

The Sleepless in the Mist

Departing from Thistle Hold, the player party is accompanied by a small group of royal soldiers of the Narugor division. The trio is clad in matching uniforms, patterned in the red and yellow livery of Duke Junio Berakka.

The group is led by the sanguine and jovial sergeant Hollin, who takes great pleasure in poking fun at the two unfortunate privates Jagatas and Donmar - who are being led to their new assignments to serve as watchmen at one of the watchtowers that line the northern edge of the duchy, along the border of the forest Davokar. By how worried Donmar appears to be, and by how vocally Jagatas is complaining, one might think that the assignment might be some sort of penal duty.

Jagatas seems to have recently been demoted from the rank of sergeant for some infraction, and it may be that this assignment is another part of his punishment.

Donmar appears to be fresh out of training and not incredibly bright. He holds numerous superstitions, wildly combining church lectures with nuggets of barbarian taboos and no small measure of old wives tales.

Hollin regales the poor watchmen and the party with harrowing tales of his time as a watchman. "We didn't have moats or palisades back then. We were lucky if we had shoes! You know jakaars really love chewing on boot soles?"

The soldiers use the following statline:



Guardsman
(Based on Argasto's Caravan guards)

Manner: Despite their individual shortcomings, these are professional soldiers and will heed their disciplinary drilling when combat starts.

Race	Human (Ambrian)
Resistance	Ordinary
Traits	Contacts (Ambrian Army)

Accurate 13 (-3), Cunning 7 (+3), Discreet 5 (+5), Persuasive 9 (+1), Quick 10 (0), Resolute 10 (+0), Strong 15 (-5), Vigilant 11 (-1)

Abilities	Long weapons, Shield Fighter
Weapons	Spear 4 (Long), Sword 4, Bow 4
Armor	Scalemail 3
To Hit	+1 (Shield)
Toughness: 15	Pain Threshold: 8
Shadow	Unpolished copper (0 corruption)
Tactics: The soldiers will fighting with spears and shields and try to leverage their advantages by fighting together. If a more chaotic melee erupts, they will switch to swords.	

As they travel along the path, the party passes several of the watchtowers. Every now and then the party encounters a watchman patrolling ("Well met!"), or relaying a message between towers ("Out of my way!").

Where the towers are tightly spaced there are often also palisades, moats, trenches, and earth walls to add to the defense against the darkness of the forest but soon the towers seem to grow less frequent. Some seem to be under construction or have little more than their stone foundations. Others have been destroyed - be it by fire or other means.

Vigilant party members may have spotted the grey-cowled mysterious figures who tend to the posts atop the watchtowers. If asked about them, sergeant Hollin will offer some information, but it'll be noticeable that he chooses his words far more carefully than usual. Jagatas grumbles wordlessly, and Donmar falls silent and pale when the topic is raised.

"They're the Sleepless. They sit at the beacons every day and every night, watching for beasts and things from the forest. They're the duke's... they're Lord Junio's Solution."

If pressed harder on the topic (Persuasive), Hollin will tell of the... contagion that has been sweeping the nation. It came from the War, from the dark things unleashed in the south. Men who would die and rise again, and die and rise again, until there was nothing but crushed bones and butchered flesh and still they would rise...

For a time it seemed the contagion had remained in the old country, but soon it was clear that it was not the case. People who passed might wake again, clawing themselves out of their graves or death shrouds. The church condemns them of course. They're unnatural and steeped in darkness, but... their minds are the same as when they were alive... and it's a shame to waste loyal men..

When the duke was granted the duty to protect the northern border, he immediately started the construction of the watchtowers, but there was the issue of how to man them. Garrisoning 160 towers would have emptied his duchy, unless he could find men that could serve day and night, in all weathers, with no regard for food or water... or sleep.

"That's Junio's Solution. He grants amnesty to the undead and employs them to watch the kingdom's border."

Donmar shudders and prays for the sun.

Several animals will be seen darting across the road, away from the forest.

