

Ravenloft™

Rise of the Witch Queen

By. Charles Phipps

Ravenloft: Rise of the Witch Queen, is a just finished storyline that is something that I'm rather proud of. It was a campaign that was heavily influenced by over a decade of role-playing and while it's got some areas of it that are not as 'Ravenloftian' as they might be, they are nevertheless something that I am quite happy with. The game lasted thirteen 'episodes' and is now into it's 'second season' with an entirely new storyline to carry the story arc further.

Before I go on, I give special thanks to Stuart Turner for providing the format and some of the inspiration for this storyline. I also want to thank the rest of the Kargatane for the Gazetteers that made the story possible.

Campaign Background

One of the problems of Ravenloft is something that many players likely never notice upon in that a lot of the storylines fail to take into account some of the 'lesser known' domains and aspects of the setting in favor of Strahd and the rest of the core over all. I wanted to design a game that was built about exploring the 'lesser known' domains and furthermore using less usually used monsters as the basis for the plotline.

It was a daunting challenge but one that I was eager to pursue. As another matter, I was determined to use a great number of the Ravenloft modules that were in my possession for the game.

The game thus includes 'Circle of Darkness', 'The Cat of Fevlovic', 'Ship of Horrors', 'Hour of the Knife', 'Thoughts of Darkness', 'The Evil Eye', 'The Shadow Rift', and elements of the 'Children of the Night' series. I was determined to try and make a fairly unique campaign from all the divergent elements.

The Campaign Premise

I decided to choose a most unusual villain for the campaign out of sheer pique for the assumption of Azalin and Strahd as the central villains. In this case, I decided to use Vecna and Radaga.

Vecna, as you all may know, is a character that most certainly doesn't belong in Ravenloft. There's nothing tragic about the Sauron-like evil and arrogance of the man and his domain is incredible in it's over-the-top villainy.

Instead, I decided to do something rather peculiar and combine Vecna with the witch of 'Feast of Goblins' into one particular character that honestly bore little resemblance to both.

According to Ravenloft history though, the Witch Queen is a Baba Yaga-like spooky villain that figures prominently in many Ravenloft fairy tales. Supposedly a child of darkness born to a nomadic people (the Vistani) and other say to the faeries, she was offensive to the gods and they cursed the world to turn against them. Nevertheless, she thrived and raised 'a terrible darkness across the land' that was stopped only by a mighty hero that cast her down and thus restored the world.

It's all particularly normal fantasy stuff but the kicker was that the darkness she was cast to was 'A Great Rift' that shall 'return during the last days' and that it shall bring 'A time of unparalleled Darkness.' In this respect, I made her the first Dukkar

(who isn't a male by nature against Ravenloft lore).

When dealing with a powerful evil like a Lich, you either need to keep your eye on the 'human' element (Azalin is a dictator and a father) or you need to keep it mysterious. In the case of the Witch Queen, I chose the later and largely let the players fill in the blanks for themselves on what her past was.

Some of the fun elements that I 'hinted' at but never confirmed was that the villainess was actually defeated by Strahd Von Zharovich of all people and that she was the one he made the pact with from her prison in the Shadow Rift (I later had the Shadow Fey rewritten for her too).

But at heart, the central villain was a Maguffin, a plot device. Someone who was never going to actually show up in the story but whose influence was felt throughout the campaign. Had she shown up, the campaign premise might have lost all of it's feeling and instead be replaced by parody.

Besides, in this age of 'Enlightenment', who really believes in Fairy Tales?

Ravenloft Technology Levels, History, and Geography

My Ravenloft is somewhere in the middle of the 19th century of all places with a few having lower technology levels than most. Trains, manned balloons, and things like steam engines are all coming into fashion around the Core.

I broke a central taboo and explained the name of the world of Ravenloft and in the campaign it's called Arkara, after Arkham in Call of Cthulhu.

The unifying history of Arkara was the fact that 'civilized' life had arisen in the Core from Barovia that had gone onto colonize the other territories during a time when it was a Great Empire but eventually the bloodline split and most of the Empire went to become Darkon and other nations rebelled against Barovian rule. The seminal event of the breakup of the Barovian Empire is recorded as being the massacre of most of the yet uncrowned Prince Strahd's political opponents during his brother's wedding that turned into a bloodbath. I put Pardion/Timor/Nosos/Staunton Bluffs as a Cluster of Islands just outside of Mordent and Sourange just below Valachan in my case. Pardion is ironically the 'Crown' capital of Mordent and they're all one nation. The Core is overall known by the name of 'Balok.'

