



An Illustrated History of the Core

Ryan Naylor

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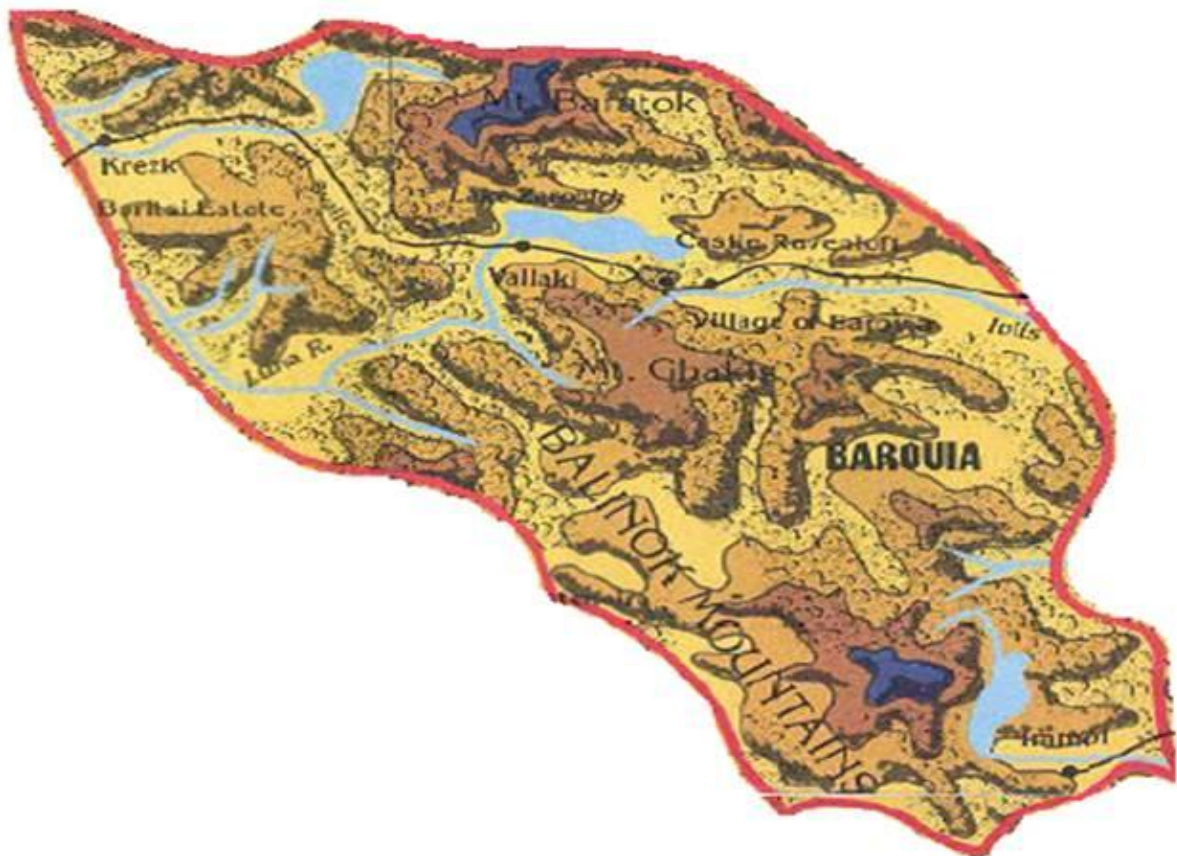
The History

351 BC: Barovia forms.

We all know what leads up to this. It remains isolated in the Mists for nearly 200 years, which (along with centuries of being isolated in the Balinoks before, plus 30 years of war leading up to 351) probably goes a long way to explaining the xenophobic character of the Barovians.

Some things may exist in the Mists prior to this point: refugees from the remains of previous Demiplanes of Dread (see RL3e, perhaps including the paka), the Crown of Souls—isolated people, items and Mist horrors with no real solid land to cling to. However, the strong bond Strahd forges between himself and Barovia with his “I am the Land” ritual and the Ba’al Verzi knife (I,SI and I,SII for the discussion between Azalin and Strahd about it) links him strongly enough that when the Mists claim him, they can drag in all of Barovia as well.

The 200 years before they drag in the next domain (whose darklord is equally strongly bound to the land, you will notice) may be due to them recovering their energies, or just observing what’s going in Barovia.



547 BC: Forlorn forms

Most of the few remaining humans (those not turned into goblins - all druids (Gaz I, Castles Forlorn, but not I, Strahd II)) flee into Barovia, and most settle around Immol (Gaz I). Over the next few years, Strahd orders the construction of the Bogie Towers along the border to fight goblin incursions (Gaz I).

I, Strahd II has a couple of interesting things to say about this (if we can believe Strahd). First, is that the druid Strahd meets is quite unconcerned about the conjunction, and that something is therefore affecting the minds of everyone involved except him (all the NPCs, if you will). Also, the joins are seamless. So neither the people nor the land show major signs of being joined.

Also, Castles Forlorn implies (although doesn't state, so this is supposition) that Forlorn hasn't been copied so much as ripped straight out of the ground (evidence being the earthquake damage and so on). Perhaps that's why it's so small? Also, it's interesting to note that both the original darklords are strongly tied to their domains - Strahd through his "I am the land" ritual with the Ba'al Verzi knife, and Tristen by Ruals' curse binding him to the tree. I like to think that the Dark Powers are experimenting with ways of capturing people, and haven't yet figured out the best way to do it - they copy Barovia, but steal Forlorn, and until they've perfected it, they need lords who are mystically bound to the land to work out how to do it (before shifting to ethereal resonance, perhaps).



575 BC: Arak forms

This is where I, Strahd II becomes unreliable. On one hand, Strahd seems to be using the Domains of Dread timeline where Lamordia forms in 575 BC. However, he's ignoring the fact that it also doesn't join the Core until 683 BC. But since I, Strahd II is definitely nothing but propaganda (I like to think it's a prompt for Van Richten to out Azalin as a lich, since he outed Strahd the previous year and is about to publish the Guide to the Lich), I'll ignore it. Also, his description of Arak is wrong of this time period, which is currently lush and pleasant and has people living in it.

If you don't, Lamordia forms immediately north of Mt Baratak, with Arak off to the east.

Also note that Keening is still part of Arak at this point - when Tristessa (not her real name) died, the mountain shifted from where it was to where it is now. So where was it originally? Darklords says Marbh-Cathair lay on a trade route between Sidnar and Egertus, which is a bit awkward because Egertus isn't going to exist for decades. It does fit nicely into that position though, so we'll compromise and say it was where the trade route through Arak will be, and sits on a trade route between Barovia and Darkon (which otherwise only has a single mountain pass north of Krezk to trade through). It's the long way round, but getting through mountains can be like that. Plus, the Old Svalich Road has to go somewhere - that line is purely my invention.

Also note the Ivlis River now flows into Arak, joining up with one of its rivers rather than into the Mists. And look how well the two domains fit together! Even the elevations match up!



579 BC: Mordent forms

This is my favourite map. I just love the shape. I gave Mordent a new hinterland to match up the elevations, but otherwise it's as is.

The Old Svalich Road doesn't go anywhere in Mordent - it gets to the river and then peters out. Strahd tells us there's a road to Mordentshire, but it's only going to be here for a couple of weeks so I didn't bother. Perhaps it becomes a trail which wasn't worth marking on the map? Or perhaps there's a little hamlet where it all goes on to the river? I quite like the idea of Mordent as a rustic backwater in the moors anyway.



579 BC: Darkon forms

Only a couple of weeks after Mordent forms. There's a single mountain pass into Darkon near Krezk (according to I, SII), and the rest of the trade with Darkon goes the long way round through Arak, although they don't really have time to build a road from Sidnar to Marbh-Cathair - they just follow a pass (speculation based on Darklords). Given the enormous productivity of the Arakan mines from the temporal fugue, a few Darkonese immigrants move to Arak to work in the mines. According to Gaz II (amongst other sources), Karg is the second city of Darkon in this period, rather than Martira Bay, which is still not much more than a fishing village.

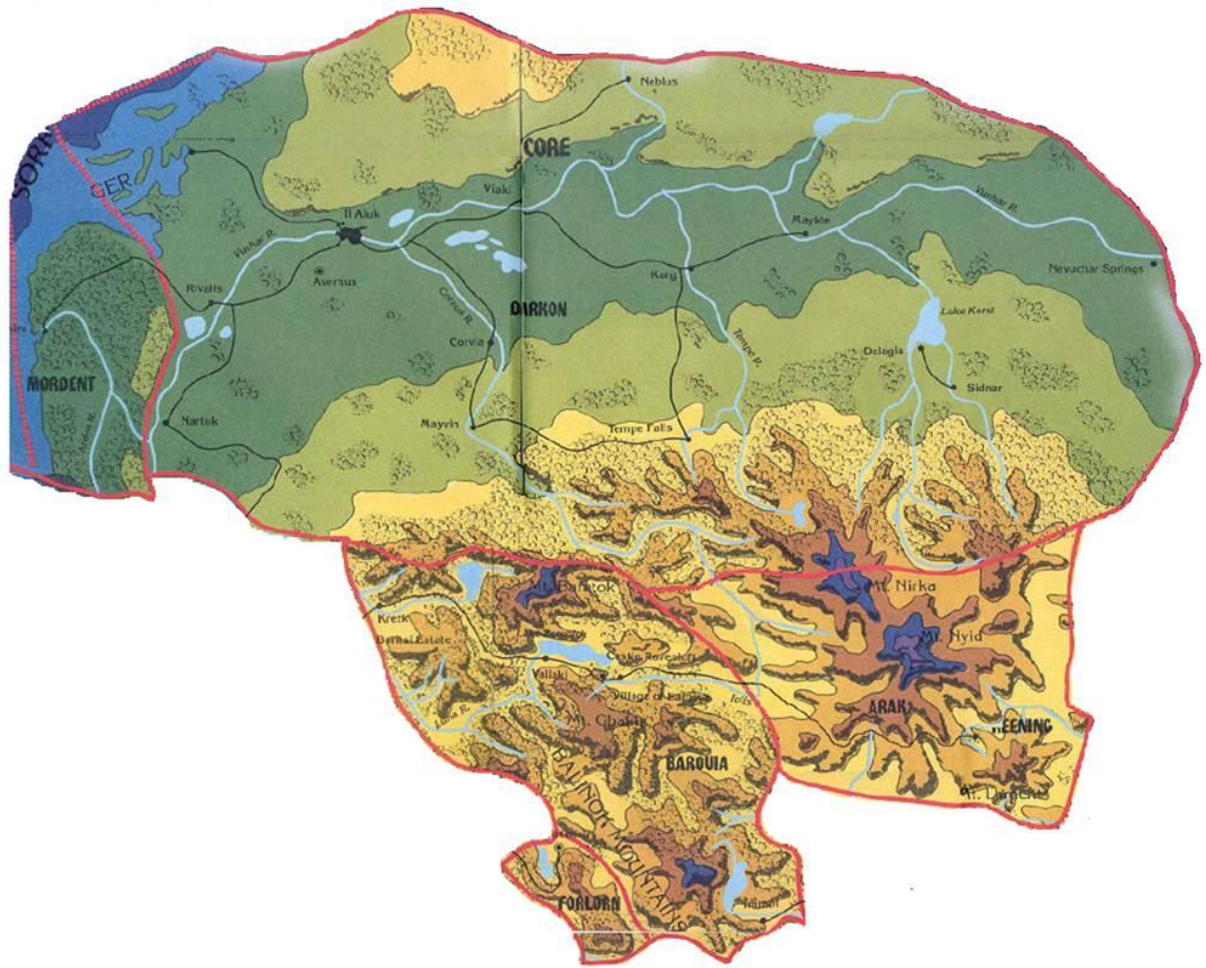
Strahd and Azalin have a few border skirmishes, which Strahd passes off as a war.

Mordent is still a little backwater appended on to the side of Darkon. It's only land route goes to Rivalis, which is probably not much more than a cross roads at the moment. I would imagine most trade would be done by sea, which may be the impetus for Martira Bay to start growing. But fundamentally, everyone's focus is on the east and south; the west's hour is yet to come.

So why is Mordent there rather than next to Barovia (which is where Strahd says it is?) Primarily because none of the geographical features match up: the elevations are wrong, the roads don't align, and most importantly, the coast line is completely wrong. So Mordent has to be connected over here rather than next to Barovia unless you want Rivalis and Nartok to gain sea frontages (which I think would probably have been noted in the histories somewhere had that happened). I've tried to keep the domains' shapes as much as possible, and that requires too much change for me to approve.

Plus, the mountains south of Mayvin and Barovia line up really nicely. It must have been like this.

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581 BC: Bluetspur forms

The remains of the Thaani (those who weren't in the towns when the domain formed - Forbidden Lore) stream out of the mountains into Barovia, and settle around Immol.

This one has always been contentious - cosmic horror in your gothic horror and so on. According to the Black Box, the mountains here are twisted and warped, defying gravity with corkscrew spires and stone arches. Small, glowing lights move through the rocks at night. Almost nothing lives here (by 740). From Thoughts of Darkness onwards, there's the more familiar version.

I like to think that ToD happens 6 months later than it canonically does, and that the hell dimension version only gets like that after the Grand Conjunction. Before that (when it's part of the Core), it's weird but relatively normal.

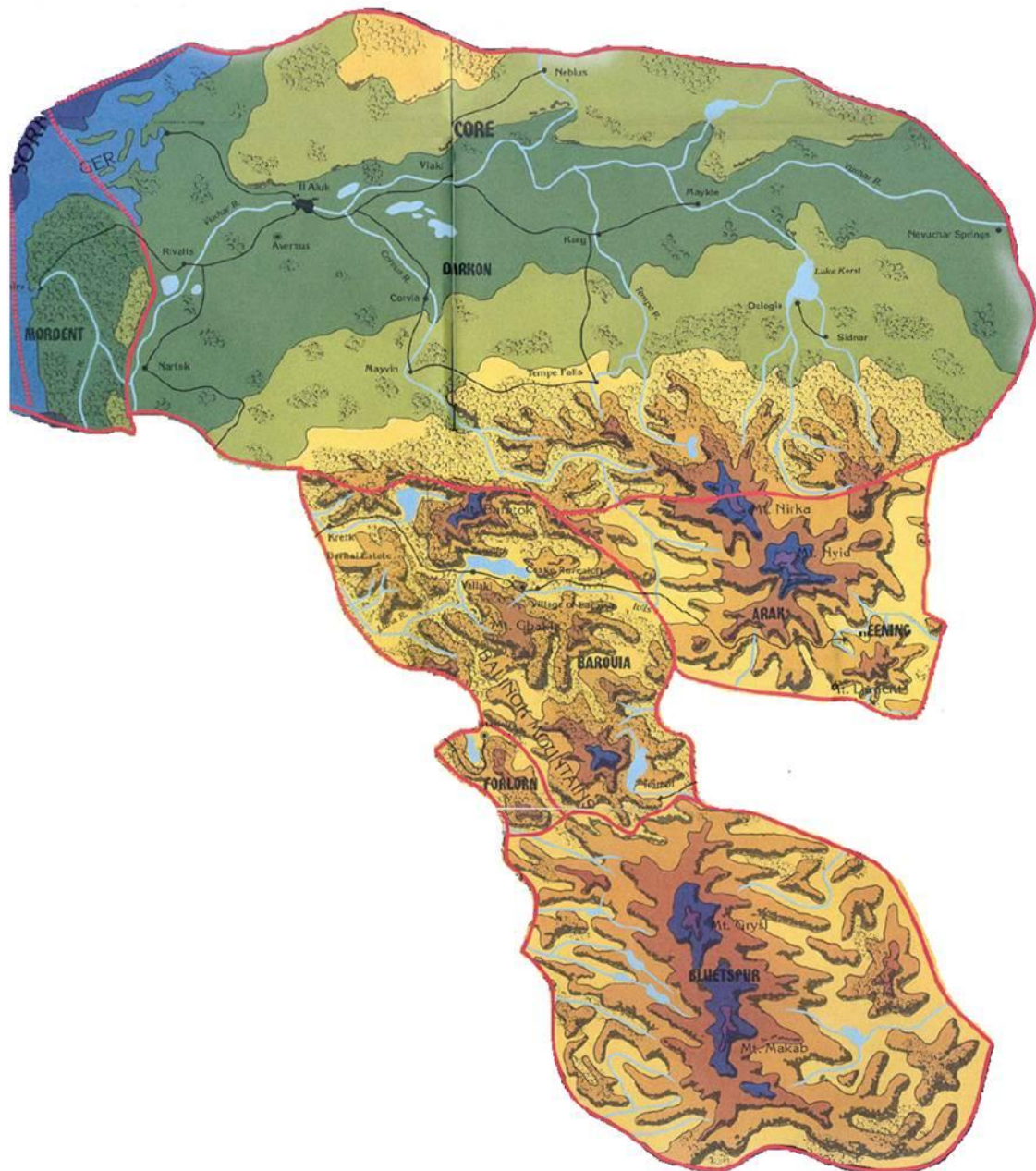
Forbidden Lore implies a few people still live in Bluetspur (and wander down out of the hills when insane) although the Black Box says no one lives above ground. Then we have the mystery of what happened to the people in Thaan's cities and towns.

For those wanting to get a bit more out of Bluetspur before the Grand Conjunction, the solution may be that, before 740 BC, there was still a dwindling population (from the Thaan cities) hidden away in the mountains, who finally (?) die out just before 740 BC. These mystically protected towns fall one by one to the illithids, a la the Dying Earth genre. Invisible, protected from the God Brain's maddening field, they eke out a spartan existence thinking they are the only people left in a dying world...

There's also the problem of why, in the last 150 years, the illithids haven't swarmed out of Bluetspur and conquered the Core. Essentially, there can only be 2 reasons for this: either they don't want to, or they can't. Perhaps when "illithids spawned Bluetspur", they did it deliberately, and sealed the God Brain in by itself, so it took years to kidnap enough humans, ceremorphise them and build up its numbers to the point we see in Thoughts of Darkness. Perhaps they're focusing on cracking this last hidden nut in the Thaani city. Perhaps they're confident that the Thaan are the last humans in the world, and they've killed them all, so they don't bother looking? This is complicated by the God Brain desperately trying to reach out to psychics to experience physical sensation again, but perhaps the God Brain doesn't want to share its discoveries with the illithids? Perhaps they're its jailer rather than its servants?

Personally, I incline towards the Thaani city, if only because it offers more potential for adventure beyond "Run! Run in screaming terror while you still have a mind!" But that's up to you.

And yes, Bluetspur looks like a bit like a brain.



588 BC: Keening forms

After years of conflict, Loht's forces finally defeat the Cult of the Spider Queen. Loht captures the leader and her baby, and with his powrie offside, breaks the Law of Arak by staking her out on the side of the mountain above Marbh-Cathair to die in the sun. This is the only time the Law of Arak has ever been broken. The cleric's screams as she dies (empowered by her dying curse) become an enormous sandstorm, which scours the surface of Arak (and Keening) of life. When the storm clears, her mountain has shifted out of Arak and halfway across Darkon. The mountain becomes Mt Lament, and the cleric's ghost becomes known by the Patterna name of Tristessa (Sad One).

So the mines of Arak only survive for 13 years before being eradicated.

This leads to 2 options for the gap between Keening and Arak: either there's Mist there, or there's some domain there which doesn't last until the modern day. I don't like having Misted areas ringed by domains when I don't have to, so...

Speculation: Between 588 BC and 691 BC (when Tepest replaces it), Ghastria sits between Keening, Barovia, Arak and Darkon.

There are a couple of reasons for this.

First, we know Ghastria is around in this timezone - Darklords tells us d'Polarno's uncursed life was "several centuries ago", which would put his time in the court of King Oderic at around 540 BC. Assuming his rise to power and then fall occurs over about 10 years (which would probably place him in his mid-30s if he starts his influence at about 20 when he achieves his majority), that means Ghastria forms in about 550 BC. I don't want to put it much earlier than this, because I like Forlorn being the second domain to form. And 550 BC or thereabouts puts its formation in the first glut of domains formed, with Forlorn, Har'Akir and Zherisia all forming within a few years of each other. Any later than this, and you start misusing the phrase "several centuries ago". However, there's no Sea of Sorrows for it to exist in, so it must be an Island of Terror. This is presumably therefore the period where d'Polarno nearly wipes out his peasantry exposing them to the picture. But he needs a consistent source of victims 4 times a year to renew himself which is made harder by being an Island. Unless the Dark Powers helpfully send a huge number of people through the Mists or through conjunctions, or he cuts a pretty substantial deal with the Corvara, both of which seems unlikely, where does he get them from?

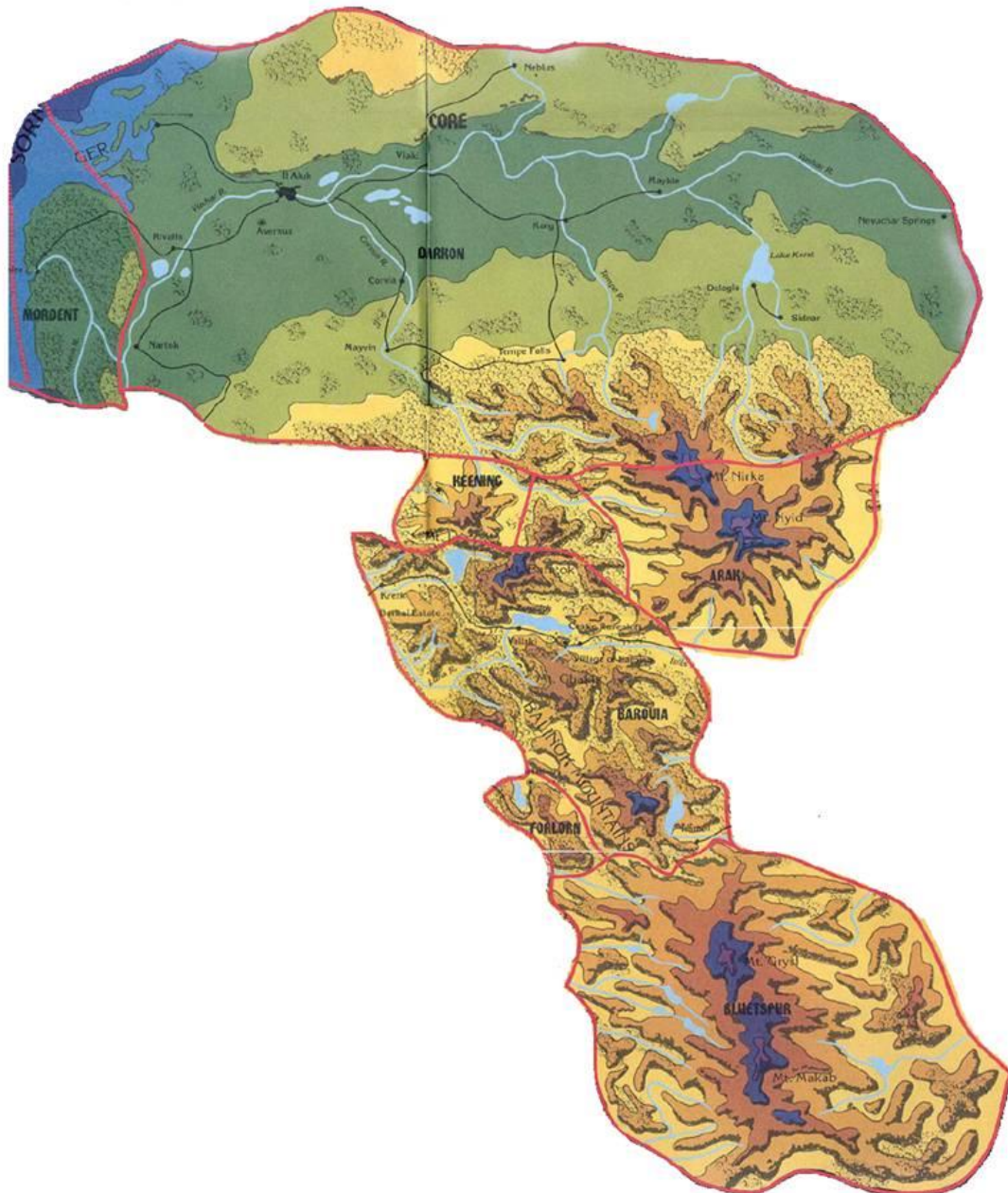
This position doesn't really help with Ghastria's isolation, because they can really only trade for food with Darkon, and there is still a mountain in the way, but it does provide a reasonable source of victims for the painting, so I think it preserves the thematic issues while resolving the practical ones.

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Second, the RL3e map of Ghastria does fit quite nicely into this gap. In fact, the gap is almost exactly the shape of the real world East Riding of Yorkshire, which is too delicious a coincidence to go past.

If you don't like this idea, there may be nothing there but Mist: as you get deeper into the mountains, the clouds close in until you're lost in the fog. Or there may be terra nullius – all the geographic features shown on the map is there, but there's no civilisation. It may be unclaimed land; it may be part of Barovia or Darkon.

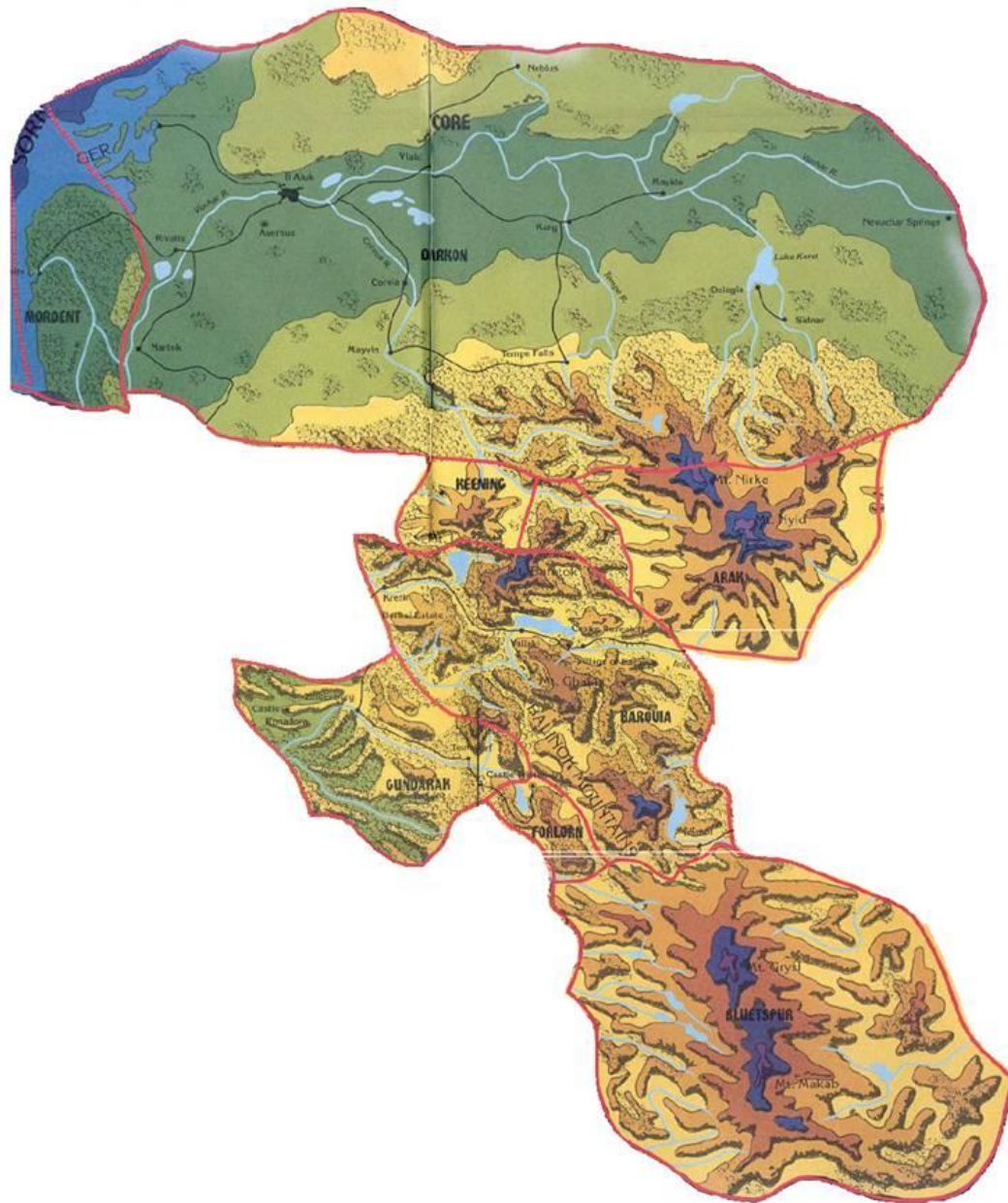
I must say, I prefer the Ghastria idea though.



