

The HAUNTING of CALROW RUINS

"You can hear them at night when the mist creeps in off the lakeshore, jibber-jabbering like madmen trying to form words. For years they've haunted me, but still I can't fathom what it means, as if some half-formed mind yearns for the power to speak for itself..."

—Ser Paviss, Knight Overwatch of Calrow Ruins

INTRODUCTION

Gibberlings infest Calrow Ruins. When the mists blow in off the shores of Lach Gwyren, snaking through crumbling arches and shattered barbicans, the gibberlings' terrible wailing can be heard for miles. These leering, furry abominations are spawned from captives by an ancient brood mother lurking beneath the ruins. Once imprisoned in a magic tapestry deep within the keep, the brood mother is close to finally escaping thanks to the meddling of a vengeful lady-in-waiting. Amidst a noble feud to reclaim the ruins, the characters are faced with solving the mystery of the gibberlings.

Lady Bridgette Nydaridien wishes to clear her family's ancestral holdings of the monstrosities, and offers the characters land as her vassals should they help her retake the ruins. Her rival, Lord Comsfor Polding, argues that Nydaridien's family didn't have the strength to hold the keep and so a new claimant should be allowed to stake his claim; he offers the characters great wealth should they help him retake the ruins. Whoever they side with, their actions bring them into

**A FANTASY ADVENTURE FOR
4-5 PCS OF 2ND-4TH LEVEL**



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contact with Ser Paviss, a knight who keeps lonely vigil over the keep in the name of his former lord, Lady Nydaridien's father. Yet it is clear Paviss is not right in the head, and it is clear more horrifying secrets lurk in Calrow Ruins than anyone could realize.

BACKGROUND

Calrow Keep was once a bastion of security and justice in a dangerous wilderness. However, three calamities reduced the keep to ruins and paved the way for the rise of the gibberlings.

The first befell the keep nearly a century ago when rampaging horned trolls of the Murkhorn tribe destroyed Calrow's walls in pursuit of adventurers who stole their treasures. Descendants of these horned trolls live to the north in forest caves, plotting the day they can recover the preserved head of the shaman who once led the pack which is displayed in the stateroom (Area 19) of Calrow Ruins as a trophy. Among the trolls' treasures was the *grim tapestry* (Area 12) with the likeness of a hunchbacked, grinning creature in black robes embroidered on its surface. This creature magically trapped within the tapestry is the gibberling brood mother, a twisted, deranged horror of the outer planes. The brood mother feeds on psychic and magical energy—the minds of dead mages and psionists, and the brash emotions of noble men and women, give it power.

The second calamity befell the keep twelve years ago when the ruler of the keep, the widower Baron Ulrich Nydaridien, offended Lord Mattier de Freh of a neighboring province by refusing the hand of Lord de Freh's daughter Arista. Baron Nydaridien, fearful of those who sought to usurp him, had taken to consulting the brood mother in the tapestry; it telepathically warned him of foes both real and imaginary while drinking deep of his fear. Distraught, Arista cast her would-be wedding ring, a band of gold clasping an onyx gem, off the parapets. Gravely offended, Lord de Freh laid siege to the keep. Though Lord de Freh was defeated and beheaded for his treachery, the destruction was so extensive that the Nydaridiens

were forced to vacate the ruined keep.

Gradually, Calrow Keep was reduced to a minimal retinue of servants and a handful of guards led by the inimitable Ser Paviss who had long been in the service to the Baron. Arista de Freh was spared her father's fate and made a lady-in-waiting of House Nydaridien, though she never forgave the Nydaridiens for what befell her father. When repairs on the keep were delayed by battles and matters of governance, the Baron moved his court elsewhere and the tapestry was all but forgotten. That is, until Arista returned to the keep in search of her ring. The guileful brood mother promised Arista her revenge, returning the onyx wedding ring which had slipped between the cracks in the keep's blasted masonry. There it was imbued by foul energies with the power to turn the blood and body of anyone its wearer touched to onyx. In exchange, all Arista had to do was lead the knight Ser Paviss to the tapestry, and so she did one stormy night. Amidst terrible flickering lights, a nightmarish, slug-like creature crawled from the tapestry's embroidery and into Paviss' ear. Arista fled, the knight's dying screams ringing behind her, to seek her revenge on the Nydaridiens.

Two years ago, the tapestry commanded Arista to arrange for the Nydaridiens to return to Calrow. During their visit, a terrible quake shook the surrounding lands and all but collapsed the keep. . Arista was forewarned of the quake by the tapestry, and sought to use the disturbance to end the entire Nydaridien bloodline. Amidst the calamity, vengeful Arista used her ring's power to turn the Baron to onyx, but she was betrayed by its foul magic. Her task complete, Arista had outlived her usefulness and died alongside the Baron she so despised, turned to onyx herself. Her dying sight was the image of the hunchbacked figure stepping from the tapestry into the world. From the shadows came terrible gibbering, jabbering, and wailing as gibberlings broke up from the tunnels below in numbers beyond counting.

CHARACTER HOOKS

You can use any of the following hooks to get the characters involved with Calrow Ruins.

Grim Treasure Hunters. Following legends of either the *grim tapestry* or the *onyx ring*, the characters have traced one or both of these infamous treasures to Calrow Ruins. They may be seeking these items for their own power, as elements in an ongoing campaign, or as part of a mission to destroy corrupting magical artifacts.

