



ORD

- CAPITOL
- CITY
- FORTRESS
- FEATURE OF INTEREST
- RAILROAD
- ROAD
- GRAYS
- MOUNTAINS
- HILLS
- FOREST (temperate)
- FOREST (boreal)
- SWAMP

SCALE (in miles)

5 15 25 50 100 150

It is generally held that both Thuria and Tordor were saved from the worst ravages thanks to the work of the Morrowan priest Gordenn, who would ascend in 812 BR. Gordenn saved countless lives through a combination of miraculous intervention and the careful coordination of farmers and cattle ranchers across the region, which enabled relief to reach the most afflicted areas. Even after the worst of the drought subsided, many of Ascendant Gordenn's communal practices were maintained to serve the people of this western region in the long dark age to come.

DIRGENMAST SHIPS AND CAPTAINS

One of the most ancient of Tordoran traditions was the Dirgenmast ships, great funerary vessels once used to honor the passing of their lords and kings. This tradition stretched back to before recorded history, predating the Morrowan religion.

Upon a lord's death, a great festival was held in his honor, culminating in a unique rite. The lord's body was placed on a specially built Dirgenmast ship and its deck heaped with fuel. This pyre would then be set afire as the ship sailed west at sunset. By tradition these ships were captained by the lord's most loyal retainer, his shield-bearer, who volunteered to join his master in death by piloting the vessel to ensure its arrival in Urcaen. The greatest lords were sent forth with an entire crew. As the ship headed into the Black, the Dirgenmast captain would sound a doleful horn to bid farewell to the living and announce the lord's coming to Urcaen.

This tradition continued into the Tordoran period, although it was eventually denounced by the Church of Morrow for both the sacrifice of the Dirgenmast captain and the ritual of cremation, which Morrowans believe hinders rather than facilitates the soul's passage to Urcaen. Nevertheless, the custom persisted until 910 BR when it was formally replaced by sea burials in which the honored dead were sent into the depths after a more orthodox ceremony.

The long legacy of the Dirgenmast captains and their ships influenced many traditions of the Tordoran Navy. The distinct look of the ancient funeral ships and pyres became common in the iconography of the Tordoran Armada, whose galleons were called Dirgenmasts in honor of this tradition. Mighty horns on these ships sounded upon leaving their homeports and when entering battle, a sound dreaded by Tordor's enemies.

THE ORGOTH LASH

The Orgoth landed in 600 BR and immediately set about conquering the Khardic Empire; once it had fallen, they turned their attention to Tordor. The Tordoran Armada was at the height of its power, with more than a thousand Dirgenmast captains sailing the Meredius. The king of Tordor had heard tales of the Orgoth's strength but believed that his fleet could keep his nation's shores free of Orgoth blackships.

The Tordorans achieved several minor victories during their initial naval conflicts against the invaders, but that changed once the Orgoth unleashed their full might. The two nations' mighty ships clashed headlong in what still stands as the bloodiest naval battle in the history of Immoren. The Tordorans put up a gallant fight and destroyed many enemy ships but eventually fell to the superior numbers and terrifying weapons of the invaders. This was the Battle of a Thousand Sails, from which the Sea of a Thousand Souls would take its name. The bravery of the Dirgenmast captains would be memorialized in song and story, for they never turned from their foe and fought to the very last. In the end, however, their efforts proved futile—their ships were shattered and sent into the depths. The last Dirgenmast captain ordered his burning ship to ram the Orgoth flagship and take it to the bottom of the sea with him. The Tordoran Armada was no more.

In the years that followed, the Orgoth did their best to destroy the maritime traditions of the Tordoran people. Every port was put to the torch and its population slaughtered. Shipwrights were burned alive, and for generations the Tordorans were forbidden to use any but the smallest river-going vessels. The people of Thuria tried to resist the Orgoth after the fall of Tordor for a handful of years, but the Orgoth crushed them as well and marched inland. Centuries of oppression followed and left a profound impact on the people of these two once great kingdoms, but eventually they would join with the other Immorese to play a major role in the Rebellion.