Some time thereafter, a thick fog will come out of the forest. The party soon loses sight of the nearest towers, and can do nothing but try to stay on the road. The fog is thick like soup and crawls into clothes and armour to chill one to the bone. If examined with Witchsight, the fog will appear impenetrably black, unmistakably unnatural and tainted with deep corruption. And there is something moving in the fog ahead, something burning with a deep blood-like crimson (the aboar). Anyone rolling for corruption while within the fog will roll twice and pick the higher value. (or if that seems too punishing, roll one dice higher - or add +1 to the corruption roll)

While making their way through the fog, the party will come face to face with a gigantic aboar. Startled, the beast grunts and fixes the party with its far-too-intelligent animal eyes. Something glimmers there, a ferocious intellect but also fear. It casts a glance towards the forest. Perhaps evaluating what is the greatest concern - Man or whatever lurks in that fog.

The beast is definitely old, and carries the marks of many clashes. One of its tusks appears to be freshly broken, a streak of blood soaking into the fur of its face and neck. Its back is studded with old broken arrows and lances, long since embedded in its thick hide. Its fur sparkles with clinging ice and frost.

The party's horses will be frightened by the beast, and the soldiers will begin to dismount and ready their spears in case they need to fight the aboar. (Donmar falls out of his stirrups and struggles with his combat gear). If told to stand down, sergeant Hollin won't argue. He has no real interest in risking lives today.

The aboar can be fought, and uses the stats from the core rulebook. However, if left alone the beast will simply leave. It is not the true threat here, and it is fleeing from what is coming.

Whether the party fights the aboar or allows it to go, once it is out of the way the party will be approached by the Rider in Gray.

Donmar will call it a wraith at first, as the rider's gray hood and cloak sparkle in the now frost-laden fog, and their black leather mask gives them an ominous appearance. As they identify the party, they will lower their drawn bow and suck in a laborious breath.

"Well met, sergeant." It is a hoarse female voice.

Hollin will give the rider a curious - almost wary look: "Hail Sleepless. Say, why have you left your post?"

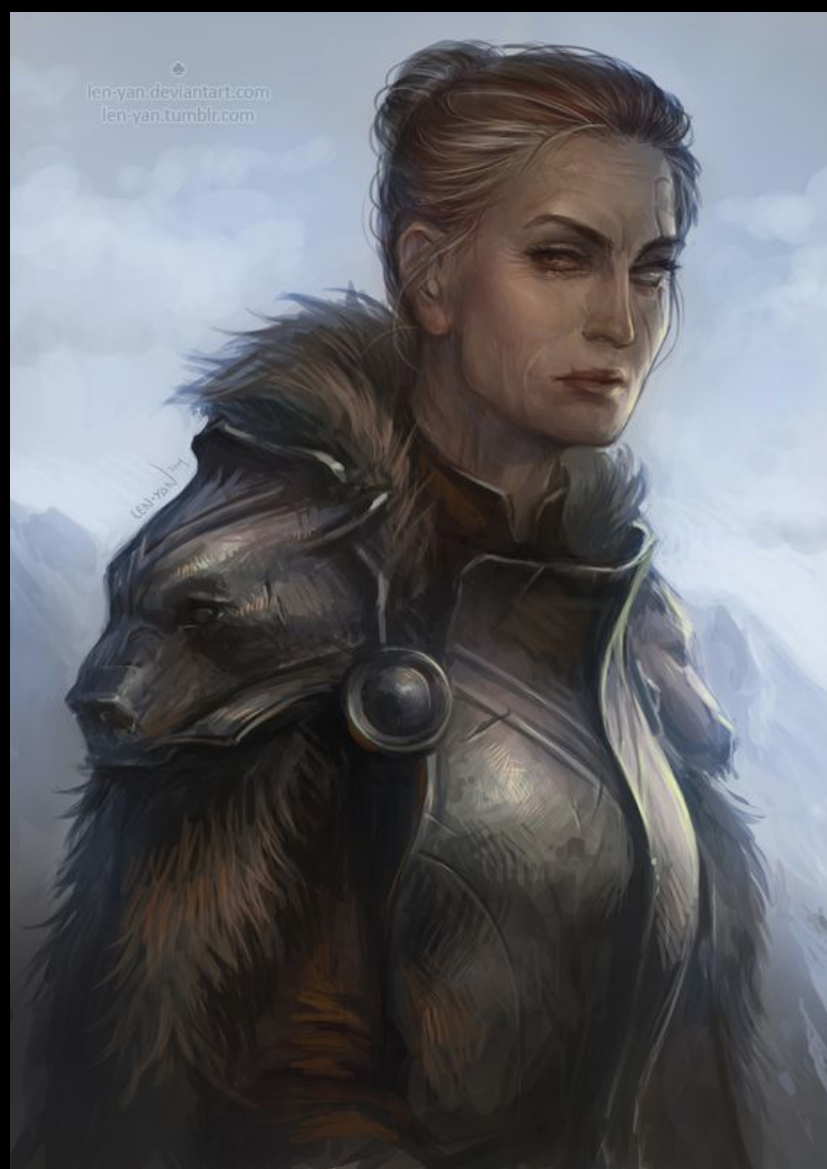
The Sleepless rider will take another strained breath before speaking. "I beg your pardon, sergeant, but I left my tower to seek help. The watchmen of our tornföra have fallen very ill. Myself and my second are the only ones who still stand - for this mist seems to sap the breath out of the living. I would warn you against staying out here, and if you can help I beg that you return to our tower to help our watchmen."

