

The Iron Legion

Components of the Legion

So you think we're a bunch of pansy old people, do you? Well let me tell you sonny boy, the Iron Legion has the best-damned souls in the Underworld. We're people who died of old age, yes, but do you have any idea what it takes to survive to old age? Guess not – you weren't very successful at it.

- Disgruntled Centurion at a Necropolis town meeting



The Iron Legion is composed of wraiths who died of, or during, old age. Long ago the Legion laid claim to all who died in the last phase of life, whether the actual immediate cause of death was disease, malnutrition, or the simple failing of the body. Persons of the proper age who are victims of “unnatural” deaths are disputed, yet currently the ranks of the Iron Legion are sufficient that the Legion chooses not to haggle over a few scattered souls. The Ashen Lady’s followers also include those who died prematurely because they wore out their bodies. Sufferers of long-term disease such as emphysema are claimed by the Iron Legion, as well as individuals who destroyed their livers through alcohol abuse consequently died of liver failure. The Iron Legion explains these inclusions by broadly defining its authority as being over all who have used up the life flow given them at birth and died as a direct result. Hard living makes for quicker deaths, as the peasants of the Middle Ages could well attest. Other Legions contest individuals included in these broad categories, and a running feud with the Skeletal Legion has bubbled up over those who have died of disease while in their twilight years. The Skeletal Legion claims that they always resolve such matters peacefully.

The Iron Legion knows better.

Deathmarks

Although details of the designs sported by members of the Iron Legion vary somewhat depending upon the exact cause of death, Iron Legionnaires all bear gray bands about their arms and legs. The number of bands relates to experiences in life; wraiths who lived especially difficult existences sport more marks as a sign of their struggles. Such marks are considered a sign of valor among the Legion, for they symbolize the depth of experience endured in life.

In addition, Legionnaires may bear marks of special distinction for service earned, which are Moliated onto their Corpora. Members of the Lady’s Salon have a tattoo-like design encircling their left eye. The mark resembles eyeliner, yet the lines extend and curl up to the temples where they form the symbol of the Salon. Advocates have their left palms entirely blackened, though many joke that this is not a mark of distinction but the result of swearing on too many Bibles while alive.

Strengths of Iron

The advantages of age lend strength to the Iron Legion. While younger wraiths might boast of energy and passion, it is slow, cunning patience of age that is surer proof against any foe.

Old mob bosses never die, they just join the Iron Legion. It makes perfect sense, really – some of the grandest schemes of all time involve the founding of personal dynasties. And of course these family leaders usually die in their old age, bringing them into our fold. Medicis were plentiful around here in their day, and quite helpful with reorganization plans that took place a few centuries ago. You can still find a few of the founding fathers of the great houses of Europe out here in the Shadowlands, though most have gone to live in Stygia to be part of the Council of Ministers. And of course, those live-fast, burnout zillionaire computer types are starting to fall under the aegis as well.

One of the advantages of having so many tycoons around is that we have excellent connections in the Skinlands. Do you have any idea how much easier it is influence the major powers of the Western world when you can have their ancestors speak to them directly? Those who still respect their families, that is. It's such a shame the younger generations have become so bloody independent. Still, for the older families, those ties are an invaluable tool. So many of our plans are carried out by the direct descendants of some of this Legion's finest. When we want to encourage donations to medical research, we nudge at the wealthy New England families. If we need a Fetter destroyed, Vincenzo Marinelli's family can remove it from existence within hours. Of course, the Marinelli's might not know where the orders are coming from, but then again, neither do the other Legions. Capiche?

And let's not forget the impact we can have upon the economies of the world, not to mention the Underworld. We're just waiting for Donald Trump to keel over; he'll be a nice addition to our Economic Strategists corps. How do other Legions survive without this kind of advice? Well, I guess that's why we're a bit better off financially than they are.