ARCANISTS OF THE REBELLION

Although each nation of the Iron Kingdoms holds that the Rebellion began with its ancestors, the citizens of Ord enjoy a unique distinction: the Gift of Magic first manifested among them in 137 BR, just outside the town of Tarna. A young Thurian girl, Madruva Dagra, witnessed Orgoth soldiers assaulting her two sisters. Fire sprang unbidden from her hands in an arcane manifestation of rage and engulfed the soldiers. Their bodies were burned and fell to the marshy ground as Madruva and her siblings fled into the woods.

The Orgoth reprisal was swift and vicious—Madruva and her bloodline were hunted to extinction. The Orgoth had acted in fear, but it was too late. The seeds of rebellion were sown across western Immoren; the number of those practicing magic grew and the first secret arcane fellowships were founded in Thuria. The works of Sebastian Kerwin and his Arcanist's Academe as well as the Circle of the Oath in Ceryl would pave the way for all the arcanists, alchemists, and arcane mechaniks who followed. The contributions of the Thurian people to the field of arcane study are indisputable, as is their importance to the

Rebellion. Had the unique relationship between Tordor and Thuria in ancient times not allowed Ceryl to remain a bastion of higher thought, it is unlikely these great thinkers could have emerged to lay the foundation for the war to come.

When the Iron Fellowship arose in 1 AR, the people of Thuria were foremost among the members of the alliance. One of their earliest victories came in 32 AR, during the Battle of the Hundred Wizards at the city of Tordor where Merin stands today. With the support of local nobles and commoners both, one hundred arcanists succeeded in freeing the city. It remained free for eight years before being razed by the Orgoth, who executed hundreds of arcanists and collaborators along with their families. Still, many Thurian and Tordoran arcanists and alchemists fled south and east, some founding the Order of the Golden Crucible and others aiding in the construction of the first colossals in Caspia. The sons and daughters of Ceryl and Tordor played key roles in these momentous events.

The people of Tordor and Thuria suffered badly in the final years of the Rebellion before the liberating armies of Caspia could reach them. The Orgoth were particularly ruthless and thorough in their scourging of this region and eradicated many of their holdings, including the great port fortress where Five Fingers now stands. The great atrocities they committed in these final days against towns and villages that have since sunk into the lonely marshes are the root of many haunted legends of the region.

THE FOUNDING OF ORD

When the Council of Ten convened in Corvis in 202 AR there was general accord between Thuria and Tordor to establish a new unified nation, giving birth to Ord. To the lasting grief of the Thurian people, southern Thuria, including the great city of Ceryl, was ceded to Cygnar. This underscored the power of Caspia and its allies in these negotiations but was in line with territorial divisions established by the Orgoth during the long centuries of their oppression. The nobles of northern Thuria and Tordor were in no position to contest this division. Representatives of the newly formed nation of Khador claimed parts of northern Tordor once held by their northern empire, but their claims were dismissed as the southern kingdoms united against any restoration of the old Khardic borders.

One of the greatest generals among the Council of Ten was Merin Cathor, a hero of the Rebellion and the descendent of an ancient castellan bloodline. He ably represented the people of Tordor in the negotiation of the Corvis Treaties and was quickly accepted as Ord's first monarch. In 203 AR he was ceremonially crowned King Merin Cathor I in front of the gathered castellans. It fell to him to create a new government to guide the war-ravaged people of this kingdom, who dubbed him "the Valiant."

Among King Merin's first acts was to reinstitute and legitimize the traditional relationship between Tordoran and Thurian nobility, though with some notable changes. He divided Ord into gravs, with Tordoran nobles ruling the north as lord castellans and Thurian nobles ruling the south as moorgraves.