593 BC: Gundarak forms

Personally, I think the best part of Tapestry of Dark Souls is its portrayal of life in Gundarak. It really doesn't sound like a nice place to be - possibly only Falkovnia would be worse. Gundar himself is a foil to Strahd obviously.

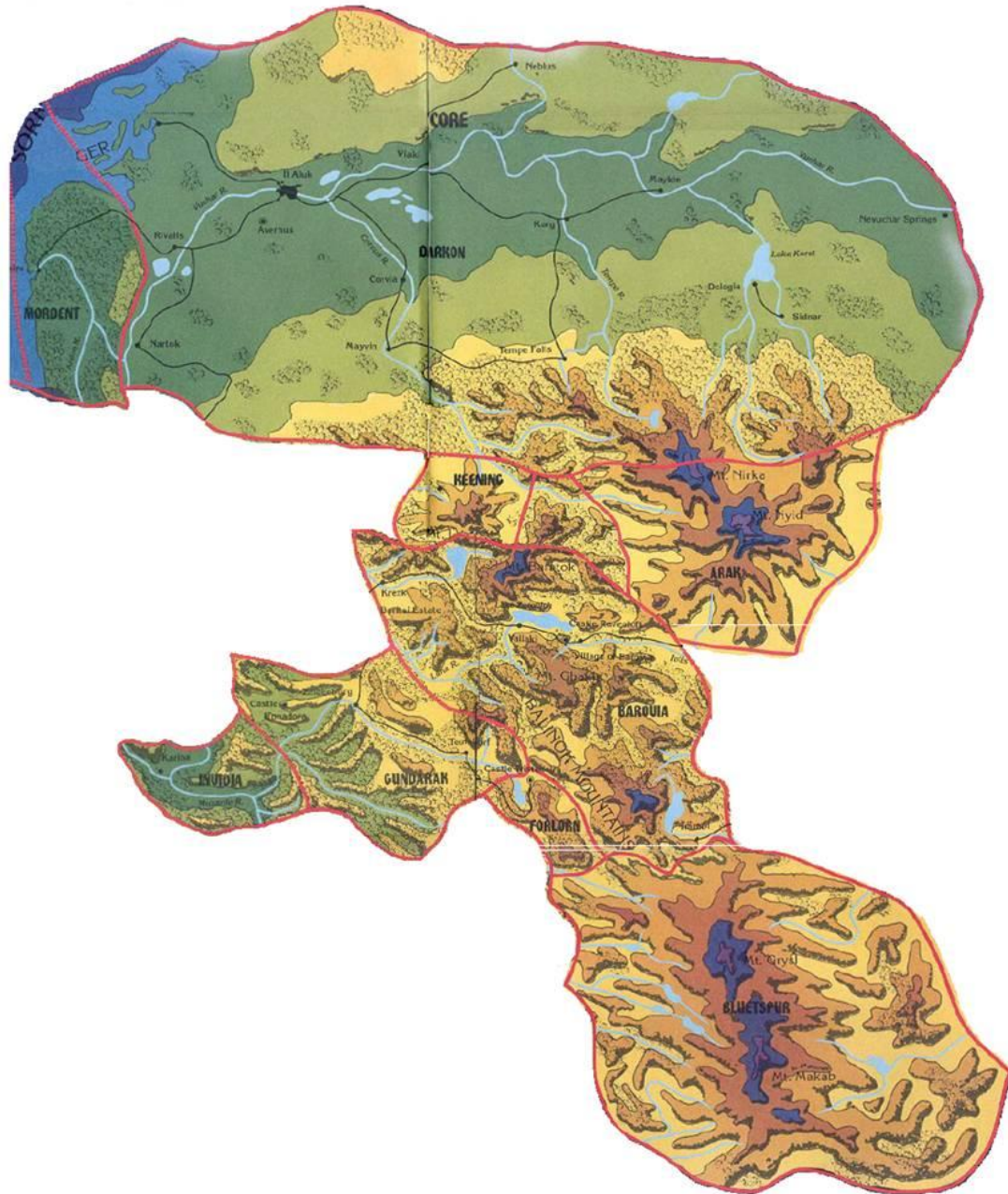
Someday...



603 BC: Invidia forms

The only detailed description of Bakholis (Invidia's first darklord) is in Gaz IV, but it's a great one. Bakholios crime's include murder, tyranny, crushing taxation, abduction, rape, torture, razing a village and crucifying everyone in it, feeding someone slowly into a pit of ravenous and rabid wolves, and leading a gang rape. He truly deserves his darklordship, obviously. Following his imprisonment, he actually gets worse apparently, so that when Gabrielle Aderre finally kills him in 729 BC (126 years later!) everyone was **extremely** happy. Then, only 20 years later, Gabrielle herself is overthrown (politically, if not metaphysically) by Malocchio, who actually has quite a similar style of governance to Bakholis. While Gabrielle was a pretty poor ruler (allowing banditry, purging Vistani, and destroying everyone else's happiness), her more personal evil must seem like a pleasant blip in comparison to the other 140 years of brutal tyranny Invidia has endured. So it just goes to show: all you need is historical perspective.

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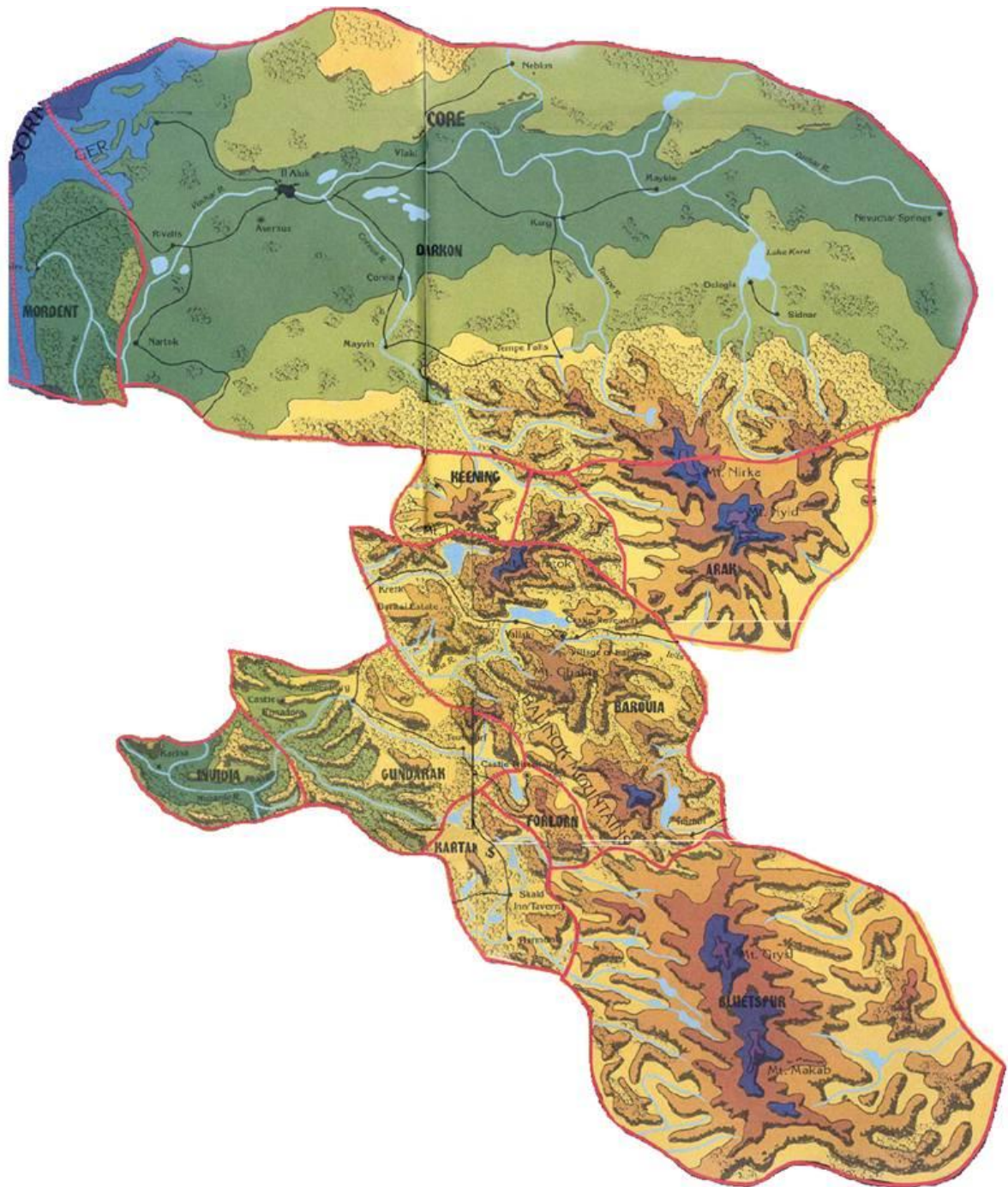
613 BC: Kartakass forms

Harkon Lukas has been wandering around for about 3 years now, making a nuisance of himself, but it's only now that he accrues enough bad karma and goes into the Mists to earn his own domain. I'm not sure which Mists it would be, since it's apparently Strahd who chases him into the Mists, but Kartakass doesn't form anywhere where he could have been chased into. The ways of the Dark Powers are strange, and they decide Kartakass is going next to Gundarak, Forlorn and Bluetspur, rather than next to Barovia where Lukas entered the Mists.

Also note it's going to be ages before Lukas gets bored enough to run for meistersinger; for now, he's just happy being a citizen of note.

By this point, it should be fairly obvious that in most cases there is a reasonably consistent spread outwards from Barovia when new domains form. This isn't going to last forever, but it's an interesting point, and does explain why the Vistani call Barovia "Anda Thema" (the heart of the world).

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625 BC: Valachan forms

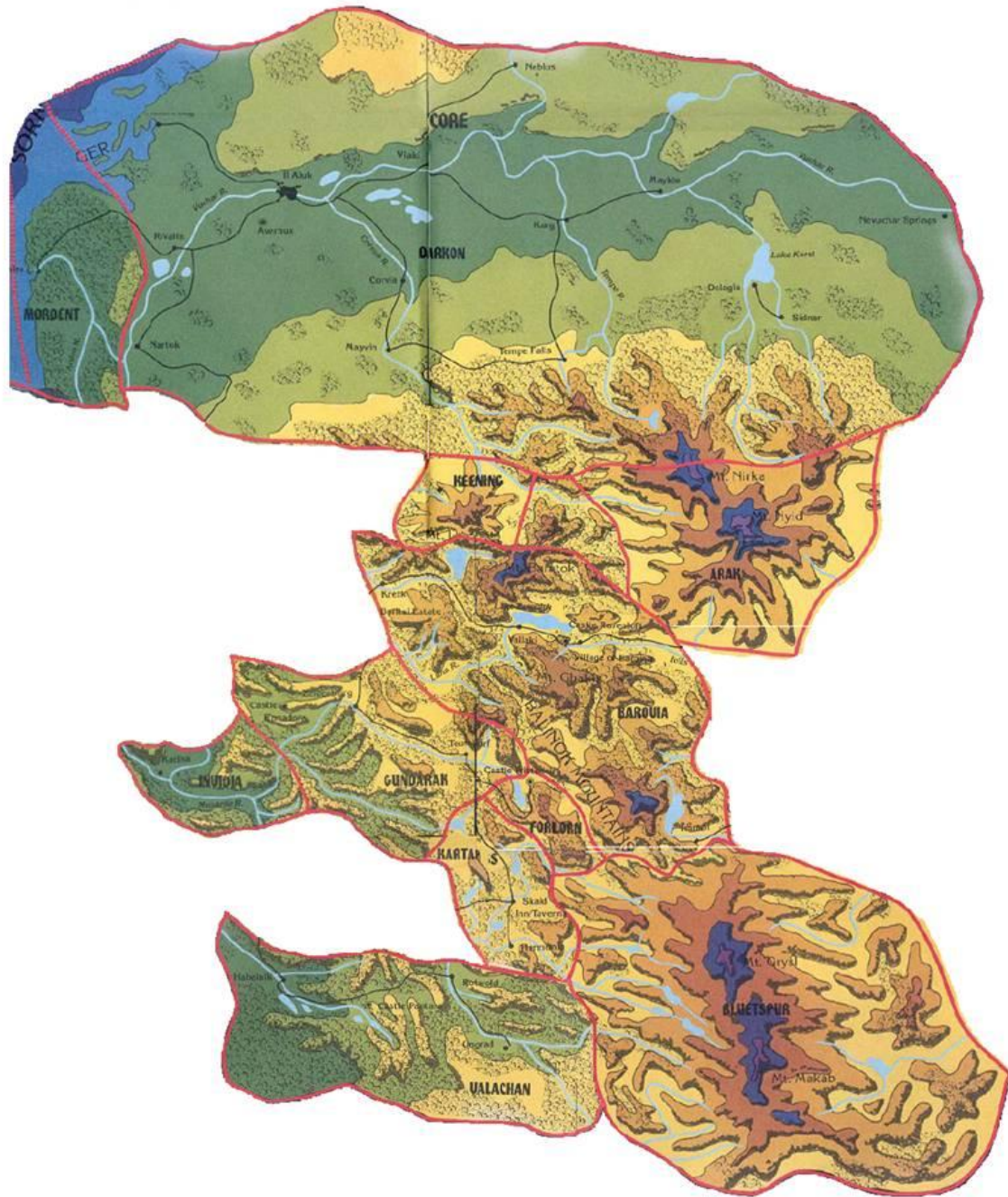
Urik von Kharkov flees Darkon following the death of his Kargat master (possibly after causing the death of his Kargat master), having earned a reputation for cruelty that exceeds even that expected of Kargat vampires. Once in the Mists, he regains his memories, kills a woman, and uses the Beast to kill his original creator. Nearly ravenous from thirst, some time later he is swept up again, and becomes darklord of Valachan for his hypocrisy in wanting to be a man when it's easy but being happy to use the Beast when convenient.

A brief diversion: a lot of darklords seem to be offered a last chance before damning themselves. Strahd was told what to do, and had some idea of what it would entail, but did it anyway. Tristen ApBlanc was warned with dire omens and earthquakes for months before he was finally taken by the Mists. Azalin's history contains so many layers of deception it's hard to work out, but there's being given the lich recipe by his tormentors, his experiments in Barovia (particularly around Mordent's creation by which time he really should have known better), and then being split into Firan and Darcalus to see if, bereft of his memories, he would still seek power and make the same mistake. Azalin's is also the first example of an oubliette forming (Darkon under Darcalus). Then we have Kartakass during the "Invidian occupation", when Harkon Lukas causes the keep to fall, which seems (although it is unclear) to have Kartakass as another oubliette before Lukas takes full control. Then Valachan, where von Kharkov is held in a rainforest oubliette before earning his position as lord of Valachan. Lamordia and Kislova are both surrounded by Mists long before their respective lords take over. Lord Soth sees a dream-Sithicus before he decides to damn it all and live without admitting he was wrong. And so on. That's excluding the people the Mists dump in Ravenloft to cause trouble before earning a domain (like Drakov). So who said the Dark Powers weren't merciful?

Valachan is one of those domains that has not been well received, which is a bit disappointing after all the work I put into it. Despite its reputation for nothing ever happening there, quite a few background events and adventures occur there, particularly compared to other "forgotten" domains. Like its lord, it's full of uneasy dualities, like post-colonial melding of its people, the odd climate, the relationship with Adeline, and so on.

Note Valachan currently neighbours Kartakass and Bluetspur, with steep cliffs dropping down into the Valachani forests. Given the cliffs and that it's on the wrong side of Kartakass, it's very much the hinterland of the Core. Things aren't going to improve for it for a long time to come, when it'll stop hanging around the back and join up with Mordent. Where it'll still be seen as a backwater, but at least is getting closer to civilisation.

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630 BC: The Sea of Sorrows forms

Pieter van Riese makes a dark bargain to sacrifice anyone and anything to whatever power will let him force passage through a terrible storm. When the storm abates, he finds himself alone on the Relentless, doomed to wander the misty seas forever.

The Sea of Sorrows has always had very mutable boundaries. It's described as extremely prone to fogs and mists and Mists, so even ships hugging close to the shoreline could wander into a bank of fog and never emerge again. It can obviously extend into other domains as well, as van Riese takes on new crews. Quite how he manages to convince anyone to come aboard when the Relentless is well known (by name) as a dire omen is a bit of a mystery - perhaps when corporeal, the Relentless disguises itself as something innocuous. Perhaps it is named "Relentless" in van Riese's native language when corporeal, but seen as "Relentless" in whatever your native tongue happens to be when incorporeal?

In any case, van Riese and the Relentless get a couple of cameos in adventures as omens of dire warning, just before your PCs are swept up by the Mists or attacked by a soul kraken or something.

Because of its mutable boundaries, it is hard to pin down exactly which domains it links to and which domains were reached through it via the Mists. Valachan, for example, has a coastline in the Red Box but doesn't in Domains of Dread or RL3e. Is Nebligtode originally found north of Lamordia (as Ship of Horror has it, until the Grand Conjunction at least) or is that just a Mistway (as the Nocturnal Sea gazetteer has it)? I quite like the idea of the Mists pulling back and flowing in again, like they do in the Mistlands of Darkon, so sometimes Valachan is bordered by sea, and sometimes by Mist. Needless to say, no one lives anywhere near places where the Mists could wash over them, so that part of the domain is probably doesn't have anyone living along the Schrodinger-coast (as the maps show).

We know Ghastria is around in this timezone (although on my map, it's still hypothetically nestled between Keening and Arak). If you don't like this, it could take its place in the Sea of Sorrows anytime from now onwards. In my supposition, it'll move there when Tepest displaces it in 691 BC. If you take the Red Box maps as "in game" maps, there's land in the right place for Ghastria by 740 BC, so it must be there by then.

Blaustein will be around in the next few years, but given how close it is to Dementlieu and Mordent, it should be on the Red Box map if it's there, and it's not, which may mean it exists as an Island of Terror (harvesting wives via conjunctions) until about 741 BC. Or maybe it's just not on the Red Box map for some other reason (it's a secret pirate hideout and they kill everyone who gets close enough to put it on a map?).

Obviously, Markovia and Dominia are yet to join the Sea. Markovia does it in 740 BC, and Dominia does it in about 748 BC ("recently" according to Bleak House, which is set in 750

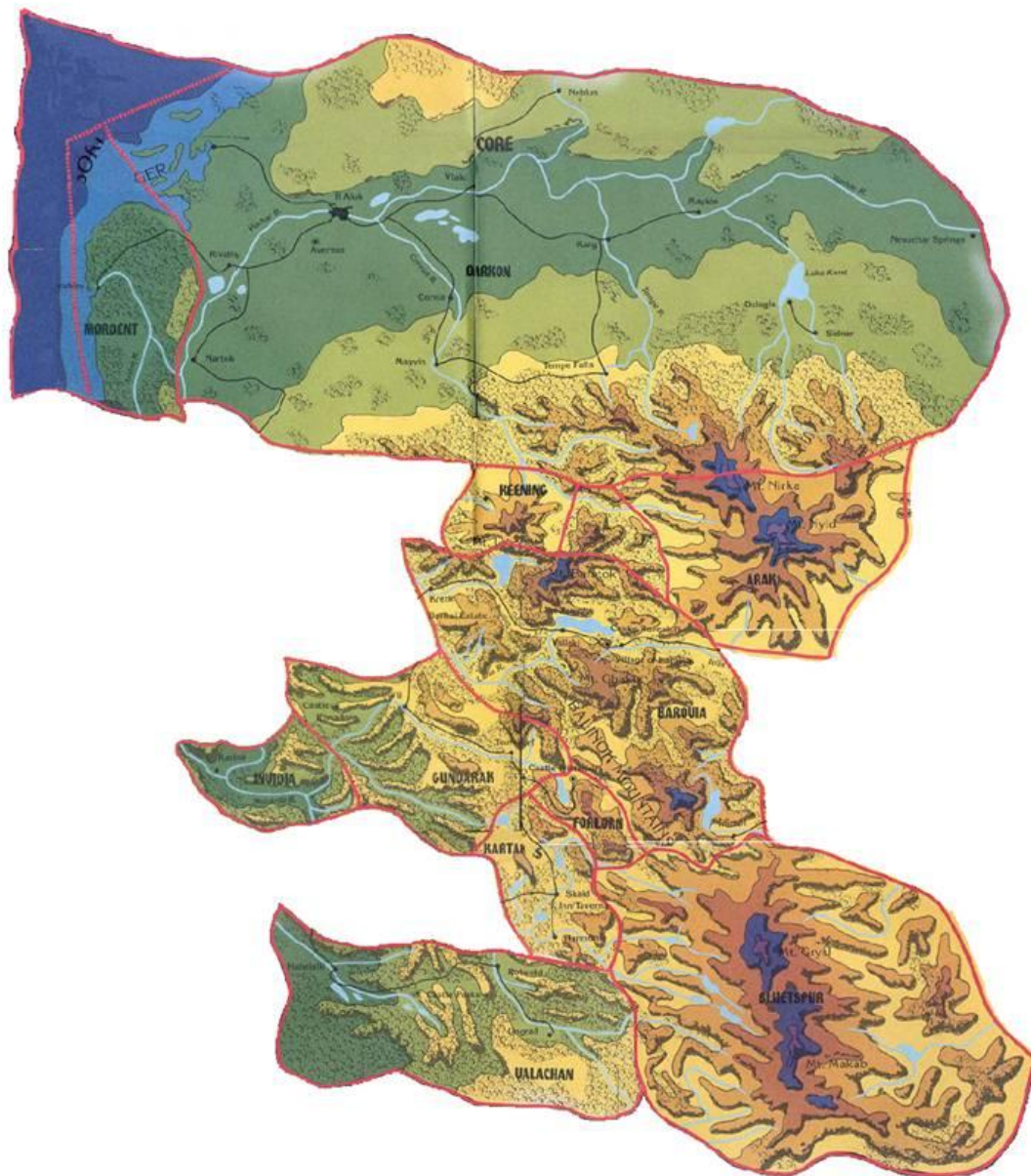
BC). Demise will appear in 686 BC or so.

Ramsay Island (from the House at the Edge of Midnight) forms about a century before 740 BC or in 393 BC, depending on which part of the adventure you're reading. As 393 BC has to be a continuity error (no Mordent or Sea of Sorrows for them to come from, amongst other problems), we'll say it forms in the next few years.

Finally, a lot of the islands that end up in the Nocturnal Sea could be transiently located here (L'île de la Tempête, which forms in 677 BC, for example, is specifically noted to appear in the Sea of Sorrows at times).

The upshot of all this is that the Sea of Sorrows is largely empty for a long time: Ramsay Island, Demise and Ghastria are all there between 635 and about 690 BC, but Markovia, Blaustein and Dominia don't arrive until after the Grand Conjunction.

Interestingly, Nebligtode (which will one day become the Nocturnal Sea) forms just after the Sea of Sorrows, in 635 BC. At this stage, it's probably an Island (perhaps with a Mistway to the Sea of Sorrows), but it might be north of Mordent/Lamordia in the Sea itself, depending on which source you believe.





From left to right: Ramsay Island, Ghastria, Markovia, Dominia and Blaustein (750 BC).

682 BC: Nova Vaasa forms

What have the Dark Powers been doing for the last 50 years? Obviously their attention has been elsewhere.

And so we come to the tangled continuity sprawl that is Nova Vaasa - unique because out of 5 canon descriptions in 2e, not one agreed with the others. How many moons are there, The Awakening? What class is Tristen, Enemy Within? What is Tristen's name, Monster Compendium II? So three cheers for Andrew Cermak for trying to make some sense out of that tangled mess for Gaz V.

It's also one of the ones that tends to cause controversy because of Tristen not deserving it. Interestingly, Lamordia (the other one), is the next domain to form. Perhaps it's a phase the Dark Powers are going through?

Personally, I prefer Rotipher's interpretation of events: before he was cursed, Tristen was LE, and it was the losing control he regretted, not the murder. His hypocrisy (particularly given how young he was when he became a darklord) leads to a literally 2 faced darklord, and an equally bifurcated domain, also full of hypocritical nobles in lovely country villas, squeezing the lifeblood out of their servants and urban poor. As regards Edmund Hiregaard, Malken is gaslighting the alchemist (Tristen's cousin) into thinking his dark side is Malken.

Another theory I devised years ago was that the domains that have been retconned (Arak and Nova Vaasa) also border the Nightmare Lands (although not yet). Perhaps the unreality of the dreamscape drifts in slow sheets across its neighbouring domains, causing uncertain histories to follow?

Important to note: Malken is the darklord, and Tristen is his curse, not the other way around.

This is also the first time the Church of the Lawgiver appears in the Core.

Another interesting point about Nova Vaasa is that it significantly changes size during the Grand Conjunction. Continuing this theme, the Nova Vaasa on this map is slightly smaller than the Nova Vaasa that'll appear in 690 BC, which is smaller than the one that'll appear in 740 BC. I like to think it represents Malken's struggle with Tristen: as Tristen gets older and more tired, his is less able to constrain Malken's evil, and the domain swells to match (although unfortunately, neither 690 nor 740 really coincides with anything important in Malken's life).

A brief diversion into the world of trade: Barovia (the south Core) and Darkon (the north Core) are originally able to trade through the Krezk path, or the trade route through Arak and Marbh-Cathair. Mordent and Darkon can trade overland or through the Sea of Sorrows, which starts the long demographic shift in Darkon towards the west.

