

Adventure Background

Deep within the arid heart of the Pommel, an ancient evil stirs—a malevolent force born from the twisted ambitions of a deranged mind. This abomination, known only as the **Centaur**, was the result of a horrific experiment by the infamous **Dr. Frantisek Markov**. Unlike his usual grotesque creations, this being was a fusion of human and beast: a gaunt, skeletal horse's body with a human head and arms grafted grotesquely onto its neck. It defied the usual mental degradation that afflicted Markov's other experiments, possessing a cunning intellect that grew sharper with each meal of living flesh.

Curious about the Centaur's heightened intelligence, Markov released the creature onto his island of Markovia, where it survived by hunting and feasting on live prey. As time passed, it became clear that the Centaur's intelligence waned between meals, forcing it to constantly seek fresh kills to sustain its intellect. A dark alliance soon formed between the Centaur and a group of **Broken Ones**, twisted creatures drawn to its terrifying presence and cruel leadership.

When the Mists engulfed Markovia, the Centaur and its followers were transported to **Nova Vaasa**, specifically to the dense, forbidding forest known as the **Beastwood**. No longer under Markov's watchful eye, the Centaur sought to establish dominance over humanity. However, the people of Nova Vaasa, horrified by its appearance, attacked it on sight. Forced into hiding, the Centaur turned to consuming human flesh, which triggered a surge in its intelligence far beyond its prior state. The Beastwood became its hunting ground, and its alliance with the Broken Ones grew stronger. The Centaur, now a predator of humans, began to see itself as more than just a beast—it became a conqueror.

The Call of Darkness

One fateful day, a mysterious voice beckoned the Centaur from the eastern reaches of Nova Vaasa, drawing it to the barren, desolate region known as the **Pommel**, Nova Vaasa's southernmost wasteland. Compelled by the voice, the Centaur and its followers journeyed out of the forest and across the vast, scorching plains, eventually arriving at a towering mesa—a natural monument riddled with cave systems.

Inside this mesa lay an ancient, forsaken power: a dark vestige imprisoned within an **Amber Sarcophagus**. The vestige, radiating malice and promises of unimaginable power, manipulated the Centaur, bending its will with dark promises. In return for its servitude, the Centaur was gifted arcane knowledge, powerful enchantments, and magical abilities beyond its wildest dreams. The vestige also whispered of a secret weapon—an insidious toxin that could be used to incapacitate its enemies.

Following the vestige's instructions, the Centaur tainted a natural spring near the mesa, contaminating it with a potent paralyzing agent derived from the **Cats' Paw Cactus**. The spring became a tool of the Centaur's dark ambitions. To spread its influence, the Centaur ordered the

Broken Ones to disguise themselves as priests and roam the countryside, delivering jugs of this paralyzing water to unsuspecting villages. Once the villagers were incapacitated, the Centaur and its followers would descend upon them, feasting on their flesh and abducting survivors for their sinister rituals.

The Rise of the Goblyns

Under the vestige's guidance, several of these abducted villagers underwent a horrifying transformation into **Goblyns**—grotesque, servile creatures bound to the Centaur's will. Unbeknownst to the Centaur, these Goblyns were also loyal to the true puppet master behind its rise to power: the dark vestige known as **Shami-Amourae**, the Lady of Delights. Manipulated by this ancient entity, the Centaur continues to amass power and servants, all while growing ever more dependent on the vestige's whispered promises.

Now, the Centaur's ambitions have reached a new height. It plans a large-scale assault on the town of **Arbora** during the **Night of Dark Deeds**—a night when the boundaries between the Material Plane and the Mists blur, and the land is shrouded in darkness. On this night, the Centaur intends to slaughter the townsfolk while also bringing some of them back to the mesa to expand its growing army of Goblyns.