In addition to its very deliberate breathing the sleepless speaks with an archaic dialect of the ambrian tongue. Characters who have come from the old country or who have spent time among many elders of the first generation of ambrian settlers may recognize the dialect as Old Alberetorian.

The Sleepless Rider

The rider's name is Pallas - though Hollin is strict in referring to her only as "Sleepless". She was a lieutenant in the royal army during the great war. She retired shortly after the conquest of Ambria and settled in a small town with her husband. He died 5 years ago, and she followed him shortly thereafter. Sadly, Prios would not take her to His heaven, and she was left to walk the earth.

Hounded out of her town by her fearful former friends, she spent a year evading the attention of the Witchhunters and others, before she heard rumours that Duke Junio was providing amnesty for those undead who were willing to continue to serve the queen. Pallas is one of the longest-serving Sleepless, and possibly one of the most qualified military commanders in Ambria. It's a shame she is dead.



The Sleepless Rider
Lieutenant Pallas Ironheart/Hjärnhjärta

Manner: She is stoic and silent, solemnly performing her duties. However, she remains a brave commander at heart and if the situation calls for it she may step up to rally her men.

Race	Undead (Ambrian)
Resistance	Challenging
Traits	Contacts (Royal Army)

Accurate 10 (0), Cunning 13 (-3), Discreet 9 (+1), Persuasive 12 (-2), Quick 10 (0), Resolute 9 (+1), Strong 7 (+3), Vigilant 10 (0)

Abilities	Leader (adept), Tactician (master), Twin Attack (master)
Weapons	Long bow 4 (precise), Fencing sword 5 (balanced) and sword 4
Armor	Lacquered Silk Cuirass 3 (flexible)
To Hit	-0
Toughness: 10	Pain Threshold: -
Equipment	Map of the area, a wrapped bundle of raw beef, holy symbol of Prios, Mask of the Sleepless, 1D10 thaler
Shadow	Rust-covered iron (thoroughly corrupt)
Tactics: Pallas will use her Leader ability to point out targets (+1D4 damage). She will prefer to use her longbow at range but may leap into the fray to defend her fellows.	

Pallas will lead the party to her tower. It looks very much like most other watchtowers - a tall wooden structure sitting atop a small stone building. It is surrounded by a circular palisade, and the small courtyard has a small storehouse and an adjoined stable.