Other lands are known to exist on the globe and occupy spots on the 'misty borders' with the Shadowborn Cluster being a large continent to the South known as Nidala, Vorostokov (Sanguinia is part of its cluster) being another known land that's reachable by sea, and also the 'Far East' and 'Far West' that is a Cluster of the Steaming Lands, I'Cath, and the Six Islands along with the Amber Wastes respectively.

In my Ravenloft, everyone who is brought from another land gradually loses their own memories of it like they do in Darkon and eventually buys completely into the false history of the land. It's believed to be a round planet really and is slowly taking shape as one. There's unified constellations, a moon, and plenty of other aspects that make it 'seem' normal.

Race in Arkara/Ravenloft

My approach was to take the feeling of 'Dark Fantasy' of Ravenloft and push it to

the limits. The place is dripping Gothic and with all sorts of oddities but it has the occasional fun element too such as a few nods to *Van Helsing* and similar films.

The first major change though is that there are no elves, dwarves, or any of the other races outside of the Shadow Fey. They may exist in Darkon, Sithicus, and the like but they are still faeries who follow arcane rules and behavior patterns.

Another element is that race plays a significant part of the background of the PC's but it's largely hidden from view. I am extremely loose with the PC's race so long as there's significant explanation for it and it looks like it will be good role-playing.

Class Changes in Ravenloft

Finally, class change wise, I throw a lot of the changes to the rules of Ravenloft regarding the various classes.

Bards, Druids, and Paladins are all present in Ravenloft naturally and none of them are particularly strange in the grand context of things.

Bards are, in fact, completely unchanged in Ravenloft.

Druids take on a slightly darker tone in the context of the game with their religion being bloody, dark, and worshipping the 'Hidden Gods' that they claim are beyond the veils of the mist. While the druids have no real idea about the power of the Dark Powers, they have a better idea than most what they are about and only the Vistani exceed them in knowledge.

Paladins, I do have a house rule for. Basically, Paladins never lose their power if they 'believe' they are still good and noble. They simply switch to neutrality (where their Detect Evil picks up a person's 'evil' in regards to their religion) or outright detection of good when their power is reversed (detecting those whom do not follow their fanatical interpretation of their religion).

I also have the statement that monks in Ravenloft have routinely been the target of bandits and robbers so that self-defense is taught to a large number of them. That's my explanation for the class in RL and what I'm sticking to.

The Player Characters

Marish ni Shadowborn

The Shadowborns are a Core-wide bloodline of individuals rather than their previous isolation to the Shadowborn Cluster. The family is famous for its activities of heroism and charity but has often been subject of persecution.

Marish in the context of the game is a runaway from her family's estate in Valachan that refuses to speak of her background there until it's revealed in the *Cat of Fevlovic*.

Marish *thinks* that she actually is the daughter of the Duke of the Shadowborn family who ruled the area of Valachan in the name of Mordent. Then her Uncle Ailil came back from a hunting mission in Verbrek 'changed' and betrayed the family to the attack of the Baron Urik Von Kharacov whom used the opportunity to take over the region.

(If the timeline seems messed up, realize that this will play into later importance

of the games where the players realize that memory is not something to be trusted in the Land of Mists with the revelations from *Ship of Horrors*).

Her uncle then proceeded to take her, her mother, and her aunts into the Land of Verbrek and infected them all with Lycanthropy before inducting them into the Cult of the Wolf God. The character routinely would flashback to this time and often think of the atrocities she committed.

Later, Marish would be captured by Priests of Ezra who drove out the 'curse' of Lycanthropy from her body and left her wandering in the wastes of G'henna where she was picked up by the player character Ketler.

Marish is an interesting character since her player deliberately made her profession to be that of a courtesan at the start of the game while keeping her class a Ranger. It made the players a little confused at the start due to her high survival ability and toughness versus her entertainment abilities.

Ketler Bollenbach

Ketler Bollenbach is the son of the infamous Golem maker who plays an important role in this campaign.