The formation of Keening closes this pass, so for the last 100 years or so, all trade between the north and south Cores has had to go through either Arak or the Mists (the Dark Powers decide that if Strahd and Azalin can't play nicely, they don't get to play together at all). Gundarak and Invidia can trade along the rivers, and then overland to Barovia. Marbh-Cathair's gone, but the mountain passes they used to trade through remain—which just goes

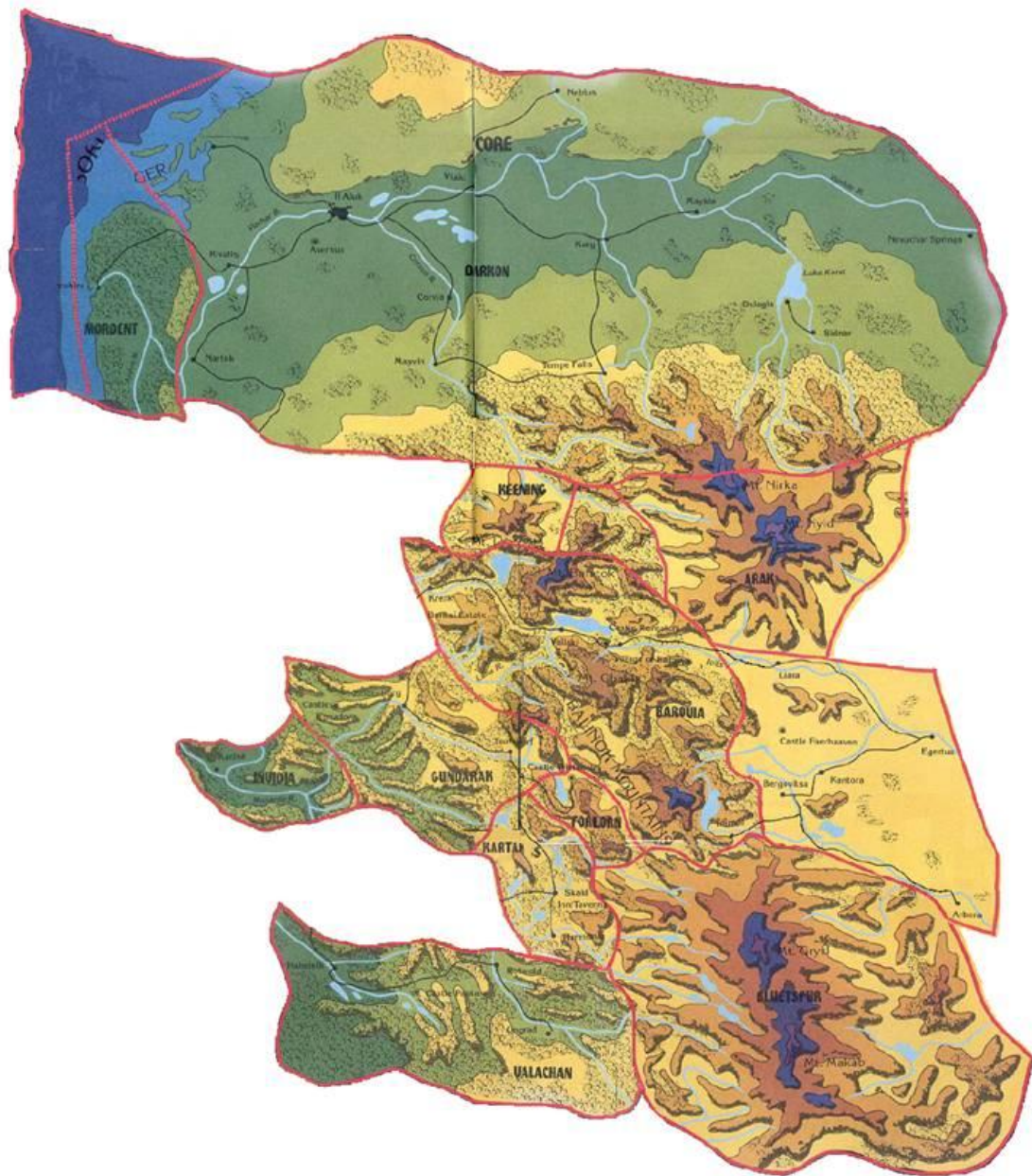
to show how traumatic the Scourge of Arak must have been for the Core as a whole. It annihilated a domain, destroyed a healthy slab of the mining industry, and made trade extremely difficult. Again, this probably reinforces Barovian xenophobia.

My placement of Nova Vaasa after 100 years of this means that the old route through Arak suddenly has Liara on it as a way station (in a very similar position to where Marbh-Cathair was, actually). Coincidentally, this is Tristen Hiregaard's hometown. Trade between north and south Cores therefore continues through Arak, with only minor deviations into Nova Vaasa, which fits Nova Vaasa's isolated, foreign, wilderness character. In 8 years, Falkovnia forms, and even though it's Falkovnia, it's easier to trade through it than Arak, so this trade route will very slowly dry up.

If you don't like the distance between Kantora and Bergovista changing slightly between 682 and 690 BC, you could always stick the domain at its 740 size and position, between Barovia and Darkon (multiple choice histories to go with Nova Vaasa again!). However, there are 2 reasons why I don't think this is correct.

1. If you want to have Nova Vaasa directly between Barovia and Arak (so, without changing positions in 690 BC), trade goes through Arak, Egertus, Kantora, Bergovista and further south to the Old Svalich Road. I think that requires too central a position for Nova Vaasa, but you may disagree. It certainly would explain the bloated size of Nova Vaasan cities.

And 2. In Gaz V, contemporary sources from 682 (although it has to be 683) BC in Nova Vaasa describe "howling fear to the west, stone death to the north, shapeless nightmares to the east and nothing but ominous swirling to the south". Which is to say, shortly after it forms, Nova Vaasa was bordered by Barovia, Arak, the Nightmare Lands (from 683 BC) and the Mists. If it was in its 740 BC position, it's mostly got Mist to the west, not howling fear.

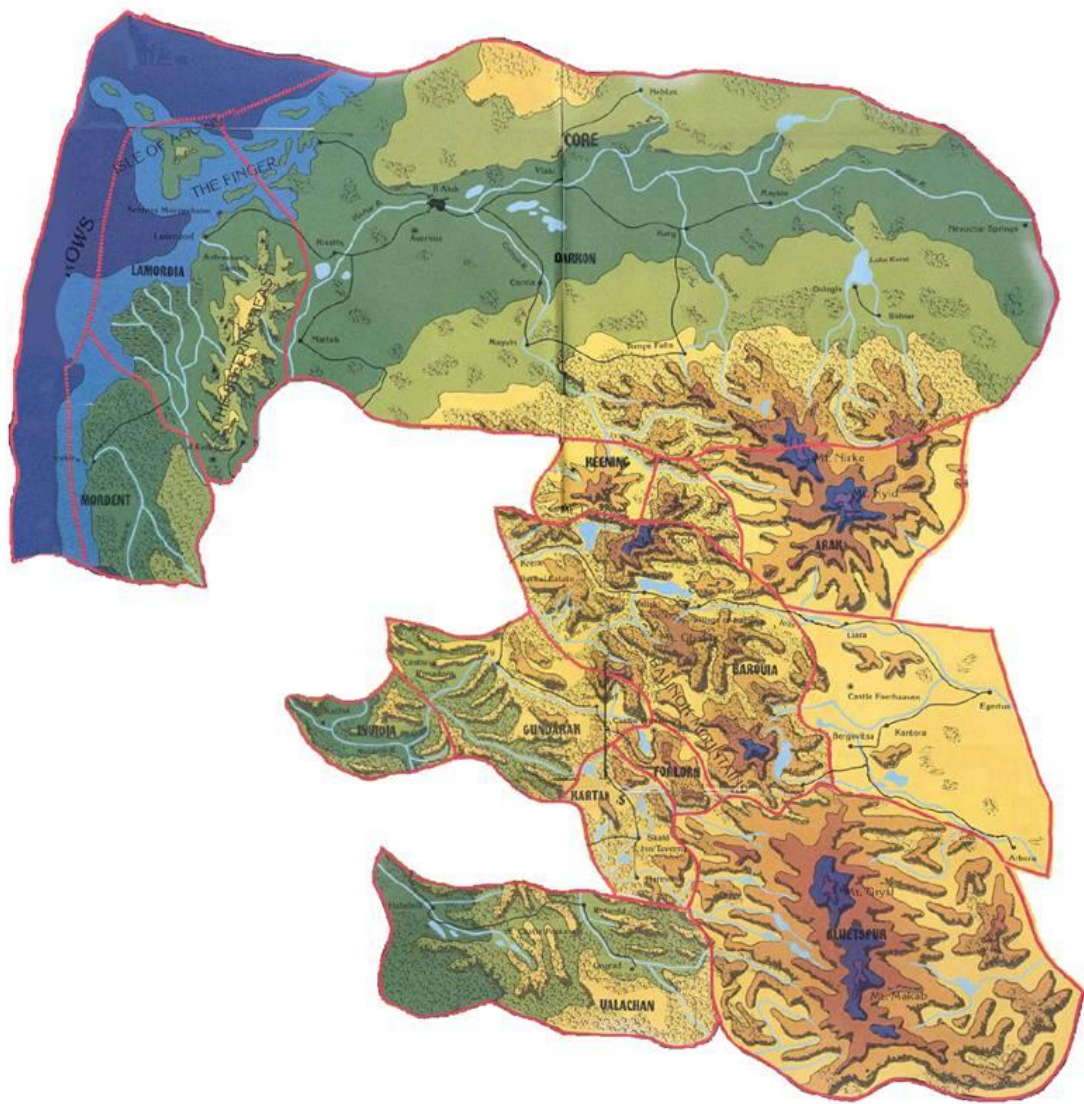


683 BC: Lamordia forms

Less to say about this one thankfully. Lamordia assumes it's current position with Darkon, shifting Mordent down a bit. The Sea of Sorrows gets a bit larger, and with more trading partners. Demise will appear in about 686 BC, so the Finger's a little bit shorter than this map shows. Given none of the roads or rivers join up in the northern Core now, all the trade must be done by Mist or sea, except between Ludendorf and Rivalis, so this is probably when Rivalis and Martira Bay really start to boom.

In terms of Adam being the darklord: I would like to point out that, while their descriptions say Adam was created evil, Adam and Mordenheim's descriptions (and the novel) say they're both unreliable narrators. I think we should go with the Red Box and say that, at first, Adam was childlike and innocent, and then, out of hatred for Mordenheim, deliberately chose evil. In the novel, you can even pin down the moment he does it, because both Mordenheim and Adam refer to the same scene. And then whatever he did to Elise and Eva was enough to earn his darklordship. I like to think he deliberately dropped Eva out of spite, and is therefore guilty of trying to kill the only 2 people he actually cared about in the world just out of rage and the desire to hurt Mordenheim.

Needless to say, I do not approve of Eva's descendants being playable as of Legacies of Blood. I think that may have been misguided.



683 BC: The Nightmare Lands form

Who knows how long they've been hidden away in the Mists for?

I've decided not to show the Nightmare Lands on my maps only because it was too much hassle to keep changing the size of a completely featureless box. It is there, however. In this timeframe, it stretches from the edges of Darkon, along Arak and probably stops at the point of Nova Vaasa. When Hazlan forms in 714 BC, it grows to stretch alongside Hazlan down to Bluetspur as well.

Nothing much happens here for a long time. Quite understandably, half the population of Egertus flee when the Nightmare Lands appear. The Gathering Cloth is made and sold to some Nova Vaasans. Van Richten and Ilhousen will go there on a visit (which tells us that the Ring of Dreams and the poorly-named "Forest" of Everchange exist, and so therefore probably also the City of Nod - so it's in its modern form, just not the same shape). After the Grand Conjunction, the Illuminated Man will join the Carnival, and the Clinic for the Mentally Distressed will be drawn into the Nightmare Lands.

And that's about it.

I've always thought of the Nightmare Court as all being aspects of the Nightmare Man, by the way, rather than individual beings - his fears and regrets clothed in his memories or imagination. Also, there's a member of the Court described in the Guide to Transylvania but not in the Nightmare Lands Boxed set - the Red Haired Child, who deals in regret.

684 BC: Borca forms

Camille Dilisnya is darklord, although she's essentially a less sympathetic version of Ivana Boritsi without the poison touch. She is born in Mordent, from a branch of the Dilisnyas who took the opportunity to flee Strahd's wrath when Mordent appeared in 579 BC (when, appropriately enough, Strahd himself was either in Mordent or distracted or unconscious). After murdering her husband, she intended to flee to yet another branch of the family in Invidia, but her carriage lost it's way in the Mists and ended up in Borca (so either she was travelling from Mordent to Invidia via Vistani, she was planning a long and very roundabout trip, or she was risking the Mists on her own—I'm inclined to think that she was just fleeing blindly, and the Invidia aspect was added on later by her, her family, biographers or false history). She may also have been deliberately driven into the Mists as Yagno Petrovna and Ivan Dilisnya were, but I like to think she got away before she was caught.

However, Borca's appearance does mean that there are now roads linking Kartakass, Gundarak, Borca, Barovia and Nova Vaasa, and river trade from Barovia to Borca and Nova Vaasa and Gundarak to Invidia. Valachan is still quite isolated, and the only route between north and south Cores is through Arak. But overall, this must have been the start of a long period of advancing trade through the south Core, with Borca as a vital central point, which probably goes a long way to explaining the influence Borca obtains and retains from now until the modern era. As Gaz IV says, trade is its lifeblood, and when the rest of the Dilisnya clan come from all the domains of Ravenloft, they bring with them economic ties and a certain degree of cosmopolitanism (which is probably the first time it appears in the Core actually, given all the other domains are quite isolationistic).

Eventually, Borca will turn its trade attentions to more lucrative, less volatile partners like Falkovnia (and then on to Darkon), Richemulot, Mordent, Dementlieu, etc. But at the moment, there's no one to trade with except Gundarak (who is bad for merchants and seizes their stuff a lot of the time), Barovia, Kartakass and Invidia (who is almost as bad as Gundar), and the Borcans are merchants from the start, so they have to be going south at least some of the time. Gundar can't seize the goods of every merchant that travels through there.

It's like the Arak road - it starts off as an important trade route, but dies off as newer, safer and more lucrative routes open up as new domains form.

So, at the moment, Borca is doing some trade with the bandit haunted and unstable domains of the south, but as soon as better options appear, it's turn to them and the south road will fall out of use. Then, when Bakholis is killed and Invidia enters a new age of potential stability, the Borcans try heading south again but meet Gundar's son and then Aderre, and learn not to take advantage of Vistani sorcerers. And the Blood Coin is crafted.

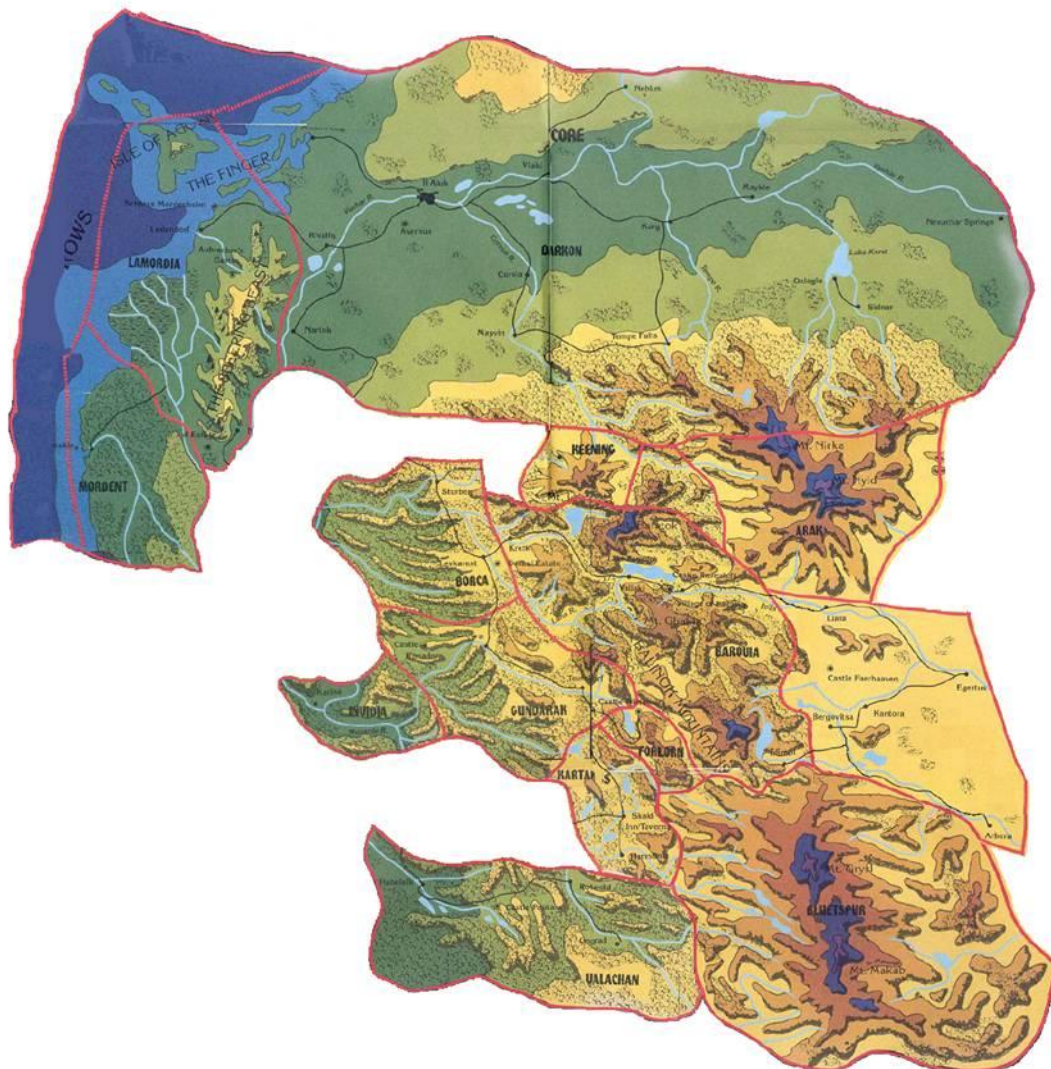
Note that in this period, Borca's a less corrupt and unstable place than it'll become after the Grand Conjunction when Ivan Dilisnya gains control of the military and tax systems. Camille

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Dilisnya does own the entire domain though, just as Ivana will after her. She's a competent ruler but unpopular due to her temper, so Borca is less stable but richer than it will be under Ivana, and much less oppressively corrupt (but more stable) than it'll become under both the Dark Twins.

The Church of Ezra is founded in Mordent in 666 BC (tee hee), but finds its spiritual home in Borca just one year after Borca's appearance. Camille then causes the First Schism and formation of the Mordentish sect when she poisons just about everyone she knows in a fit of outrage at a possible betrayal in 698 BC, which nearly causes a Church-led peasant revolt.

Note the Dorvinians claim their country appears now alongside Borca (and presumably Keening). Obviously, there isn't enough space to physically fit it there either. Damn false history.



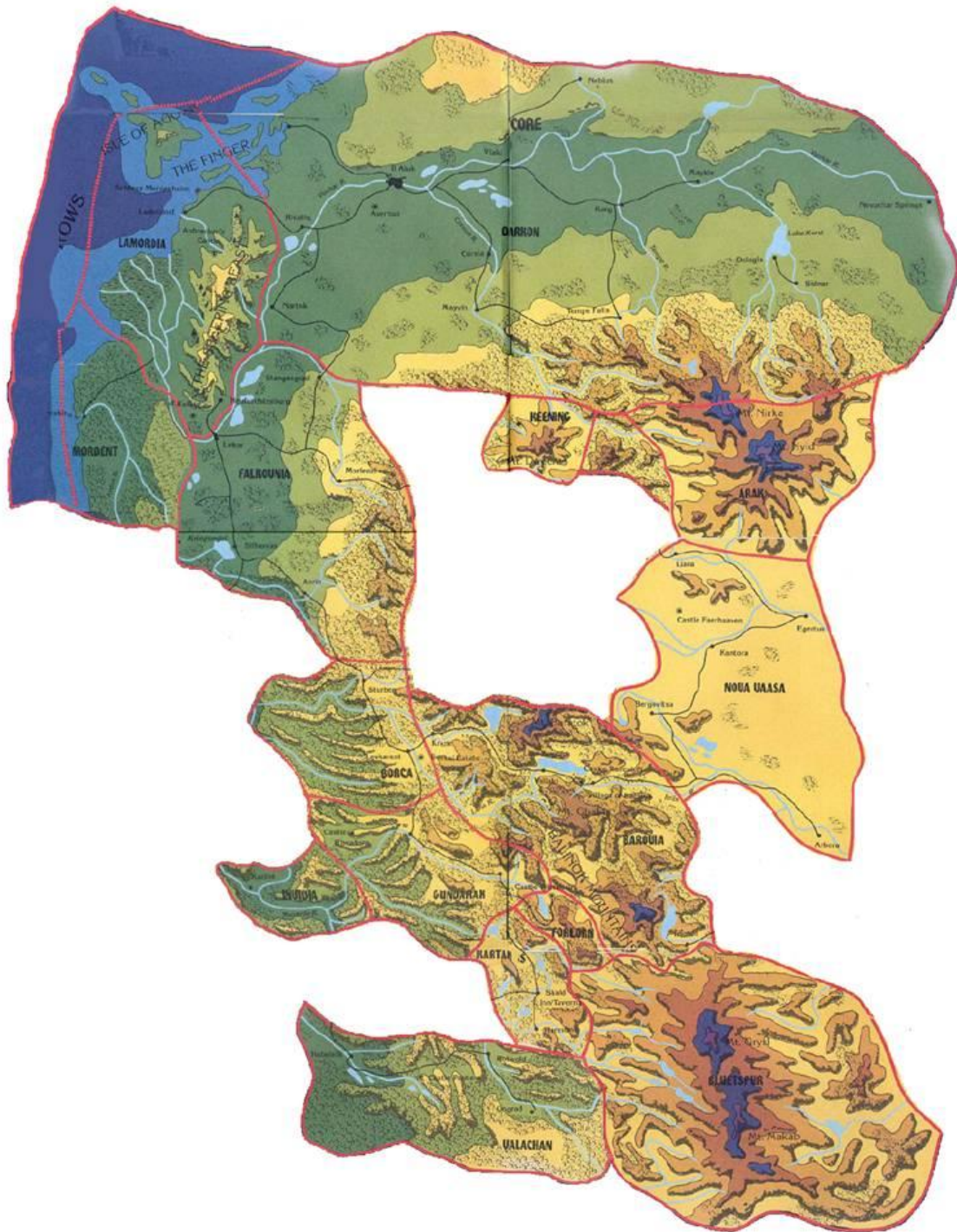
690 BC: Falkovnia forms

After a little while wandering around Darkon and butchering peasants, undead chase Drakov into the Mists and Falkovnia forms, leaving a gigantic Misty hole in the middle of the Core. Borca's attentions turn north, to trading with Falkovnia and through it, Darkon, and ignoring Gundarak and Invidia. Ghastria (still going with my speculation) could disappear anytime between now and next year, when Tepest forms. Nova Vaasa gets slightly bigger, and slides upwards. Mordent currently borders Falkovnia, Lamordia and the Sea of Sorrows.

Falkovnia is both a good thing and a bad thing for the rest of the Core. On the positive side, Falkovnia is a more stable and familiar route between Darkon and the rest of the Core than going through Arak. It also produces much more grain than it needs, so everyone benefits from that. On the downside however is Drakov's need to conquer. Also, the formation of Falkovnia must have been incredibly disruptive to the Core - the changes wrought by its formation are almost on a par with those of the Grand Conjunction. However, we now have the basic shape of the modern Core in place.

A word on Drakov: Drakov is a powerful fighter and seasoned mercenary captain. It is established as fact that he has had a very successful career as a mercenary king, which means he must be a reasonable tactician. His main (military) flaws are that he is stubborn and thinks he knows best (to the point of using completely outmoded tactics that may have been successful against medieval foes on Taladas, but are completely wrong for facing gunpowder weapons, not to mention his disdain for magic). His main personality flaws are viciousness, a huge inferiority complex, and sadism.

People have interpreted Drakov's curse as meaning his never has any military victories at all. Reading the 2e stuff on him though, I think it's slightly more subtle - he never has any meaningful or satisfying victories. Remember that he doesn't consider victories against old men, women or fops to be of any value, so it doesn't matter how often he invades most of the countries around him, any victories he may accrue mean nothing to him. And he has no hope of defeating Azalin. He also wants to earn the respect of his peers, so the fact that everyone else thinks he's an incompetent fool is probably exaggerated by his curse rather than being a reflection of his actual prowess (rather like Mordenheim's scientific abilities).



A brief history of Drakov's military campaigns

690 - He's consolidating his rule.

691 to 694 - He's concerned with internal issues, dealing with a wererat infestation and completely coincidentally a powerful thieves guild led by Claude Renier, who has led his family in from prime material Mordent. Drakov finally drives the Reniers out of Falkovnia and Richemulot forms; Mordent hops down to border it, making it the only domain to border Falkovnia which Falkovnia never invades.

695 to 696 - Falkovnia invades Lamordia. Apart from being beaten back by the weather and gunpowder weapons, I think this is a war Drakov has a reasonable chance of doing well in, if only because he doesn't care all that much about victory and Adam's unlikely to get involved because he doesn't care either. Neufurchtenburg's very vulnerable on that side of the Sleeping Beast, as well. This invasion leads to a secret deal to supply weapons and armour (but not guns) to Falkovnia in 700, which is formalised as treaty in 703. So this actually counts as a victory for Drakov - he beats someone into submission, and forces reasonable terms out of them afterwards, even if Lamordia remains an independent country. Or he's beaten by the weather and cowards' weapons, depending on how you look at it.

700 to 701 - Falkovnia invades Darkon. He actually makes it a reasonable distance this time, probably because Azalin's not expecting it. Although he's beaten back, he scares Nartok immensely, who starts work on its walls (making Nartok into a boom town).

704 - Invades again, but this time beaten back within minutes. He purges his commanders.

706 - Invades Borca, but let down by the fact Falkovnia is currently full of Borcan spies (or "merchants" as they are more commonly known). So Camille poisons them even before they've left Falkovnia, and then poisons the rest. So Drakov is beaten by treachery and cowards' weapons, but he never invades Borca again. Purges continue.

707 to 709 - Invades Dementlieu. He has some initial successes, despite being faced with guns again (presumably, he's learnt from last time) before all of his leaders start defecting and leading his troops into ambushes. Dominic is only about 8 years old at this point, so I sincerely doubt he gets close enough to any Falkovonian commanders in order to brainwash them, so this may be a case of genuine defections by his commanders (perhaps influenced by Dementlieu's general character). I'd certainly want to get out of there if I could in the face of years of purges among his commanders for "mistakes" in Darkon (not to mention the horrors of wars in Darkon). After this though, Talons start wearing their bracers to ensure their loyalty to Drakov. So defeated by treachery again.

711 - Darkon again. The weak have all defected or been purged, so let's try again. And presumably, he tries something different, like distracting Azalin and then striking at Mayvin

rather than Nartok. We don't know canonically, but we do know he lasts longer than he did in 704 BC. Following failure here, Drakov begins a long planning campaign, determined to take Azalin down. So he does learn from his mistakes.

716 - Invades Richemulot

719 - Invades G'Henna and Markovia. I think these 716/719 are actually training exercises for Darkon rather than real invasions (so they don't count). He knows he needs troops ready to face hordes of undead and gunpowder weapons, so he invades realms where he gets similar conditions: guns in Richemulot, and monsters and harsh conditions in G'Henna and Markovia. Or maybe he's trying to strike at Darkon through G'Henna. Either way, his training exercises are a bit too extreme, so he calls off his planned invasion of Darkon and purges his commanders. So defeated by incompetence this time.

724 - Invades Dementlieu and Richemulot again, this time for real. This scares Jacqueline enough to make her demand all he citizens swear to defend the realm. We know the war goes on for a while in Dementlieu (perhaps aided by the Brain), but then I would imagine Dominic calls a surrender and brainwashes everyone he can find to destroy the Falkovnians from within. This is the only time Drakov is beaten by overtly supernatural powers (if you accept Azalin is publically known as a necromancer and could control his undead that way, rather than through darklord powers).

727 - Invades Dorvinia. Does quite well until Ivan personally poisons everything that moves while in disguise. So, cowards' weapons again.

Then he focuses internally - probably trying to train competent, loyal commanders - for the next 23 years.

751 - Invades Darkon. This is quite sensible if you think that Azalin's necromancy animates the undead armies, and Azalin is currently dead. Unfortunately, it's not that simple, so Drakov makes it all the way to Nartok (this time, with treachery on his side), before Azalin stirs and the undead rise.

So, Drakov is defeated by weapons he has no experience with and the weather, an all-powerful necromancer a couple of times (although he keeps trying different tactics each time, but is just outclassed by Azalin), internal treachery, foreign spies, poison several times, incompetence amongst his commanders, and supernatural powers once. So his reputation amongst players is probably worse than it should be, because several of those are not his fault or he had no way of knowing about, and he does seem to learn from his mistakes.

691 BC: Tepest forms

The sisters Mindefisk earn their domain at the age of 16 by each of them planning to betray their sisters and escape from rural Tepest with a handsome rake, and then killing him when they find out he's been playing them, not out of vengeance but so that neither of their sisters can have him. This is after years of working together to seduce, kill, rob and cook travellers. Their first seduction is at 13, incidentally, which is a bit... worrying. Depending on your game, you may decide that "seduction" there is not used in its everyday sense, but in the sense of "getting someone to do something they wouldn't normally want to do."