- Simon Moreville, Centurion in Manchester, Introductory Session for New Recruits

The Seat of Shadows is just one of the many buildings redesigned by the great Italian architects of the Renaissance. Its domes and spires represent the pinnacle of architectural fashion of that era. No place on Earth could rival its majesty, save perhaps the Duomo of Milan. Our team of architects has been working ceaselessly for centuries, restoring and rebuilding the damage done by the Maelstroms. Of course, with the increase in population in the Shadowlands, our engineering and architectural teams have been kept very busy with new additions to existing Necropoli. We are indeed fortunate that most architects and engineers die peacefully in their sleep after long lives of service. It gives us a great advantage over the other Legions. Have you seen the pitiful roads the Skeletal Legion has been putting up? You'd think they knew nothing of the latest paving technologies.

Our technical skills extend beyond construction. All of the great scientists of the Underworld belong to our Salon. What we do with them I'm not quite sure, but I've heard that they've been able to make some impressive advancements in the weapons technology arena. What a boon for us! Maybe the scientists who developed nuclear energy in the Skinlands will be able to devise a more efficient use for the soulfuel that we currently use to power our machines.

-Woody Peterson, tour guide, public areas of the Seat of Shadows

What is life without art, without beauty? How could I ever survive this miserable existence if my dear Patroness did not graciously support my work and my habits? I am the finest painter in all of Stygia – nay, in all of the Underworld. For three centuries I have bestowed my talents upon the richest

and most powerful souls Stygia has to offer – a fresco here, a portrait there – and it makes existence worth enduring. People are no less vain in the afterlife, the demand for the finer things is still high. It is simply more of a luxury now, since all of my paints and canvases must be formed from human souls. Yet there is a delicate drama in all of this, for what higher honor could these poor fools hope to achieve than to be the essential ingredients in another of my masterpieces?

You, my dearest friend, should consider joining us in the Salon. Your writing talents would certainly be appreciated. My Lady loves to have new poetry read at every opportunity. You would be the darling of the court! Not only that, but we have all of the best talent residing here. I have found my work has improved dramatically with the assistance of my brethren of the Salon. Where better to carry on your work than in the company of your peers, people who can appreciate you for the genius you are? Stop hiding in that dingy Necropolis and join us in the City. Greatness and honor await you.

- Pietro Avanzia to Joshua Cooper

A Day in the Death

Organization

Efficiency, Order, Patience.

- *The Three Virtues of the Iron Legion*

Few bureaucracies run as smoothly as does the Iron Legion. But of course, few governments have the combined skills of hundreds of well-seasoned officials with centuries upon centuries of experience. Everything the Legion does is planned very carefully in advance, with maneuvers and movements plotted down to the tiniest details. There are no such things as unexpected events, only unprepared planners – that's the Legion's philosophy. The Iron Legion expects perfection from its troops, and rewards good service generously through commendation, reparation, and promotion.

The Iron Legion spends a great deal of time training each recruit, time considered excessive by some other Legions. Yet the leaders of Iron insist that patience – and repetition – produce excellent results. Once a member of the Iron Legion graduates from his training courses, he is ready to face the most challenging tasks with ease and grace, wasting no time with indecision and doubt. At least, that's the plan, and more often than not it works reasonably well.

Construction and Resources Planning

One of the specialties of the Iron Legion is the construction and fortification of the Necropoli. Citadels don't just happen after all – the best ones are carefully planned and constructed from the wreckage of the cities around them. And, for whatever reason, the best architects and fortifications engineers always seem to fall into the lap of the Iron Legion. As such, the Iron Legion has a near-monopoly on the best construction and fortification techniques of the Underworld. If given a choice,

nine Anacreons out of 10 will choose to have the Iron Legion fortify their Citadels – and the 10th is probably a suck up to his Deathlord.

Furthermore, any number of Roman engineers make up the overseers of the Construction division, meaning that roads the Legion lays down are straight, solid, and built to last. There have even been proposals made of aqueducts, a sort of Byway, but to date there's been no implementation of these daring ideas.

Special Forces

No matter how fierce the politicking gets in Stygia (and the forges get fed well on political casualties, rest assured), Oblivion and its servants remain the ultimate enemy. As the majority of soldiers of the Iron Legion lived long, full lives, they have no intention of having their afterlives cut short, either. With that in mind, the Legion has an active and energetic anti-Spectre imperative. Research goes on around the clock in an effort to ferret out and exploit any weaknesses that the Shadow-eaten possess, and new theories are constantly tested in the field.