By the time of Merin's coronation, construction had already begun on a new capital at the site where the ancient city of

Tordor had once stood. The new city was built with the aid of Rhulic architects and laborers and named Merin to honor the man who had overseen the birth of the Ordic nation. One of the king's most vital restoration efforts was funding a new navy to protect Ord, drawing on the seafaring pride and traditions of the people of this region. Despite efforts by the Orgoth, such lore had not been entirely lost, preserved in some cases by Morrowan monks of Asc. Doleth. The Ordic Royal Navy began humbly in Berck but would grow in time to become one of the most respected fleets in western Immoren. The king ruled from Merin until his death in 243 AR. He was succeeded by his eldest son, Merin Cathor II.

Because his father had led a long life and ruled for forty years, King Merin II was already aging when he ascended to the throne. He came to power in an increasingly more volatile political atmosphere than had existed during most of his father's peaceful reign. With the reconstruction complete, the new Iron Kingdoms had begun to fester with plots and schemes as each raised armies, ostensibly for defense. King Levash Tzepesci of Khador did not hide his desire to expand his nation's borders, and several skirmishes between his forces and Ordic defenders broke out in the late 240s. With the foundation of the Greylords Covenant and the creation of the first Khadoran colossals, the balance of power in western Immoren began to shift as Levash eyed the lands of his neighbors.

THE COLOSSAL WAR

Unwilling to let his colossals stand idle, King Levash launched the first attacks of the Colossal War in 250 AR, sending his forces against both Ord and Llael. Though Ord's fleet repelled Levash's ships, the Ordic and Llaese armies could only slow but not stop the Khadoran advance on land. Khadoran victory seemed inevitable until Cygnar entered into an alliance with the besieged kingdoms and sent its armies and colossals north to face the Khadorans. The outdated Cygnaran colossals built during the Rebellion proved inferior to the more advanced Khadoran machines, but the tide of war changed when Cygnar developed its own modern colossals several years into the conflict.

The cost of the war was great for all involved, but it proved ruinous for the Khadorans, who were pushed back to Volningrad. King Merin II himself was killed in action in 257 AR. In his shining armor, "the Bright King" had been an inspiration to his nation, which now mourned his passing. The Khadorans eventually surrendered and were forced both to dismantle their colossals and destroy the foundries that had produced them.

RISE OF THE GREAT PORTS

King Merin Cathor III succeeded his father to rule a nation scarred by seven years of brutal war that had transformed many of its northern lands into ruined battlefields. Much of the work completed in the reign of King Merin I had been undone during the conflict, and Ord lacked the resources to recover quickly. Merin III spent his reign maneuvering the political aftermath of the Colossal War and rebuilding his nation. This period saw several Ordic port cities rise to prominence, with Berck exceeding its significance from the time of the Tordoran Armada. It endured the Colossal Wars better than

other northern cities thanks to the protection of its navy. King Merin III pushed spending to increase the strength of the fleet while several growing merchant houses worked to attract shipping to Berck's harbor.

As Berck dominated legitimate trade and profited from the expansion of the Ordic Royal Navy, another port city farther to the south experienced an even greater economic boom. The island town of Five Fingers, which had earned a dark reputation as an Orgoth stronghold during the Occupation, had since transformed into a pirate haven. The prosperity of this settlement, made possible by the rise of a powerful criminal fraternity, took Ord's capital by surprise. A man named Bolis Turgon would be credited with the growth of Five Fingers on the back of vice, piracy, and smuggling.



The sudden wealth flowing through Five Fingers, combined with its strategically significant location at the mouth of the Dragon's Tongue River, drew the attention of the Cygnaran crown. Caspia saw an opportunity to solidify its control of the Dragon's Tongue River from Corvis to the Bay of Stone by pressing its claim on Five Fingers—ostensibly a city that had begun on the Cygnaran shore. Cygnar moved its northern fleet into the Bay of Stone on the premise of retaliating against pirates taking haven in the city. In response, Ordic naval ships also entered the bay, each of the two fleets on high alert. For a time, violence between the two kingdoms seemed assured.