I like the Hags (again, they're portrayed really well in Tapestry of Dark Souls). No one is as petty, spiteful, malicious and co-dependent. They are a great ally for PCs (making magical items or casting spells, in an unreliable arms dealer/deal with the devil kind of way), but also really savage opponents, and being different hag types and class/spell selections, they're quite individual as well in their tactics. We know they're willing to work with Azalin (amongst others) to make magical items.

In 2e, Leticia (the oldest) and Laveeda (the middle) were CE, and Lorinda (the youngest) was NE. This says to me that Leticia and Laveeda are the bossy, domineering ones, and Lorinda is the one most likely to be able to work with the others effectively - the peace maker, if you will. This is reflected in Darklords' description of their first murder - Laveeda distracts him, Leticia hits him with an axe, and Lorinda helps her by slitting his throat with a sickle (remember, these girls are 13 at this point).

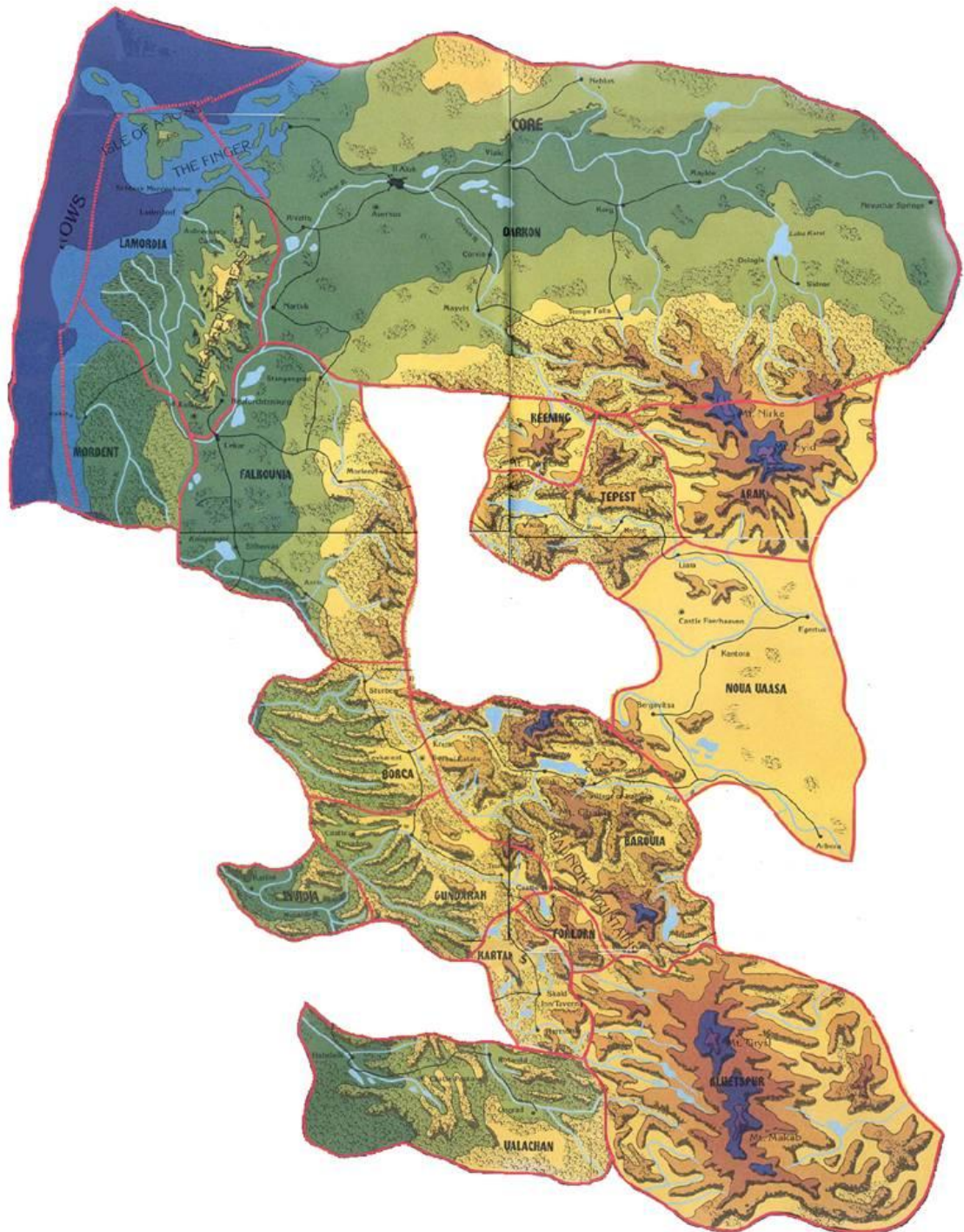
Then there are their 3e stats. Leticia is a sea hag, with a lot of sorcerer (or, in Pathfinder, witch) levels, so she's a powerful spellcaster. Laveeda is an annis, and a reasonably powerful spellcaster. Lorinda is the most powerful basic hag, but the weakest spellcaster. This suggests to me a typical birth order issue - the oldest is the "haggiest," bent over her cauldron casting spells and using the evil eye. Laveeda is the independently minded middle child, a bit of a tomboy, often out by herself in the woods. Lorinda (like a lot of youngest children) is always being belittled by her older sisters and is never powerful enough (except perhaps one brief bitter moment when they'd just transformed and she was the most powerful, but her sisters have both outstripped her again since then), so she has a seething resentment of the others. Well, all of them have a seething resentment of the others, but hers is particularly acute.

Life is suffering for the hags, since they can read each others' minds and see each others' true forms. They each hate and blame the others for being stuck here, and are quite happy scheming to embarrass or hurt them, but resurrect them if they're killed (possibly because they can't live without them, possibly because they don't want them to be free of suffering). They also work together, because that's what sisters do. All in all, a pretty warped family.

I feel that the shadow fey and the Inquisition have side-lined the Hags a bit in their own domain. Given their main defining feature seems to be spite (doing evil just for evil's sake—they're essentially mini Dark Powers, manipulating the creatures of Tepest for their own amusement), I see them as egging on both sides of the conflict (and probably trying to cause mayhem in neighbouring domains as well - remember they like to go to Lake Kronov to mock the Lady of the Lake, and I can see them doing similar things by proxy to others. Tristessa would be easy as well, if you can stand at the borders and mimic a baby crying;

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Yagno Petrovna as well - perhaps that's why he summons Malistroi?). They're incredibly versatile as villains, and deserve a lot more than they've had so far.



694 BC: Richemulot forms

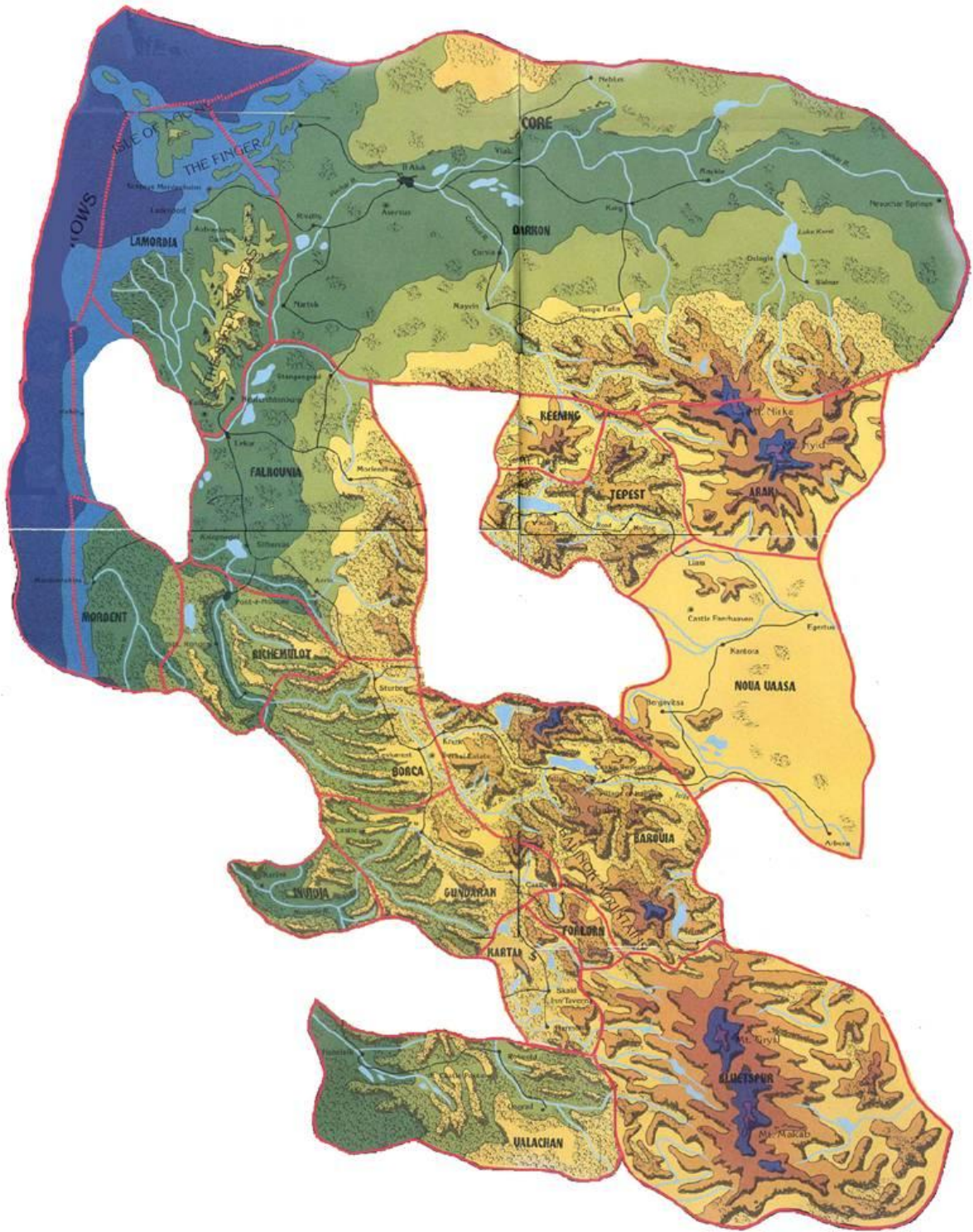
Claude Renier is the darklord, at least until he accidentally poisons himself with his chemical bane and accidentally stabbed himself in the heart with a silver dagger in a freak accident and accidentally falls out a window on the top floor of his house and crashes through the roof of his kennels and is partially eaten by his dogs. We know it was an accident because Jacqueline was there and saw it happen.

The Reniers come from prime material Mordent (they were the family that built the House of Gryphon Hill, although they hadn't been infected with lycanthropy then), and Mordent hops down to border Richemulot rather than Lamordia. This leaves a channel of Mist along Falkovnia's border, which one day the d'Honaire family's ship will blunder into en route to Martira Bay. As I said before, shipping on the Sea of Sorrows must be very unnerving in this period, as it must be hard to navigate without land or stars (so you don't know how far north you've gone to avoid the Mists), and when you could blunder into the Mists at any given moment.

Richemulot's population is largely immigrant-driven - mostly serfs from Borca or people from Falkovnia I would imagine, although the Gundarakans and Invidians certainly have cause to flee northwards as well.

Only two more observations for this one: Louise Renier must really hate Jacqueline, since by the modern day, Jacqueline still looks middle aged but Louise is now in her old age.

And Scholar of Decay was a great book. I much prefer its depiction of Richemulot's wererats to Gaz III, which are a bit too skaven for my tastes.



698 BC: Markovia forms

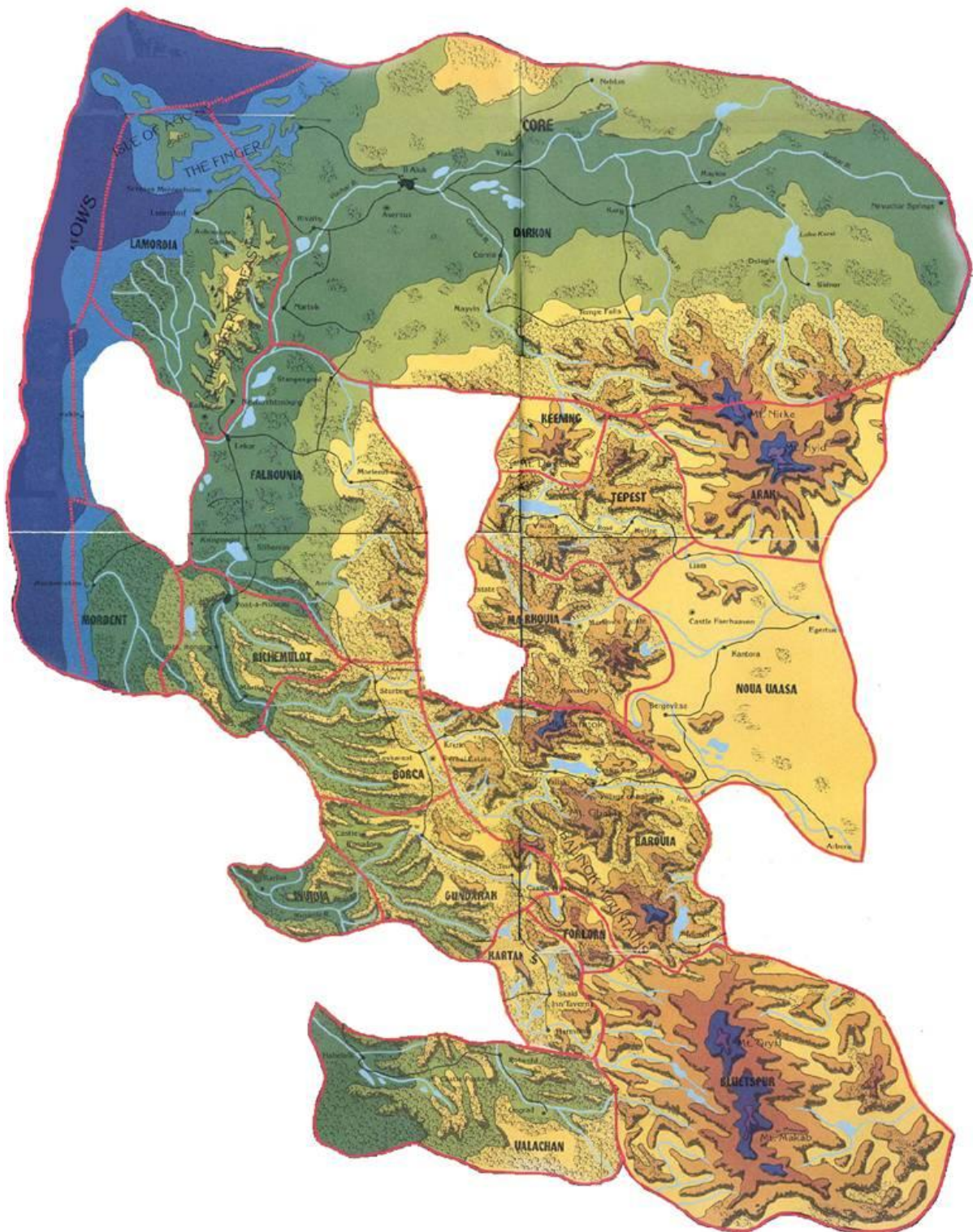
Frantisek Markov grew up on a small pig farm outside Vallaki in Barovia, married and opened a butcher shop. As a hobby, he began experimenting with surgical procedures on first, his pigs, and then second, his wife. When the other Barovians discovered what he'd done, they chased him into the Mists north of Barovia, and he became lord of Markovia.

Now, Markov is very intelligent and his faith in science and disdain for superstition marks him as a very unusual Barovian, but being able to perform surgery in your backyard shed when you're a pig farmer is a remarkable achievement. On one hand, as a celebration of the powers of intellect and in recognition of the fact that he's nearly 100 years old by the modern era, I'd like to say that he is entirely self-taught. We know he loves reading from his library in Neither Man Nor Beast, and from the grave markers under Castle Ravenloft, we know his family used to be quite influential. On the other hand, as he painfully and blasphemously vivisects his pigs, his terror track may have started in early with some supernatural ability to keep his victims alive for at least a couple of days. (Most die after a couple of days; Ludmilla his wife dies after 3—so not a huge length of time). Perhaps, despite owning only a small pig farm, his family fortunes have been sunk into a large natural philosophy library which he devours? Perhaps he spends a fortune (inherited or made from his butchery) importing surgical supplies ("butcher's supplies") from Borca, Mordent and Lamordia? And once he has his own domain and supernatural powers, he is free to really push the boundaries of science (learning enough over the decades to successfully pose as a doctor), expand his library and learn a few languages.

Leonardo da Vinci, who Markov is clearly based at least partially on (with his love of painting), was also only schooled informally as a child, although he did work in one of the foremost artist's workshops in Europe in the fifteenth century. So there you go.

Markov has the power to combine any creature with any other creature. When Markovia is part of the mainland Core, he seems to spend his time getting really wacky with his experiments—putting human torso on lions, lion heads on humans, and creating traditional broken ones (the ones who are a completely mishmash of creatures, perhaps inspired by the mongrelmen being created in G'Henna next door). Once he's stuck on an island with no human contact, he focuses exclusively on the more familiar Markovian broken ones (animals he makes into humans). Perhaps he gets bored with no one to talk to? Or settles down to crack his curse once and for all?

Originally, Markov's border closures cause crippling agony. After the Grand Conjunction, he causes the much less evocative (but a touch more subtle) bad weather. Markovia is also home at one point or another to two separate sects of the Order of Guardians, which seems quite high until you consider it is basically a craggy, isolated hell where no one in their right mind would go to disturb you.



702 BC: G'Henna forms

Yagno Petrovna, scion of a long line of inbred hicks but deranged even by their standards, makes up a demon-worshipping religion after spending a night out alone in Barovia, tries to sacrifice his sister's newborn baby to it, and gets chased into the Mists by his family (presumably, just north of Krezk somewhere). Instead of forming the domain right there, it forms a bit further north.

I've always wondered how G'Henna (starving, arid wasteland of religious zealots who venerate starvation) and Falkovnia (breadbasket of the Core) interacted, since they're right next to each other and even joined by roads. Did the G'Hennans import tons and tons of grain to sacrifice to Zhakata? Did they impose enormous taxes on food being transported through the domain along the Tiumori road (which is now complete, with G'Henna's appearance - for nearly 40 years, we have uninterrupted east-west trade through the north-central Core). Did they ban grain imports entirely (it is illegal to buy or sell food to G'Hennans)? Is there some black market trading? What we do know (from Circle of Darkness) is that G'Hennans imported grain from Falkovnia and used it to brew some of the best beers and ale in all of Ravenloft. Zhukar is still home (in the modern era) to multiple breweries, although many of them have closed down since there's no more foreign trade with which to bring in supplies. The G'Hennans probably indulged quite heavily on the days of the week when they were allowed to drink but not to eat (in preparation for the days when they weren't allowed to do either).

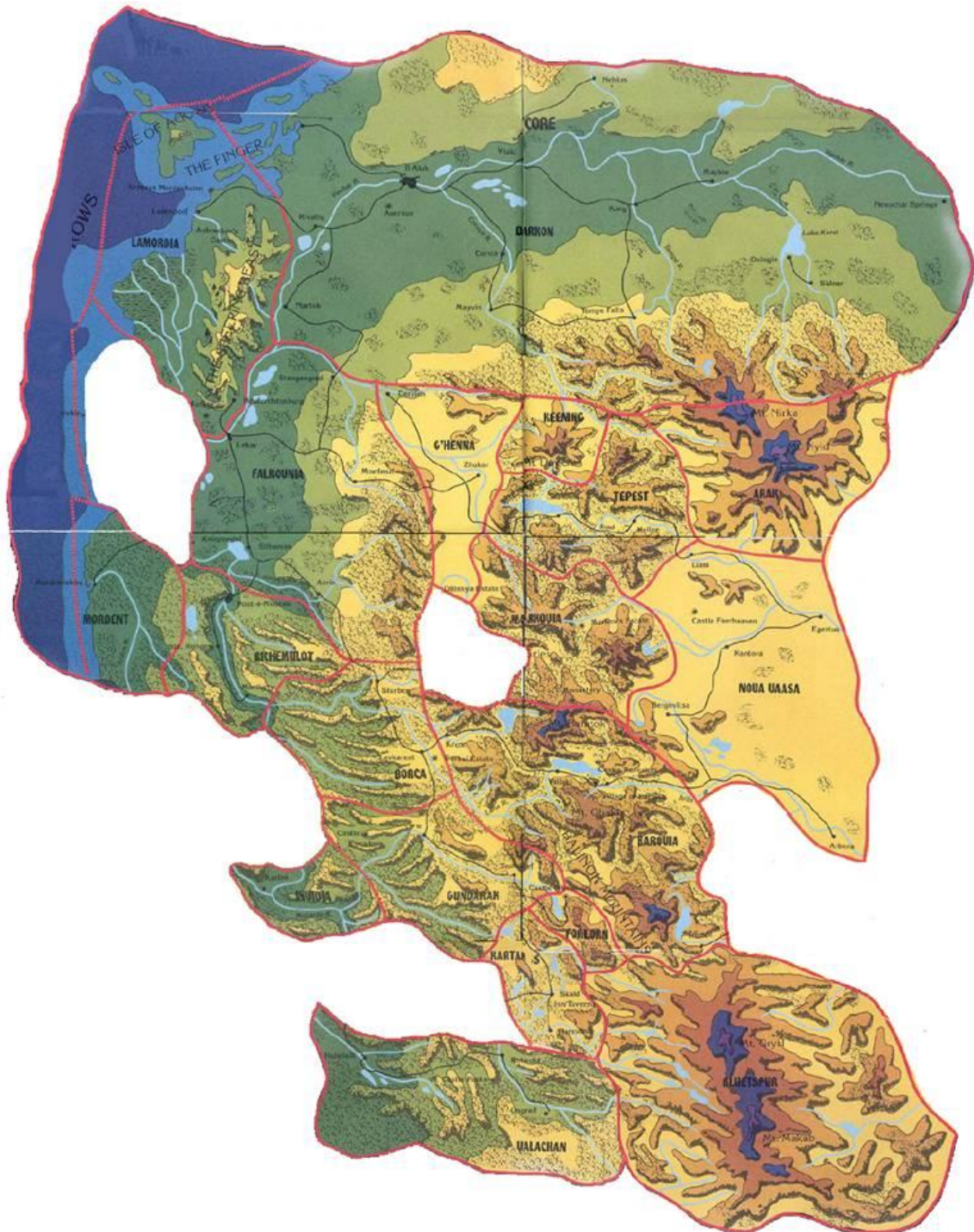
The thing about G'Henna, of course, is that the populace are actually devoted to Zhakata, so if there is black market trade, most people will still regard that as blasphemous. The irony of course is that, of all the people in G'Henna, Petrovna is one of the few who have doubts about Zhakata's existence, and he's the one who actually made him up. In recognition of this, most of his supernatural abilities only function when he's near his altar.

At this stage, the worship of Zhakata the Provider is still permitted, although I would imagine it's always been a niche sect of the church. In a few years, Petrovna's doubts will grow so great he hires a wizard to commune with Zhakata for him (summoning Malistroi instead, who taunts Petrovna, who kills the wizard and leaves the fiend trapped in a magic circle for 40 years). Then, during the Grand Conjunction, the heretics who worship Zhakata the Provider cause Zhakata to rip G'Henna out of the Core and jam it into the Mists, so they get banned too. Having the entire world around you dissolve into Mist would understandably cause an already devout populace to have a religious experience, so G'Henna must have been a very stressful place to be for the first few months after the Grand Conjunction before they realised the rest of the Core was still out there.

Two last things: When Petrovna turns those who've disappointed him into mongrelmen, their human form sloughs off them like dust and blows away, revealing the mongrelman beneath. So, when G'Henna is lashed by dust storms, the mongrelmen all rush out into the storm,

desperately hoping to find their lost human dignity...

And G'Henna apparently has carnivorous cows.



707 BC: Dementlieu forms

The formation of Dementlieu makes shipping on the Sea of Sorrows much easier (no Mists to wander into), joins the Musarde and Vuchar rivers to each other and to the sea, so river boats can now reach every domain from Darkon down to Barovia (with the exception of Nova Vaasa). Before this, the Musarde drained into the Mists, and the Vuchar doubles back into Lamordia on the very edge of the border (under the red line on previous maps, which means the border shifts slightly northwards with Dementlieu's appearance).

Dominic himself (as a child) seems to be modelled on the kid from *The Turn of the Screw*, plus a bit of staple evil child. If you're interested, I think the movie *Joshua* almost perfectly captures what he must have been like as a child—brilliant, manipulative and utterly callous. After a couple of years of manipulating people and causing chaos for his own amusement, he drives his governess in Mordentshire to suicide by destroying her relationship with everyone she knows. Worried by the police attention (although not by any regret, tellingly), he manipulates his father into taking the family on a cruise on the Sea of Sorrows, where they wander into the Mists and discover Dementlieu.

In a revamp, I would suggest that the young Dominic's mother be the first woman to fall "victim" to his curse. Perhaps she was the one person he cared for, but after their arrival in Dementlieu she swiftly ended up committing "suicide" or permanently institutionalized for her sudden, demented insistence that her young son is actually a hideous creature of pure evil that needs to die.

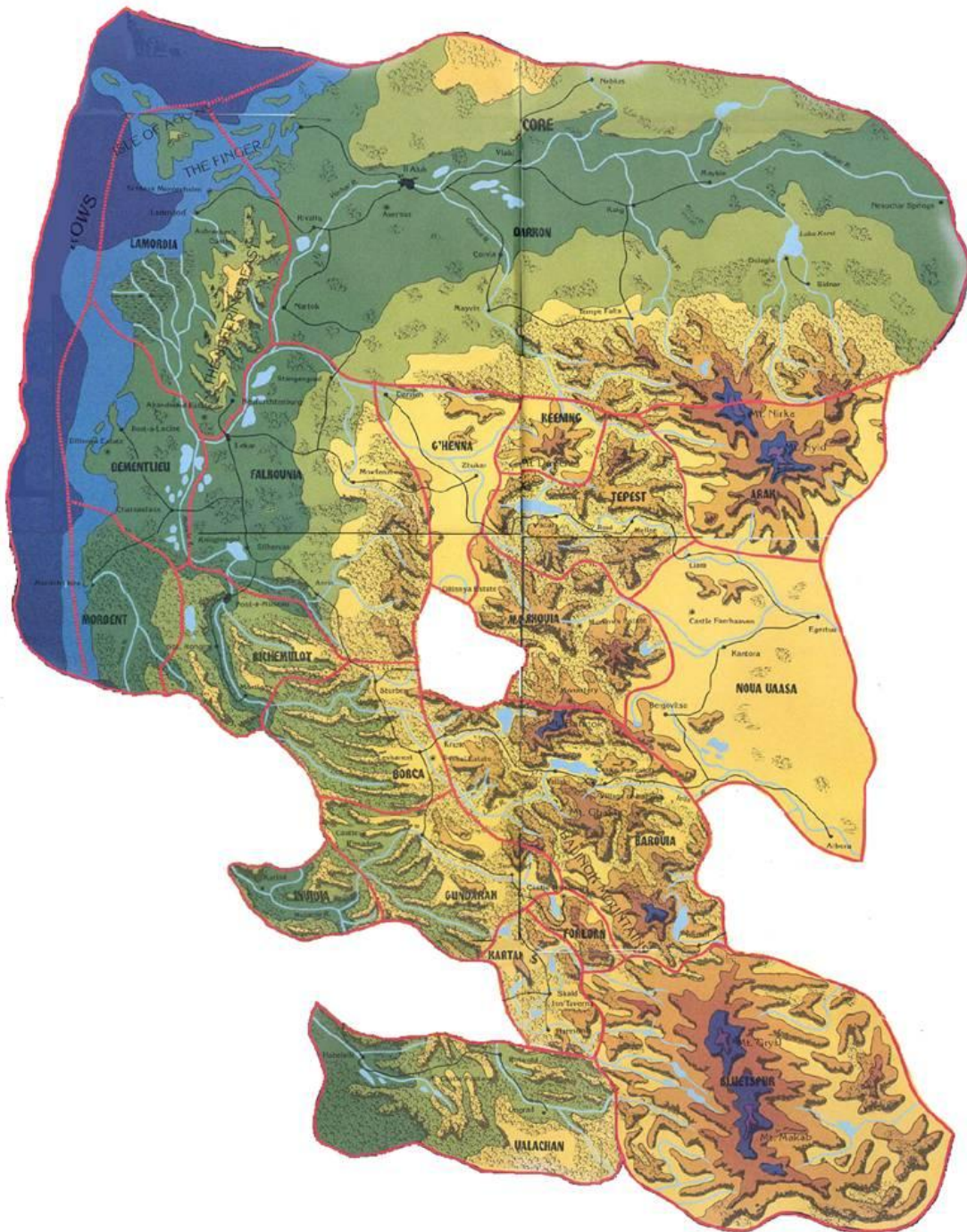
After mommy was out of the picture, the young Dominic may have enjoyed a grace period of a few years before he grew old enough to seek out young love -- at which point he would have had an unwelcome realization that maybe Mommy didn't just go mad after all.