Ketler's history is largely that he was raised by his 'grandfather' Emil whom was the most famous scientist of Barovia but also a mad eccentric who left Ketler to his own devices (literally).

I allowed the player to take the artificer class from the *Eberron* campaign setting since it much better fit his role as an alchemist and scientist in the context of the Ravenloft campaign setting.

Ketler would seem to be the 'normal' one of the family for much of the storyline with his practicality, lecherousness, and cowardice serving as comic relief for the game. His completely unheroic nature would occasionally frustrate games but it was not something that we'd trade for anything. The only 'curious' thing about Ketler was the fact that he was

What Ketler would discover later in the campaign was the fact that he was actually linked to the campaign's secondary villain in Secandus (see below). The pair of them sharing souls and the source of Ketler's frequent nightmares that would give insight into many of the adventures.

Ketler would form an interesting relationship with Thomas, due to the fact that early on he was the only person who shared the character's secret.

Thomas Crownguard

Thomas Crownguard is believed to be a Knight of the Shadows named Thomas Crownguard who is the son of Sir Gustav Crownguard who heads the secret society at this point (and who will die and pass on the mantle to Gondegal in the game).

Sir Thomas knew the Lady Marish from before her loss and is constantly gone to by the former lycanthrope for comfort and advice. The other players trusted implicitly the character.

Which is ironic because he was lying to them the entire time.

Thomas Crownguard is actually an early prototype golem for 'Secandus' (his

original name was Pentus). A flesh golem, Thomas possessed the unique ability to be able to absorb the memories and personality of a person he killed before taking that individual's visage. Thus he wasn't Sir Thomas but Sir Thomas' murderer.

I allowed this background under the implicit understanding that he wouldn't be given any freebies for it and if he appeared to 'die' then he would 'disappear' as a character just as if he'd been killed. Furthermore, that he'd suffer the appropriate level adjustments.

The storyline worked spectacularly as Thomas' brooding and agony over the fact that he wasn't actually the late paladin was something that tormented (along with the memories of a human being that wasn't him). I look forward to him meeting Adam as well someday.

Thomas would eventually develop a relationship with Laurie Weathermay and the revelation of his true nature would have tragic results there. He would also go on to have a religious revelation and become a Paladin.

Benedict Guardian

The character of Benedict is the only public nonhuman in the group. In Benedict's case, he is a resident of G'henna by birth and a mongrel man. The irony is that Benedict never was anything but a mongrel man.

In G'henna, the "Twisting Disease" is a punishment from 'God' (Zhakata) and thus the people who suffer from it are cursed and forsaken by him. However, this includes the children of Mongrelmen rather than simply their own 'sinful' selves.

Benedict was the child of a mongrel man village that was razed to the ground by Knights of the Shadows. The Knights wrongly believed the creatures to be monsters and when they realized otherwise, their leader chose to adopt Benedict and take him to a nearby monastery to be raised that was devoted to Ezra. Later, he would leave the monastery and try and do the works of his goddess but would be shunned and hated across his homeland until he met Marish and Ketler.

Benedict was an amusing character while he lasted but he was also hideously cursed. Benedict had a schizophrenic personality that manifested itself as an extra head that was chaotic evil. The player had been inspired by Gollum from the 'Lord of the Rings.' Benedict himself was a lawful good cleric of Ezra while 'Box' was a would-be-wizard.

Benedict would never find out that his village had been massacred by Thomas Crownguard (the original) or that it was done on the orders of the leader of the Borcan Church of Ezra. He perished in the second adventure at the hands of Lady Adeline.

Coryn Nesmith

Coryn Nesmith is an amnesiac sorcerer whom has fallen in with the Circle of Darkness in G'henna. She has a disturbingly bubbly personality that is initially cute but later one realizes that it is the product of some violent trauma that has rendered her with the outlook of a child.

Though she doesn't realize it, she's actually a half elf and it is partly to explain her supernatural powers that seem to have no origin and have a tendency to get her

seriously in trouble with the superstitious and easily disturbed people of the continent of Balok.

Coryn's twisted origin is revealed in '*Ship of Horror*.'

Andrea Glycine

The replacement character for the slain Benedict, Andrea Glycine is an unusual player choice for a character in that she is a necromancer.