Noble's Behest. One of the two nobles approaches the party, asking them to reclaim the keep in their name. Parties of Good-aligned characters are approached by Lady Nydaridien, while more mercenary parties are approached by Lord Polding. What each of these nobles can offer to entice the characters is outlined under their NPC descriptions.

Return to the Keep. One or more of the characters may have survived the quake and the ensuing gibberling massacre that resulted from Arista de Freh's betrayal. Haunted by the horrors they witnessed, the characters take it as a matter of personal honor to vanquish the gibberlings that caused so many they once called friends.

SCALING GIBBERLING ENCOUNTERS

Most of the enemies faced in Calrow Ruins are gibberlings. In general, gibberling encounters should start at a Medium difficulty, but if the gibberlings are not dealt with swiftly (e.g. within 2–3 rounds), a particularly loud racket is raised, or another story event occurs, then more gibberlings enter the fray from other areas of the ruins, increasing the encounter to a Hard difficulty. Likewise, if gibberlings in an area are alerted, the difficulty of any gibberling encounter in that area taking place within 1 hour increases by one step. Use the following tables as a guideline for how many gibberlings equate to an appropriate challenge for your party.

Darkscape Mushrooms

Darkscape mushrooms are marbled grey mushrooms found in the Moat Fissure, Kitchen Court, and Yew Court. They are nature's response to an incursion from the outer planes, and a character proficient in Arcana, Nature, or herbalism kit can identify them and their nature (no check required). *Darkscape* mushrooms can be consumed to cure a creature of gibberslug infestation, and also act as deadly poison if ingested by gibberlings, inflicting 26 (4d10 + 4) poison damage.

NUMBER OF GIBBERLINGS FOR 2ND LEVEL PCs

Difficulty	3 PCs	4 PCs	5 PCs	6 PCs
Easy	2	3	3	4
Medium	3	4	5	7
Hard	5	6	7	9
Deadly	6	7	8	11

NUMBER OF GIBBERLINGS FOR 3RD LEVEL PCs

Difficulty	3 PCs	4 PCs	5 PCs	6 PCs
Easy	3	3	4	6
Medium	5	6	7	9
Hard	7	8	9	11
Deadly	10	11	14	16

NUMBER OF GIBBERLINGS FOR 4TH LEVEL PCs

Difficulty	3 PCs	4 PCs	5 PCs	6 PCs
Easy	4	5	7	8
Medium	7	8	10	12
Hard	9	11	13	15
Deadly	11	14	15	20

ENCOUNTER TABLE

The following encounter table can be used to populate the region surrounding Calrow Ruins and enhance the adventure's themes at the GM's discretion.

ENCOUNTERS

1d10 Encounter

- 1 Horned troll of the Murkhorn Tribe, which always have loathsome limbs due to mutations caused to the tribe by the brood mother in the tapestry long ago.
- 2 2d4 animals like **boar**, **deer**, ducks, egrets, geese, **hawks**, rabbits, or **ravens**. 5% chance of strange behavior due to the influence of the forming gate to the Outer Planes.
- 3 Strange winds carrying sounds of gibbering and mad howling through the trees, across the grasslands, and down the river. NPCs and beasts are unnerved for the next hour, and attempts to command or calm them made with disadvantage.
- 4 2d4 **bandits**—mercenaries employed by Lord Polding—harassing traveling peasants, sharing a liquor flask beneath a hanging corpse, or ominously sharpening axes.
- 5 1d4 **guards** loyal to Lady Nydaridien trading spooky stories over the campfire of the keep's fall and the gibberlings.
- 6 2d4 **commoners** headed south carrying bundles of wood, truffles, or rabbit pelts.
- 7 An easy encounter with **gibberlings** that have escaped beyond the confines of Calrow Ruins.
- 8 Eerie hallucinations plague one or more characters until the next encounter check or sunrise, taking the form of shapes moving in their peripheral vision, the likeness of a screaming face underwater, or the hollow of a tree suddenly seeming to blink at them.
- 9 1d2 **perytors** squabbling over the heart of a recent kill.
- 10 The **ghost** of Arista de Freh hovers momentarily as if trying to warn others of something, but black blood runs from her mouth forming into stones, choking her; she only attacks if provoked or in the presence of someone of the Nydaridien bloodline.

NPCs

Lady Bridgitte Nydaridien

Bridgitte Nydaridien is a proud **noble** in her mid-thirties and the daughter of Baron Ulrich Nydaridien, the same Baron under whose rule Calrow Keep fell into ruins. In addition to reclaiming the keep for her family's honor and legacy—embodied in the ancestral crest of two argent swans addorsed on a field of sable—she also wishes to recover her father's corpse, or at least learn how he died. Bridgitte's personal guard is meager (12 **guards**), just enough to protect her encampment and her bodyguard, Ser Caomhan (**knight**), and must enlist adventurers to claim the ruins in her name. Unfortunately, her coffers have been depleted by paying Ser Paviss and his knights' stipend for keeping watch over the ruins. What she can offer the characters is a dozen acres of arable land each as her vassals. If desperate, she will offer a simple star rose quartz (50 gp) from about her own neck, claiming that it belonged to her father and there may be more in the keep and the characters may keep the gems if they find them.

Alignment: Lawful Good

Bond: Reclaim Calrow Ruins to honor her father's memory and leave a legacy for her family.

Flaw: She'll go to great lengths to cover up her family's role in the downfall of Calrow Ruins.

Ideal: It is the duty of the nobility to look after the welfare of those from lesser birth.