Confrontation was avoided through diplomacy between King Merin III and King Woldred of Cygnar. As a fervent Morrowan, Merin III was not initially inclined to fight for Five Fingers, which he felt embodied the worst aspects of Ordic culture just as Berck embodied its virtues and strengths. Accounts suggest advisors who were themselves pressured by criminal elements in Five Fingers led by Bolis persuaded King Merin to intervene. When the Ordic king insisted the city was, for all its flaws, Ordic, Cygnar withdrew its claim.

Any embarrassment Merin felt over the reputation of Five Fingers was magnified in 271 AR. A black cloud formed over the port, and unnaturally cold rain poured upon the city as strange lightning danced along the waterways and a thundering wind blew through town with a sound like mocking laughter. Bolis Turgon had died, and he had been brought into the Dark Twin's

embrace as one of her chosen scions. Bolis' dark ascension was met with horror by the Morrowans of southern Ord. Seeking to reassure them, the king called a High Gathering at the Hall of Castellans for a vote to declare the Church of Morrow the state religion of Ord. He spent the rest of his reign battling corruption, endorsing the Church, and committing to charitable causes, earning the moniker "Merin the Pious."

The cities of Berck and Five Fingers would continue to grow and prosper while maintaining a strong rivalry, each with a character distinct from and opposed to the other. King Merin III, who ruled until his death by illness in 279 AR, would be remembered for his faith and his contributions to the restoration of his kingdom. He was succeeded by his eldest daughter, Tadea.

CRISIS OF LEADERSHIP

Though Queen Tadea Cathor hoped to continue the work of her father, her unhappy reign was marred by unrest and further Khadoran aggression. Early in her rulership, Tadea's efforts at reform were limited by a depleted treasury. When she increased taxes on the castellans, she created powerful enemies. She enacted several charitable programs to assist the poor, which made her popular among the commoners but at the expense of her relations with the nobility. With the queen at odds with the Hall of Castellans, the government of Ord was divided and ineffective, planting the seeds for sedition.

Meanwhile troubles were brewing in the north. For once not casting their hungry gaze on Ord, the Khadorans moved against Cygnar in 289 AR in an attempt to seize the northern Thornwood. This peculiar war ended with the mysterious deaths of the sovereigns of both Cygnar and Khador in 295 AR. Although no one knew it at the time, this was the opening salvo of the Border Wars, which would rage for nearly a quarter-century.

Queen Tadea was kept occupied battling her embittered castellans; earlier that same year, a gathering of those castellans and their retainers near Carre Dova took up arms to blockade goods to the capital and make demands in what seemed an imminent rebellion. The Ordic Army was readied in case force was required to quell the uprising, but the queen insisted on seeking a peaceful resolution. The insurrection was interrupted by a sudden Khadoran assault on Ord's northern border.

With Khador's new queen too young to rule, the nation was led by the warlike Lord Regent Velibor. The Khadoran lord dreamt of restoring the old borders of the Khardic Empire and so struck both Ord and Llael, igniting the First Expansion War. He hoped to take advantage of the muddled state of Cygnar's succession, which he predicted would keep that kingdom occupied while he attacked its smaller neighbors.

The Ordic Army was ill-prepared and suffered much in the first months of battles. Queen Tadea convinced the rebellious castellans to put aside their grievances and contribute to Ord's mutual defense. Just as Ord began to shore up its border defenses in the spring of 296 AR, Tadea was assassinated. This

prompted a public outcry and widespread accusations. Initially blame was aimed at Khador, with rumors of foreign assassins in the capital. Then accusations shifted to the queen's most vocal enemies among the castellans. Evidence at the time suggested the plot originated within the palace itself, implicating the queen's younger brother Alvor, who had inherited the throne. With the army embattled, a storm of unrest swept the kingdom. While no direct proof demonstrated the king's involvement, rumors circulated and some began to refer to him privately as "Alvor the Usurper."