The daughter of Lyssa Von Zharovich before her transformation into a vampire, Andrea Glycine was raised by her father's family as a noblewoman of Gundarak. Andrea was inducted early on into the mysteries of the Witch Cult of Ragada (the religious arm of the Ebon Fold) and soon became a magician of no small power. She lacked the malice of the rest of her family though.

Away on business for her family, her family was "massacred" by the armies of King Strahd after the death of Duke Gundar when the Dark Lord of Barovia declared that all of the previous nobility of Gundarak was null and void. They were no longer a colony of Darkon (whom Gundar supposedly held the land for) but citizens of the land of Strahd.

Andrea found herself in strange company when she joined the Keepers of the Black Feather to try and overthrow Strahd so that she could restore her family's place of honor and continue her own research into immortality.

The character's haughtiness and arrogance mixed with her relentless morbidity and near sociopathic behavior regarding corpses and the dead were a source of amusement and frustration within the party.

Jonathan Mircea

Another new character that was introduced late in the game, Jonathan Mircea's history is complex because the player keeps adding to it and making it a great (if somewhat muddled) onion that keeps back new layers.

The original Jonathan Mircea was a master thief of art, jewelry, and precious valuables with a focus on religious icons. He was a gentleman thief and one who did not kill at all.

Later, it was revealed that in addition to being a thief, Jonathan was actually a trained physician who had lost his license to practice but largely took the wealth he stole to distribute to the poor. He was also a secret priest of Hala in addition to his role as a Doctor with an oath to never take a life (undead, demons, etc exempted).

Even further revelations indicate that Jonathan is a member of the Order of the Guardians and that his services as a thief are done in no small part in order to acquire religious artifacts for the Church of Hala's Guardian branch to hide.

Possibly the strangest revelation is the recent discovery that Jonathan grew up in Sanguinia as the adopted child of the Vampire Darklord there and fled largely out of fear of his father whom still holds a great control over his life.

Randal Crane

A member of the Ebon Fold that ran away from the organization when he was

very young, Randal appeared to be a smooth talking Nova Vaasan cowboy that was kidnapped at an early age by the organization and trained to kill. His sister was also a member of the organization.

Though he cultivated his secrets carefully, Randal's true history was revealed early on and he died during his first real adventure during the battle against Meredoth.

The character distinguished himself largely by being incredibly protective of Jonathan and contemptuous of Andrea's profession as a necromancer.

The Villains

Emil Bollenbach

Emil Bollenbach I gave something of a history somewhat similar to Mordenheim but fleshed it out a bit more.

Emil Bollenbach was originally a assistant of the toymaker raised in the town of Odiare and witnessed the toys coming to life. Fascinated by the process, and aware that he was close to the age of adulthood that everyone had been massacred at, Emil left Odiare through the mists and found himself wandering through domains of Easan the Mad to Mordenheim (who threw out the giggling little man after a month).

The demented, now fifty some odd year old, man has since become obsessed with creating dolls that live and building better dolls when they prove 'lacking.' He supplements his obsession by creating designer golems across the Core and varies tremendously his 'medium.'

Eventually, he was contacted by Ragada in a vision whom instructed him to make a special doll out of a sample of her blood that was brought to him by the Ebon Fold. This doll was a beautiful but soulless woman that he used to get a pair of twins on and dissected the second child to make the 'parts' necessary for Secandus. Ragada promised that Secandus would destroy all the humans except for him and then he would be allowed to make a world of dolls.

Emil's other son grew up largely as his slave/lab assistant and unaware of most of his activities. This changed drastically and Ketler soon became obsessed with stopping his father's madness.

Ebon Fold (Ba'al Verzi in Old Barovian)

The Ebon Fold aka the Ba'al Verzi are different from the standard Ravenloft portrayal of them as they are a secret society that I tied to the Witch Queen from long ago. The group basically are a collection of assassins that exists for the purposes of eventually bringing about the End of the World (what else?).

The Ebon Fold's current headquarters is in Falknovia where Vlad Dracov wrongly believes they are an organization interested in racial purity and working for the Crown as his spy network. In truth, the organization largely merely wants to put the blame for their activities on Dracov and many Darklords have private contact with the group.