Personality Trait: Does not suffer fools or liars.

Lord Comsfor Polding

A feudal **noble**, Comsfor Polding is the third son of a lord of little importance. Possessed of neither brawn nor charisma, Polding has relied on his cunning ability to figure out what people desire and leverage that to his disadvantage. He is a portly man in his forties, roughly shaven, with a perpetual sneer on his jowls, and ready to offer a false smile that hides a long and vengeful memory. While he is a lord in title, Comsfor owns just a

meager bit of land to the north with no castle on it. The device on his banners—a peryton on a fess argent over gules—was invented by none other than himself after his father and older brothers were slain by perytons. He deems the Nydaridiens incompetent fools, and intends to “liberate” Calrow Ruins from their rule. However, Comsfor Polding only has a small troupe of mercenaries (16 **bandits** and a **bandit captain**) camped at the southern edge of the Oakenfaust wood, and he must hire adventurers to claim the ruins in his name. He has 500 gp in his treasury, though he offers the minimum he thinks they’ll accept (starting at 40 gold split between all adventurers).

Alignment: Neutral

Bond: Claim a castle and surrounding lands for his own to create a legacy for his family.

Flaw: His ambitious eye exceeds his grasp.

Ideal: No one will give us what we do not take for ourselves.

Personality Trait: Jaded and sardonic with a dark sense of humor.

Ser Miel Paviss

Ser Miel Paviss is a lanky **knight** standing head and shoulder above the soldiers under his command. Sunken brooding eyes and a faint yellow scar at the base of his skull are the only physical clues that the knight is controlled by a gibberslug. He served under Baron Ulrich Nydaridien, and both were betrayed by Arista de Freh. One fateful night, Arista led Paviss to the *grim tapestry*, where the aberrant forces within the tapestry reached out and forced a gibberslug inside his skull. Unlike other gibberslug victims, Paviss did not turn into a gibberling. Instead, the unusual gibberslug gained sentience, killed the knight, and took control of his body.

The creature masquerading as Miel Paviss is currently charged by Bridgitte Nydaridien with ensuring the gibberlings stay confined to the ruins and do not infest the lands beyond. He is aided by 4 **guards** who remain loyal to him. The

guards under his command are forgiving of their commander’s oddities but secretly suspect something is wrong. The creature within Ser Paviss is driven by an urge to understand its current state and how it is connected to the gibberlings. To this end, it serves the subtle telepathic commands of the gibberling brood mother and seeks a way to liberate her from the confines of Calrow Ruins. Currently this means luring outsiders to the Keep, and let its horrors fill them with terror and rage, tumultuous emotions that will feed the brood mother until she is powerful enough to gain total freedom from the *grim tapestry*.

Alignment: Neutral Evil

Bond: Understand the gibberlings that occupy Calrow Ruins—what motivates them, why they gibber at night, and where they came from.

Flaw: Can’t resist setting others on edge, playing on fears, or pitting them against each other.

Ideal: This mortal flesh is impure and deserves to be remade in the image of something greater.

Personality Trait: Ser Paviss remembers those who died in the gibberling massacre, and he occasionally suffers a twitch while suppressing this memory.

CALROW RUINS

Calrow Ruins overlooks Lach Gwyren, a freshwater lake blanketed by fog and ringed by poplars, aspens, and cottonwoods. The keep’s disrepair is evident from even a mile away. A moat was dug around the portion of the keep not buttressing the lake. The moat was filled by channels connected to the lake, but the earthquake two years ago caused the moat to drain. This left behind a ditch with only shallow water that becomes a muddy mire after rains. A stone bridge spans the moat leading to the gatehouse, however it was broken in Lady Nydaridien’s flight from the keep to prevent the gibberlings from following.

THE OUTER BAILEY

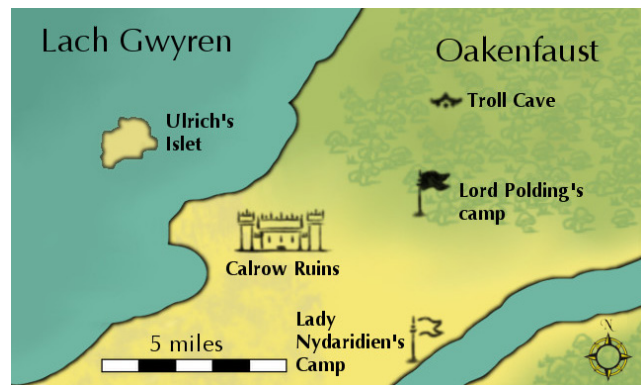
Calrow Ruins' outer bailey is the only way in or out of the keep without navigating Lach Gwyren. A pair of guards, Hamson and Glamock, stand futile watch over the shattered barbican leading into the outer bailey. These guards are loyal to Ser Paviss, though their time in and around the ruins has warped their minds toward paranoia. Both Hamson and Glamock believe they're fulfilling critical duties in guarding the barbican and cannot be convinced otherwise. Hamson, in particular, believes that the horned trolls are massing for a raid on the keep, and he demands anyone wishing to pass prove they're not trollish collaborators (for example, by demonstrating they don't regenerate wounds). Glamock, on the other hand, believes the keep and surrounding lands are cursed and encourages characters to turn back for their own good... unless Glamock realizes a cleric is among them, in which case he is keen to invite the cleric (and just the cleric) inside to negotiate with his commander, Ser Paviss.