That, of course, leaves the problem of who exactly gets to do that testing. That “honor” falls to the so-called Spectre Brigades, wraiths who constantly get thrown into the front lines in order to test the latest pet theory from the skinny geeks back in R&D. Of course, the Spectre Brigades also get to test new weapons (which they like) and new tactics (which they abhor) on occasion as well. Plus, wraiths in the Spectre Brigades get double bounty on any Spectre Corpora they bring in, making a turn in the Brigades a risky yet profitable proposition.

Spectre Brigades are usually assigned to Byway way stations or ships that patrol relatively calm areas of the Sea of Shadows. Most Brigades have at least one Harbinger, to make for fast transport to trouble spots, and all are occasionally called upon for counterstrike duty. When it's just a matter of getting to a spot Spectres have hit and following them back into the Tempest, most Brigadiers are ready to go in an instant. It's just those moments when they have to chase Spectres armed with R&D's latest brainchild that causes nervous breakdowns and Catharsis in the ranks.

Reconnaissance

The members of the Iron Legion pride themselves on their powers of reconnaissance, infiltration, and sabotage. Information is power, especially among the Dead, and the Iron Legion aims to be powerful indeed. With that in mind, the Ashen Lady's coffers have purchased spies and saboteurs throughout the Underworld – in other Dark Kingdoms as well as in the other Legions. While drunken boasts that the Iron Legion could bring the whole house of cards down with a word are exaggerated, to say the least, the other Legions are aware and wary of the Iron Legion's pervasive influence.

The best sources of information the Legion has, however, are its own members. They are, to a man, survivors, experienced at blending in. They understand the value of accomplishment, as opposed to glory, and as such they get the information they need and get out without worrying about bruised egos or recognition for their work. And as for the young bucks who fee free to yammer in front of “the old guys,” well, Iron Legionnaires outlasted them in life; every day it's more likely they'll outlast the whippersnappers in death as well.

Family Ties

The Iron Legion recognizes the strength of family ties, particularly among mortals who have lived to see several generations of their offspring. Because so many new wraiths are desperate to contact their loved ones, each new recruit is allowed time off to search for news of her dead relatives. Although this practice seems indulgent to some, the Iron Legion's policy is that no recruit can function to her fullest potential while her mind is focused on other things – like whether Grandma Keely has been turned into a nightstand. Once a new member has successfully established communication with the deceased branch of her family, she will be able to return to the task at hand with fewer distractions.

The Ashen Lady

Descended from a long line of kings of the Celtic people, Andriana spent her life as queen and matriarch to a large tribe in the southern part of Britannia. After her death, she continued to communicate with her people, advising them on the movements of enemy tribes and passing on the wisdom that only experience can bring. Her goodness was noted throughout the Underworld, her compassion became legendary. Centuries ago, Charon selected her to become a senator in his new Roman-style government, and ever since she has served the Hierarchy with unwavering devotion.

Charity, philosophy, and endurance are the Ashen Lady's highest ideals. She is always looking out for new ways to help the average soul, whether by aiding them in obtaining a fair trial, or by administering some of her priceless wisdom. She believes that the study of philosophy and art are the highest pinnacles of human achievement, and that only through the understanding of the soul can we ever hope to end the wars among peoples both living and dead. Her goals include maintaining and improving the strong foundations of her Legion, to ensure that in the centuries to come her ideals will be upheld throughout the Underworld.

- Official Biography of the Ashen Lady

Oh, sure, the other Deathlords may be great military leaders, but the time has long since passed for the Hierarchy to be ruled by the laws of war. What other Deathlord has her political savvy? Who can challenge the Iron Legion's powers of strategy? No, if anyone is to replace Charon, it should be the Ashen Lady. At least we won't be running off into battles at the drop of a hat. We'll have some peace and civility for a change.

- Silus Martinus, Anacreon of Gaeta

Of course the Ashen Lady would prefer that she be the next supreme ruler of the Hierarchy. At this time, however, she takes only small steps toward the goal. Instead of constantly puffing about her talents to the other Deathlords, she quietly builds her resources and undermines the credibility of her rivals. Ashes, ashes, they all fall down. By sealing compacts with high-ranking officials in other Legions, she hopes to topple the other Deathlords by undercutting their internal support. When the time is right, the Ashen Lady will tug on those strings, and the support structures of the other Legions will come tumbling down. Only the Iron Legion will remain standing, and only those who swear fealty to the Ashen Lady will be permitted to rise from the dust.