In the face of the Khadoran threat these rumors were hushed and whatever evidence may have existed destroyed. King Alvor would become a controversial figure in Ordic history, initially reviled but subsequently remembered as a great hero of the war. Soon after ascending to the throne, he rallied the people, urging them to join together and focus on the war consuming the north.

THE BATTLE OF THE BROKEN SWORD

While Queen Tadea was widely beloved among the citizenry, she was not an effective wartime leader. In stark contrast to his sister, Alvor reacted quickly and decisively to the Khadoran threat. He personally took up arms and joined his generals in the field, proving to be a brave and formidable warrior. His courage earned him the respect and admiration of the castellans, the officers he served with, and the common people.

Rallied to his banner, the Ordic Army won several engagements north of Scarswall and inflicted heavy losses on the Khadorans in the Gallowswood and Shadoweald forests. Unfortunately the Khadoran numbers, strength of arms, and superior warjacks proved more than a match for Ord's armies and the defenders were driven back from their northern townships and farmlands. Late in 300 AR, the king returned south to the capital to gather reinforcements while the Ordic Army fortified along the Murata Hills, transforming Midfast into a heavily armed bastion.

In early 301 AR the king marched with fresh forces to relieve troops fighting north of Midfast. The king arrived to discover that the Ordic position had been overrun and his soldiers routed. Without hesitation Alvor launched a counterattack. Several battalions rallied to him, buying time for the organized retreat of the Ordic forces back to Midfast. However, in the chaotic melee that followed, Alvor was isolated and killed. Though his body was never recovered, his shattered sword was found and brought back to Merin. It would become an important symbol of Ordic defiance and pride, immortalized on the nation's flag. The Battle of the Broken Sword is remembered as a significant day in Ord's history, one when the kingdom suffered loss but refused to yield. Stewardship of Ord passed to Lord Castellan Agnolo Caetan, who ruled briefly during the minority of Alvor Cathor II.

Khador pressed on and eventually captured the port of Radhavo, formerly the second largest city in northern Ord. Though Lord Castellan Caetan served ably and his armies fought Khador to a standstill outside Corbhen and Midfast, soon no Ordic defenders remained north of the formidable walls of Midfast. Unable to press further into Ord, Khador negotiated for peace in 304 AR.

THE SIEGE OF MIDFAST

Unknown to the Ordic government, Khador only ended hostilities to buy Lord Regent Velibor time to resolve an internal crisis. A great barbarian horde from Khador's frozen mountains and forests assembled late in 304 AR to pillage the farmlands of the interior, left vulnerable by the departure of garrisons sent to the war front. Velibor convinced the horde to strike further south instead, insisting Ordic lands were ripe for pillage and possessed far greater wealth.

The barbarians took the bait and marched south to besiege the heavily fortified city of Midfast, attacking with a tremendous numerical advantage. Seeing Midfast as the lynchpin of Ordic defenses, Velibor hoped to crush the city beneath the horde and then bypass it with his own army to march on the Ordic capital. With its formidable defenses, Midfast held for weeks, but its defenders dwindled.

The Siege of Midfast became one of the most famous battles in western Immoren's history, notable for the heroism of Markus Graza, an Ordic Army officer and devout Morrowan who saved his nation from ruin. With Midfast's ammunition stores depleted and its wounded defenders exhausted, Markus went alone from the city under a banner of truce. Drawing on his knowledge of the beliefs of the northern tribes, Markus offered a ritual challenge to the chiefs of the horde. By their terms Markus was required to fight all fourteen chiefs, each in turn. It was a seemingly impossible task. As the barbarians and the Ordsmen on the wall watched, the siege stalled for a week as Markus faced two of the barbarian chiefs each day in single combat. Markus won victory after victory, suffering grave injuries on the fifth and sixth days. By the final day even the barbarians of the horde cheered for him over their own kinsmen. In the last battle Markus found the inner reserves to endure by calling on his faith. Ascendant Katrena manifested in the sky above as Markus defeated the last chief and collapsed.