Exploring the Outer Bailey

The outer bailey is where the peasants serving the Nydaridien family once dwelled. Massive boulders, now overgrown with moss and artistically engraved with runes by the keep's former occupants, are scattered across the grounds. Ruins of workshops, stables, livestock stalls, granaries, and servants' quarters occupy much of the outer bailey.

Meeting with Ser Paviss

Ser Paviss is brooding and distant, apparently occupied with his grim duty of standing watch over a ruined keep, but will meet with the characters to provide them with information (and deliberate misinformation) about what they can expect within the keep. During this meeting, he attempts to ascertain as much as he can about the characters while giving away as little about his true nature as possible. Characters conversing with him may make a DC 11 Wisdom (Insight) check to learn one of the following about Ser



Paviss: his Bond, Ideal, Flaw, or Personality Trait.

Ser Paviss knows the following:

- ▶ Some gibberlings have the vague likeness of former servants or knights. They have raided the garrison, and are armed. (True)
- ▶ Gibberling activity is confined to within the walls of the ruins thanks to the efforts of Ser Paviss' guards and the moat. (False)
- ▶ A general layout of the castle, including the main areas the Garrison wing, the Great Hall, the Kitchen wing, and the Keep. He also knows about the postern entrance. (True)
- ▶ There are no other hazards or monsters in the ruins besides gibberlings. (False)

METHODS OF ENTRY

Bridge

This stone bridge spans 20 feet, supported by three pillars rising from the muck with arches forming beneath it. Razorvine crawls up the edges and threatens to spill over the stone railings. The last ten feet of the bridge are broken, ostensibly to keep the gibberlings inside. Characters jumping across this gap or climbing up from the moat below, enter the gatehouse (Area 10).

Moat Fissure

Murky water about 2 feet deep is all that remains of the moat. A PC proficient in Arcana, Nature, or the herbalism kit who searches this area will discover a cluster of 3 *darkscape* mushrooms.

Exploring the moat area outside the cellars (Area 4) reveals a narrow fissure in the stone leading to the cellars, mostly hidden by

overgrown moss that a Small creature could squeeze through. The fissure can be widened to allow Medium creatures to squeeze through by dealing 30 points of bludgeoning damage, damage from a pick, force damage, or thunder damage. However the noise created by such activity will attract gibberlings, raising the difficulty of encounters in the cellars by one step.

Postern

Exploring the perimeter of the keep on the lake side reveals a concealed postern entrance on the northwestern side, disguised via an optical illusion created by masterful stone-laying so it is only visible when viewed from within 60 feet. This narrow passage only permits creatures through in single file, leading into what was once the garrison (Area 8).

AREA DESCRIPTIONS

1. Arming Room

Once used to store equipment used to defend against a siege, this chamber is mostly empty, filled with broken ladders, leaking barrels of oil, heavy rocks, nets, etc. The oaken double doors leading into the garrison court (Area 9) are intact. An old but still functioning ballista (900 pounds) rests in the western end of the room with six ballista bolts stacked against the wall (40 pounds each). Aiming, loading, and firing the ballista each require one action.

Ranged Attack—Ballista Bolt: +5 to hit, range 120/480 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (3d10) piercing damage.

The gibberlings in the base of the armory tower (Area 2) will attack this room if they hear loud sounds or see bright lights coming from it.

2. Armory Tower

A medium **gibberlings** encounter awaits here, though these gibberlings are equipped with scraps of armor granting them an AC of 14, as well as handaxes and greatclubs.