Themes and Content Warnings (Session Zero Checklist)

- **Themes:**
 - Horror
 - Body Horror
 - Weird West
 - Mystery
 - Desert/Grasslands Survival
 - **Content Warnings:**
 - Body horror (grotesque transformations, mutations)
 - Blood and Gore
 - Paralysis/Restraint
 - Kidnapping
 - Harm to children (including death)
 - Animal death
 - Starvation/Thirst
 - Severe weather
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Overview for Players:

Your characters are tasked with saving the town of Arbora from an evil entity growing in strength within the deserts that surround the settlement. You must stop the Centaur's nefarious plans before it's too late, or the town, and its innocent children, will be lost to darkness.

Strong Start:

- **Have players introduce their characters:** Suggest they establish connections to one another to foster strong roleplay.
- **Describe the desert's eerie atmosphere:** Begin with a tense scene to set the mood of desperation and foreboding.
- **Set the stakes early:** Make it clear that time is running out, and failure will have catastrophic consequences for the town of Arbora.

Arrival in the Mists

The following section offers two classic methods to transport the party into the Domain of Dread, **Nova Vaasa**. Choose between being **Swallowed by the Mists** or a **Vistani Fortune Telling**, both time-honored entryways into the Land of Mists.

Swallowed by the Mists

This scenario assumes the party is traveling through a foggy moor of your choosing when a thick, chilling mist suddenly envelops them. These are the Mists of Ravenloft, and before the party realizes it, they will be swept into the domain of **Nova Vaasa**. Alternatively, this event can occur in any terrain you wish; simply modify the descriptive text as needed.

"You find yourselves traversing a desolate moor, your path set toward a remote hamlet as the final rays of the sun sink below the jagged horizon. The vast, eerie moor sprawls before you, its contours softened by a creeping fog. Without warning, a dense, bone-chilling mist rolls across the landscape, wrapping itself around you with an unnatural embrace. As dusk deepens into twilight, the mist tightens its grip, cocooning your party in a thick, unyielding shroud. The usual sounds of the moor's wildlife fade away, replaced by the steady rhythm of your own heartbeats thudding in your ears. Even your companions' voices become distant, as if carried away by some spectral wind. The ground beneath your feet turns unnervingly smooth, like glass, and an insidious sense of unease settles deep in your chest, giving rise to a bone-chilling dread that snakes through your thoughts. Panic flutters at the edge of

your mind, threatening to overwhelm you, just as an overwhelming sensation of impending doom crashes over you like a wave. It's as though the very air hums with the anticipation of an unseen menace poised to strike. You suddenly feel the ground shift underfoot, becoming hard-packed sand and gravel. The temperature begins to climb as the mist transforms from a cool fog into a dry, dusty cloud. The earth beneath you trembles. A low, thunderous roar echoes in the distance—hoofbeats. Hundreds of them. And as you squint through the swirling dust, you see it: a wall of stampeding beasts hurtling toward you."

Roll initiative and proceed to **Stampede** below.

Stampede!

A stampede of wild beasts, shrouded in a dust cloud, surges toward the party. The stampede begins 500 feet away, though you may choose to start it farther back to lower the encounter's difficulty, giving the party a better chance of avoiding the stampede's deadly path.

Stampede Rules: A typical stampede spans a 300-foot diameter and is composed of a massive herd—often bison or similar creatures. While creatures near the edge of the stampede may evade it, outrunning a full stampede is nearly impossible.

When a stampede begins, all nearby creatures must roll initiative. Twice per round—on initiative counts 10 and 0—the stampede moves 300 feet, continuing until it can move no more.

Saving Throws:

- When the stampede enters a creature's space for the first time, that creature must succeed on a **DC 15 Strength or Dexterity saving throw** (made with disadvantage) or be knocked prone.
- On a failed save, the creature takes **3d6 bludgeoning damage** (half damage on a successful save).

Creatures Knocked Prone:

Creatures that fall prone may attempt to hold their ground, making the saving throw again each time the stampede moves. This save is made with disadvantage while prone.

Movement in the Stampede

A creature caught in the stampede can attempt to move through the chaos, but doing so is extremely difficult and dangerous.