Just inside the circumference of the palisade there is a low stone wall that seems to be under construction. There are piles of stone ready for addition to the wall, and near the foot of the tower is a pile of darker stones with an almost porous appearance - a dark mineral dotted with red and purple inclusions. These are subtly warm to the touch (though touching incurs 1D4 temporary corruption) and unaffected by frost. [Witchsight: Dark and slick with a foreboding oily blight]

The fog is still dense. So dense that even the top of the tower can hardly be seen.

The watchmen of the tower's tornföra are named Beremar, Godtai, and Segel. There is another Sleepless in the tower, a man who was called Evard in life, but who is now only Sleepless.

When the party arrives, Segel comes out holding a torch above his head - struggling to see in the fog, and standing on unsteady legs. He too is sick, but in the best shape out of the three men.

"*Cough* - Is that you, Sleepless? Did you find help?!"

Entering the cramped stone building, the party can see the poor Beremar and Godtai. One is laying in the lowest of the three bunks in the tower, and the other has been lain on the room's table. They are shivering, and gripped by a deep fever. Their skin is wet, drenched with sweat and warm to the touch. They are burning up. The room smells of vomit.

Segel returns to sit at his bed, cradling a cloth bundle to his chest. [Witchsight: Segel's corner of the room is covered in a dark shadow, fluttering like dazzling heat]

As the Sleepless Rider carefully closes and bolts the door, a small iron bell in the middle of the room starts to chime - disturbed by the yanking of a rope trailing up through a hatch in the ceiling. At its signal, Pallas immediately starts to make her way up to the top of the tower. She simply leaves the party with a request:

"Save them."

----- Below is subject to change, and can easily be tweaked or altered -----

What has been happening?

Beremar, Godtai, and Segel have been collecting stones from a nearby ruin to use in constructing the stone wall around their tower. The group has been very happy to find that some of the stones are hot to the touch, and have been using them to keep warm. Unfortunately these rocks are both steeped in corrupted magic and precious to a number of undead spirits entombed in the ruin.

The ruin is the tomb/prison of an elven forest deity known as Great Lady Frost. Some ancient culture, probably a successor-fragment to the fallen Symbaroum, bound the deity to this location for some unknown purpose. As the Great Lady and her children seek warmth, the tomb is lined with these ever-burning hearth stones to placate her. Now that so many of the stones have been stolen, the Great Lady craves them.

The men are sick from their exposure to the hearth stones. The symptoms are like radiation sickness - skin lesions, hair loss, intense nausea, and many other symptoms. Antidote will not help, but rituals that reduce corruption will. Simply removing the hearth stones will also help, as they constantly expose the poor men to temporary corruption.