At age 13, Dominic gains a nemesis in the form of the Living Brain, and the two have been playing cat and mouse ever since. Although Dominic has unlimited uses of his powers and potentially unlimited duration, the Brain has a slightly wider variety, and knows who Dominic is, whereas Dominic still hasn't discovered why the Brain is called the Brain. Both, of course, can also use traditional methods of influence as well as supernatural ones.

Dominic officially becomes Chief Advisor to the Lord Governor at 27, and engineers the Treaty of Four Towers (or the League of Five Nations, as it is commonly known until the Grand Conjunction) in 729 BC. Dementlieu is the instigator of this Treaty, so while it was probably intended to strengthen his influence in other domains, the Falkovnian invasion in 724 BC must have really scared him. Interestingly, when he makes Guignol replace Chambon as Lord Governor in 728 BC, he has Guignol ruin Chambon's supporters. Since he controlled them both, is this done by or against the Brain, or just for fun?

Originally, I would have explained Dominic's curse as saying he basically wants someone to

love him for who he is, in spite of his powers of mind control. Unfortunately, any woman he loves comes to see him for exactly who he is, and is repulsed. However, in thinking about this, I realised he's been able to control everyone around him for his entire life, and able to supernaturally dominate them for his entire adult life. He's been indulged and obeyed for as long as he can remember. He's not going to have a particularly emotionally mature response to *anything*. So I think his curse may be nothing more adult than just being unable to get what he wants in one specific sphere. A petty curse for an emotionally petty man.

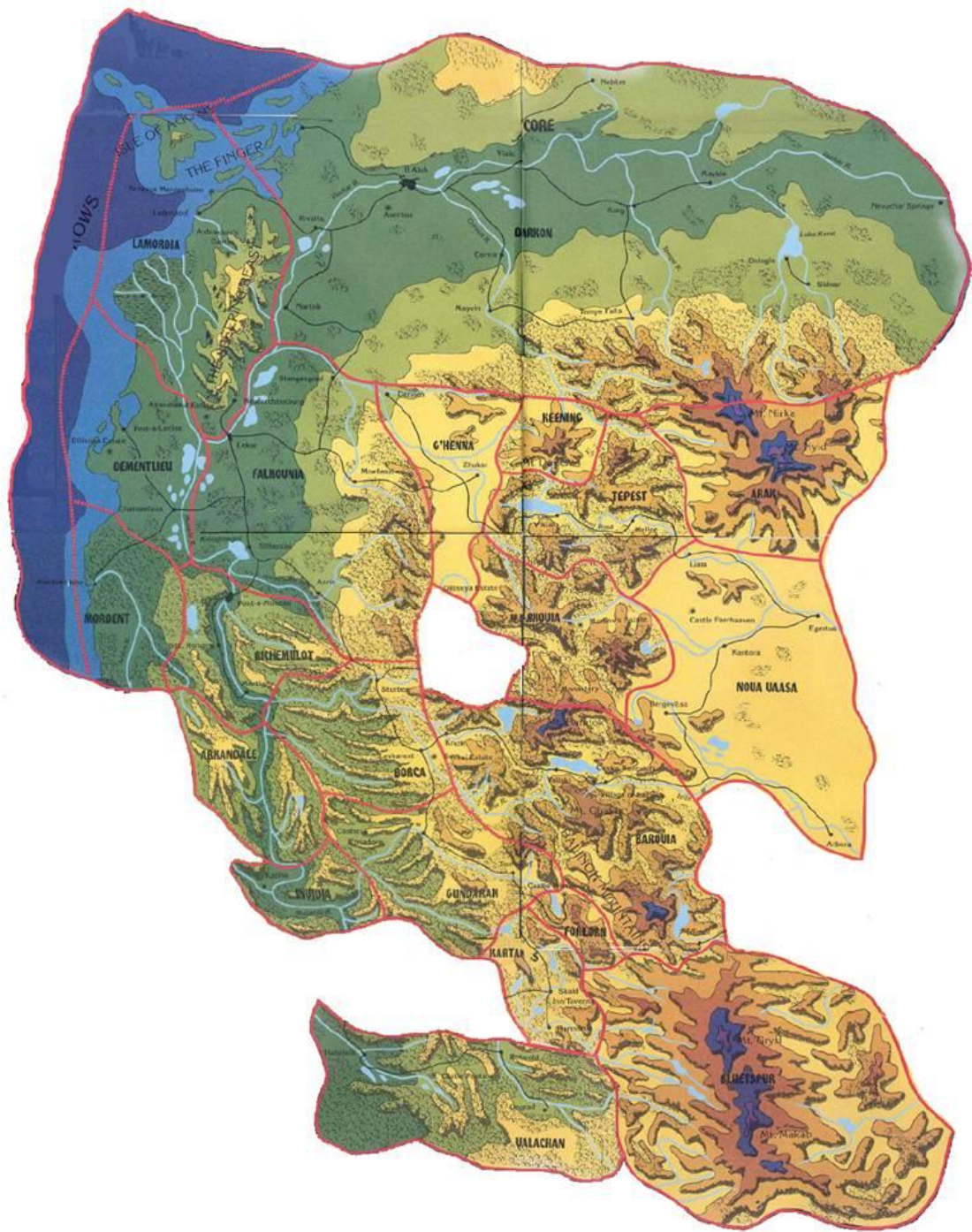


708 BC: Arkandale forms

Arkandale more or less finishes off the Musarde, linking the few remaining bits of the south Core with the rest. The only domain still isolated is Valachan, with only Kartakass and Bluetspur for company, and even then, it's separated from Kartakass by cliffs.

Nathan Timothy was determined to seek out new lands and discover an egress from Ravenloft. By the sound of the Black Box, he travelled through every domain of the Core before deciding to risk the Mists. Obviously, he can't have done all the via boat, so either he jumped from ship to ship occasionally, travelled by foot, or didn't see the whole Core. At some point before becoming a darklord, he has the Virago built, and afterwards becomes a rich river merchant with monopoly power over shipping in Arkandale (because werewolves attack all the other boats).

Although I like Nathan as a character (little hints like his first wife drowning herself to get away from him), I can see from a design principle why it might be a bad idea to have a darklord that can't get to 99% of his domain. So, he is freed after 32 years of being trapped in Arkandale to wander the rivers of the Core once more.

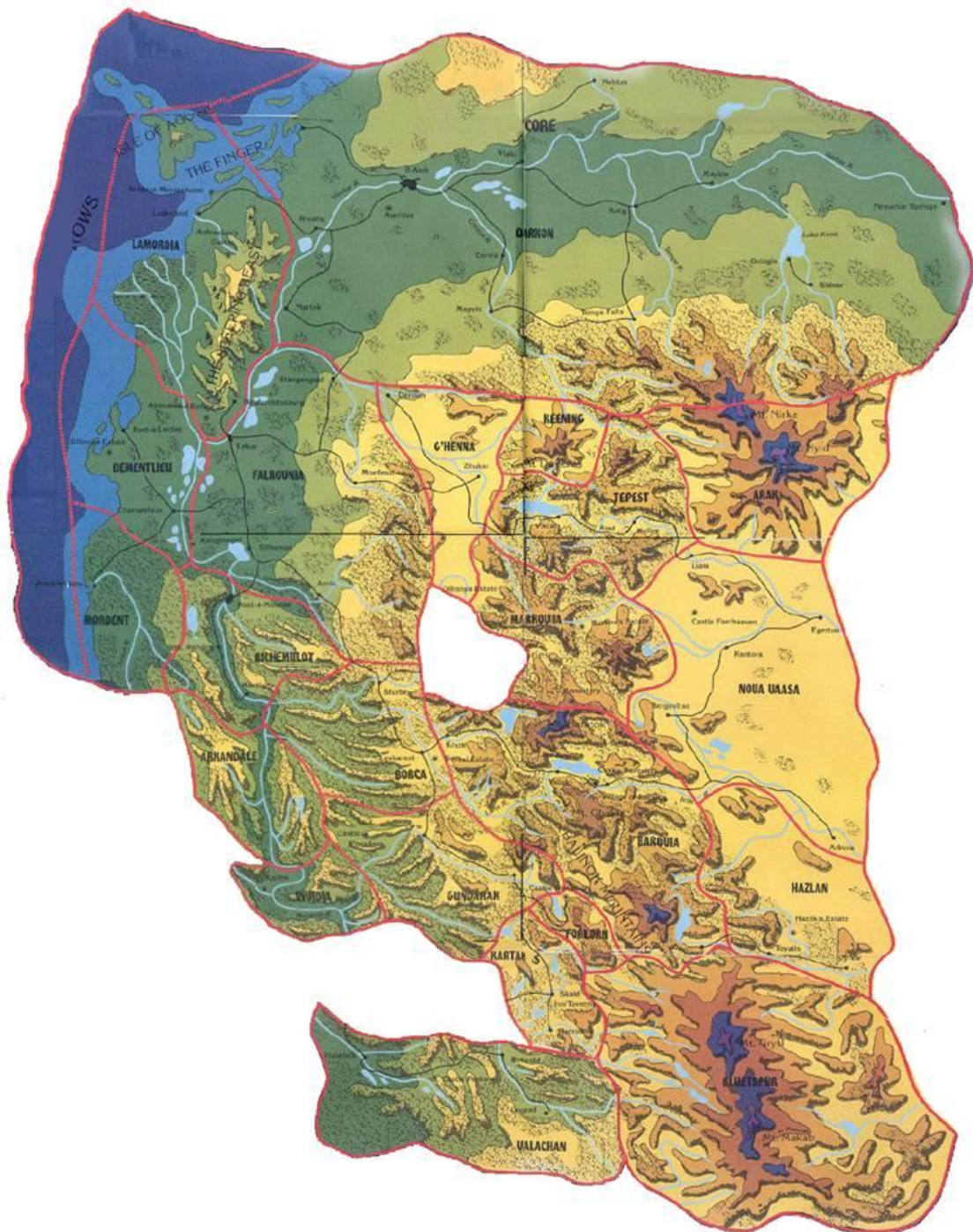


714 BC: Hazlan forms.

Hazlik is drawn into the Mists and finds himself in the Nightmare Lands. After some time, he flees from the horror of it all (particularly Hypnos' influence), and he spends months in the Mists stewing about how much he hates the Mulan. When he finally reaches some kind of genocidal-level of percolation, Hazlan forms. Hypnos continues to torment him though. For 25 years, Hazlik outlaws arcane magic in his domain but changes his mind after he returns to Toril during the Grand Conjunction and sees how the children of his rivals are progressing.

The Nightmare Lands, which (probably) used to end at the bottom of Nova Vaasa now extend all the way from Darkon to Bluetspur.

Hazlik is still I think the only homosexual canon character in Ravenloft, although Ivana Boritsi is implied to be a little experimental in her youth, and Arthur Sedgwick may have unreciprocated love for Alanik Ray. For those who are interested in Hazlik's progression, the Black Box (real world publication date 1990) and the Red Box (1994) make no mention of the whole rival-lover-entrapment thing but do mention the effeminate tattoos. Domains of Dread (1997) and Secrets of the Dread Realms (2001) mention the murder and the rival's gender, but not the entrapment aspect, which first appears in Gaz I (2001) and caused a bit of controversy at the time as I recall.



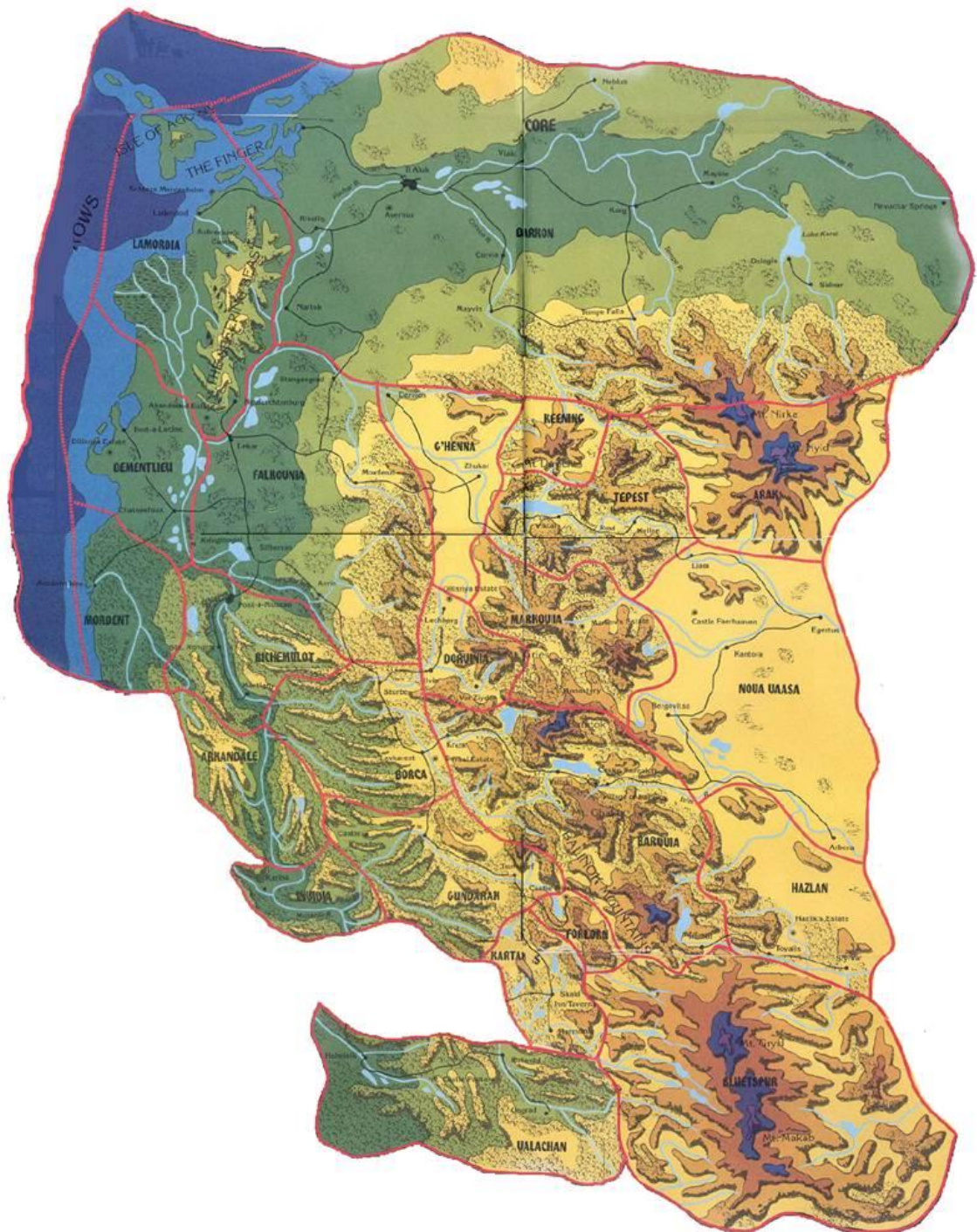
715 BC: Dorvinia forms

Although if you ask the Dorvinians, they claim their domain has been there alongside Borca since 684 BC. In any event, the central Core is now complete. We're on the home stretch now.

Ivan Dilisnya is chased into the Mists by his own family (from Sturben, presumably), having spent a happy childhood in Borca torturing animals, poisoning a servant's child, his mother, his brother-in-law, and his sister, with whom he had a disturbingly intense relationship. As darklord of Dorvinia, he will go on to have a disturbingly close relationship with his cousin Ivana, where during the Grand Conjunction he will "seek her out for comfort." It doesn't last though.

Dorvinia has all the corruption of modern Borca, but none of the oppressive taxation. The borders close in exactly the same way as Borca's, but as of the Grand Conjunction, Ivan loses the powers to close the borders (fundamentally because Ivana has a stronger personality, although Ivan does seem to be an oddly effective ruler, despite the corruption and his idiosyncracies).

Rather like d'Honaire, Ivan is extremely childish, which I quite like. He has nightmares where he awakes calling for his sister, likes to dress up, loves to eat, and everyone around him thinks he's deranged. It just goes to show that high camp and pure evil can go together. I particularly like the way Our Hero dismisses him as a psychotic fop in Gaz IV, whereas Azalin clearly recognises how dangerous he can be. Another petty curse for a petty man - Ivan loses his sense of taste. That's all. But he feels the loss keenly, and would do anything to regain it. His sense of his own aging, jealousy of Ivana's youth and addiction to various poisons might also count as curses, but it's hard to say.



720 BC: Sithicus forms

After killing Medraut Gundar (to the relief of his father, who is terrified of him) and discovering the portal in Castle Hunadora leads to Vallaki rather than Krynn, Lord Soth besieges Castle Ravenloft. He gives this up in order to chase the ghost of his seneschal Caradoc (who betrayed him by concealing Kitiara's soul from him) from Castle Ravenloft to Vallaki to Castle Hunadora to the Misty Border south of Gundarak, where he kills him but gains a domain. For the first night, everyone in the Core can hear his banshees singing his tale.

Soth's actions in trying to gain Kitiara's soul are what earns the domain, although you'd think allowing the Cataclysm to happen and murdering his first wife would be cause for a failed Powers Check or two.

At first, the differences between his memories and the realities of Nedragaard Keep annoy him, but Soth quickly becomes immune to the pain, so that the only things that let him feel human lose their effect. In 725 BC, he draws in a village of kender and creates kender vampires (bitterkinder, according to Gaz IV) to serve him.

In 737, he begins to withdraw into his memories. He only stirs to commission the Memory Mirrors from Tindafulus, which takes 6 years to complete and just make things worse. In the meantime, one of the short stories suggests he is returned to a mortal body on Krynn during the Grand Conjunction, but he's so lost in his thoughts by then that he probably discounts it as a dream.

By 744 BC, he has become so lost in the memory mirrors that Sithicus starts to collapse around him. When Black Roses Bloom is a pretty good adventure, but it does suggest an alarmingly close link between the people of Ravenloft and the domains in which they live: as the domain starts to fade, so do their memories and sanity. Now, this doesn't seem to affect the Wanderers, so it might just be the close ties between elves and the natural world that causes it. Or it might be that all but a handful of people in Ravenloft are constructs of the Mists who can normally pass the Turning test but sometimes don't.

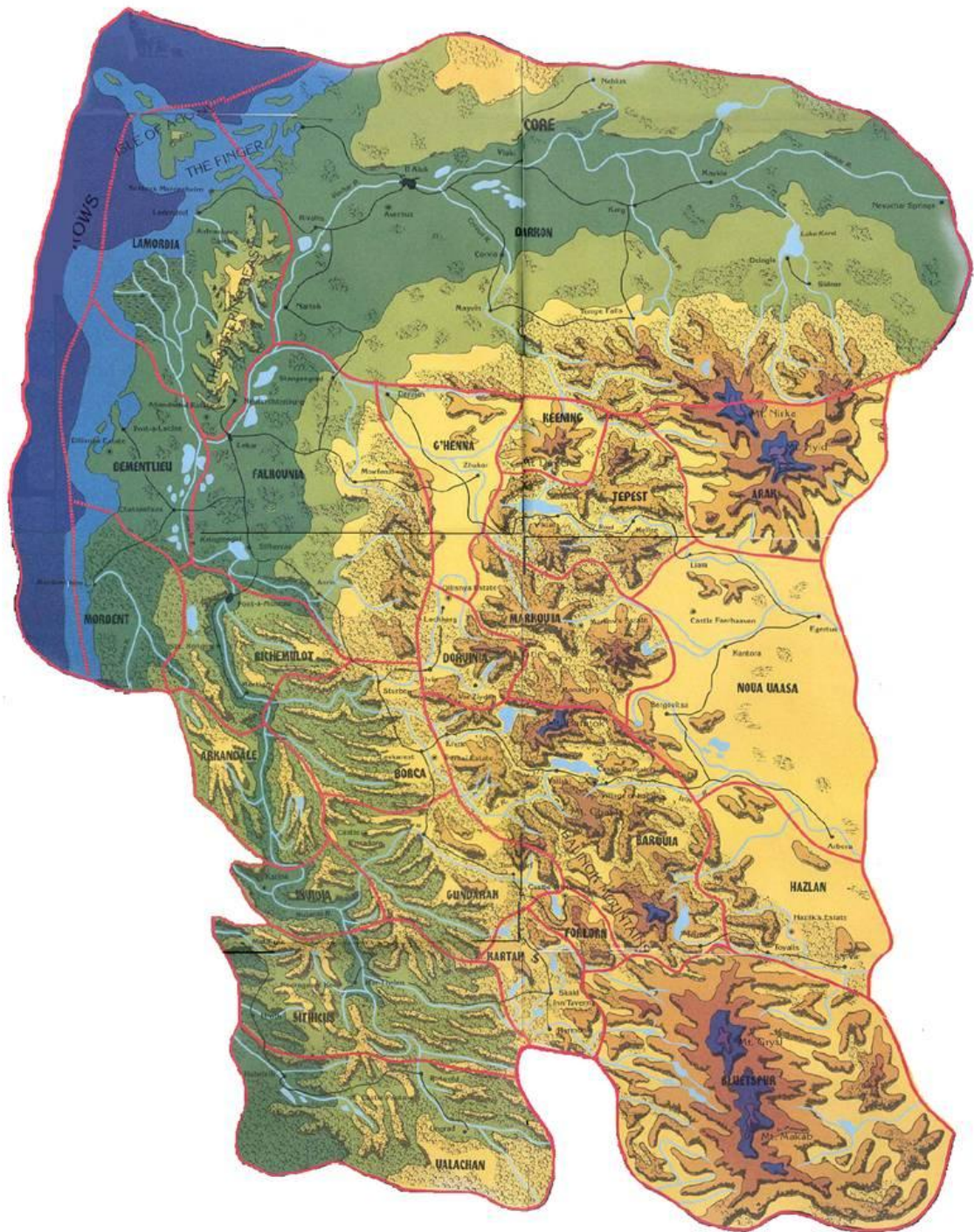
Anyway, Soth is fully awake briefly, but quickly returns to his slumbers (interspersed with a few episodes of hunting Kitiara, keeping the Vistani trapped and hoping Malocchio will go to war). The fact that he makes Magda swear never to reveal his true history does suggest he's doing everything he can to disengage from his past and present for his own fantasies. He wakes up fully when he hears his history in full, which is how he knows Magda (well, Inza) has broken her word. And Spectre of the Black Rose ensues from there.

I must say, while I really love all of James Lowder's work, the Sithicus in SotBR annoyed me for being different to all the previous versions with its near complete lack of elves and so on. Apart from that though...

So Soth is returned to Krynn, perhaps just moments after he left, perhaps 27 years later, because Tracy Hickman doesn't understand how shared worlds and work for hire work. About 40 years later, he is returned to life and then killed for refusing to serve Takhisis and having decided to let go of his anger and fear and pride and seek forgiveness and redemption. To quote from *Dragons of a Vanished Moon*, "You left me alone too long. You left me to the darkness [both quite telling statements from our point of view] which became my light, for I could once more see my wife's beloved face. I could see myself."

So depending on how you look at it, Soth may have been released from Ravenloft because the Dark Powers couldn't get him to bite at their lure, or because he'd actually learnt something from his time in Ravenloft. You decide.

Incidentally, Valachan is now finally connected for easy trade to the rest of the Core via the rivers. So that's good news for them.



730 BC: Verbrek forms

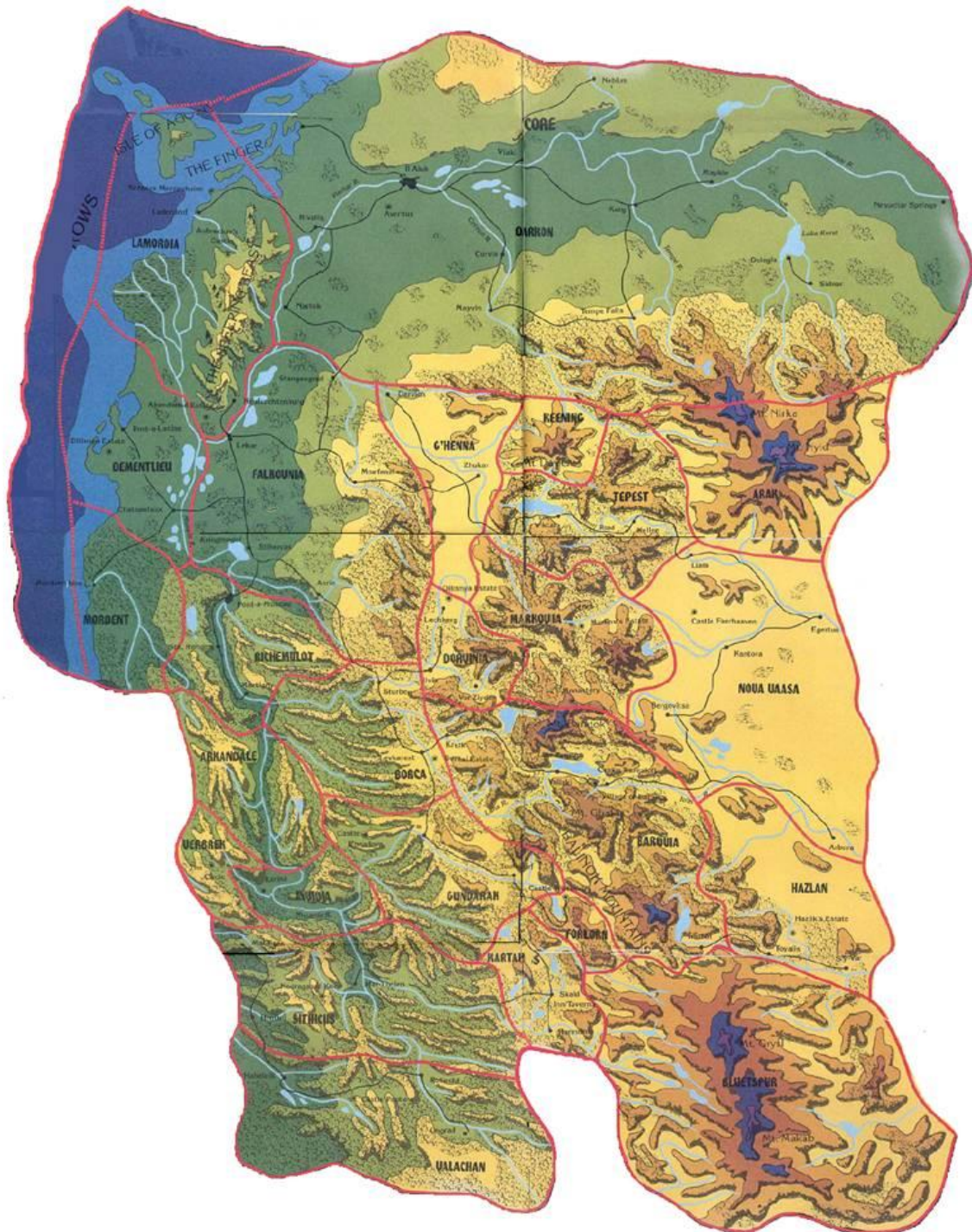
Alfred Timothy is sickly and frail in human form, and despises his weakness. Inspired by the humans of Arkandale leaving little devotions to the Wolf God to protect them from werewolves, he decides to become a cleric of the god. Unfortunately, either the god doesn't exist or he doesn't want to talk to Alfred, because he doesn't grant prayers, so Alfred goes on a long rampage trying to attract his attention. This results in him crossing paths with Gabrielle Aderre and her mother. Isabella tries to extort free passage for the Vistani from Timothy (obviously seeing greatness in his future) in return for helping him, but he attacks her, she curses him, and he flees. Gabrielle refuses to help Isabella until she reveals the truth about her father, then leaves her to die, kills Bakholis and becomes darklord of Invidia. Timothy is lost in the Mists for a while, then emerges to find himself a cleric of the Wolf God and darklord of Verbrek.