- A creature attempting to move within the stampede must make a **DC 15 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check** at the start of its turn.

- On a **success**, the creature moves up to half its speed through the stampede's space without being knocked prone.
- On a **failure**, the creature is knocked prone and must remain in the stampede's space, unable to move that turn.

If a creature is **prone** within the stampede, it must spend half its movement to stand before attempting to move again. Any prone creature must still make the movement check as above to move while within the stampede.

Conclusion

Once the stampede has passed, the dust begins to settle. The choking cloud of dust and dirt slowly clears, revealing a vast, sun-scorched grassland stretching out in all directions— Allow the players a moment to collect themselves. When they are ready to move forward, proceed to **Scene 1: An Untimely Burial**.

The Vistani Fortune Telling

This entry point begins with the party traveling through a grassy or desert-like region, exhausted and potentially lost. They encounter a group of **Vistani** who offer them a night of shelter, along with an ominous fortune reading. By morning, the characters find themselves transported to **Nova Vaasa**, the Ravenloft domain. This introduction is inspired by the 2e adventure *Night of the Walking Dead* and serves as a classic entry into the Land of Mists.

You can adjust this setup to fit any terrain of your choice by modifying the descriptive text below.

Arrival at the Vistani Camp

"Time becomes a nebulous concept as endless, sun-scorched days blend into moonless nights. Each evening, the sky darkens with a simmering heat, but no rain graces the arid landscape. As twilight approaches, the party spies a distant light, flickering on the horizon."

As the party draws nearer to investigate:

"A small oasis of dry earth emerges from the sea of sun-scorched grass. The glow comes from a fire at the heart of a modest camp. In the flickering light, a colorful caravan comes into view, accompanied by two weathered horses, three playful children, and an elderly woman. Moments later, two figures step into the

firelight—one old and lean, the other young and robust. They settle by the fire, and the old man, his single eye glinting in the firelight, gestures invitingly toward the approaching adventurers with his withered hand."

Vistani Welcome

A group of Vistani, draped in vibrant scarves and adorned with trinkets, warmly greets the party. Their leader, a wise and weathered woman named **Marika**, steps forward.

"Welcome, weary travelers! I sense the weight of your burdens and the shadows that follow you. Come, join our camp. The night brings many dangers—the Mists will soon enshroud this land, and only those with guidance will emerge unscathed."

As the party settles around the campfire, the eldest daughter, **Svetlana**, approaches with a mysterious gaze. She offers the party a chance to have their fortunes told by reading the tea leaves.

The Fortune Reading

If the party agrees, read the following:

As **Svetlana** begins heating the water over the fire, **Marika** speaks:

"Let us delve into the tendrils of destiny through the ancient art of tea leaf reading. In the delicate dance of leaves within the brew, we can glimpse the weave of fate. Are you certain you wish to know what lies ahead?"

Give the players a moment to respond, but whether they agree or not, **Svetlana** continues the ritual.

"Svetlana sets a pearl-white bowl on a wooden tray and pours hot water into it from an engraved teapot. She then sits cross-legged, closing her eyes in concentration as Marika begins to sprinkle tea leaves into the water. Svetlana opens her eyes, focusing on the swirling leaves with unwavering attention."

"As the tea leaves settle, imagine a cauldron—a vessel where forces converge. In this brew, I see a creature... a blend of grace and an unsettling visage... The leaves whisper of a release, of a hand unseen guiding this aberration."

As steam rises from the bowl, the vision continues:

"Picture the steam, like veils of fate... There is a labyrinth, ancient and forgotten. The leaves tell of a beckoning voice, calling from a cavern, a dark power echoes in the tunnels.. ."

The vision grows darker:

"Now, the leaves reveal a toxic dance - an elixir of suffering barded for long forgotten rituals... rituals that transform the innocent into devoted minions."

"With the Night of Dark Deeds on the horizon, shadows deepen in the brew. A sanctuary, once thought safe, becomes the stage for a dark plot. Minions, born of treachery, await commands under the unholy night."