They are effectively Radaga's Cult and filling a role very similar to Vecna's clergy in the context of the story.

Ragada the Witch Queen

The actual “true” story I was keeping for the storyline was that on Prime Material Akaria (the homeworld of Barovia), Ragada the Witch Queen was the ‘child’ of the Dark Powers that somehow managed to pierce the veil of their prison and lay the seed for their child. Ragada proceeded then to bestow vast powers on her followers and tore the land to pieces on the Realm.

Eventually, though, Ragada was betrayed from below by her fairy followers and her own kinsmen in the Vistani. While fleeing from Prime Material Akaria, Strahd Von Zharovich was visited by an arcanaloth whom said the “Powers above” would entrap her with her masters if he could chase her through the portal that her followers would trap her in on the other side. Strahd did this, of course, and the Shadow Fey as well as the Vistani (who were tricked) were trapped in Ravenloft.

Unfortunately, the nature of keeping a portal perpetually open and closed at once is the fact that it created a permanent ‘shift’ in reality to the Demiplane of Shadow that touched all things. If an individual, any individual, was truly forsaken by the gods then the Dark Powers could draw them through the Gateway into their prison.

The Dark Powers, and Ragada, both hope that this eventually would result in their mutual freedom anew. With her limited ability to affect those of her bloodline and send out visions, Ragada has occasionally created brief bodies for herself and become a minor part of Akarian lore.

She is close though to succeeding in her quest for freedom though as she has managed to ensnare Secandus as her champion whom can wield the Sun blade and Holy Symbol of Ravenkind against her prison.

Secandus (Aka General Randolph Vrommel)

The “Ultimate Golem” was designed as a secondary villain for the storyline. Secandus was the ‘greatest’ creation of Emil Bollenbach and almost immediately left his Creator to wander the world and begin raising hell.

Secandus was somewhat inspired by an unusual source in Largo from *Bubblegum Crisis* and Skynet from *the Terminator*. He was a golem that was obsessed with his inhumanity and why it made him better than a normal human being.

Secandus looked completely human and even possessed the ability to have children. He was cursed with an obscenely high intellect though and the realization that he possessed a ‘shattered soul’ that prevented him from enjoying the things that other human beings did.

As sort of the Anti-Adam (I still want the two character’s to meet), Secandus grew to loathe humanity while embracing his golem nature. The figure thus became obsessed with creating a golem race that would replace mankind.

Ironically, he’d find a home in Falknovia as leader of the Ebon Fold. Under the guise of a human male, Secandus was also a general in the Falknovian armies whose mission was to supervise terrorist missions that would disrupt the peace of the Core and eventually allow Vlad Dracov to take over. He also was in charge of numerous projects to create technologies to help Dracov’s armies.

Secandus takes up the role as the 'dutiful son' of the Witch Queen Radaga and replaces Loht for most of the storyline of 'The Shadow Rift.'

Next- *Circle of Darkness*

Campaign Adventure 1#: Circle of Darkness
Day of the Scorpion December 18th, 740

Sir Thomas walked through the burning sands of G'henna as he saw that, once more, there was no rain from the sky. It was a curse upon the land that neither water nor snow fell from the sky. It was supposedly the punishment of the god Zhakata, a strange and foreign deity that had taken hold of the Barovian people of this land and made them declare themselves to be a theocracy.¹

Sir Thomas remembered that day well, the days when the sun and the moon had hung in the sky together. He remembered when plants had begun wailing with human voices. He remembered the ground opening up and sundering the lands of Markovia and G'henna from each other. He remembered the creation of the new mountain ranges that barred all but the greatest travellers. He remembered the dead refusing to leave the mortal existence. He remembered all of this during the wholly inadequate to describe the horror "Great Upheaval" as they called it in other lands and here in G'henna, they called it "The Final Judgement."²

"What do you think their reaction will be to us?" Brother Benedict the Leper said as he walked along with his staff by the huge plate mail wearing warrior. His left deformed, claw like hand, was wrapped around a phial of glimmering white water³ that had been given to them by the Pontiff of Ezra.

"Fear, anger, hatred," The Knight of Shadows said. "The usual."