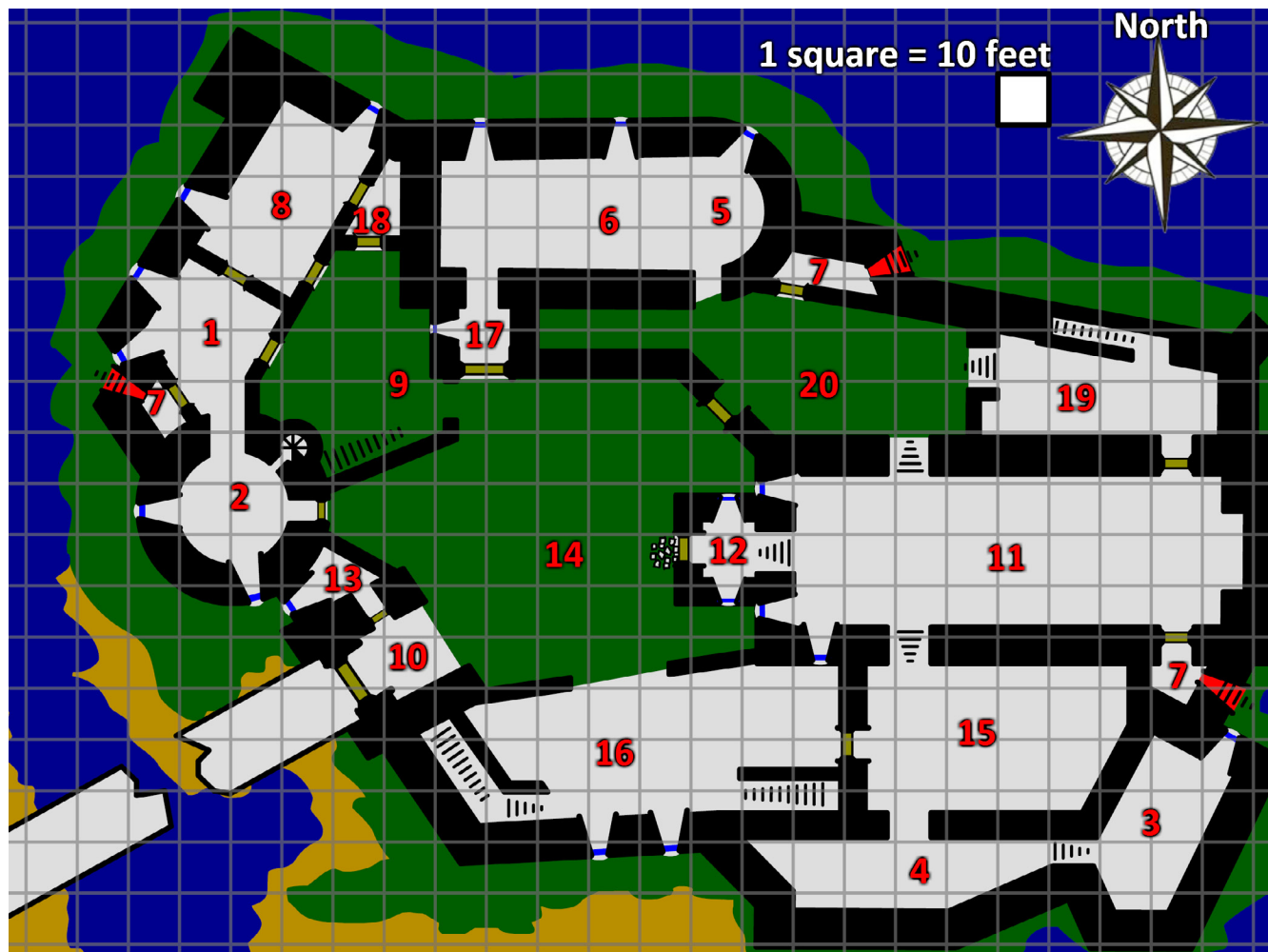
Melee Attack—Greatclub: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

They employ slightly more advanced tactics than other gibberlings, throwing their handaxes from behind cover before charging into melee en masse. When the fighting starts, a “runner” gibberling begins scrambling up the spiral stairs (difficult terrain); if it reaches the top of the tower (90 feet of spiral stairs above), it begins screeching, alerting any gibberlings in alerting any gibberlings in Areas 1, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, and 16.

The armory was located at the base of this watchtower, and a few shields, handaxes, maces, and shortwords may be recoverable. Severe damage to the upper parts of the tower have scattered chunks of stone large enough for Small creatures to gain three-quarters cover behind. Spiral stairs lead up to the top of the tower, though they are broken in two places creating 5 foot gaps; while jumping these with a running start is easy for most characters, the stone is unsteady and a DC 15 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check is required to safely distribute one’s weight after landing otherwise a large chunk of the stairs falls out, dealing 11 (2d10) bludgeoning damage to any creatures below, widening that gap to 10 feet, and leaving the character dangling above a precipitous drop. If the check is failed by 5 or more, the character falls. From the top of the 40-foot high watchtower, clear lines of sight are possible across the garrison court (Area 9), inner bailey (Area 14), kitchen court (Area 16), yew tree court (Area 20), and the surrounding lands.

3. Breeding Grounds

Low steps from the cellars (Area 4), as well as a fissure in the moat, lead to this low-ceilinged root cellar. The floor is flooded with water and a thin layer of slippery pond scum, causing all of the chamber to be difficult terrain. The only natural light comes from the fissure and a solitary high window. However, it is a wholly alien place now, with strange living sacs of semi-transparent flesh and undulating fur holding humanoids in



a variety of states of transformation from human (or dwarf, elf, or halfling) into gibberling. Bloody fur seems to grow from the walls like moss, and a whispering jibber-jabber sets the hairs on the back of the neck on end. Characters who spend at least 1 minute in this room or who investigate any of the gibberling “breeding” sacs must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw or be affected by the confusion spell for up to 1 minute. Affected creatures jibber-jabber for the duration, quietly at first, but grow gradually louder. Crossing this room without bumping into any sacs requires a group DC 8 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check; if any character fails, a medium **gibberlings** encounter ensues as newly-spawned gibberlings tear free from the fleshy sacs in a frenzy of claw and fur.

4. Cellars

Wine and ale, most soured, are stored here in large oak casks. An easy **gibberlings** encounter awaits here, though they lurk in the shadows attempting to ambush characters entering. A life-like black onyx “statue” of an imperious young woman with a look of shock on her face staring at her hand missing its ring finger stands before an open secret door on the west wall. This statue is the body of Arista de Freh whose abuse of the powers of the *onyx ring* destroyed her. The fate of the *onyx ring* is left for the GM to decide. The secret alcove apparently once held a tapestry judging by the hooks on the wall (the *grim tapestry*). On the ground is a scabbard of exceptional quality (25 gp) bearing some minor noble crests on its surface; a DC 12 Intelligence (History) check recognizes the crests as belonging to Ser Paviss’ line. The scabbard fell when Arista betrayed him.

5. Undercroft

This unfinished earthen-floor room was meant to be an expansion of the crypt, however the quake toppled the keep and the resulting rubble completely cut it off from crypt (Area 6). In addition, the quake opened up a fissure to the infinite darkness below. 4 **swarms of insects** (gibberslugs) dwell in this room, ferociously attacking anything that enters but not pursuing creatures into Area 20 if it is daylight. A character hit by their bite must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be afflicted by gibberslugs (see the **gibberling brood mother** description).

