breaches of personal integrity it forces people into, even in the afterlife. Unfortunately, the Paupers Legion, with the fewest members *on record* of any other Legion active in Stygian politics, must of course rely upon politics to get the bulk of its work done. The Legion’s members look to its master, the Beggar Lord, as a model of behavior. His extensive politicking is what other Legions have seen and characterized as “begging,” as he makes political concessions in exchange for increasing the ranks of his followers. Although sometimes he does have to get down on his bony knees and plead his case, it rarely comes to that. Besides, he’s not adverse to a touch of groveling, if it gets him what he wants.

Things could have been more difficult recently, though. Without Charon around to intercede in affairs for him, the Beggar Lord has been faced with seven ears to beg for attention rather than just one. Luckily, as things tend to happen for the Prince of Beggars, the other Deathlords (more often than not) come seeking political assistance.

Of course, there’s an obvious reason the Beggar Lord is patronized by the Ladies and Lords of the other Legions – without him and his kind, barring the return of the Ladies of Fate to political matters, there would be an even number of Deathlords in Stygian politics, which could easily lead to stalemates on every level. The Beggar Lord and his kind act as very important swing votes when major decisions are made. Not surprisingly, the ranks of the Legions of Paupers will swell noticeably before an important vote is called.

The Beggar Lord, both publicly and privately, makes a great deal of noise about his relationship with the Ladies of Fate, particularly concerning their mutual disdain for politics. It’s assumed among members of the Paupers Legion that the Beggar Lord could appeal to the Ladies of Fate to clarify the mystery concerning any individual wraith’s death, were he suitably moved to do so. While the Ladies of Fate claim to concern themselves only with the demise of those for whom Fate held a place, the Deathlord himself has implied on occasion that the good Ladies aren’t considered the Underworld’s greatest Oracles for nothing. And, although the Beggar Lord has never actually intervened in clearing the mystery surrounding a Legate’s death, he does seem to relish torturing his servants with promises of “great rewards” for unwavering loyalty under extreme circumstance, followed by veiled references to the Ladies of Fate.

His Schemes

The Beggar Lord, like others of his kind, is currently embroiled in a variety of complicated webs of intrigue.

Most notably, he supports and official return of the Guilds. Shortly after Charon issued the Proclamation of the Breaking, the Beggar Lord realized it was a bad idea, but if the Emperor went back on his previous ruling it would be a show of weakness before his enemies. As such, the Beggar Lord bit his tongue and bided his time. But now, with Stygia's emperor gone these five decades, the Beggar Lord believes it's time to start making some serious changes. Naturally, some of the Guilds would prefer to stay hidden, free from the shackles of Stygian domination, so his plan isn't perfect. But he's working at it very diligently, with agents in the strangest places.

The Guilds exist, he argues, whether or not anyone believes in them. Current figures suggest that as many as 10 percent of all wraiths are members of a Guild, so why do the majority of wraiths claim to be ignorant of their existence? That's a lot of ignorant hicks in Deadtown. The Beggar Lord believes that the best thing the Deathlords could do is to legalize the Guilds so as to tap their resources for the good of Stygia.

After all, if the other Dark Kingdoms are unwilling to ally themselves with Stygia against Oblivion, then surely someday they will attack the Kingdom of Iron. When that happens, Stygia must have the strongest wraiths with the most effective Arcanoi. The Beggar Lord believes that the best way to insure this is to bring the Guilds into the open and start them properly training the populace on how to use the abilities they possess.

The Beggar Lord can go on and on in this vein for as long as he's permitted. This is because, due to extreme vanity and no small measure of insanity, he honestly believes that he can come out on top in the end. The Beggar Lord thinks his victory is assured because even though he's been whining to the other Deathlords for so long about being the least powerful with the fewest wraiths, he's actually worked himself into a strong position by silently accumulating an incredible number of mediocre souls. Admittedly, these are only valuable to him after they've entered his forges, but every soul counts.

In fact, the Beggar Lord realized more than a century ago that the tables had begun to turn – the size of his Legion was almost average relative to the other Deathlords. If someone noticed, then the Beggar Lord certainly couldn't beg for souls anymore. He might actually have to work for souls, like the other Deathlords, or rely on the random luck of how people actually died. He was horrified.

So to reduce his visible numbers, while still being able to accept the rejected unwashed masses of his peers, the Beggar Lord has been taking these souls, the nutcase rejects from other Legions, and melting them down for their plasm. He's been stockpiling swords and other soulforged constructions, with the help of the Artificer underground, in exchange for spearheading the fight to restore the rightful place of the Guilds in Stygian society. He hopes that his Legion, armed with soulforged armor and dark implements of destruction, will stand above all others, positioning him for the ultimate power grab. The last will become the first, and the Beggar Lord will beg no more, having claimed the emperorship for himself.

It's widely suspected, and sometimes jokingly implied, that the Beggar Lord is insane. Most wraiths, even his own unflappable Legates, would be surprised to hear how far from sanity he really is.

His Weakness

As wraiths grow old, they forget what it was like to be alive. The sensations they have in a day are literally shadows of the ecstasy it is merely to have the wind blow across your back, or the pleasure it is to walk upright in a healthy body. Sometimes the Restless even start to seek out extremes of experience to remind them that even though they're dead, they're oddly enough still alive.

The Beggar Lord was one of Charon's oldest counselors when he was made a Deathlord at his friend's whim, and had already been dead a very long time. A wry soul, he enjoyed the Republic and the imperial days which followed. But so much has changed over the millennia that the Beggar Lord hasn't felt anything on his own in quite some time.

The Legion of the Onyx Tear is not merely his personal guard. Once a week, within the funouselike privacy of the Seat of Golden Tears, its members take turns tying their master down and performing extraordinarily painful maneuvers, such as pressing soulforged fishhooks into his back and pulling out meaty gobs of Corpus. (This hardly gets a reaction out of the Beggar Lord, but they have to start someplace.) After a few hours of such torments, he begins to get this tingling feeling, as though he might almost be feeling something again.

If the other Deathlords found out how far gone the Beggar Lord is, much less how many arms he's accumulated by melting down and abusing their leftovers, action would have to be taken regardless of how it would destabilize the political balance on the Isle. If the Guilds knew they were dealing with a madman, they would distance themselves from the entire Legion of Paupers. If his own wraiths knew how gibberingly insane their master has become, they would laugh and laugh and laugh – and leave Stygia.

But would they tell anyone? Of course not.