The light of Markus's ascension to join both Katrena and Morrow awed all who witnessed it, transpiring even as reinforcements arrived from the Ordic capital. Thousands of barbarians were so stunned they surrendered at once, casting their weapons aside. Those who fought were swept from the field by the fresh Ordic cavalry forces. The Khadoran Army had been camped to the north of the barbarians and witnessed the miracle of ascension; knowing Morrow stood against them, their ranking kommandant ordered them to quit the field. Against all odds, Ord stood victorious. The northern barbarian tribes never regained their strength, while Markus became a revered figure among Morrowan soldiers.

The defense of Midfast marks the end of the First Expansion War, the period during which Khador achieved all of its significant gains during the lengthy Border Wars. In the aftermath of the siege of Midfast, the Ordic Army had time to fortify. Their greatest work stands to this day; the Markus Wall. Constructed over the span of the eight war-torn years following the Siege of Midfast in 305 AR, this stone and turf fortification ran the entire range of northern hills of Ord from the Windwater Lakes near Corbhen to Zerkova's Hill near Fellig.

Despite the reprieve, Lord Regent Velibor refused to give up his aspirations for the conquest of Ord. Over the objections of many Khadoran nobles and senior army officers, the

lord regent sent his forces into battle again in early 306 AR. Khadoran legions assailed Ord's fortifications at Boarsgate, Scarsfell, and Midfast, but the attacks lacked the numbers to topple any of these fortifications. Velibor had divided his forces to continue the ongoing assault against western Llael, and both efforts suffered.

THE BATTLE PRINCE

Alvor Cathor II took the throne at age 14 in 305 AR, claiming inspiration by Markus' deeds and fervor to bring glory to Morrow's name for Ord. Ordinarily he would have been too young to be accepted as king, but the ongoing strife made the people desperate for a new leader. The boy-king also had the support of Lord Castellan Caetan himself, who declared him fit to rule. With Caetan at his side, King Alvor II commanded the army personally and took part in almost every major battle until the end of the Border Wars eight years later. He is described in Ordic legend as possessed of tireless stamina and a peerless sense of duty, enduring sleepless nights and weary days as he and his royal escort traveled from one border fortress to the next, wherever the fighting was fiercest. Some said the very spirit of Ascendant Markus spoke through him. Repeatedly the Khadorans facing him were undone.

While the Battle Prince is considered the greatest hero of the end of the Border Wars, the contributions of the Kingdom of Cygnar at this late hour should not be dismissed. The war stretched on long enough for Cygnar to resolve its own succession troubles and in 308 AR their new queen Juliana sent support to both Llael and Ord, reinvigorating those beleaguered kingdoms even as the Khadoran Army reached its limits. Khador had seen the crowning of Queen Ayn Vanar V in 307 AR, but she remained secluded and had not taken up the reins of rulership. It would be some years before she discovered Velibor's excesses and, with her treasury nearly bankrupt, exiled the lord regent. With the nation under her control, she called an end to the Border Wars in 313 AR. Despite decades of warfare, Khador was unwilling to surrender any territories it had gained. King Alvor II felt compelled to accept Queen Ayn's terms for his own nation was overtaxed and eager for peace.

King Alvor II ruled for over forty years, remembered for his heroics in battle but proving even more adroit at overseeing the reconstruction for Ord. He faced considerable difficulties in restoring the realm's stability given the expenses and loss of life incurred during the wars as well as the loss of major territories. One of the challenges he faced was resettling a large number of northern castellans displaced by Khadoran conquest. Many were descended from proud and ancient lines with considerable political clout, and King Alvor II could not ignore them. To preserve the political stability of the Hall of Castellans, he forced the castellans and moorgraves who remained to divide their holdings, granting lands to the dispossessed. This forced some castellans to move into southern regions traditionally held by Thurian nobles, increasing resentment between these two peoples. Nonetheless, the king ably handled his nobles and preserved the peace. On the king's death in 346 AR, the crown passed to his son, Alvor III.