In the final moments:

"—beasts feasting on souls, guided by whispers from the shadows. Many threads remain hidden, but beware..."

Svetlana breaks her gaze from the cup and locks eyes with the party:

"Shami-Amourae awaits you."

At that moment, **Marika** gasps and hastily makes a protective gesture. She warns:

"The Centaur will feast during the Night of Dark Deeds. You must find a way to stop it, or all of Arbora will perish."

Conclusion

After the ominous fortune, **Lazar**, the grandfather, quickly ushers his family into the vardo (wagon).

"No charge for the fortune," he says hurriedly. "It is time to rest. Please, be our guests and sleep beside the fire."

The Vistani do not leave their vardo for the rest of the evening and will retaliate appropriately if the PCs attempt to disturb or break into their wagon.

Regardless of where the party chooses to rest—whether by the campfire or elsewhere—a thick mist rolls in during the night, obscuring everything. When the party awakens, the Vistani caravan has vanished without a trace, and they are now in the domain of **Nova Vaasa**.

Proceed to **Scene 1: An Untimely Burial**.

Vistani Family

- **Grandfather (Leader):** Lazar
 - **Grandmother:** Marika
 - **Son:** Rinaldo
 - **Daughter:** Svetlana
 - **Children:** Miklos (youngest boy), Zara (middle girl), Jovan (eldest boy)
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Vistani Abilities

Each adult Vistana (excluding the children) uses the **Bandit** stat block, with the following additional traits:

Vistani Curses

A Vistana can utter a curse as an action, targeting a creature within 30 feet that it can see. The target must succeed on a **DC 10 Wisdom saving throw** or suffer the effects of the curse, which can only be removed by spells like **remove curse** or **greater restoration**. If the target dies and is later revived, the curse persists. When the curse ends, the Vistana takes psychic damage based on the severity of the curse invoked:

- Fine motor control failure (1d6 psychic damage).
 - Sinister cosmetic transformation (1d6 psychic damage).
 - Lost nonmagical item (1d6 psychic damage).
 - Vulnerability to a damage type (3d6 psychic damage).
 - Disadvantage on checks and saves for an ability score (3d6 psychic damage).
 - Attunement to a magic item ends (5d6 psychic damage).
 - The target is blinded or deafened (5d6 psychic damage).
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Evil Eye

As an action, a Vistana can use **Evil Eye** to replicate the effects of **animal friendship**, **charm person**, or **hold person** on a target within 10 feet. The saving throw DC is **10**. On a failed save, the target is affected by the chosen spell. On a successful save, the Vistana is blinded until the end of its next turn. A creature that succeeds on a saving throw against **Evil Eye** becomes immune to all **Evil Eye** effects from Vistani for 24 hours.

Part One: Events

1. An Untimely Burial

Introduction

The characters come across a priest burying bodies in the desert, unaware that the people aren't dead—merely paralyzed! Even more troubling, two individuals are already sealed in coffins underground. When the time is right, read the following description aloud:

"Before you stretches an eerie landscape, a desolate and haunting grassland that seems to extend into infinity. In the distance, fields of tall grass sway like waves beneath the oppressive heat of an unforgiving sun. A lone path winds through the barren terrain. Confusion lingers in the air as you and your companions exchange bewildered glances, each expression mirroring the disbelief you all feel."

Encounter Setup

After discussing their situation, the party will likely set out to investigate their surroundings. Regardless of the direction they choose, after walking for nearly an hour, read the following:

"In the distance, a figure materializes by the roadside. His wide-brimmed hat casts a shadow over his face, giving him an ominous appearance. Standing in a shallow hole, he grips a spade in his weathered hands, steadily digging graves beside the path. Around him lie the motionless forms of several humanoid bodies, their stillness a stark contrast to the restless, wind-swept grass around them. The gravity of the scene settles upon you as the long shadows of towering rocks dot the horizon. A dry, whispering wind passes as the man continues his solemn task, oblivious or indifferent to your sudden presence."