At the moment, Verbrek is an absolutely tiny realm, but it's going to get a lot bigger after the Grand Conjunction when it absorbs Arkandale and all of Timothy's werewolves charge northwards to slaughter humans...

According to Gaz IV, there's something funny going on with people's memories of Arkandale after the Grand Conjunction: people seem to be forgetting Arkandale was ever there. At the very least, they know the new name of the realm is Verbrek (and possibly always was).

Interesting note: until 3e, Timothy didn't have a curse, unless for some reason not having a shadow counts as a curse for him. Now, it's transforming back into human form whenever he is overcome with emotion, which is pretty unpleasant for someone who hate humans and wants to lose himself in the savagery of the wolf.

A note on alignments: In 2e, Alfred Timothy was LE, and had sphere access very like a druid. In 3e, he became the NE cleric of a CE god.



736 BC: Daglan forms

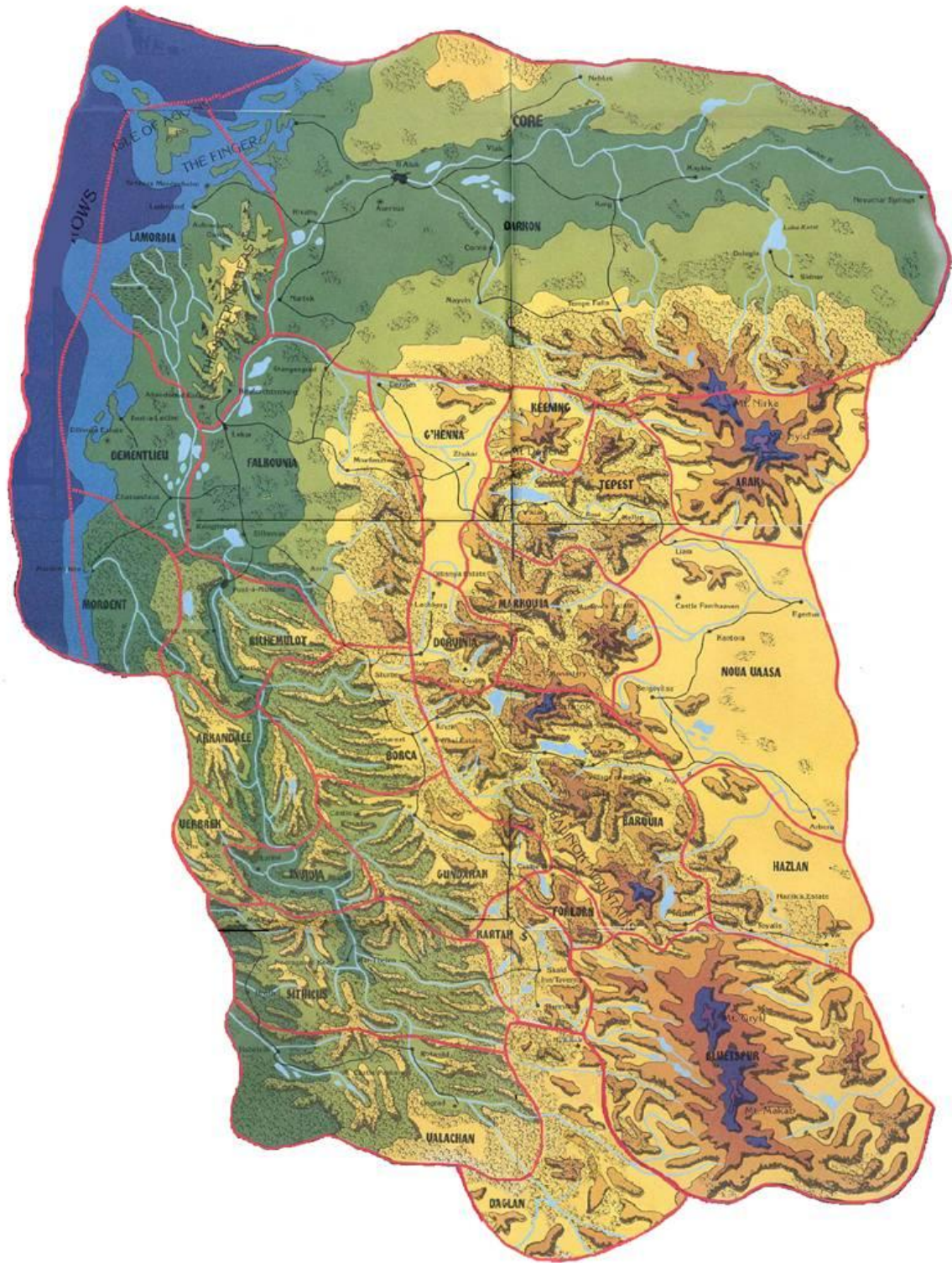
Or not. Really, it depends on whether you ran Feast of Goblins in your game or not, and what ending you gave it. From Gaz I, Radaga existed, was killed, rose from the dead and became darklord of Daglan, which "soon dissolved back into the Mists." So that could be when the PCs hunt her down and kill her, mere days after its creation, or years later in the Grand Conjunction. Also, whether Radaga is the sole darklord or gets replaced by Daegon depends on which ending you choose, although I think Feast of Goblins is pretty clear that the third ending, where the PCs kill Radaga and Daegon is released from the Crown of Souls to be darklord, is the "real" one.

In any case, Daglan is completely isolated, bordered as it is by domains of no real consequence, with an insignificantly small population who don't like human contact and spend their time harvesting wheat/ghee to eat. 5% are undead who spy for the darklord, so it really doesn't pay to draw attention to yourself or pry into other's business. So however long it's there for, it has no real impact on anything.

Radaga herself is an evil priestess, who is potentially alive but probably (and canonically) a wight priestess when she becomes darklord. Daglan Daegon is an undead goblin spellcaster who has been trapped in the Crown of Souls for 500 years, waiting for his bloodline to die out so he can be reborn again. In the adventure, Daegon is a necromancer with slightly enhanced spellcasting ability, but I personally feel that necromancers have been done (Strahd, Meredoth, Tsien Chang,...). If I were converting him, I'd make him a sorcerer with a necromancy bent (which explains why he had to wait until his bloodline had died out, since sorcery is carried in the blood). It also fits Hyskosa's prophecy (In the house of Daegon, a sorcerer born..., although that refers to Radaga, not Daegon). Alternately, I might make him a witch or even a magus instead.

In the same year, the same PCs return to Castle Gundar and kill the Duke, so the Dark Powers make Heinfroth darklord of Gundarak instead. The Duke'll be back in 16 years though.

And obviously, the prophecy leading in to the Grand Conjunction is beginning.



740 BC: The Grand Conjunction occurs

By my count, there have been 2 Upheavals (events that had a major effect on the positioning and/or borders and/or relations between several domains) to this point: the Scourge of Arak (588 BC) and the appearance of Falkovnia (690 BC). Note they're about a century apart. If you want to engage in numerology, what's going to happen in the late 700s? The Time of Ultimate Darkness, which is due to start in 775 BC. The gaps are getting smaller obviously, so if you use these three dates to construct a geometric series and then project backwards, what are our other numerologically significant dates? The arrival of the Vistani in 470 BC, and the birth of Tatyana in 333 BC. Coincidence? Yes, probably. But I'm sure the Church of Ezra is very interested.

Anyway, there is a reason that the Grand Conjunction is called the Great Upheaval. Just about every domain is affected in some way. In this version of the map, I've drawn the post-Grand Conjunction borders in blue over the top of the original borders so you can see just how much they've moved.

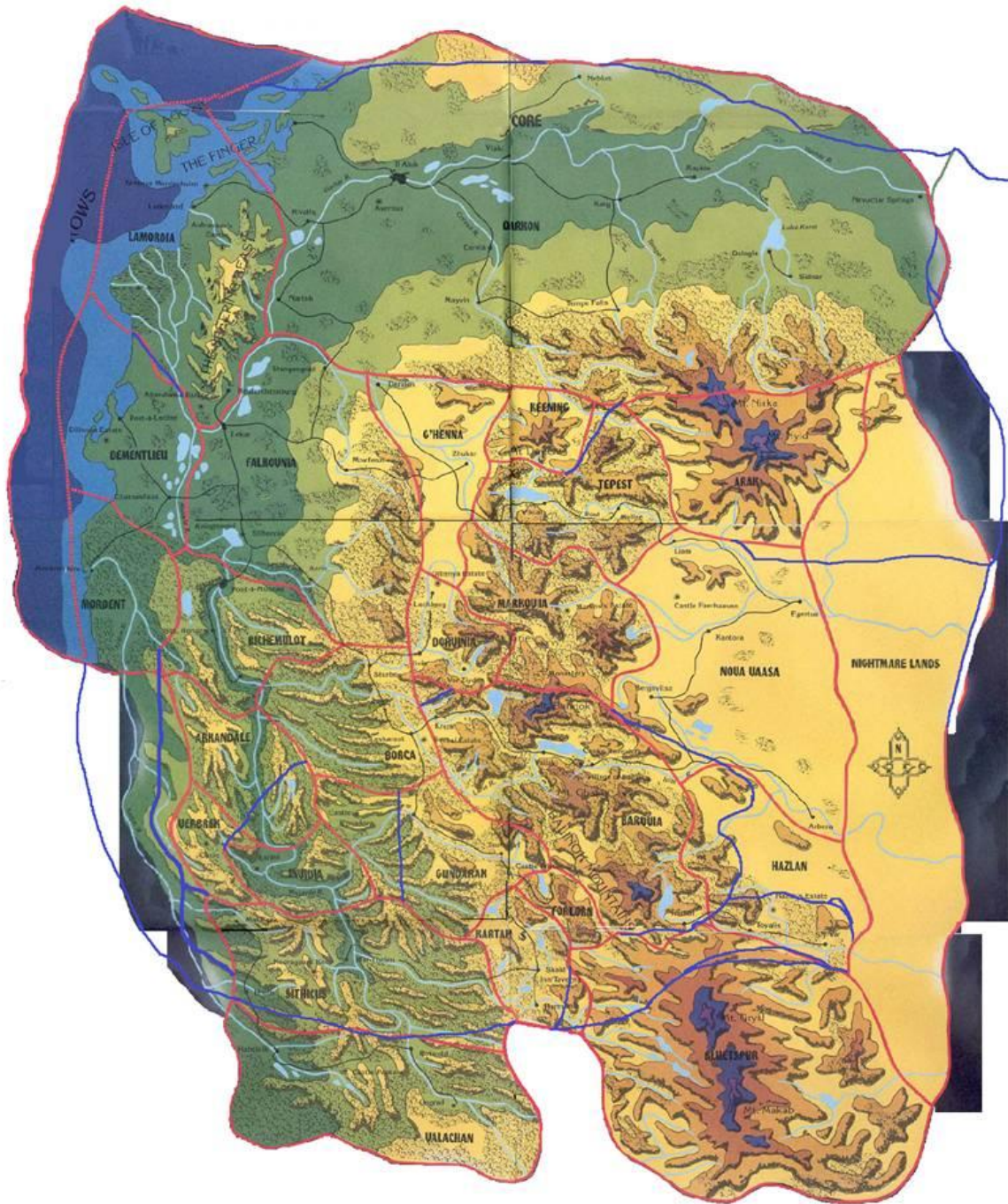
So, what actually happens in the Grand Conjunction?

The Dark Powers are obviously intimately involved in this, for whatever reason, since it is extremely unlikely otherwise that the rulers of Prime Material Barovia would exactly resemble Strahd and Tatyana. So there's some sort of trap here, but it's not clear what. Also, the forward planning allows Hyskosa to pen his prophecy.

The first step is that a single darklord breaks the bonds of their imprisonment. This is Azalin at the end of From the Shadows. The PCs steal the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind from Castle Ravenloft on the night of Tatyana and Sergei's wedding. This somehow weakens the planar boundaries (perhaps it causes a temporal paradox, because the Icon should be in Castle Ravenloft on Sergei's body when Jander Sunstar tries to destroy Strahd), allowing Azalin to pull himself free.

The borders dissolve, so the darklords are free to wander from place to place.

The domains themselves return to the Prime Material plane (among other places, including Baator at one point), superimposing themselves over areas in various worlds. We know some darklords are returned to their original homes (Soth and Hazlik, for example), and it's perhaps safe to assume that their domains go with them (so Hazlan forms a conjunction with Toril) – but we don't know that for sure; Hazlik and Hazlan could separate. Other darklords are returned to different parts of the Prime Material plane (Harkon Lukas, Ankhtepot et al could end up in Barovia, despite coming from other worlds). It seems to happen quite piecemeal, with minor conjunctions happening at different times, so perhaps some of the darklords (and others) are actually whisked from place to place over the course of several weeks. Enough of Borca survives for Ivan and Ivana to seek each other out, but there's enough chaos that they want to, so there must be some structure remaining for this to happen despite the upheaval.



One of the previous three steps weakens the forces trapping Gwydion in the Obsidian Gate, so he tries to break free, which seriously damages the planar integrity of Ravenloft and is responsible for a lot of the damage around the central Core; the Shadow Rift itself is a bleeding planar wound out of sync with the rest of the Core, its borders permanently closed like a scab, the major features of the Greenlands constantly moving to try to find the right configuration to heal the wound, the Stonedowns appearing as an accidental reflection. Fractures appear.

The PCs get the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind onto the altar in Prime Material Barovia, which re-powers the planar boundaries and the Grand Conjunction collapses. Inajira, Azalin and Strahd all fail to kill each other and are all trapped again; the whole thing is a bit of a failure really.

According to Azalin, he sent PCs (Oldar) back in time so he could kill Strahd, not steal the Holy Symbol of Ravenkind. And Roots of Evil never happened. While this does make more sense, it's less interesting as an adventure. From Lord of the Necropolis, we know the Dark Powers re-write people's memories in some insidious ways. Perhaps Azalin's not as strong willed as he thought he was and the Dark Powers have tampered with his memories after all?

In the immediate aftermath, the Core reforms, but completely shaken up:

Forlorn is unaffected.

The Sea of Sorrows is largely unaffected, although it's impossible to really be sure. Shoals and currents and things could easily have been rearranged to make life difficult for ships. By the Red Box maps, Markovia is there (although explorers won't actually discover it for another few years), Ghastria probably is, and Blaustein isn't (since it should be visible on the map but isn't there).

Falkovnia (surprisingly) is least affected physically, although obviously the disappearance of G'Henna next door has serious implications both socially and in terms of trade.

Lamordia and Dementlieu, and Mordent and Richemulot are largely unaffected, except their borders very slightly change to work out some of the kinks.

Keening grabs a (relatively) big slice of Tepest, which must have been extremely unpleasant for anything living there.

Borca and Dorvinia merge (after Ivan "seeks out" Ivana "for comfort." They also grab a small slice of Barovia. All goes swimmingly for a little while for the new co-darklords, until they realise they can't actually stand each other.

Kartakass loses a slice to what will be Hazlan.

Sithicus loses a bit to the south, but grabs a bit of unclaimed land to the west.

Hazlan loses most of its north to Nova Vaasa, but grabs a big chunk of Bluetspur and a bit of Kartakass. Oddly enough, that piece of Bluetspur also remains attached to Bluetspur, so it's been copied rather than ripped off.

Darkon loses part of its northern frontier (although, given the ebb and flow of Mist across the Mistlands, it may just be that the Black Box maps and the RL3e maps arbitrarily draw the lines in different places. It also snaps up all of Arak, a big chunk of what used to be the Nightmare Lands, and a big chunk of new land out into the Mists as well.

G'Henna and Markovia are obviously affected greatly; Markovia is moved to the Sea of Sorrows, which causes a bit of panic, and G'Henna is lost in the Mists. People in both domains think the rest of the world has crumbled away into nothing. The Church of Belenus in Tepest really doesn't take this well.

Daglan also vanishes into the Mists, if it hasn't already.

Bluetspur goes as well. If you believe Bluetspur is on the dark side of the Core's moon, or becomes a comet, then I suppose technically it's still a Core domain, just moved. I personally like to treat it as a blood-red comet that appears in the sky sometimes (Bluetspur has a conjunction with the Core "when the stars are right"), but otherwise it's an Island.

Arak becomes the Shadow Rift. Gwydion gains new powers and begins gaslighting Loht.

Invidia does quite well out of it, grabbing a huge piece of Arkandale and half of Gundarak. Fortunately, Invidia's always had a lot of werewolves in it anyway.

Barovia also does well, grabbing the rest of Gundarak, part of Nova Vaasa and a bit of Hazlan. In return, it loses a tiny piece in the south to Hazlan.

Obviously, Dominia forms around the newly displaced Daclaud Heinfroth.

Verbrek goes from being one of the smallest domains to one of the largest, grabbing two thirds of Arkandale (and butchering most of the humans who live there). It also grabs a bit of unclaimed land from the Mists. People immediately begin forgetting Arkandale was ever there; everyone around knows it's Verbrek now. This is probably the case for other border changes as well.

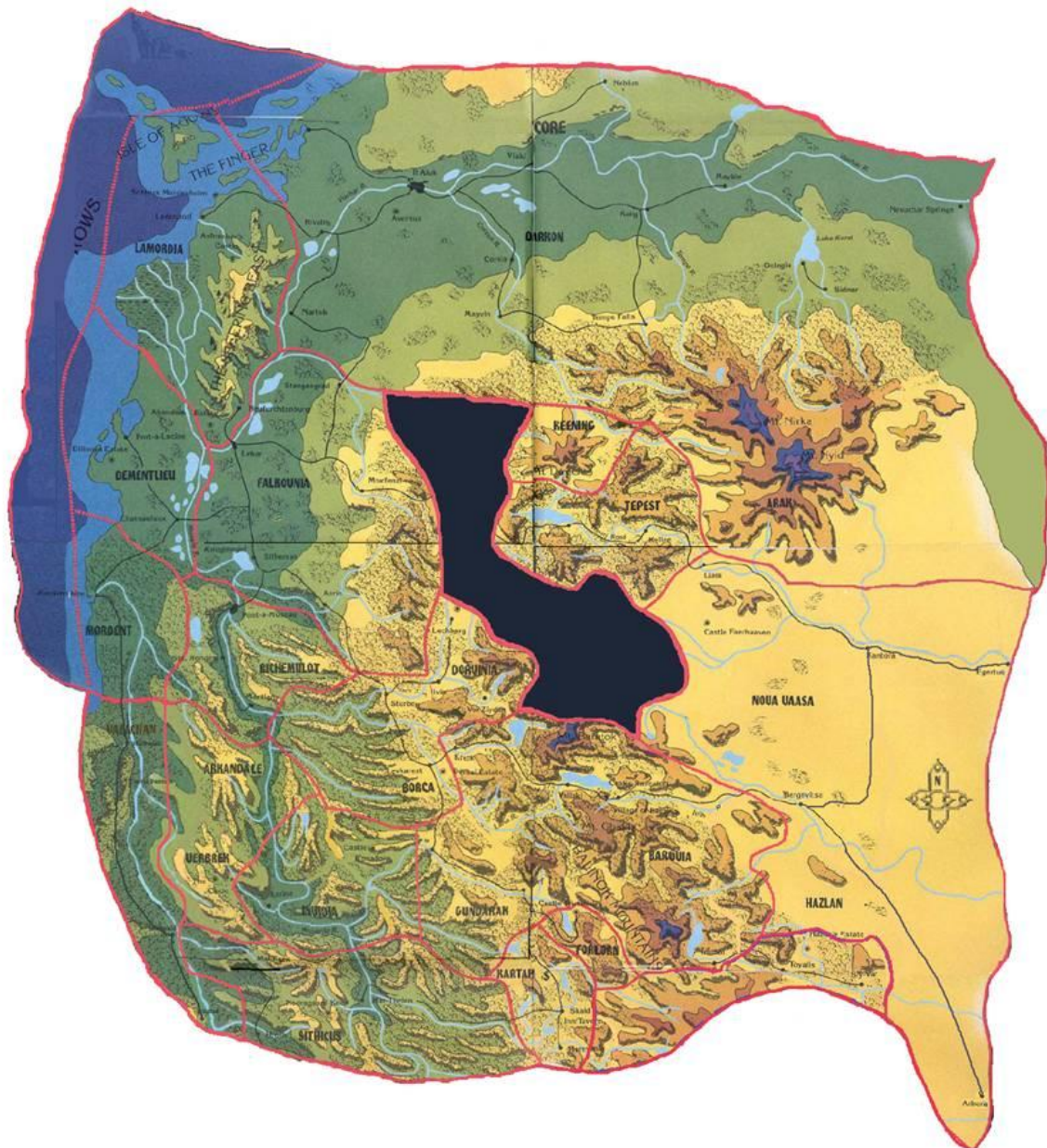
Most (physically) affected are Valachan and Nova Vaasa. Until I started to look at this closely, I just assumed Valachan was rotated and displaced, and Nova Vaasa got bigger. What actually happens is that the human landscape (towns and roads and things) are lifted up and resettled over the existing physical landscape, like a drop cloth falling over different pieces of furniture. Nova Vaasa claims most of the Nightmare Lands and part of Hazlan, and the human landscape spreads out over this whole area. God knows what the first merchant

who tried to ride from Arbora to Bergovista thought when it suddenly took 3 times as long to get anywhere. I hope they packed enough food and water. Or perhaps their memories are altered.

Valachan definitely suffers the most. It shrinks to about a third of its original size (obviously the Dark Powers didn't think von Kharkov was interesting enough either), and the human landscape is rotated and dropped over the unclaimed Mistlands in the west. This is clumsily done, and all of their houses are left facing into the weather rather than perpendicular to it. In Valachan, the blame for the Upheaval is placed on an attempted assassination attempt and divine disfavour because of it.

In the immediate aftermath, the Wildlands also forms.

What other changes the Grand Conjunction causes, the effects ripple out for a long time.



744 BC: Castle Island forms

A blatant King Arthur fractured tale, but since I wrote it, I have no one to blame but myself. A few odd differences between the original Book of S article and Gaz V, and I'm not sure why some of the changes were made (I didn't write that).

Another darklord that the Hags like to antagonise.

748 BC: Dominia joins the Core

According to Bleak House, which is set in 750 BC, Dominia has "recently" joined the Core. So this is an approximate date; it could be a year either side. Heinfroth has earned the right to rejoin the Core due to his depraved experiments into the physical causes of madness.

This means that the modern Sea of Sorrows is now complete: Blaustein joins the Sea in around 741 BC (late enough it's not on the Red Box maps, early enough for the Blausteiners to get a name for themselves and make a mark on ocean piracy), and the others were all there in the immediate aftermath of the Great Upheaval.

In other news, elsewhere in the Core, Malocchio has replaced Gabrielle Aderre as ruler (although not darklord) of Invidia, having shattered her mind in The Evil Eye; the Shadowborn cluster has just formed; Azalin has set in motion the preparations for the Grim Harvest; the Lamordian colony on Markovia vanishes without a trace; and the Nocturnal Sea is mistbound but sort-of present (so the eastern side of the Core now has a coast, but not necessarily a sea, if that makes sense). Given the presence of Hilda Borganov in Tidemore, it may be that the Drowning Deep has joined the Core, but the rest of the domains that form the Sea, including Nebligtode, haven't, which would mean that it's still mist-bound because the Deep doesn't have a surface until Nebligtode settles over the top of it. Actually, I quite like that idea.

So a busy couple of years in Ravenloft.

749 BC: The Grim Harvest begins

Thus making life worse (or at least shorter) for the people of Falkovnia. Death is created from Lowellyn Dachine, we discover Azalin's cloning project, and finally, in 750 BC, the Requiem occurs - Il Aluk is Slain, Azalin vanishes and the people of Darkon have a massive social convulsion about the Hour of Ascention, which in part leads to the success of the Darkonese sect of the Church of Ezra.

These adventures are not well liked, and for good reason. They have a dukkar (a male Vistani seer - obviously completely unintended), far too much magic generally and the Radiant Tower specifically, the Requiem rules for playing undead are clunky, and the changes made to Darkon were pretty unpopular. However, putting that aside, it does have it's good points: the 3 adventures link very closely together, are very evocative (Falkovnia particularly), have a real medieval tone (compared to the cod-Victoriana of most Ravenloft products), and give a real sense of jeopardy to what's going on - if you clean them up, they do form a pretty good campaign with massive implications. Also, the Ebon Fold is a great secret society, and it's a pity they all die mid-Death Ascendant.

In 3e, becoming undead actually works better (more coherently) for PCs than it did in 2e, so that's a good reason to look over them again for conversion.

The official word on what happened in the Requiem is that Azalin never stops being darklord of Darkon (which never stops being Darkon), although he does end up merged with the minds of the entire nation. His last coherent thought before being absorbed is that all he has created in a necropolis, which echoes through the minds of the Darkonese, leading them to think that Darkon has been renamed. Death is trapped in Il Aluk by the Shroud, but is not an actual darklord yet.

Also, the dwarf who loses his hand in the Shroud (from the Forgotten Children book the Kargatane released) is a great adventure - very evocative. I highly recommend it. I've in fact run variations on it three times in different campaigns.

On a related note, a Dragon issue at the time Requiem was released gave more undead classes, including the crawling claw, which I've always wanted to try for the role playing challenge. I also love Thing from the Addams family.

Over the next few years, Azalin tries to struggle back into wakefulness (prompted at first by the Falkovnian invasion in 751 BC). Death, its delusions of grandeur assaulted by Azalin's "escape" from its grasp, creates three Horsemen to drain Azalin's power by destroying the Darkonese and funnelling his energy back to Death. Balitor, Oldar, Kazandra and the PCs get together to regenerate Azalin. Tavelia (and I think Galf Kloggin) form a third corner, trying to get Azalin back but to bind him to her will. Anyway, Kazandra wins, Azalin is restored but bound to Irik's body, has new powers which I feel GMs have always overrated in terms of

their power, and sets about trying to salvage civilisation from a partially collapsed society. Death's power is much reduced by the destruction of the Horsemen, but he's been evil enough to attract the attention of the Dark Powers and becomes darklord of Necropolis. But we'll come back to that later.

750 BC: The Nocturnal Sea forms

After teasing with its presence for a couple of years, the Mists finally fully reveal the Nocturnal Sea. The east coast of the Core, particularly the Nova Vaasan cities, begin to boom with new trade opportunities. Their main partners obviously are Liffe and Graben, and a bit further out, Vechor.

It's always annoyed me that on nearly all the maps, there's a border around Todstein that shouldn't be there. Todstein and Graben are both part of the same domain. Please attend, maps.

The FoS Gaz has one of my favourite lines to appear in a Ravenloft expansion: "Flotsam collects along these shores (Liffe seems to attract the cast offs of other lands)." I just love it.

Also this year (as well as the Requiem, remember), the Burning Peaks cluster forms (which I don't hate nearly as much as everyone else seems to) and Van Richten vanishes. The Burning Peaks aren't going to be there for long though.

Of the domains that will one day make up the Nocturnal Sea, Vechor is the first to form, in 600 BC. The Drowning Deep also forms somewhere around the same time.

Neblightode forms shortly after the Sea of Sorrows and at the same time as Souragne, in 635 BC—perhaps the Dark Powers are going through a watery phase?