The Seat of Shadows

The word “opulent” does not adequately describe the Seat of Shadows. At the walls of the compound, towers of black stone adorned with white spindles pierce the air, giving the entire structure the appearance of some massive insect that might rise and shake itself free of the ashy Stygian earth. Reconstructed in the 1700s by the brightest architects of the Italian Renaissance, the Seat of Shadows mixes centuries, styles and visions in such a way that all are fused into a seamless, monstrous hole. It is conventional wisdom that any number of sackings of major cities in the Skinlands had the Ashen Lady’s fingerprints on them, so that she might have more building materials for her palace. Needless to say, the Iron Legion denies the allegations, and the Smiling Lord (whose ranks were swelled by those conquests) offers his support to the Ashen Lady’s denials.

Over a thousand souls are housed within the compound, and there are temporary quarters for several hundred more. Permanent residents include the Ashen Lady and her council, as well as her Salon and corps of personal bodyguards. Significant features include a vast private library, an art gallery, several ornate fountains, a state-of-the-art research laboratory, and a reliquary in which are housed thousands of precious relics.

Visitors may tour the main courtyard, escorted by a guide. Daily tours also allow tourists to view the majestic ballroom, the military drilling grounds, and two of the grand baroque fountains. Other areas of the Seat have been glimpsed by lucky visitors, but the Ashen Lady is very particular about which sections of her home she is willing to show off to visitors.

Political Structure

The Iron Legion’s chain of command begins with the Ashen Lady and her High Council. Although every person on her Council of Ministers is accountable to the Lady, each has almost complete authority over her own areas of responsibility. Some units, such as the Salon and the Advocates, operate independently outside of the Council, but all basic Legion functions are controlled by one or more of the Ministers. Each Minister has a staff of generals, and from there the chains of command follow the standard Stygian model.

Council of Ministers

The 11 Ministers on the High Council are responsible for the major functions of the Legion. Their identities of only a few are known. The Ministers, in no particular order, are:

Minister of Economics (Haym Solomon): This wraith oversees all financial transactions and economic strategy. He produces annual reports on the trends in the Stygian economy and sets the Legion’s budget.

Minister of Defense: The Minister of Defense oversees research and development of tactics, devices, and Arcanoi which relate directly to combating Spectres. She also has jurisdiction over Byway patrols and counterstrike units.

Minister of Construction: This wraith heads the Construction Division, which is responsible for all building, paving, and fortification projects, both in Stygia and the Shadowlands.

Minister of Research and Development (Sheilagh O'Donnel): The Minister of R&D coordinates all research programs, save those specifically claimed by other Ministers. Her bailiwick includes the MPPU, engineering research, weapons development and so on. Although individual projects do fall under the duties of other Ministers, R&D is still responsible for assigning the appropriate staff to that project and ensuring that all laboratories are properly equipped and managed.

Minister of Recruiting: He oversees the harvesting and recruiting of new wraiths, including everything up to indoctrination. The Reaper corps reports to him, and he also has final say (which he rarely exercises) on which new recruits are forge fodder.

Minister of Training: She designs, develops, and implements training programs for all of the Legion's other divisions. This includes skill testing, recruit placement, and Maelstrom response programs.

Minister of Planning: This wraith is responsible for the development of new Necropoli and resource allocation.

Minister of the Military General (Hugh of Lusignan): Oversees all fighting battalions, and is second in command of the Legion in times of war.

Minister of Legion Relations (Adam Orleton, late bishop of Hereford, Worcester, and Winchester): Essentially the master diplomat of the Legion, he oversees relations with the other Legions and deals with Stygian political issues.

Minister of Intelligence (Tobias Smeck): Sabotage, intelligence, and counterintelligence programs (including efforts to infiltrate the Labyrinth) are in this minister's purview.

Minister of Special Projects (Charles Proteus Steinmetz): The Minister develops new programs and oversees miscellaneous units, including the Communiqués. He also serves as a liaison with the Salon, on those rare occasions when the Lady doesn't feel like dealing with the creative types directly.