6. Crypt

When the keep above collapsed, the eastern half of the Nydaridien family crypt was buried in rubble. Several sarcophagi have been cracked, however, revealing treasures buried with the skeletons (4 art objects worth 25–50 gp each). Here, the **ghost** of Arista de Freh habitually berates the corpses of Nydaridien nobility for thinking themselves better than her and for giving birth to the “pompous Baron Ulrich and his simpering mule of a daughter.”

If not already hostile towards the characters, she requests they bring her Lady Nydaridien’s head so she can finally give her father justice and go to her peace. Characters conversing with the ghost may attempt a DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) or Intelligence (Religion) check to realize that the ghost actually feels guilty for someone she betrayed and only repairing the effects of her betrayal will put her to rest.

Outright rejection of her offer or hostility causes the **ghost** to attack the offending character with her Possession trait as a medium difficulty **skeletons** encounter emerges from the crypts (use the Scaling Gibberling Encounters table); once expelled from a possessed character she vanishes to let the skeletons fight for her.

7. Garderobes (toilets)

These stone toilets have narrow slightly slick shafts leading down 30 feet to outside the castle

walls into the moat or lake, depending on location. They could be used as a means of escape or covert entry by particularly bold characters, though Medium-sized characters will need to squeeze. Ascending or descending without ropes requires a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

8. Garrison

A barricade of spiked shields encircling the postern is all that remains of the defender’s last stand during Lady Nydaridien’s flight from the keep. This is where the soldiers’ barracks once were located. A few skeletons impaled on spears are all that remain of the defenders’ last stand. The oaken double door leading to the garrison court (Area 9) has been hewn through, along with the door to the arming room (Area 1) as if by a frenzied mob of attackers.

9. Garrison Court

A hard **gibberlings** encounter awaits here, though during the day the gibberlings are partially burrowed into the exposed earth where they sleep clumped in one or more heaps of writhing fur.

This courtyard, with its ivy-covered walls, is littered with sparring dummies of wood and straw, as well as signs of battle like broken spears, chunks of stone debris, and torn banners. Stairs to the south of the courtyard lead up to the top of the armory tower (Area 2), but were broken in the middle by large stones falling from the damaged tower.

10. Gatehouse

The old gate is jammed shut by a tangle of rotting fur and flesh from dozens of gibberlings which were caught within the gear mechanism during the castle’s evacuation. During the day, the fur and flesh seems to pulse and occasionally a blinking eye or writhing arm can be seen within it grasping out slowly in the direction of living beings. However, at night the gate becomes more dangerous, taking the form of a living wall of flesh and limbs covered with vaguely human faces. Treat it as an easy **gibberlings** encounter

with all the gibberlings' hit points added together into the same pool, but a speed of 0. Attacking the wall causes it to scream loudly as it fights back, alerting any gibberlings in Areas 2, 9, 10, 13, and 14. The wooden gate has AC 19, hp 30, and resists the first 15 points of damage from any source.

There are a few ways to bypass this hazard besides combat:

- ▶ The living wall of gibberlings can be charmed or tricked into lifting the gate it's fused with using its many limbs either through magic or by characters disguised as a gibberling.
- ▶ *Darkscape* mushrooms are poisonous to the living wall of gibberlings as well. If killed through poisoning, the living wall dies in a bloody convulsion, but not before several human arms extend from it and turn the mechanism, opening the gate.
- ▶ The gate is shaded from direct sunlight exposure by the overhang of the gatehouse, but the living wall detests sunlight. If characters expose it to sunlight, the living wall attempts to climb up the gate into the gap in the walls where it will be shaded, and in so doing raises the gate with it.

11. Great Hall

This massive feast hall is dominated by a long table and a masonry hearth on east wall above which rests the head of a horned troll, a peryton, and a brown bear. The west passage leads into what was once the foyer but is now where the *grim tapestry* (Area 12) is kept; hides of dripping flesh and fur hang from the arch like a grotesque curtain.

Six life-like onyx "statues" of knights stand beside the table, protecting a life-like "statue" of the Baron who is staggering backward with a look of terror while reaching for his sword. Close examination of the Baron's eyes reveals the trapped image of Arista de Freh in them as he saw her at the moment of his death. The ghost of Arista de Freh makes a fleeting appearance, circling the Baron with a vindictive glare before

vanishing through the north wall. If the characters have been hostile with the **ghost** before or are in the employ of Lady Nydaridien, then the onyx "statues" animate as **animated armor**, two animating per round. Alternately, if it is daytime and the brood mother is trapped in the tapestry, black vapors stream from Area 12, animating two "statues" at a time.

12. Grim Tapestry

This small chamber was once the foyer to the great hall (Area 11), but the entrance from the inner bailey (Area 14) was barricaded by the Baron in an act of desperation, then further barricaded by gibberling and humans corpses, cutting it off completely from the inner bailey. Any character peering into this room through one of the arrow slits in the inner bailey witnesses an illusion of unrelenting horror, requiring the character to make a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of the tapestry for the next three rounds and scream for the duration, alerting the gibberlings in Area 14.

The *grim tapestry* hangs against a wooden board erected in the center of this chamber, with withered corpses of spellcasters and psionics the brood mother has drained, hoping to gain the power it needs to break free of the tapestry completely. The tapestry depicts a grey-cloaked hunchback with long curling claws, seething white eyes, a hideous grin, and a face that seems to shimmer and blur as one views it from different angles. It radiates abjuration and conjuration magic if viewed with detect magic.