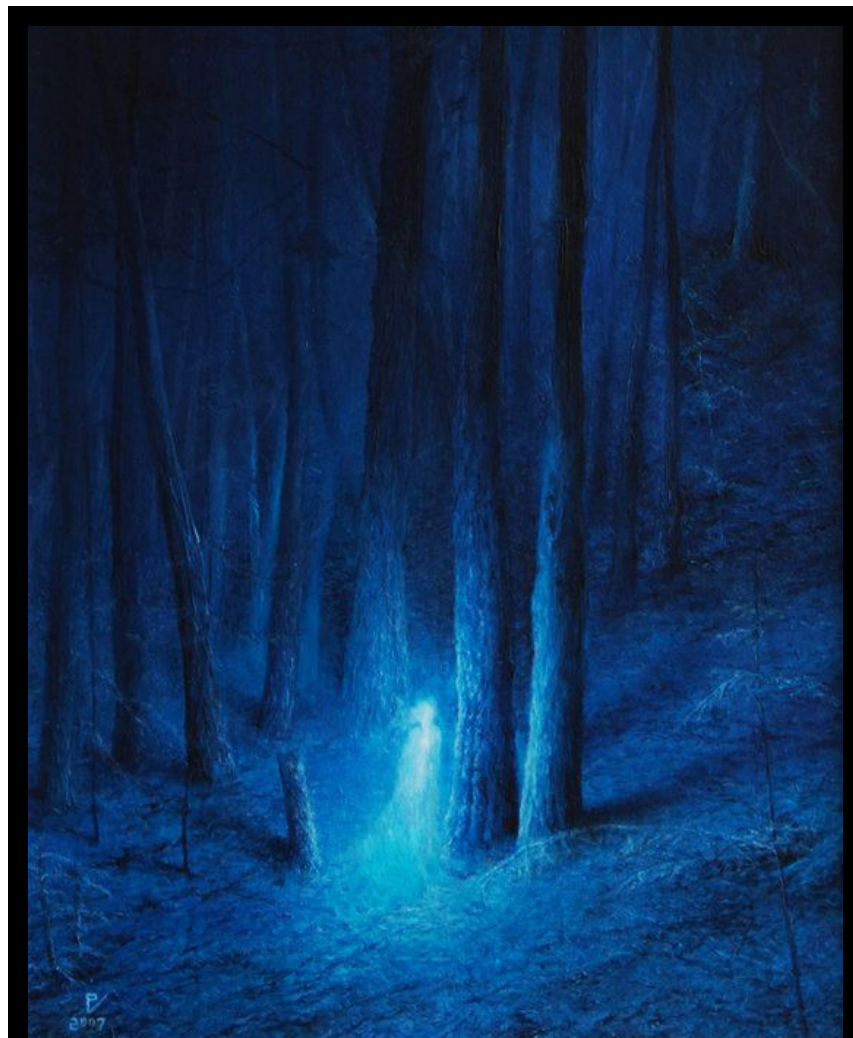
If questioned, Segel will explain where the stones came from, and he can lead the way to the ruin. Inside Segel's precious bundle is a large uncut ruby which beats like a

heart with internal warmth. It is a dark artefact dripping with corruption, and it's the poison seed the Great Lady desires.

As night falls, the courtyard will be bathed in a flickering blue sheen as the first Frostlight descends on the tower. If simply observed, the Frostlight will first approach torches and flames and extinguish them with its frigid presence. Then it will float around the hearth stones and seem to cozy up to them, drawing from their dark heat.

After a while, more Frostlights (Players+2) will start to appear and one (or more if the entire party remains indoors) will enter the tower and attack Segel.

If attacked, the Frostlights will probably not coordinate significantly, though they may make a concerted shift of their attention to seek the warmth of the living.



Frostlight

Manner: Flutters and flickers like a dying flame

Race	Spirit
Resistance	Weak
Traits	Alternate Damage (I), Spirit Form (I), Cold Child
Accurate 10 (0), Cunning 9 (+1), Discreet 11 (–1), Persuasive 5 (+5), Quick 13 (–3), Resolute 15 (–5), Strong 7 (+3), Vigilant 10 (0)	
Abilities	None
Weapons	Touch of death 3, ignores armor, damages Strong
Armor	None, half damage from normal weapons
To Hit	-3
Toughness: 10	Pain Threshold: -
Shadow	Ashen grey with black flakes
Tactics: The frost lights are drawn to heat and suck the strength out of anyone they touch. They do not make any tactical considerations in their hunt for bodily warmth and comfort.	

Cold Child

Monstrous trait unique to Frostlights.

Any character that dies from damage from a Frostlight will temporarily be brought back as the frozen undead host of an unborn spirit.

These frost ghouls persist only for a short time before the ice completely ruins the host, but in that time they will act clumsily to protect or serve their kind. They will not use weapons, but rely on natural attacks.

If the Frostlights are slain, or if the tower's beacon is lit, it will attract Great Lady Frost, a deity of the woods. She may have been a winter elf once, but she has been consumed by corruption and been twisted into a disturbing abomination. She tends to her Frostlight children and her presence is marked by the deep fog that is her domain. As she approaches, the fog will clear as it turns into a thick layer of hoarfrost covering all surfaces.

Great Lady Approaches

During the engagement with the Frostlights, whether the players are engaged in combat with them or watching them suck the life out of Guardsman Segel, the Sleepless will spot something in the mist and sound the warning bell.

Anyone climbing the tower to check it out will soon notice that the fog seems to be clearing - crystallizing - as something approaches from the forest.