Turnover of the Ministers is steady but not rapid, and most have good runs of several decades, if not centuries. On the other hand, the creep of progress is inevitable, and not one of the original Ministers remains. The Ashen Lady, in some of her more forthcoming moments, notes that this gives younger wraiths "something to shoot for."

The Rest of the Menagerie

From the earliest days, the Iron Legion has been friendly toward the fae. 'Tis odd, I know, for in the Skinlands Iron has always been said to be fatal to the Fair Folk, but things change when you cross the Shroud, it seems. Apparently, she had a fondness for faeries when she was a child. The whole thing seems silly now, for it's not as though they're very useful to us. But women being what they are, she's always had a soft spot for the little buggers, even commissioning songs and poems in their honor.

Lately she's developed a keen interest in werewolves. Every so often she mumbles something about them being tied to the land and preserving the Great Mother. Been going on about them for a few centuries, at least. She's always hounding the Salon to discover new ways to contact the spirits of the wolves. As if they'd want to talk to her!

One thing's for certain, though: She loathes vampires. Can't stand the bloodsuckers. Oh, you should see it when someone offers her a dead Leech for her Salon. Wails like a banshee, she does. (I'd wager that banshees are but children compared to the Lady – her wails are more terrifying than a sound any earthly critter could howl up.) Oh no, no vampires are welcome here. She'd as soon smelt them into shoe leather as look at them. I've even heard that she goes out of her way to make trouble for them in the Skinlands as well, but that'd be a Dictuum violation, so I can't countenance those stories.

Mages and mummies and the like, she has little use for. There may be a few dead sorcerers lingering at the Salon, but the Legion has no official policy on these types, nor do I see one coming any time soon. She's got no interest in their games, and as such pretends they don't exist. It must be working; they've not bothered her in years.

- M.V., court jester

Favorites

When the fashionable ladies of Europe began surrounding themselves with the most intelligent and learned men they could find, the Ashen Lady determined that she would have no less than the best for herself. Collecting the most talented poets, scientists, and philosophers she could find in her ranks, her coterie of intellectuals keeps her amused and in good humor even during the worst of times.

Legionnaires in the field resent the lush life of the members of the Lady's Salon, living as they do in relative ease at the Seat of Shadows, but any grumbles the grunts air fall on deaf ears. Reapers for the Iron Legion are paid special bonuses for "discovering" suitable candidates for the Salon, which has led to some comical scenes of Reapers trying frantically to preserve the lives of potential Salon members long enough for these "great" men and women to fall under the Legion's purview.

Few Salon members are ever seen again outside the walls of the Seat of Shadows, and no one knows what happens to Salon members who lose their seats; the popular rumor is that such unfortunates become the next round of seating themselves. The actual membership of this group is unknown, but the rumors persists that Albert Einstein and Arthur Rimbaud are among the stars. Shamans, scholars, philosophers, and all manner of wise men and women surround the Ashen Lady, advising her on important matters as well as entertaining her with the arts.

The Ashen Lady sets great store by her menagerie of minds. Her detractors claim that this Circle is nothing more than her private zoo of pets, kept for her pleasure when they could be working for the good of the Empire. To no one's surprise, the Lady's supporters sing quite a different tale. They speak in glowing terms of the greatest collection of thought to be found in Stygia. The more paranoid among Stygia's conspiracy-theory community suggest that the Legion collects scientists to keep them working for the Lady's own ends; Iron Legion doctors are furiously working on cures for cancers and other illnesses so that the Legion may claim millions of souls that would otherwise belong to the Skeletal Lord.

It is undisputed fact that the Lady's favor can make or break artists who are attempting to establish themselves in the Underworld. As such, membership has become something of a prize for up-and-coming artists in the Hierarchy. More than a few Lemures have crossed Legion boundaries to join the Salon, disregarding their Deathmarks for a chance at the Lady's favor. Surprisingly enough, the other Deathlords have chose to ignore these miniscule losses. Indeed, on occasion a Deathlord seeking favor presents the Ashen Lady with a choice soul to add to her collection. The souls bartered thus, of course, have no say in the matter.