At night, the **gibberling brood mother** is freed from the tapestry, and is accompanied by a medium **gibberlings** encounter. A protection from evil and good cast on the tapestry compels the brood mother to return to being trapped inside it until the next night, though she may now animate it as described below.

During the day, the brood mother is unable to manifest in physical form, but she can animate the tapestry as a *rug of smothering* that has the following additional trait:

- ▶ When reduced to fewer than half hit points, as a reaction the brood mother can turn the rug into a cloud of black vapor that streaks to the breeding grounds (Area 3) or stateroom (Area 19) at fly speed 40 ft. While in this form, the rug cannot damage others or be damaged.

13. Guard Room

A one-legged **gibberling** wearing a sallet helm and wielding a spear paces about in this room jibber-jabbering, occasionally stopping to gnaw on its fingers or the bloody stump of its missing leg. This gibberling, once a guardsman who colluded with Arista, is oblivious of other creatures unless they try to attack it. The northeastern wall bears an inscription as if carved hastily with a dagger: *Forgive me. She has betrayed us. My fate is—*.

14. Inner Bailey

The inner bailey is filled with ruin and decay. The grass is dead and riddled with earth mounds. Debris from the collapse of the upstairs keep litters the northern section of the bailey. A layer of mist lightly obscures the bailey in the evening and early morning.

A hard **gibberlings** encounter awaits here. During the day they're burrowed just below the earth where they sleep so that they're not visible until a character is within 5 feet; if damaged but not killed, a gibberling screams and wakes the others. At night they're cavorting, wailing, wrestling, digging, smashing, and scavenging.

15. Kitchen

What was once a cherished part of the keep has become a cesspit of foul concoctions and jars full of writhing gibberslugs and preserved gibberslug husks. The tables drip with oozing, pustulant grey flesh. Among the jars is a bloating floating head which awakens if charm magic is used on it; the head is left as an open-ended tool for the GM to use as they see fit; perhaps it belongs to an NPC with whom the characters are familiar!

A medium **gibberlings** encounter lurks in the kitchen, scouring cupboards, gazing fixedly at gibberslug jars, or fighting over scraps of food. Their preferred method of attack is improvised throwing of various things in the room, including gibberslug jars.

Gibberslug jar. Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, range 20/60 ft., one target. Hit: 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution save or be infested by gibberslugs (see the **gibberling brood mother**).

16. Kitchen Court

What was once a lovely courtyard replete with an herb and rose garden has been absolutely demolished by the collapse of the servants' quarters above. Much of the stone appears to have liquefied and then re-hardened, with humanoid skeletons trapped within the stone. There are two bizarre life-like onyx "statues" of maid servants poised in horrific agony on the west side of the courtyard, servants who crossed Arista during her betrayal. Stairs to the west lead up to the top of the gatehouse (Area 10), while stairs to the east lead up to servants' quarters which were mostly demolished by the quake.

A character proficient in Arcana, Nature, or the herbalism kit who searches this area will discover a cluster of 3 *darkscape* mushrooms.

A **gibbering moulder** lurks at the bottom of the 20 foot well and is responsible for the destruction above. When it senses creatures within 60 feet, it comes to the surface just out of sight and begins gibbering, sounding as if a soft voice is speaking unintelligibly from the well. Once creatures are subjected to its Gibbering trait, the moulder emerges to use Blinding Spittle and attempts to grab a weak character and drag them down the well, the walls of the well liquefying into a horrific scene of blinking eyes that make climbing impossible.

17. Oratory

This quiet prayer room echoes with unintelligible ghostly voices. Clerics and paladins intuitively understand that they can use Channel Divinity to make the voices louder and intelligible, revealing a cryptic warning: *“Beware the betrayer who begets betrayer. The undying mother will truly end once her child is redeemed by the darkscape.”* This refers to Arista betraying Ser Paviss, hinting that Ser Paviss can be freed from the sentient gibberslug (allowing him to truly die) by feeding him a *darkscape* mushroom, an event which also releases Arista’s spirit.

18. Oubliette

A tiny prison cell with a single 5-foot wide grate on the floor echoes with piteous moans. Light cast down the grate reveals an old man in tatters who shields his face at the bottom of the oubliette. He identifies himself as Dellard (**commoner**), former castellan of the keep. His mind is mostly gone; he suffers memory gaps and violent fits of jibber-jabbering like the gibberlings. Closer examination of the man in bright light reveals his eyes are black, his hands crooked, his forearms covered in gruesome scars, his facial features slightly squished, and he has a wild black mane of hair and beard uncharacteristic for a man of his age.

The Baron imprisoned Dellard when he criticized him for refusing Arista as his wife. Arista secretly offered to free him, but when he refused, she threw a jar of gibberslugs down on him to “make use of him one way or another.” Multiple gibberslugs infested Dellard but he tore them out with his bare teeth, and is now immune to the gibberslugs. Dellard can prove a helpful guide if rescued; however, if Dellard succumbs to a gibberling’s Gibber trait, instead of becoming frightened he is affected by the *confusion* spell for 1 minute.