At midnight, Great Lady Frost will enter the courtyard.

Great Lady Frost

Great Lady Frost is a mythical being, a story told among the barbarian clans of a powerful spirit - sometimes a deceased legendary queen, sometimes a manifestation of the forest - associated with the spirits of the unborn. In some stories she is a tragic figure who wishes to be nurse to the dead children but cannot give them the warmth they crave as she has been turned into ice. In other stories she is a dark and malicious spirit driven by spite and jealousy towards expecting mothers, who have what she could never have.

Recurring in most of the legends is an aspect of ice, mist, and frost. Many barbarian clans hold the superstition that sudden and unexpected frost is an omen or sign of stillbirth.



Great Lady Frost
Queen of the Stillborn

Manner	Mournful, tending to her dead children.
Race	Spirit/Abomination (Elf)
Resistance	Mighty
Traits	Spirit Form (III), Manifestation (III), Gravely Cold (II), Long-lived

Discreet 10 (0), Quick 11 (-1), Cunning 10 (0), Strong 9 (+1), Accurate 5 (+5), Vigilant 18 (-5), Resolute 16 (-6), Persuasive 7 (+3)	
Abilities	Exceptionally Vigilant III Exceptionally Resolute III
Weapons	Gravely Cold 2 (Paralyzing)
Armor	Only takes damage from Mystical powers and magical weapons, and even then the damage is halved.
To Hit	-1
Toughness: 9	Pain Threshold: 5
Shadow	Deep dark blue, like a bed of cornflowers encased in black ice (thoroughly corrupt)
Tactics: The Great Lady desires only to protect her Frostlight children. Any harm that befalls them will be met with swift retribution.	

Fighting Great Lady Frost

The players are unlikely to be able to slay the Great Lady, and indeed even if she is struck down she will probably rise again at the heart of the forest. It should be reinforced how ruthlessly powerful this forest deity is, and that in some cases it may be best to avoid attracting an abomination's attention.

Negotiating with Lady Frost

The Great Lady is an intelligent creature, though her mind is clouded by her corruption. She has become addicted to the warmth and trickling corruption of the Heated Heart, and wishes it returned to the tomb where her corpse is bound.

As the Great Lady is mad with corruption, any test to communicate with her will suffer -7. This modifier is reduced by every point of corruption the Persuasive character has.

If presented with the Heated Heart, the Great Lady will approach the character holding it but in her spirit form she cannot touch it. She will demand that the heart be taken to her physical body in the ruins.

If a character slays a Frostlight in her presence she will immediately engage that character in combat. She will plunge her ghostly arms into her victim's chest and embrace their heart in a cold embrace.

The Ruin

If the party realizes that Segel's theft of the artefact is what has caused these events, they may order him to lead them to the ruins.

If the Great Lady arrives and demands the heart, the party may be forced to deliver it.

The ruin is a crumbled temple sitting atop a small hill a short walk (20 minutes) from the tower. Little but the foundation and a few rocks marking walls remain to suggest the ruin ever existed. Most of it is being consumed by nature, with several trees growing within the ancient chapel.

At the center of the temple ruin stands a pedestal with a heavy stone bowl. It seems to contain frozen water that someone has chiseled into, possibly to free something (Segel did this, to free the Heated Heart). [Subject to change. Room to hint at backstory.]

The tomb underneath the temple can be reached by clearing some rubble from a staircase.

The great tomb chamber underneath the temple has the Great Lady's physical form (a dessicated husk) bound in chains on what looks like an altar. The alcoves around the chamber hold ancient jars that contain the remains of stillborn children.

If the party was led to the ruin and the chamber by the Great Lady's spirit, she will order them to place the Heart on her body. This will wake the Great Lady's corpse. She will plunge the ruby into her chest, where the malefic stone heart will fuel her blighted form. [Fighting is a bad idea. The wight might just flee and the players have unleashed a grim plague on the land.]