Maelstrom Prediction and Preservation Unit

The Maelstrom Preparation and Prediction Unit (MPPU) is a highly specialized division of the Salon. Comprised mainly of scientists, the MPPU has been charged with discovering everything there is to know about Maelstrom protection, prediction, and diversion.

All Iron Legion Members are specially trained in Maelstrom Emergency Procedures. In particular, the MPPU designs and administers courses in coping techniques, teaching Legionnaires to steel their courage in the midst of the storm-borne chaos. Word is that the training will eventually be extended to the Hierarchy as a whole, as a gesture of good faith from the Ashen Lady to her fellow Deathlords.

The MPPU also employs engineers and architects to buttress existing Shadowlands structures and to design new construction methods to ensure that future buildings are as stable as possible; too many Citadels have been battered into rubble by Maelstrom winds in the past. The procedures MPPU engineers use are similar to those employed in earthquake retrofitting in the Skinlands. If the MPPU is successful, not only will the Legions have plenty of advance notice before the next Maelstrom, but also the storm's resultant destruction and chaos will be minimized. That, at least, is the MPPU's goal.

Communiqués

Although the use of the Embody Arcanos is officially prohibited, the Iron Legion maintains dozens of wraiths who have demonstrated a talent for manifesting across the Shroud. Communicating with the Quick is a topic of special interest to the Ashen Lady, who has been known to mumble offhand remarks about how in her mortal life she was guided by spirits of her ancestors, who came to her on the wind. As such, she would seem to have a vested interest in allowing others to benefit as she did, perhaps in the interest of helping more mortals survive to a ripe old age.

There are any number of powerful Puppeteers and Proctors in the Legion's ranks. Not all of them have offered their services willingly, though many of them prefer servitude over Molation or the other tortures that would otherwise await them if the Legion were to hand them over to the tribunals. Any Iron Legionnaire discovered in the practice of these forbidden Arcanoi is automatically made the target of a "recruitment" for the ranks of the Communiqués. More than one "young" wraith has compared the situation with that of hackers brought on board by the NSA, and in fact, many of the "recruits" do turn and become willing Iron Legion advocates.

Fully fledged Communiqués are at the beck and call of the Ministers, who use them to transmit messages all over the Western world. There's no rhyme or reason to the messages the Ministers send, save that they must be transmitted immediately and without question. A Communiqué who delves too deeply into his work is encouraged to take a vacation, and discouraged gently from being too inquisitive upon his return.

As a reward for excellent service, the Legion sometimes permits Communiqués to perform missions of their own. Generally these bonuses are limited to contacting the wraith's own family and friends; after all, who else does the wraith have any business speaking to? There is one exception to this policy: For purposes of amusement, the Ashen Lady occasionally permits Communiqués to speak through charlatan mediums and fake psychics, exposing a fraud while greatly disturbing the host's

mental state. Many a Victorian séance was “enlivened” by the harmless and casual interference of off-duty Communiqués.

Advocates

Fairness and justice are important concepts in the Iron Legion. The Iron Legion wishes to ensure that everyone gets what they deserve but more importantly, that no innocent person is punished for a crime he did not commit. To aid in the quest for the truth, the Legion established a corps of Advocates from the ranks of the attorneys and judges that have entered the Legion. (What else could you do with hundreds upon hundreds of lawyers?) As often as possible, defendants being tried by members of the Iron Legion are provided with an attorney from the corps of Advocates. Furthermore, the Legion often loans out their lawyers to persons accused of any crime within Stygia itself.

Advocates are generally stationed in Necropoli and serve at the local courts. Sometimes these wraiths hold the positions of magistrates and other court officials. Members of the Advocates corps often were attorneys, judges, officers of court, or other learned scholars during their lifetimes. Those who have been deemed honest enough are allowed to continue in their work after crossing the Shroud. Advocates caught cheating or accepting bribes are promptly carted off to be melted down into something more useful to society – like paperweights.

No one is entirely certain of why the Legion chooses to expend so much energy on the legal system. Many suggest that it is a way to promote the good name of the Iron Legion and to demonstrate goodwill from the Legion to the other loyal members of the Hierarchy. Enemies claim that this is just another attempt by the Iron Legion to control an important Hierarchy function by loading it up with loyal supporters of the Ashen Lady. After all, in Stygia the graveyards may not vote, but they do show up in court.