19. Stateroom

Lavishly decorated with oil paintings, statues, and smashed ivory figurines (five pieces each worth 30 gp are salvageable), this room was

meant to impress visiting aristocrats. The room now impresses adventurers with a grizzly scene: dozens of shattered skeletons, covered with dried gore, as well as three life-like onyx “statues” poised in the middle of terrified combat. Where the person they were protecting should be is a pile of onyx dust (50 gp) that was once the Baron’s cousin. The onyx statues include the Baron’s brother and two knights who were betrayed by Arista. A *detect magic* spell cast on one of the two intact oil paintings (200 gp each) or one of the three whole statues (500 gp each) in this room reveals they are each enchanted by abjuration and necromantic magic—a *glyph of warding* that triggers *Evard’s black tentacles* if a creature tries to remove or tamper with an oil painting or statue.

The **ghost** of Arista de Freh appears fleetingly in this room, necrotic energy crackling from her as she broodingly floats through the south wall to the center of the room and vanishes into the floor.

Stairs from here lead up to the ramparts.

20. Yew Tree Court

This once-beautiful courtyard was built around an old sacred yew tree. The tree is now sickly, and pestilent black sludge bubbles and gurgles around its base. Dozens of withered gibberslug husks lie scattered about the courtyard, their decomposition forming the odiferous black tar. A DC 20 Intelligence (Nature) check or a *detect poison or disease* spell cast on the yew tree reveals the gibberslugs are corrupting into some form of aberration, and if not saved or destroyed within 5 days, will become a **roper**.

The black sludge is effectively a **black pudding** with 42 hit points, without a climb speed, and without the ability to Split as a reaction. It does not attack unless a character attacks it first or steps in it.

The collapse of the keep littered rubble around the courtyard’s north end, where a staircase climbs to nowhere (where the noble family’s quarters once were). The damage also caused a gap in the northeast wall to drop into an old unfinished section of the castle’s undercroft

(Area 5); a trail of black slime leading down into the darkness.

A character proficient in Arcana, Nature, or the herbalism kit who searches this Area will discover a cluster of 3 *darkscape* mushrooms.

CONCLUSION

If the characters perish, are transformed into gibberlings, or retreat for more than a month, then the gibberling brood mother accumulates enough power to break entirely free of the *grim tapestry*, leading a horde of her foul children to wreak havoc in the countryside.

If the characters liberate Calrow Ruins from

the gibberlings and slay the gibberling brood mother, the threat is vanquished. A conflict may form between Lord Polding and Lady Bridgitte Nydaridien as to whom will claim the keep, and the characters may become involved for either side, or perhaps decide to establish the keep as their own stronghold.

Further adventures await: the characters may be forced to seek out the Murkhorn trolls for the secret of how to destroy the *grim tapestry*, or to face the troll clan if the brood mother managed to escape and consolidate its power among the trolls. They may scour the caverns beneath the ruins for the lost *onyx ring*, or sealing a forming breach to the outer planes beneath Calrow Ruins.



MONSTER INDEX

Gibberling

XP 50

CR 1/4

Chaotic Neutral Small aberration

Initiative: +2

DEFENSE

AC: 12

hp: 9 (2d6 + 2)

OFFENSE

Speed: 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

Melee Attack—Mace, Shortsword, or Handaxe: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage.

STATISTICS

Str 13 (+1)

Dex 14 (+2)

Con 12 (+1)

Int 5 (–3)

Wis 7 (–2)

Cha 8 (–1)

Languages: –

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 8

TRAITS

Gibber: When in a group of 10 or more, gibberlings collectively cause creatures within 100 feet to become frightened unless they succeed on a DC 9 Wisdom saving throw. The fear lasts until the gibberlings can no longer be seen or heard. Once a creature makes its save it cannot be affected by this feature for 24 hours.

Overrun: A gibberling does not provoke opportunity attacks when it moves out of an enemies' reach.

Sunlight Sensitivity: While in sunlight, the gibberling has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ECOLOGY

Environment: temperate, subterranean

Organization: Horde (10–500)



Gibberling Brood Mother

XP 200

CR 1

Chaotic neutral Medium aberration

Initiative: +2

DEFENSE

AC: 12

hp: 52 (8d8 + 16)

OFFENSE

Speed: 30 ft., burrow 5 ft.

Melee Attack—Multiattack: The gibberling brood mother makes two bite attacks.

Melee Attack—Bite: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage, and the target must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be afflicted by gibberslugs.

Ranged Attack—Gibberslug Spit: +4 to hit, range 30 ft. one target. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) acid damage, and the target must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be afflicted by gibberslugs.

STATISTICS

Str 14 (+2), **Dex** 14 (+2), **Con** 14 (+2), **Int** 11 (+0), **Wis** 12 (+1), **Cha** 8 (–1)

Languages: telepathy 60 ft.

Senses: darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

TRAITS

Gibberslugs: A creature afflicted with gibberslugs has one round in which fire can be applied to the place where the slug burrowed, killing the slug. If the slug is not removed, the creature takes 2 (1d4) damage at the end of its turn each round until it is reduced 0 hit points at which point the slug reaches its brain. A lesser restoration spell kills a gibberslug, as does eating a *darkscape* mushroom. A creature reduced to 0 hit points by a gibberslug drops into a nightmarish coma for 1d20 + 4 hours during which it undergoes a horrific transformation into a gibberling. It can only be awakened from its catatonic state with remove curse or greater restoration, at which point the creature is dying.

Sunlight Sensitivity: In sunlight, the gibberling brood mother has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ECOLOGY

Environment: Temperate, subterranean

Organization: Solitary, leading gibberling horde