If the Great Lady is restored to physical unlife, she will lose her Spirit Form and damage immunity, but she will gain Regeneration (4) as long as she holds the Heated Heart.

If the party went to the ruin with Segel and found the tomb chamber, they will be attacked by Frostlights. Killing them will prompt the Great Lady's spirit to manifest furiously.

The Heated Heart

A ruby the size of a man's fist, uncut but imbued with a sour magic. Gazing deep into the red crystal reveals that it beats like a heart. The stone is remarkably warm to the touch. Not the dry and stinging heat of a flame but rather the sweaty and clammy heat of a feverish body.

Without the touch of the living, the Heated Heart will slow and cool and become still. If picked up the stone will quicken to match the beat of whoever holds it, and their body will be flooded with warmth - as if their blood was warmed directly by holding this second heart in their hands.

The Heated Heart is an artefact that can be bound with 1 Permanent Corruption.

With every use of the artefact, a character will infuse themselves with the Heated Heart's dark blood. If the artefact is destroyed, the character will gain one point of permanent corruption for every point of Dark Blood.

If a character has even a single point of Dark Blood, any children they conceive will be stillborn and their corpse will not decompose.

Your Heart's Content

1D4 Temp' Corruption. +1 Dark Blood. Special. By sleeping with the ruby clutched to one's chest, a character can allow the artefact to sustain them. The character recovers an additional 1D4 Toughness and will not feel cold, hungry or thirsty for the entire day. At 5+ Dark Blood, the character will not feel any other desires either, becoming apathetic.

Between Heartbeats

1D4 Temp' Corruption. +2 Dark Blood. Free. Clutching the ruby in one hand, the character can act in the time between one heartbeat and the next. Becoming a black blur to all onlookers, the character can either take a move action (does not trigger attacks of opportunity) or make a free attack against an opponent. At the end of this action, the character returns to their original position. At 8+ Dark Blood, the character's heartbeat is permanently slow and heavy, so slow that they take a full round Between Heartbeats, but at the end of the turn the character must roll 1D20. On a roll of 20, the character's heart stops and they are immediately at Death's Door.

Bleeding Heart

Smearing the stone with their blood, an injured character can invite the Heart's Dark Blood to mend their wounds. The character can trade any amount of points of Dark Blood for Toughness, but every point will also give the character 1 permanent corruption. Flesh healed this way will have a dark red hue like a constant bruise, and might raise suspicion.

How it may play out

The players flee: An entirely reasonable response. The players have been dragged into this situation and have no obligation to help these guards who brought their doom upon themselves. The guards will die, and the tower may be destroyed, but Pallas - the Sleepless Rider - will blame the players' party for abandoning them and may pursue them. She might even be able to use her contacts to ruin the party's reputation with the army and Duke Berakka.

Defeating the Spirit of Lady Frost: Banishing Lady Frost's spirit form is merely a temporary solution. Unless the stones are returned to the ruins, the undead will continue to harass the tower.

Restoring the Lady's Heart: If the Heated Heart is returned to the Great Lady, she will escape her jail-tomb. What she does after that is anyone's guess, but her corruption is thorough and the Dark Blood which sustains her will continue to be her curse.

Destroying the Heated Heart: If the Heated Heart is destroyed without giving it to the Great Lady, her physical form will immediately crumble to dust and her link to reality will be severed. Whether this means she is gone forever or that her spirit is free to roam is up to the GM.

Saving the Guards: This is actually fairly trivial - simply throw out the cursed rocks the guards are clinging to for warmth. Give them some hot soup and a cleansing ritual or two and they should be good as new. They may be stuck with a few points of permanent corruption, but they'll live.

NPC Template

Character Name	
Manner:	
Race	
Resistance	
Traits	
Discreet 5 (+5), Quick 11 (−1), Cunning 9 (+1), Strong 18 (−8), Accurate 13 (−3), Vigilant 10 (0), Resolute 10 (0), Persuasive 7 (+3)	
Abilities	
Weapons	
Armor	
To Hit	
Toughness:	Pain Threshold:
Shadow	
Tactics:	