"I only pray that Ezra will guide us through our hour of need," Benedict said as the 'Leper' moved his hood back to reveal sight of his shark like mouth set to a fishlike head. They saw the darkened city gates of the only remaining city in the "Wastelands", the great city of Zhukar.

-Introduction to "Circle of Darkness"

DM's notes

1. Though it still hasn't reached it's climax yet. Part of a running theme in Ravenloft is that where time doesn't stand still, it operates in cycles. As far as the people of G'henna know, Yagno Petronova is a recent leader of their nation. He came to power after the Grand Conjunction and promptly instituted the cults of starvation and terrifying pogroms of infidels. The players, had they bothered to research, would have found that there was a series of religious leaders of Zhukar that routinely lead revolts from Barovia and their names were all variants of the same man.

Yagno is unaware of this cycle, the same as Dominic Dominic d'Honaire and other human darklords. I don't know exactly where I was going with this but I'd probably use the idea that there's only a limited number of souls in Ravenloft and they keep reincarnating.

2. The Final Judgement is the G'hennans much more evocative title of the Grand Conjunction that, PC wise, actually was done by a prior group of heroes. The players are operating in the same world as their prior PCs, even if they will likely never meet them. The much more nasty and apocalyptic strangeness of the GC is my own invention that's meant to show the magic of Ravenloft going completely wonky as the dimensional threads unravel.

3. Benedict and Thomas have just returned from braving a mission into Borca in order to meet the Pontiff and try to acquire some aid. The "aid" is actually just a holy relic of some kind that the beleaguered Pontiff hopes will be symbolic enough to look like he's doing something important about the matter while he shuffles away the G'hennans.

Adventure Background

G'henna is currently undergoing the final phase of its latest "Yagno Cycle." As far as everyone whose not immortal is concerned, and even many who are, time moves from Point A to Point Z in a never ending series of repetitions of their sins. Perhaps it's a type of universal karma where the damned are given a chance in the shadow of the Dark Powers to recant, or more likely the Dark Powers derive some sort of subsistence from the feeding on the painful sins of souls that never learn from their mistakes.

In Yagno's case, the Dark Lord arrives in G'henna after fleeing from his family and spends his time in the desert as a mystic and evangelist of his new god. Slowly, but surely, develops a fanatical core of believers around him and then takes over the city of Zhukar where he declares an independent theocracy of the land. The story then comes on to some form of crisis demanding him to summon his god physically, he instead summons the Demon Malistroni, and eventually that demon turns on Yagno before killing him.

The Grand Conjunction has changed things a bit as Yagno is no longer doomed entirely to repeat the mistakes of the past. The PCs, by their actions, can stop the cycle of devastation and perhaps free the lands from dissolution.

DM's Summary of Circle of Darkness

Circle of Darkness basically, according to the module, follows the PCs as they come from another land into G'henna and get involved in a rebellion against Yagno., The exposed to its nightmarish realities of the starvation cult, recruited into the Circle of Darkness resistance movement, and set to stealing an artifact that's meant to break free their god Zhakata from his chains that they think Yagno has placed upon him. In truth, 'Zhakata' is a Nalfanshee named Malistroni that was bound by Yagno when he tried to summon his god, and upon his freedom starts transforming people into monsters while heading to Zhukar to kill Yagno.

The PCs, basically, end up killing Malistroni or Yagno and leaving the domain. It's an effective little module with a lot of flavor text but it wasn't something I wanted to run straight out of the pages.

DM Modifications

The biggest modification I did to the module was making the PCs from Zhukar. The idea of the PC's as G'hennians was an interesting change of pace as I had to come up with a great deal more detail for their local culture than before. Furthermore, because Zhakata was a "new" god, I had to seriously de-emphasize his role in most of the suggestions that the various handbooks gave for them. It worked out well and I was able to ditch the Petcheko character (an annoying tagalong from the module) while making Rega the Betrayer (the PC's recruiter into the resistance whose actually an inquisitor) into a childhood friend.

The PC's motivation was simple for joining the Rebellion against Yagno Petronova in this case, they hated him and considered him and his theocracy to be a nightmarish tyranny.