L'île de la Tempête forms in 677 BC.

Liffe is one of the last to form. Lyron Evensong becomes darklord of Claveria (basically a pocket, at this stage, or a very small Island, if you believe the FoS Gazetteer) in 738 BC. Liffe itself forms from the cast off remnants of little realms in 741 BC. Of course, if you don't like that idea, you can say the Book of Crypts adventures were all set in Liffe, which existed fully formed as an Island at the time. But I like the FoS version.

The formation of the Isle of Ravens is very difficult to pin down. It could be anywhere between 540 and 710 BC.



From left to right: the Isle of Ravens, Liffe, Graben Island, L'île de la Tempete, Vechor, Todstein.

755 BC: Necropolis forms

Or rather, becomes a full domain. It's the sort of place adventures *come from* rather than places for adventures to go to really.

It's also the last Core domain to appear!

By publication date, this is also when Vecna kills Iuz and slips through the fingers of the Dark Powers. As he escapes to Sigil to become a greater power, he claims to destroy the Burning Peaks cluster. Whether this is true, or a lie on his part, or a deception on the part of the Dark Powers, or happens in a different year, is up to individual GMs.



The future?

756 – 762 BC: The Gazetteer years

Our Hero – highly educated, aristocratic, arrogant and a wizard - turned her back on Darkon to study the Slain City in 750 BC, presumably just after Azalin vanished. She studies the city for 5 years, and learns more about it than any other living being, although this study also costs the life of her daughter (in a bid to gain more information from a captured ghoul, and an effort to gain a spy that could go into Necropolis – even by Ravenloft standards, she’s a bad mother).

There is a bit of apparent discontinuity in the dates here, but they actually do make sense if you follow them through carefully and remember each chapter is researched and written over about 6 weeks.

Azalin had made his escape from the Grey Realm/the minds of the people of Darkon 7 months ago when Our Hero begins work on Gaz I. From Gaz II, we know Azalin is restored in late summer 755, which means he commissions the gazetteers in the winter of 755, plus time to gather S’s things, plus time to travel to Barovia via carriage (which takes more than a week and is very uncomfortable), and then Our Hero starts work in early 756 (in mid-spring, in fact). She then spends the first part of summer in Hazlan, then goes to Forlorn, and then Kartakass in late summer and into early autumn. Vistani take her back to Nevuchar Springs, where she begins Gaz II. She spends weeks surveying Darkon (where she actually meets Azalin, more or less, and gets her magical bracer), and crosses into Lamordia just after New Year’s Day in 757 (which is not as pleasant experience), and sees out her first year of surveying in Falkovnia.

Gaz III starts in spring in Dementlieu. Our Hero then travels down to Mordent, where she completely mucks up the tale of the Alchemist by losing track of which Strahd is the real one, and crosses into Richemulot in late summer 757. She reaches Borca as autumn is setting in, and Invidia when the last of the leaves have fallen. She then travels to Verbrek, where Alfred Timothy kills her at the Circle, and wakes up 2 weeks later in Valachan “just after the turn of the year” to 758 BC. She sees out the rest of the winter in Sithicus, where she falls afoul of the Tribe of Hyskosa, who give her a message for Azalin that they’re going to oppose his plans.

As Gaz V begins, she spends weeks trudging through springtime Borca and Barovia on foot (to find the Keeper of Secrets to learn about the Shadow Rift on the way) before entering Nova Vaasa, where she begins her survey in early summer. She is still haunted the guilt of Sithicus, and can’t quite get over the long-buried memories of her daughter. She buys a baby in Liara, and crosses into Tepest in early autumn (which comes early in Tepest, as she says). She briefly passes Castle Island, learns some more about the Shadow Rift, and then after spying on the Hags, falls into a pit trap, where she is rescued by the Gentleman Caller, who has noticed Our Hero cataloguing his children and sends another threat back to Azalin. Our Hero sees out the autumn in Keening, where she sacrifices the baby to Tristessa, and then

flees. Although she doesn't say so, she almost certainly flees north to Darkon, which is a much shorter distance than it would be to go back to Tepest. Also, it's her home. From there, she writes up her notes on Keening and the Shadow Rift, and then hires a carriage to take her to the coast to survey the Nocturnal Sea. It's now mid-late autumn 758 BC.

And that, sadly, is where we leave the canon history.

The plan now (if the gazetteer series had continued across the planned 13 volumes), was that Our Hero would spend a year (2 books) surveying the Nocturnal Sea and then the Sea of Sorrows. She'd probably spend the New Year (759 BC) in either Liffe or Vechor, and then finish up on Blaustein, where she decides she's had enough as Azalin's slave and ends it all. Unfortunately, she revives several weeks later again, and goes to where she committed suicide and comes face to face with an extremely nasty surprise... her own bloated corpse!

In late 759 BC, she sails down a mistway again to Souragne, then (in early 760 BC) the Verdurous Lands (where she abandons both ship and crew to rot in Saragoss), goes to Sri Raji and the Wildlands. From there, we have a desert gazetteer (G'Henna and the Amber Wastes). From Pharazia, she goes to the Shadowlands (so it's now 761 BC) and then (probably) Odaire. Then (over the summer of 761 BC) she goes to the Zherisia Cluster and the Frozen Wastes cluster.

How have these domains changed since they became clusters?

Har'Akir and the Pharazian nomads have begun to trade (although that involves crossing Sebuu, which is dangerous in itself). The followers of Diamabel are forbidden from leaving Phiraz, and the Akiri don't seem to want to leave Har'Akir, so the whole thing is dependent on the nomads. The Akiri like it, the nomads are getting richer and more powerful, and they're starting to pass things on to the Core via the Road of a Thousand Secrets.

In the Frozen Reaches, Sanguinia and Vorostokov had only just tentatively begun trade in 755 BC. Both are worried about the predators from the other domain: giant wolves and vrykolakas. However, Vorostokov is trapped in endless winter, whereas Sanguinia (presumably) has a brief summer. Sanguinia also has a much higher population, and its people are probably better adapted to their surrounds (since they've always been used to living on top of a mountain, whereas Vorostokov has only relatively recently become trapped in winter). On the other hand, Vorostokov has the only permanent link to the Core through the Bleak Road. I would imagine by the time of 775 BC, Vorostokov will have emptied of anyone who can get out (fleeing into Barovia or Sanguinia). The extra population could cause famine in Sanguinia (if it upsets whatever delicate equilibrium they've got). Zolnik will certainly do all he can to keep people there, because he doesn't want to rule an empty valley of endless winter. Mircea might be more welcoming to migrants.

Saragoss is essentially a hell of captive ships. Everpresent fog and chaotic currents prevents them from even noticing that Sri Raji is just over there; essentially, there're no bearings for

anyone to find Sri Raji from. Also, ships can only escape via sea when a new ship enters. If they could escape to Sri Raji, they're facing an enormous climb up the back of Yahasha Mountain, right in Arijani's back pocket. And Arijani hates and fears outsiders, so I doubt they'd last long. The Sri Rajians go to that part of the domain as little as possible, so I'd be surprised if the average Rajian knew Saragoss was even there. They do, however, know that the Wildlands are there, and keep trying to exploit it's natural resources. For some reason though, the people that go there keep vanishing...

Paridon really becomes aware of Timor in 755 BC. A lot has been written on this, from Shadow of the Knife to the FoS gazetteer, so I'll leave that there.

To see out 761 BC and usher in 762 BC, Our Hero rounds out the clusters and starts on the Islands. We hadn't thought/confirmed this far ahead, but Farelle, Rokushima Taiyoo, I'Cath and one other would have gone here – perhaps Chris' long-lost Scattered Lotus cluster? Then, she uses the Carnival to get from there to Staunton Bluffs, 2 new domains (if I had my way, one of which would have been Mictlan) and finally, the series ends in the dying days of 762 BC in Bluetspur. Which means Azalin's metaplot – the multi-stringed showdown between Azalin, the Gentleman Caller, his children, the Tribe of Hyskosa, Madame Eva, and Isolde and the Carnival – would have, if Azalin's plans had worked out correctly, occurred at the very end of 762 BC.

This tees off the beginning of the Time of Unparalleled Darkness, which would be a long, slow progression of events that culminate 13 years later.

763 – 775 BC: The Dying Days

The End Times. The lead in to the Time of Unparalleled Darkness.

Here, I'm going to brush over the period heading up to that (when all the Dread Possibilities come true) and survey what might be happening in these years.

As a note, I think any games set in their period should really hammer home the doomsday flavour of the period: the End Times are upon us, the Grand Scheme is coming to an end, the Apocalypse is coming. Even if you don't actually think that's what the ToUD actually is. For a real life taste of what the might have been like, look at Medieval Europe at 1000 AD: the Pope is believed to be a sorcerer in league with the Devil, the rise of new world powers (Hungary), rioting in the streets, internecine struggles, comets auguring terrible deeds...

So, outside of Ravenloft, what's happening in the TSR worlds that might be of interest:

766 BC: The Spellplague ravages Toril (Forgotten Realms). The Mulan are wiped out (!)
This is one we're going to talk about a bit more.

Nothing happens in Greyhawk, nothing relevant happens in Dragonlance, and there's no way to tie Dark Sun or Eberron into our timelines.

In Ravenloft, a few things are due to happen in this period:

763: By now, Lucita Aderre is 10, which should be enough to provoke the long-promised falling out between Gabrielle Aderre and either Matton or the Gundarak rebels. If not now, it'll happen in the next 3 years (when Lucita is hitting puberty).

Also, the oldest of the second generation of children in Odaire will be 12, which is old enough to look after themselves without adults around. If the original children (now in their twenties and thirties) anger him, or treat him as though he weren't a real boy, Maligno could well wipe them out.

764: From numerology, this is when Ezra's Final Sect is due to be founded. If there's any pattern in where Ezra's word strikes and how, this is due in Nova Vaasa. If She's LN (as the Home Faith says), this'll probably be LN again (although very different in outlook to the Home Faith). If She's TN (as the Dementlieuvian sect says), this'll be NE. In my campaign, this is the option I took, inspired by the Six Fingered Hand from Masque of the Red Death. As a natural progression from the Darkonese sect, the Final Sect have decided that the Hollow has expanded so far that the only way to defeat the Legions of the Night is to bring about the end of the world. So that's what they set about doing. But that's just my idea.

768: The next round of murders for the Fang of the Nosferatu in Zherisia, depending on how the end of Shadow of the Knife played out in your campaign.

770: Tara Kolyana (this generation's incarnation of Tatyana) is the same age that Strahd was when he made his pact with Death. What would he do with an aged Tatyana? Would he be repulsed at her age? Would he be drawn to her more? I think this is Strahd's seminal decision here: does he realise that he and Tatyana had nothing in common, and his attraction for her

was just obsession and desire for her youth, or not? (Inajira has been biding his time in Barovia, right at Strahd's doorstep for years, presumably to wreak revenge at just such a time; he'd definitely be involved here).

Then there are the more general storylines to wrap up/start wrapping up:

The Weathermay's

Jules Weathermay was on his last legs in 757 BC, so he's probably dead by now, leaving a power vacuum in Mordent. Daniel Foxgrove can't rule, because he's not a noble (and he's being manipulated by Godefroy). George Weathermay is still obsessed with avenging himself on Natalia (the werewolf), and I seriously doubt he'll drop that to come back to rule Mordent. This leaves the twins as rulers: are they willing to take up the mantle and leave behind Van Richten's work? Will they be weak rulers? Either way, any power vacuum in the mortal world suits Godefroy, and the twins giving up the work of their uncle would suit a lot of unpleasant people.

My rendering of the twins' story actually winds up in 763 BC, as a foil to Our Hero's journey in the Gazetteers. I think the main themes in the Twins' story are the conflict between doing what is right, and obeying their obligations. Gennifer is a bit more conservative than Laurie, so there should be some conflict (which increases as time goes on) between where the line is for each of them. Is Laurie willing to turn her back on her family and ride out to fight evil? Is Gennifer prepared to say goodbye to her sister in order to fulfil her obligations? Can they do both, and for how long?

Another theme is coming of age and the loss of innocence. People have commented a lot on the Nancy Drew feel, which I think is perfectly valid for the first few books, because they have the arrogance of youth but little real experience. When they learn, they'd have to learn hard and fast. They do have to come to terms with the loss of Van Richten and George Weathermay, and the looming/past death of Jules Weathermay. So there should have been more about that in the VRGs - growing up, making hard decisions, and living with the consequences.

To trace the twins' story across the setting begins in the Book of Sorrows. The twins are putting Van Richten's library in order and waiting for him to come back from Bleak House. They've been doing some minor investigations on their own.

VRMHC is all about them coming to terms with the fact that Van Richten is not coming back. It's fundamentally a passage into adulthood for them - they go from just editing his books and making comments from their research (largely theoretical - if not, it should be) to deciding to actually take on his position and keep his work going.

With VRA, the twins are branching out into the world for their first research project. Because they're still novices, they're relying on the experience of Van Richten's friends to bring everything together. It's also their last attempt to reach out to George and convince him to come home. It fails, and the twins are forced to move on.

So by the time they're getting to VRGtWD, they've had to come to terms with Van Richten's death, and that George is never coming home either. I don't mind the personal anecdote here (although it does contradict canon), but they become increasingly ludicrous as time goes on.

❧ An Illustrated History of the Core ❧

Because the walking dead are relatively easy to beat, they've got some experience with them. It makes sense that they're out hunting them. We're still in the arrogance of youth phase. However, they're still forced to rely on contacts for information - Alanik Ray, Ratik, Toben - because they don't know enough about it. I wanted to have them make mistakes in the text to convey this lack of experience, but I'm not sure how clearly it comes through.

And they end up with Nikolas (their friend, whom Laurie appears to be a bit interested in) being mutilated by the Glutton.

For VRGttSF, I'd have the cracks starting to appear. Gaz III was released just before, and if there'd been better oversight from the developers, it would have been great to tie their concerns about Jules' health into the text. You'd convey this by making it clear that Laurie was out doing field research while Gennifer was back at home in the library while looking after Jules - instead of journal entries, they'd correspond via letter. And you have a bit more burgeoning romance between Laurie and Nikolas, drawing the twins apart even more. I'd still have other experts being brought in, albeit on a slightly more equal footing, and make sure they were human(oid) experts.

For VRGttMists (or, VRGttCreatures of the Deeps, as it should have been, to tie in with (a) sanity and (b) Gaz VI), the twins are now able to produce guides more or less by themselves. I've made no secret of the fact that I think Gennifer failing a Powers check was a mistake; instead, I think the twins' story should be one of maturation and hard truths on the rocky road of good, rather than failure and corruption (remember, George Weathermay's already got that covered). There's no real point in showing Richten Haus either, because the twins have accepted his death since VRMHC.

I think I'd probably kill Nikolas here. Or kill someone else we've grown accustomed to, and have Laurie turn to Nikolas for comfort rather than Gennifer. We leave it on a precipice - will the distance between the twins heal, or grow wider?

It's now 760 BC, by the way.

Jules would be dead by 761ish BC (or whenever suits your campaign timeline), and Gennifer is having to deal with the sudden political complexities thrust upon her. She has political power, which she wants to use for good (furthering the work, really), but feels constrained by these obligations after resisting them for so long. Laurie is out doing direct good work, avoiding her responsibilities. By 761 BC (the second last VRG - something with mind control/deception abilities would suit, perhaps like the FoS's guide to dopplegangers), they're 31, and they finally bring this all to a head. We can lay a few seeds for the Time of Unparalleled Darkness and the Dying Days leading up to that through these books as well. Something about Gennifer's lycanthropy as well would be good - perhaps that is the cause of their falling out - Gennifer realises it earlier, but conceals it from Laurie, and Laurie can't handle what she takes as a lack of trust between them after everything they've been through.

Having Natalia the werewolf disguised as a guest expert would be a nice touch as well. She and Gennifer only meet at the end, which is when Gennifer makes her awful discovery.

The last one is VRGttEldritch Abomination (Lovecraft), which ties in with Our Hero reaching Bluetspur and sacrificing herself to finally gain her freedom from Azalin. The important thing here is that Lovecraftian horror is all about sweeping away the importance of

human constructs and realising you're lost and alone in a meaningless, uncaring universe (see Matthew L Martin's ideas about cosmic horror and illithids in Ravenloft for further ideas). So, to wind it up here, and to end on a positive note, this is where the twins reconcile. Having studied creatures that want to sweep everything away and make their lives meaningless, they realise that the only thing that really means anything is each other. Which brings us nicely full circle to the sentiment of VRA, and echoes the end of VRGttV.

The Dark Twins

Speaking of twins, we move to Borca. I'm sure at some point, one will finally kill the other. If Ivana wins, Borca loses any semblance of border security or military might. If Ivan wins, the realm becomes much more unstable, and Ivan continues to goad Drokov and Malocchio.

Also remember that Johann Severin (VRA) is obsessed with Ivana, and potentially willing to hand over the Van Richten Society to Ivana for a bit of attention, which would not go well for the forces of good.

Personally, I'd have Ivana die (I secretly like the idea that she just drops dead from old age, actually – Ivan gets eternal life but not eternal youth; Ivana gets apparent eternal youth but not eternal life), leaving Ivan to run Borca into the ground and then get mashed by Falkovnia.

The Core at War

We already know from Gaz II that Drakov's turned his eye south, and wants to make an object lesson of Dementlieu. Part of that is building up military bases in Invidia. When they finally go to war, it's a well established fact that Borca's not going to come out of it well. And before anyone gets too excited, remember that if Ivan is within the reality wrinkle of a fiend (the Gentleman Caller or the Black Duke are both very obvious choices, but any of them could get involved, even unintentionally), he loses his mastery of Borca, which means he can't close the borders (assuming, of course, that Ivana's death grants him that power – he might never gain the ability as a final piece of spite from the Dark Powers). So supernatural protections might not help Borca in the event of war.

Malocchio is also gearing for war against Barovia over his Vistani pogroms, particularly in chasing them across the border into Barovia.

And then there are the Gundarak rebels, who at the moment oppose both Malocchio and Strahd, but that could change depending on how the Lucita Aderre situation plays out.

Revolution!

We've been gearing up to it for decades, but the cold war between Dominic and the Brain finally erupts into actual class-based warfare. I imagine the Brain could be receiving help from Drakov in this, or at least that Drakov might be willing to take advantage of the post-revolutionary chaos and try his hand at invasion. Alternately, Josephine Chantreaux's inability to avoid goading Drakov might be the trigger for the revolution (by threatening invasion, or just be cutting off the grain trade Dementlieu depends on). Either way, Dementlieu goes up.

Rather than have Dominic killed, I'd do a Man in the Iron Mask and lock him away in the bowels of a prison somewhere with only a blind and deaf jailor to try to influence. The Brain strikes me as the sort of person who'd like to gloat. So the Brain has the political power, but Dominic stay the darklord. And because he has no idea what's going on in the outside world, he can't keep the borders shut forever. Or perhaps they open and shut randomly, causing even more chaos. Or perhaps he keeps them closed for as long as he can, until exhaustion stops him from being able to concentrate.

The Becoming Plague

Although the Cult of Simon Audaire would certainly have something to say about it, Jacqueline is due to wrap this up sometime. If it is contagious, she'd probably be willing to negotiate a truce with Falkovnia – let the troops march through Richemulot and spread the Plague amongst the soldiers, and whomever they go to fight, and then through Falkovnia when they go back home.

So if Borca's really unlucky, after pushing Falkovnia and Invidia to war, they look around and find Dementlieu in chaos, Mordent in a power vacuum and Richemulot suddenly neutral.

Hazlik and the Spellplague

It's been mentioned before, but it is a very happy coincidence that the Spellplague wipes out all the Mulan in Mullholarand and Unther, and civil war in Thay wipes out the rest. So obviously Hazlik completed his ritual, and spends the last decade in Eleni's body.

Elsewhere

Nova Vaasa and Sithicus have both been threatening to slip into chaos for years. In Nova Vaasa, the thing that could provoke the other houses against the Bolshniks is if House Hiregaard changes allegiances. Malken has already set in place systems to reveal Othmar's criminal exploits to Tristen if Othmar annoys Malken, so I see this as the most logical route to civil war here. Malken, of course, sits back to profit.

If you're going to kill Tristen and move Malken to a younger generation, now is probably the time to do it.

Ebonbane's phantasmal forest finally surrounds Nidala completely, making life extremely difficult for both the Circle and the people of Nidala. Elena Faithhold, however, finally has real purpose in her life again.

In the Shadow Rift, Loht builds an army of changelings (possibly decimating a town in Falkovnia or Darkon, which could be awkward to explain) and tries to destroy the Obsidian Portal. If it goes badly, the Seelie Court (and possibly a lot of the Unseelie Court) flee into the surrounding domains, which would also be unpleasant for normal people. Let's just hope Gwydion doesn't get out.

Meanwhile in Tepest, even by 758 BC, Wyan has realised that he's lost control of the Inquisition and it's just a matter of time until it turns on him, Robespierre-like. I see the Hags having a good laugh at that, even if they're not deliberately provoking it.

Ankhtepot rises for the eighth and last time, after a couple of decades of sleeping fitfully. I suggest that this time, he doesn't go back to sleep.

Malistroi and Yagno Petrovna have their final showdown (if Circle of Darkness didn't do that already).

In Lanordia, Baron von Aubreker must have died by now, and his daughter takes over.

Adam and Mordenheim are too inwardly focused to really have much presence in this scenario, and Lamordia reflects that inward presence. I imagine it would stay neutral: Adam certainly doesn't care what Falkovnia's doing provided they don't bother him. However, I can see two ways they'd get involved: arms or mercenary supply to Falkovnia via Neufurchtenburg, or Mordenheim inventing a Doomsday Weapon and offering to sell it to the highest bidder (perhaps as a by-product of his normal research - "I was experimenting with a new type of power source, when I began to wonder if it could be weaponised. It was a trivial problem to solve, and I have also reduced my lab's dependance on coal for the generator. I have named the process after the smallest species of fey, the atomie...")

Steve Miller's original plan (I believe) involved PCs learning how things were going to go down in the Final Days and then travelling back in time with the knowledge of all the things they have to do to stop the end of the world. (He seems to be a man who likes the idea of time travel as much as I do). Mordenheim would certainly be interested in building a time machine to prevent Elise's mangling, so perhaps you could use that instead. And Adam, of course, would oppose that. And who wouldn't want to buy a chance to travel back and fix a few regrets here and there?

I used that idea in a previous campaign, based on the Doctor Who novel Anachrophobia. It worked really well.

Von Kharkov is planning to use Adeline to take control of Sithicus (in the mistaken belief that Azrael is the darklord), so when Sithicus collapses into anarchy, he'll move his troops in and pacify the place. Leaving Inza with fresh new toys to play with.

Someone else was talking about freeing von Kharkov by turning him back into a panther. I'm in two minds about that. You could use it if you wanted to. Or there's the long anticipated show down with the Cat of Felkovic.

Forlorn is too wrapped up in its own history to take much interest in what else is going on. We also know it still exists in some form in 400 years time, from the vision of the future in Castles Forlorn (although it might be in Ravenloft, in the Shadowfell, back on the Prime Material - we just need the castle to still be standing *somewhere*). The goblins might take advantage of the war to do some border raids (the same with the Verbreker werewolves, I suppose), and Tristen might gain some ground against the druids. On Verbrek, Alfred Timothy is waiting for the day he can face down his father. I suspect he'd lose, the loss of face from which would tear Verbrek in half from those who lose faith in him and his god and those who remain loyal to him, so Verbrek might dissolve into tribe vs tribe conflict as well.

Kartakass is also peripheral (this time, because the Dark Powers will it so - Lukas' curse is that he has nothing to rule and no real power to exercise).

Darkon I've deliberately left on the periphery, for two reasons. The first is just from a design point: Azalin has been hogging the major upheavals spotlight for so long that it's about time some of the others get a chance to shine. The second comes from something Rotipher once said: wouldn't it be great if Azalin was essentially just light entertainment for the Dark Powers, but not ultimately all that important (compared to say, Strahd, or even Drakov). His ego just couldn't take it.

As for all the Islands: I've already covered G'Henna, Odaire, Har'Akir, Paridon, and the Shadowlands (although you can add in Aurora waking up to confront Morgoroth, and Elena either dying or redeeming herself and then dying in the fight against Ebonbane). Often they're less developed, or less interwoven with Ravenloft's major plotlines, so it's hard to draw anything out. Of the ones that do:

Pharazia: Diamabel is going to be brought down by a blue eyed scoundrel. (Or was it black?) Anyway, Diamabel's downfall has been written in the stars since his first appearance.

Worst-case, end-game scenario in Staunton Bluffs would be to have some interloping adventurers figure out the ritual for laying Sir Torrence Bleysmith to rest—and then only getting as far as planting the flag of Staunton and laying claim to the lowlands before meeting a grim end. The countless ghosts of Staunton Bluffs get a lot less quaint once they realize they can touch you.

Mictlan: Also had an end game written into it in terms of the death of Mouriros. (I just can't help pimping my own work)

The Frozen Wastes: Vorostokov gets colder, lonelier and hungrier. Have a look at the end of Dark of the Moon - there's quite a lot there to suggest how things might develop. Sanguinia's never had much of a chance to develop any plot lines, so there's not a lot I can say there. It's a blank slate; do what you think is best.

The Verdurous Lands: Saragoss isn't really capable of much change. Neither is the Wildlands. In Sri Raji, Arijani could either be killed or severely injured by Ravana's Bane. Web of Illusions might have some more ideas.

One more thing:

The Vistani entered Ravenloft at the very beginning of 470 BC. They believe their power devolves from the Zarovan, and ultimately from Madame Eva (VRGtTV). Madame Eva's only got a limited time to live before Jacqueline Montarri kills her in 495 BC.

Perhaps the ToUD is as far forwards as Madame Eva can reach in the time that she's got? Outside her reach, the Vistani lose their powers, since they're cut off from Eva, making the world a little bleaker for everyone (particularly them).

Possible dates: 770 BC (300 years after the Vistani enter); 773 BC (303 years, or 101 years for each of the Kaldresh, Boem and Manusa); or 775 BC (300 years after Madame Eva decides to rebel against the Dark Powers and meets Jander Sunstar; see Rotipher's ideas about Madame Eva for more details).

So, as a vague timeline:

Trouble in the Gundarak rebel camp.

Massacre in Odaire

The Final Sect.

Death of Jules Weathermay

Death of one of the Dark Twins

Hazlik and the Spellplague

Revolution in Dementlieu

Civil war in Nova Vaasa

The Becoming Plague

The Core at War! (Starting with Invidia vs Barovia, then bringing in Falkovnia vs Barovia, which entails them cutting through Borca, which entails Borca being crushed – we're talking 3 to 5 years of war here, I would think)

Leading in to the final climax of the ToUD

As to the final climax: As I see it, Ravenloft's underlying theme is about redemption and damnation. As we've talked about before, darklords are often given one last chance to see if they'll repeat their final mistakes (and those that do end up as darklords). So the final climax is ultimately about those internal choices - after centuries of torment, have you learnt anything yet? Will you make those same mistakes yet again? The trick is working the PCs in to force darklords to those points of decision: bringing Strahd face to face with Tara Kolyana, for example, who by this time will be as old as Strahd was when he damned everyone in 351 BC. Getting Azalin to accept Irik has a life of his own. Some will fail; some will die; some (one?) will be redeemed. RL3e tells us that the Land of Mists goes through incarnations, and that this is just the most recent one. Perhaps it all ends up with Ravenloft bleeding back out to the Prime Material (as the Shadowfell?) Or just dissolving all together, like the early RL adventures, or in the Neverending Story. Either way, the players go home feeling like they've had a major impact on the multiverse.

Attached Notes

A Discussion of Trade and Urbanisation

This discussion of course depends on demography working in Ravenloft similar to the way it does in the real world, which is perhaps quite a large assumption. If the Dark Powers decide that a town is going to grow, fade or stay the same regardless of any external factors, it probably does.