Medicine Check (DC 10)

A **DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine)** check reveals that the bodies are paralyzed, not dead. If any of the bodies take damage, they are instantly cured of their paralysis.

NPC: Father Ivan Pulgachev

Lawgiver Priest (use Priest stat block)

Father Ivan hails from the nearby town of Arbora. Earlier, a group of townsfolk informed him that they had seen dead bodies along the road, several hours outside of town. Fulfilling his duties as the town priest, Ivan loaded a few spare coffins onto his cart and set out to provide the deceased with a proper burial.

Roleplaying Father Ivan

- **Mannerisms:** Ivan is stoic and dutiful, devoted to his religious beliefs. His concern lies with performing his sacred duty rather than investigating further.
 - **Personality Trait:** Calm, methodical, but somewhat oblivious to anything outside his religious role.
 - **Motivation:** To bury the dead and fulfill his obligations to the Lawgiver, the deity of Arbora.
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The Paralyzed Caravan

The bodies belong to a Hazlani family en route to Tepest, escorted by a Vistani Mist Walker named Orhan Sandweaver. However, they were ambushed, and Orhan, along with all the children, was kidnapped by strange, crippled priests devoted to the Lawgiver. The family had recently escaped the brutal life in Hazlan with Orhan's assistance.

Key NPCs:

- **HaKan the Wanderer** (father)
- **Derya** (HaKan's wife)
- **Gavril** (HaKan's brother)
- **Aydin, Takis, Chara** (HaKan's children)
- **Mihail, Kiraz** (Gavril's children)
- **Orhan Sandweaver** (Vistani Mist Walker)

Roleplaying the Caravan Members

The paralyzed family members are terrified and plead with the party to find Orhan and the missing children. They know little about their attackers but insist the Vistani can help the party find a way home once rescued.

Clues for Investigation

- **Wagon Tracks:** Tracks lead away from the campsite and deeper into the desert.
- **Horse Remains:** The bodies of four horses lie nearby, picked clean of flesh.

Investigation (DC 5-20)

- **DC 5:** The horses were eaten.
- **DC 12:** They were eaten by a pack of animals.
- **DC 17:** The remains show signs of many different types of animals, some not native to the desert.
- **DC 20:** It becomes clear that humanoids also fed on the horses.

2. Bandit Attack!

As the party prepares to leave—whether they’ve uncovered the truth or not—the scene is interrupted by a group of bandits who had previously discovered the bodies. Now, they return with their leader, intent on looting the caravan and the adventurers.

Trigger:

This encounter begins when the party has finished freeing the paralyzed family or if they fail to realize the bodies are paralyzed and move on to Arbora.

Encounter Setup

A Kantora bandit leader, accompanied by his gang, arrives on horseback. He laughs derisively, declaring his intention to take the wagon, all valuables, and the bodies.

"As you prepare to move on, the sound of approaching hooves draws your attention. Cresting a nearby ridge, a man on horseback appears, a smirk on his face as he surveys the scene. 'Looks like I've come at the right time!' he declares. 'Hand over the wagon, any gold you've got, and... yeah, those bodies too.' He whistles sharply, and a dozen more figures emerge from behind rocks on the ridgeline, weapons drawn and eager for blood."

Combatants

- **Bandit Leader** (use Bandit Captain stat block)
- **5x Pike Bandits** (use Bandit stat block with pikes)
- **6x Thugs** (use Thug stat block)

Tactics

- The bandit leader commands his men to loot the bodies and take any valuables from the party. If the paralyzed victims haven't been awakened yet, the bandits might rouse them in the process.
- The bandits will flee if their numbers are reduced to fewer than half (6 or fewer).

Adventure Conclusion

After the encounter, the party can decide how to proceed—either tracking the wagon tracks to rescue Orhan and the children or returning to Arbora for more information. If they investigate further, the paralyzed family may guide them toward darker revelations.