Because the Pcs were also starting this adventure at 1st level, I also had to come up with a reason why they were joining together and gave the idea that they all knew each other and they were waiting for two of their members to come back from visiting the neighboring lands across the desert to see if some kind of aid could be gotten. This will play an important role in later parts of the adventure. Aside from the initial meeting as the start of the adventure though, the PC's more or less played the module straight with a minimal amount of random encounters and a lot of forced 'intelligent' fighting of enemies. The Vistani, quite simply, don't show up in this module and it's good for the feeling of it.

What remaining changes I did to the module were in relationship to the Re-animators that dog the PC's escape from the Temple with the artifact they steal and the character of Malistroni.

The Re-animators just were a silly distraction and detracted from the feel of the novel, sort of like Kender. I decided to just remove them wholesale from the module and the story benefitted from it.

Malistroni the Demon I had take on the countenance of a god to drive home that fiends in

Ravenloft were more or less invincible and could alter reality around themselves, grant wishes, and everything else imaginable. It made it well that they went back to the Altar with their amulet and decided, spontaneously really, that restoring it would do something grand. It was, after all, a Temple of Ezra once. I also had him make the occasional oblique reference that he's fought and killed Yagno on countless occasions before but is continually resummoned and bound to continue the process.

Adventure Play Summary

The players gather together in an inn that's been abandoned for obvious reasons since they're in a post-Apocalyptic setting largely. They talk a good deal about their secret mission's 'success' and are largely frustrated that all they got was a lousy bottle. The thing takes on a almost [i]Dragons of Autumn Twilight[/i] intro as Yagno's men, lead by a disguised Rega, arrest them.

The PCs complain even louder in their cell after a brief (they are 1st level) fight with the guard before they're approached by the Circle of Darkness that they agree to help in acquiring their artifact.

They proceed to do so, getting into a running chase scene after an amusing conversation with Yagno where they pretend to be priests of his sect. The chase is motivated sadly by Benedict's reveal as it's very difficult to disguise a Mongrelman. Escaping through the City, I ran a miniadventure where the PCs ended up in Ezra catacombs that had been sealed off away from the city and were yet inhabited by a pack of ghouls. It was something like "Aliens" and I used the Circle of Darkness cultists as cannon fodder to pick off one by one. The PCs nevertheless survived and despite some close calls, managed to rack up some valuable experience. Purely for reference sake, I had them lead by the Ghast Jugo Hesketh from *Monstrous Manual II*. Sir Thomas lopped off his head with his 'family' sword that I had ruled to be enchanted +1 earlier.

Arriving at the Mongrelman Camp, I did my best to wratch up the PC's paranoia by making it clear that the Circle of Darkness members were a bunch of religious zealots no better than Yagno. Nevertheless, I had them travel yet still into the "Palace of Bones" and made it out of the belly of what the PC's recognized as a dragon. The increasing creepiness and the effective clarity to everyone BUT the Mongrelmen/Circle of Darkness members that it was not Zhakata in the circle was a nice bit of tension up until when Malistrone escaped.

It was very apocalyptic and a "Second Grand Conjunction" in feel for the release of Malistrone as the PC's fled to Zhukar and found out that Rega betrayed them to the Inquisition. The PCs abandoned Yagno's army to Malistrone and watched at a distance as it was butchered and turned into nightmarish aberrations by the Nalfanshee.

The climax was run a bit differently as the PC's discovered that simply restoring the altar did nothing (I'm evil that way). then one of the PC's (Benedict's player) had the brilliant idea of using the phial (which contained simple holy water) to reconsecrate the church. I had a permanent '*Holy Word*' spell in the previous church field made as the church bells assaulted Maliostrone and Yagno killed him before the PCs cut the priest down.

The Cycle broken.

Gameworld Affects

The chaos of having Yagno murdered just as a giant demon attack caused riots in Zhukar as the Inquisition was murdered by nonbelievers and the food stores raided while the religious fanatics did pretty much anything that they were told by the surviving priesthood. At the end of the day though, the PCs decided to flee from Zhukar and hope that none of Yagno's surviving minions went after them.

Afterwards, the PC's heard that a passageway had been found to Borca and the city along with the rest of the land was taken by Ivan Dilisyna as part of the nation. Because Yagno was dead, it started raining again and the weather patterns slowly began to restore themselves even if the people are now cultists of Ezra and zealots rather than Zhakata as the only meaningful change.