I would think that, when Barovia forms, most of its towns are about the same size they are today (more or less; they'd probably be slightly smaller, but not significantly). The exception is Immol, which is about half the size it is now. It will increase to its modern size in 547 BC when Forfarian refugees flood in and 581 BC when Thaani refugees flood in. It probably grows a bit after 714 BC (and particularly the Grand Conjunction) when it gains Hazlan to trade with.

The Old Svalich Road is the main trade route through Barovia. Unfortunately, the Village of Barovia is an almost-literal chokehold on it, making it either dangerous or expensive to circumvent Strahd's choking fog. This will obviously affect trade to some extent, but if it's lucrative enough, people will still make the effort. Realistically, trade anywhere in Ravenloft is quite dangerous—you have robber barons, werebeasts, military zealots, choking fog, evil fey and Mist wherever you turn, but it would be unreasonable to assume that people are trekking through Bluetspur without cause, for example, or regularly using poor quality Mistways as trade routes—those are obviously suicide.

In 575 BC, the Old Svalich Road extends to Marbh-Cathair and the Ivlis River flows through Arak, and the miners and herders of Arak can trade with the people of Barovia. 4 years later, Darkon and Barovia can trade through the Krezk pass, and an overland trade route forms linking Sidnar with Marbh-Cathair. The Ivlis becomes the Corvus, offering river trade. For about 10 years, the people of northern Barovia and southern Darkon do quite well for themselves.

At this point, Martira Bay and Rivalis are probably about 1/4 their current size, and the other Darkonese towns are about half. Civilisation is defined focus on the north-central region though, between Il Aluk and Karg. Things begin to develop in the west though, as the Vuchar becomes the Ardent and flows into Mordent, and river, road and sea trade links Mordentshire and Martira Bay.

We have no data on when Mistways forms, but 579 BC is the earliest that the Shrouded Way, linking NW Darkon with Paridon, This also increases Martira Bay's development.

In 588 BC, the Scourge cuts off direct trade between Barovia and Darkon, and cuts off the Old Svalich Road.

In the 20 years following 593 BC, Barovia can now engage in overland trade with Gundarak and then Invidia and Kartakass. This is difficult and unstable, but better than no trade at all, which is more or less what they had immediately following the Scourge. Sometime after 615 BC, the Via Corona appears in NE Darkon, providing some trade with Nidala (but not a lot, as both the Darkonese elves and the Nidalans are quite standoffish).

By the 680s, the Emerald Road has appeared, linking the Sea of Sorrows with Sri Raji, which I think would benefit Martira Bay and Mordentshire again and kick off something like the Chinoiserie movement or the cultural changes following the British Raj: spices and exotic goods are available and highly prized.

In Barovia, the Old Svalich Road now goes to Liara, and the overland trade route to Darkon reopens. This is probably more important for Nova Vaasa than it is for Barovia. In 683 BC, half of Egertus flees the creation of the Nightmare Lands and ends up in Kantora, sparking off its growth. The Nova Vaasan cities are probably slightly smaller in this period than they are in the modern era, but not by a lot: they'll really benefit from the trade with Darkon, and the completion of the Timori Road linking them to Falkovnia, where there is a large market for their horses. However, there's no middle class in Nova Vaasa, so it doesn't have the same demographic effects (i.e. population growth) that it has elsewhere.

Elsewhere, river trade is interrupted between Mordentshire and Rivalis by Lamordia, checking Rivalis' growth. Sea trade continues though, so Martira Bay continues to develop. In the south, Borca's appearance links Barovia and Gundarak by road, and the Dilisnyas really start pushing trade.

In 690 BC, the Falkovnian Upheaval means the Old Svalich Road now leads into southern Nova Vaasa. Roads link Barovia and Gundarak with Borca, Falkovnia and Darkon, The Vuchar links Darkon, Falkovnia and Lamordia, providing a shot in the arm for Rivalis. The trade drifts west and north, leaving Nova Vaasa (particularly, but also Gundarak and Invidia) on the outer. The south road in Borca falls into disuse for 40 years (unless Bakholis is overthrown).

Richemulot's appearance causes a massive influx of the poor and downtrodden from Gundarak, Borca, Falkovnia and Invidia. Mists close over the Sea of Sorrows, making sea trade more dangerous, but Falkovnia starts going to war with everyone, making river and road trade dangerous too. The Dark Powers are clearly turning the screws for about 13 years or so to see what will happen. Nartok reaches its present size in response to Falkovnian belligerence.

By 702 BC, the Timori Road is complete, linking Nova Vaasa, Tepest, G'Henna, Falkovnia (and Darkon, although it's not on the road). By 707 BC, sea trade opens up again, and the Musarde is more or less complete, allowing river trade between Barovia, Borca, Richemulot, Falkovnia, Dementlieu, Lamordia and Darkon. A year later, Arkandale links Invidia and Gundarak to the Musarde system as well.

Hazlan's appearance in 714 BC provides some growth for Immol and Arbora. The Road of a Thousand Secrets from Hazlan to Pharazia could appear now, but I think it's more likely to form after the Grand Conjunction when Hazlan is bordered by Mists rather than Bluetspur.

In 720 BC, Sithicus finally links Valachan with civilization (or at least Invidia and Kartakass) for river trade. It's not a lot though, because Sithicus is full of xenophobic elves. It's not until the Grand Conjunction that the Arden links it to Mordent.

The Grand Conjunction also cuts the Timori Road in half and Blausteiners make sea trade more risky. The Way of Venomous Tears forms, linking the Sea of Sorrows with Rokushima Taiyoo.

And finally, in 750 BC, Nocturnal Sea trade makes Nova Vaasa (Egertus particularly, but also Arbora) boom, from trade with Liffe, Graben and Vechor. Darkon doesn't take up the advantages of trade as much, again because the elves of the east aren't really into it.

And by then, the trade relations and city sizes described in RL3e and the Gazetteers are in place.

A Note on Religions

Since they potentially have a major effect on international relations, I've tried to include seminal dates for the different churches of the Mists. Generally, they're quite easy to place - Ezra is clearly described, the Lawgiver come in with Nova Vaasa, the Eternal Order is a lot younger than you might think, etc.

However, there is a question about when the Church of Hala enters Ravenloft. We know it's "several" centuries older than the Church of Ezra (VRMHCIII); Ezra was founded in 666, but became popular in 685. Assuming it came in with a domain rather than isolated travellers (which is a big assumption), that severely limits the domains that Hala could have come in with: Arak (with the native humans, obviously), Mordent, Darkon, Gundarak, and Invidia at the very latest. It's not big in Barovia (or Borca, for that matter), so it's perhaps not likely to have come from there, or from outlanders who set up in Barovia in the very early phase of history. Oddly enough, the myths of Hala are very similar to the myths of Ezra.

Gundarak is extremely unlikely (we know the Gundarak god was Erlin). Darkon is varied enough to be possible, and the Church of Hala is reasonably acceptable in Mordent, so that might be a possibility too. However, I think the best candidates are Arak (Hala fits in with the simple pastoral nature, and the Scourge explains why the Church doesn't seem to have a homeland) or Invidia (the Church was known and widespread, and witches feared, there from the very beginning of the domain; the only problem is Invidia formed quite late).

It may simply have come in as false history, particularly from those domains that share a common heritage (Mordent gives us Dementlieu, Richemulot, Arkandale and Verbrek; Invidia has false history links to Kartakass). It may have come from a destroyed or forgotten domain. It may be a combination of real historical basis and then grafted into the false history of another domain (Arak and then Mordent and Invidia, for example).

I leave that up to your discretion.

A History of the Fiends of Ravenloft

Inajira is the first to draw our attention, but one of the last to actually enter Ravenloft. He cuts a deal with Strahd in 347 BC to help him in battle in return for Strahd's soul upon death. Strahd demands his Book of Keeping as collateral. Strahd then gets swept up by the Mists and turns into a vampire, so Inajira spends 400 years looking for his lost prize and his Book of Keeping. (Which implies that knowledge of Ravenloft isn't – or wasn't - widely distributed among the Planes). He finally catches the scent when Strahd returns to the Prime Material in the Grand Conjunction, and is caught when it collapses. So he enters Ravenloft in 740 BC. Since then, he's lurked in Barovia (moving from town to town every few years), waiting for Strahd to blink and attacking him when he appears vulnerable. He spends his time trading for souls to keep his hand in, as it were.

Next in is Drigor. Mangrum's timeline (arbitrarily) puts his date of arrival as 357 BC. I'm inclined to put it in 351 BC (just prior to the wedding) for two reasons: gehreleths hate yugoloths and do what they can to interfere with their plans, so it would make sense for Drigor to follow Inajira to Prime Material Barovia; and if Drigor was in Barovia for the whole time that Strahd was darklord, it would explain why he doesn't suddenly notice an itchy blindspot appear in his mind when Drigor arrives, since his diaries suggest he can/could sense when anyone entered Barovia, and you'd think he'd mention it if he did. For similar reasons, I'd say Drigor sets up shop in Immol at first.

However, if you want to stick with 357 BC, this potentially coincides with the exodus of Vistani from Barovia until they return in 470 BC, so he might attribute Drigor's reality wrinkle with that. His harsh punishment of the Vistani thief that leads to the exodus might be due to his unconscious sense of Drigor's presence. Or, you know, just his personality.

In any event, the Madrigore family starts off Barovian. By 740 BC, 16 generations have been possessed by Drigor and compelled to write. I'd suggest he moves them to Mordent soon after the domain forms in 575 BC (Azalin and Strahd are unconscious or distracted with their war, depending on when it happens, so Strahd doesn't notice Immol start to feel "good" again). Godefroy's not a particularly active darklord, but he does value scholarship, so I can see them coming to some sort of arrangement. Then he moves again (it must be shortly after Dementlieu forms in 707 BC, because by the time Van Richten finds them in 741 BC, they're an established part of Edrigan society). So he uproots the Madrigores and moves every 200 years or so. We don't know where they are after 741 BC until they turn up in Gothic Earth having just escaped Ravenloft in 1898. They have been trapped for some time (somewhere), and it's taken Drigor 200 years to destroy every copy of Van Richten's Guide to Fiends or anywhere else that reveals his name.

Next in is the Whistling Fiend. A man in Darkon falls victim to a disease that sounds very much like transposition in 580 BC. Some wizards from Karg interfere, turning him into the Key to the Abyss. The Whistling Fiend comes through the living portal; it is unclear whether it was the fiend transposing the human. From there it destroys Creeana in 580 BC, pops up in Bakholis' Invidia in 682 BC, conducts power rituals in Gabrielle Aderre's Invidia and Barovia, and is also seen in Falkovnia. It's land based powers also includes Har' Akir, so it must go there at some point. It is potentially destroyed in 754 BC in The Heart's Final Beat.

Baltoi is hard to place. The fact that she has lent her name to an entire mountain range, and

that wizard magic was used to send her to sleep suggest she's been down there for a very long time. Gaz II says "long ago," but not how long ago. It has to be at least several centuries. Anyway, she was dragged in along with the rest of Lamordia in 683 BC, and has been asleep the whole time apart from a few minor stirrings during thunder storms.

Next is the Black Duke. If you take Van Richten's Guide to Fiends by itself, it is entirely possible the Black Duke never actually existed; the dates imply that the Order of Tramalaine (which summons him), the Brotherhood of the Whip and Sir Armand Ironhand (who makes him famous) are all in 541 BC, as part of Nova Vaasa's false history. And then he's never heard from again. As a kind of cosmic joke, Van Richten includes him in the Guide to Fiends, even though he never really existed. Such are the trials of research.

However, Gaz V canonises Mangrum's timeline dates, so the Black Duke is summoned instead in 684 BC, which means he really existed. According to my article in CotN: D, he's been building an empire in Nova Vaasa and Hazlan since then, but we don't really know. It's a long time for a fiend that powerful to be missing. He does have a land based power from Darkon, though. He could also have spent some time in Arak. Or somewhere further afield. Cornugons are the elite troops and guards in the Blood War, so I like the idea that he spends some time stalking the CE fiends (the Whistling Fiend particularly) and trying to destroy them. If a fiend is killed and its phylactery thrown into the Mists, it could be decades before someone finds it to release the fiend again, so perhaps that's where they go when they go missing.

Styrix also comes in in 684 BC (it's a busy few years for fiends, obviously). Azalin summons her to learn what outsiders might know about being trapped in Ravenloft, and when she can't tell him anything, he dumps her (and starts cloning himself). She goes to Martira Bay and begins work on the Rift Spanner (which takes a year, and was "recently" completed when RLMCII was published – in 738 BC). Since then she's been dithering around charging it and letting it lapse and then charging it again. Why doesn't she just escape? Because then there's no adventure. Incidentally, her presence in Martira Bay means that Azalin can't modify memories or control undead with his darklord powers (as opposed to his normal magic) in Martira Bay. So that could be a good option for those wondering how to oppose Azalin with his memory modifying powers.

Next in is the Gentleman Caller. His first recorded appearance is (possibly) inspiring Renthon Vorishtok in Borca to write the Revelations of the Prince of Twilight in 702 BC (although this may be Loht or someone else entirely instead). In 705 BC, he sires Vigo Drakov. In about 710 BC, he fathers Chezna the Blood Cat (assuming she's about 19 when she appears in the Awakening; she may be a bit older, but it seems reasonable if she's level 2). Around 730 BC (perhaps) he fathers the Beast of the Hills and the Jongeleur (we don't know how old they are, although we do know the Jongeleur's served Ivana Boritsi since 746 BC, so this would be reasonable ages for them to be). He inspires the creation of the Pipes of Mordent in 734 BC. In about 738 BC (based on CotN:V's publication date), he turns Marla into a penanggalan and helps her massacre the residents of one of Hala's hospices in Falkovnia. In 742 BC he re-opens hostilities with Isolde by sending an assassin to murder the first of the Skurra (and the assassin becomes the first Abomination). Over the next 10 years, he sends 5 more assassins. In 743 BC, he fathers the Changeling on the Crimson Rose (leaving her rather psychologically scarred). In 747 BC he fathers Malocchio on Gabrielle Aderre. In 749 BC, he raises Baron Metus from the grave and shows Madame Radanavich how she can do the same with the spirits of Richten Haus. In 750 BC, he appears to Loht and tells him where

to find the Sword of Arak. In 752 BC, he seduces Blasse and then tries to destroy Isolde via Professor Pacali. In 758 BC, he meets Our Hero in Tepest and tells her to stop following his by-blows around. What a busy boy he is.

Yagno Petrovna has Malistroi summoned in 715 BC, and then leaves him trapped in a magic circle until at least 745 BC, when Circle of Darkness is set.

Elsepeth transposes into Falkovnia in 729 BC. She pops up in Borca in 732 BC, and again in Darkon (Nartok) in 739 BC. She's also got land based powers from Keening, Darkon and Dementlieu, so that tracks her pretty well. She spends her time seducing men and stealing their souls.

740 BC is a good year for outsiders; along with Inajira, the Chateaufaux demons wander in when part of Ravenloft forms a conjunction with Baator (which must have been unpleasant, and hopefully short). Isolde also arrives in Darkon in pursuit of the Gentleman Caller, and adopts the Carnival. The Chateaufaux demons go to Dementlieu in 741 BC, and then aren't heard from again, although I quite like the FoS's piece about the amnizu powering a mistway from Richemulot to Souragne. Based on real world publication, that must be 763 BC I think. We don't know what happens to the barbaz.

And that is all the really big name canon fiends.

A Timeline of the Major Events of the Core

Year (BC) Event

347 Strand makes a deal with Inajira

351 Strahd becomes darklord of Barovia. Drigor may be trapped at the same time?

357 If not, Drigor enters Ravenloft?

470 Upheaval?: The Vistani enter Ravenloft.

475 The Cult of the Morninglord is founded.

542 Azalin enters Ravenloft in Barovia.

547 Tristen ApBlanc becomes darklord of Forlorn

c550 Ghastria forms as an Island of Terror

575 Arak forms around Gwydion and the Obsidian Gate. The Church of Hala enters Ravenloft?

579 Mordent is dragged into Ravenloft by Azalin and Strahd; Godefroy becomes lord when they leave.

Azalin becomes darklord of Darkon. Mordent moves from Barovia to Darkon. The Church of Hala enters Ravenloft?

580 The Whistling Fiend enters Ravenloft in Darkon.

581 Bluetspur forms.

588 The First Upheaval: The Scourge of Arak. Keening forms. Ghastria joins the Core.

593 Gundarak forms, with Gundar as darklord.

603 Invidia forms, with Bakholis as darklord. The Church of Hala enters Ravenloft?

613 Kartakass forms.

625 Valachan forms.

630 The Sea of Sorrows domain forms.

635 Nebligtode forms, probably as an Island of Terror.

643? Blaustein forms, probably as an Island of Terror.

650? Ramsay Island forms as an island in the Sea of Sorrows

666 The First Book of Ezra is penned in Mordent.

667 Demise forms as an Island of Terror.

682 Nova Vaasa forms. The Church of the Lawgiver enters Ravenloft.

683 Lamordia forms.

The Nightmare Lands form, or at least appear.

684 Borca appears, with Camille Dilisnya as lord. According to the Dorvinians, Dorvinia also forms.

The Black Duke and Styrix are summoned into Ravenloft.

685 The Church of Ezra really starts to take off.

686 Demise joins the Core as an island in the Sea of Sorrows.

690 The Second Upheaval: Falkovnia forms, kicking off an age of war.

691 Tepest forms. Ghastria becomes an island in the Sea of Sorrows.

694 Richemulot forms, with Claude Renier as lord. Mordent moves from bordering Lamordia and Falkovnia to Richemulot.

695 Falkovnia invades Lamordia. They eventually reach a treaty.
The Eternal Order is founded around this time.

698 Markovia forms.

699 The Second Book of Ezra is penned.

700 Falkovnia invades Darkon, gaining up to Nartok before being repelled.

702 G'Henna forms.

The Gentleman Caller enters Ravenloft, probably in Borca.

704 Falkovnia invades Darkon but is defeated within minutes.

706 Falkovnia invades Borca, but is brought down by the treachery of spies.

707 Dementlieu forms.

Falkovnia invades Dementlieu, but is defeated by a whole sale defection among his war leaders.

708 Arkandale forms

709 The Dementlieuvian sect of the Church of Ezra is formed.

711 Falkovnia invades Darkon again.

Ivana Boritsi becomes darklord of Borca.

713 The Living Brain arrives in Dementlieu.

714 Hazlan forms.

715 Dorvinia forms. Unless you ask a Dorvinian.

Malistroi is summoned into Ravenloft in G'Henna.

716 Falkovnia invades Richemulot, possibly as a training exercise.

719 Falkovnia invades Markovia and G'Henna, possibly as a training exercise, possibly to steal a march on Azalin.

720 Sithicus forms.

724 Falkovnia invades Dementlieu and Richemulot.

726 Jacqueline Renier becomes darklord of Richemulot.

727 Falkovnia invades Dorvinia but is defeated by poison.

Dominic d'Honaire becomes Chief Advisor to the Lord Governor.

729 Gabrielle Aderre becomes darklord of Invidia.

The League of Five Nations is formed.

Elsebeth transposes into Ravenloft in Falkovnia.

730 Verbrek forms.

736 Daglan forms, with Radaga (briefly) as darklord. Daglan Daegon quickly takes over.

Duke Gundar is killed; Daclaud Heinfroth becomes darklord of Gundarak.

740 The Great Upheaval: The Grand Conjunction. Too many changes to count, but the absorption of Dorvinia, Arkandale, Gundarak and Arak, the loss of Daglan, the restructuring of Nova Vaasa and Valachan and the formation of the Shadow Rift are probably the major ones.

Markovia becomes an island in the Sea of Sorrows.

Dominia becomes an Island of Terror.

Inajira, Isolde and the Chateaufaux demons enter Ravenloft, in Barovia, Darkon and Dementlieu respectively.

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741? Blaustein joins the Core as an island in the Sea of Sorrows.

744 Sithicus starts to collapse.

Castle Island forms.

747 Malocchio Aderre becomes political ruler of Invidia.

748 Dominia joins the Core as an island in the Sea of Sorrows.

749 The Drowning Deeps joins the Core as a mist-covered sea.

750 Upheaval: The Requiem.

The Nocturnal Sea forms.

751 The Darkonese sect of the Church of Ezra is recognised.

Falkovnia invades Darkon. Death begins hunting Azalin.

755 Necropolis forms.

763 Upheaval: The Dying Days begin.

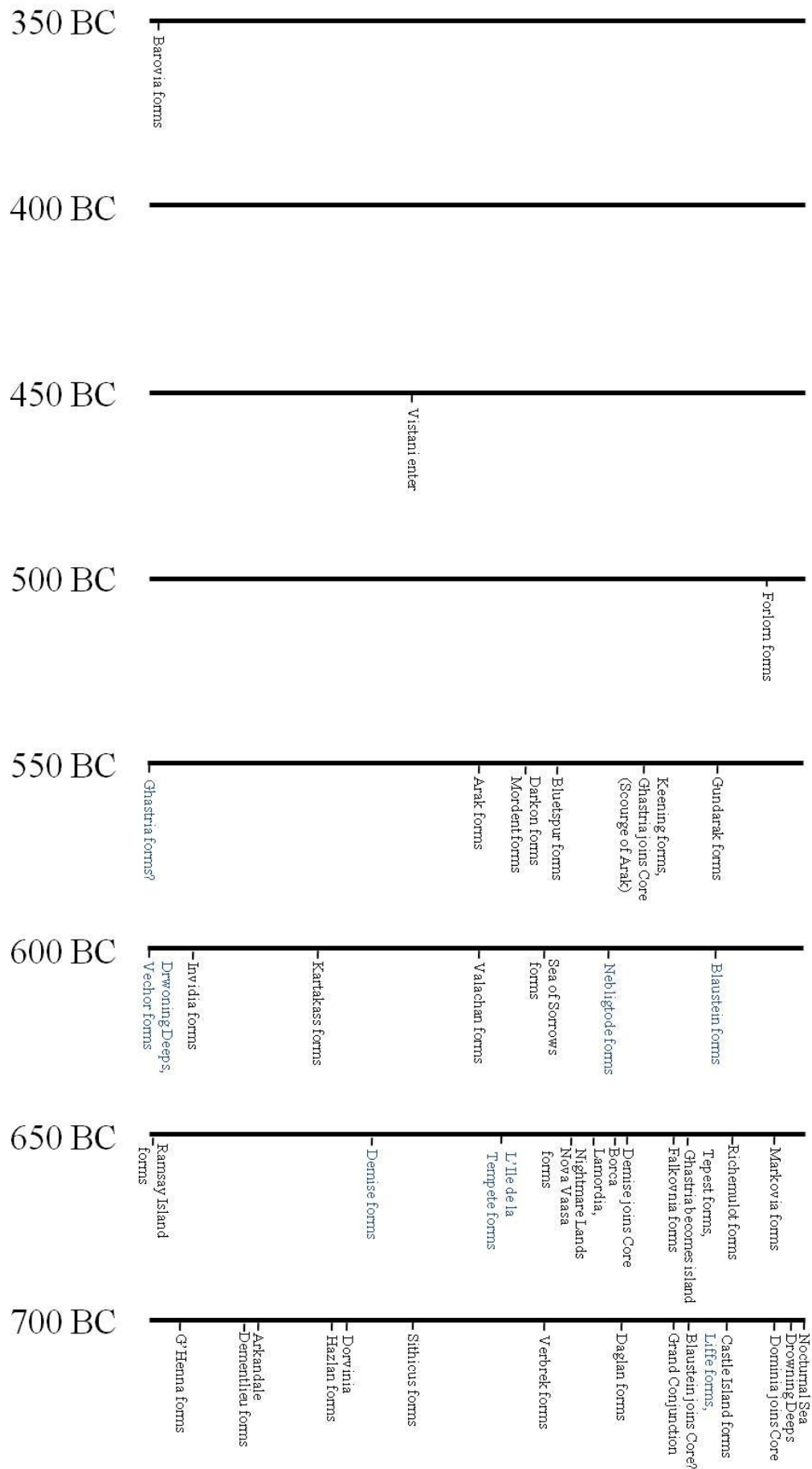
764 The Final Sect of Ezra appears.

766 Hazlik commits genocide.

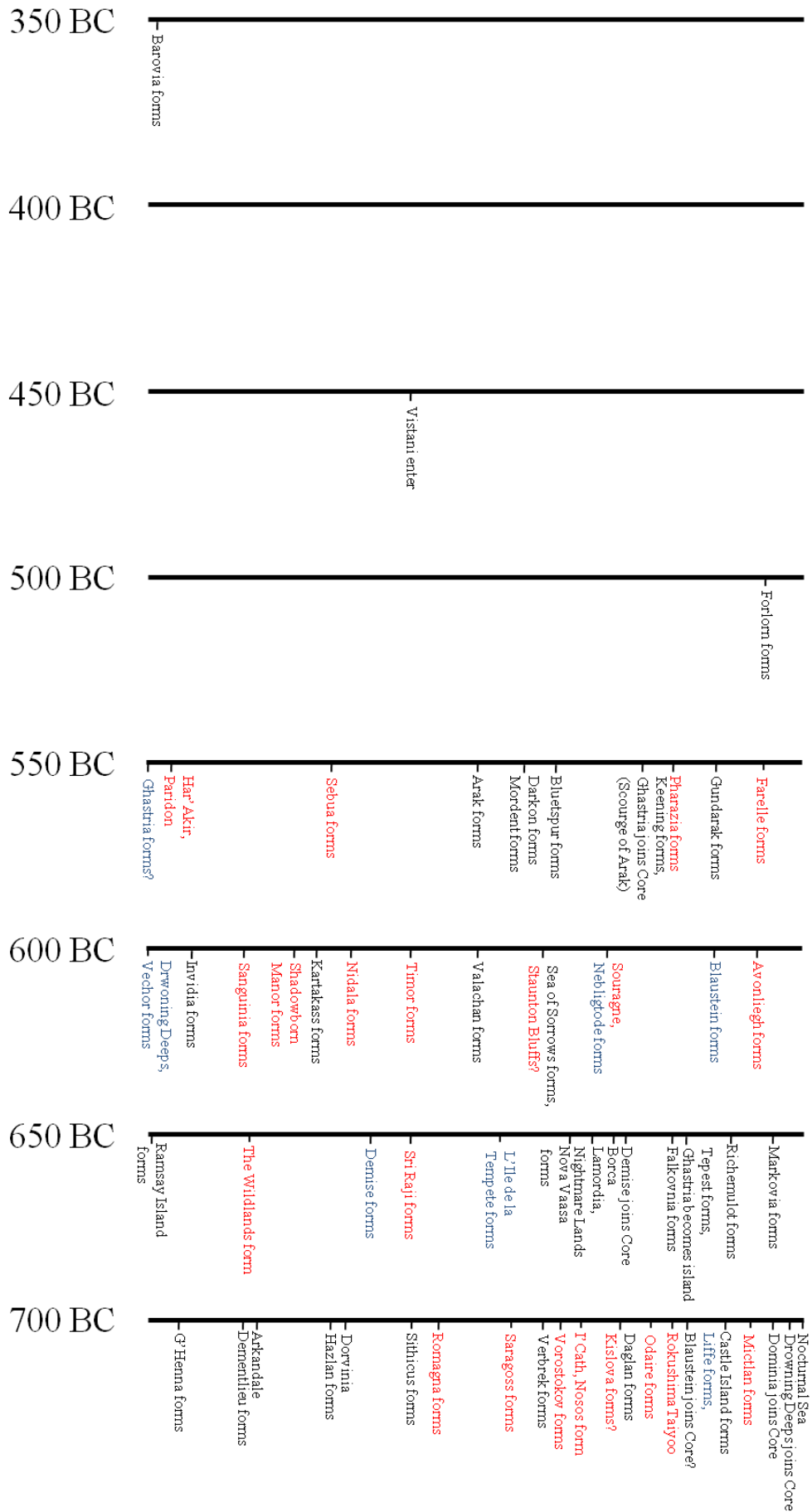
? The Core at War.

775 The Time of Unparalleled Darkness.

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Night is falling.
The Mists are rising.
Embrace the darkness.