COLONIAL ASPIRATIONS

King Alvor Cathor III was known as "the Admiral" and is notable for rebuilding the Ordic Royal Navy and founding the Trident School. The visionary king went beyond these initiatives by sponsoring more ambitious nautical endeavors, for he was convinced other lands lay beyond Immoren awaiting discovery, exploration, and exploitation. If successful, he hoped to improve Ord's position by establishing colonies on distant shores. The king created the Naval Advancement Board to improve navigation and to chart the seas as well as offer financial rewards far any captain who discovered previously unknown land masses.

He was reassured after examining written accounts from the kingdom's most adventurous pilots and navigators. These included sailors blown off course in storms who claimed to have landed on undiscovered shores. On several occasions, implausible tales were given credence by the return of unusual and previous unseen plants and caged animals. It is now thought that some of these ships may have unknowingly stumbled upon the southern continent of Zu or its outlying islands. After ten years of successful rule, the king felt he had found a navigator capable of reaching this mysterious continent. So confident was he that he both funded and volunteered to lead the expedition himself. In 356 AR his squadron of vessels sailed south hoping to return laden with riches but was never heard from again. His fate remains a mystery, though his disappearance confirmed for many the folly of venturing from Immoren, undermining efforts the king had spent his lifetime trying to foster. From the strength of her political standing, his wife Rosa Cathor convinced the Hall of Castellans to declare her queen regnant rather than queen consort, giving her the power of a sovereign, and she held the throne for the Cathors.

Young at the time of her husband's disappearance, Queen Rosa had her share of detractors. Nonetheless she is remembered as an effective ruler during her twenty-five year reign, with keen insight and an ability to negotiate with the realm's castellans. This was the beginning of the Quiet Century, an era of relative peace but with considerable underlying tensions and intrigue across the Iron Kingdoms.

Despite Queen Rosa's even-handed governance, she was blind to conspiracies within her realm and did not take proper measures to ensure the continuation of the Cathor dynasty. When she died in 381 AR the succession was uncertain. Though the House of Cathor had many branches, none moved swiftly to secure its claim.

THE MATEU DYNASTY

Vasperez Mateu, supported by an alliance of castellans, seized control in Merin following Queen Rosa's death. His forces murdered any Cathors they could get their hands on, sending the rest of the great family into hiding. After forcing his rivals from the capital, Vasperez declared himself king. Remembered as "Vasperez the Cruel," he was a tyrant. He rewarded his vassals with the spoils of the nation and ignored the ancient laws of Ord, including rights held sacred by the castellans. When the Hall of Castellans spoke out against him he imprisoned

his critics and disbanded the High Gathering, an extreme act that led to his downfall. Vasparez was assassinated in 394 AR while en route to his ancestral lands in Berck, possibly killed by members of his own family.

With the Cathors still on the run, the Mateus saw to it that the crown passed to Duret, Vasparez's son. King Duret was young and eager to please his family, so he was perfectly suited to their needs. Remembered as "Duret the Impotent," he was a figurehead while senior members of the Mateu family ruled. To appease the castellans, the High Gatherings were restored, but it was clear that Mateu interests would dominate.

The twenty-seven years of Duret's rule were quite profitable for the Mateus, who considerably expanded their holdings and influence. However, the house's rising fortunes did not translate to gains for the kingdom itself. The other castellans resented the pretender and his overbearing family. The Cathors were not idle during these years; they continued to meet with discontented nobles to drum up support for their restoration.

WAR OF THE CASTELLANS

Those opposed to the Mateus but who were unwilling to risk open defiance of the crown saw their chance to act when King Duret died of illness in 421 AR, as he had no direct heir. The castellans gathered in Merin to debate the succession, but the assembly became heated when words escalated to violence. This ignited the War of the Castellans, lasting from 421–425 AR. The great houses of Ord withdrew from the capital, gathered their liegemen and prepared for the bloodshed to come.

Battle lines were quickly drawn amidst a chaotic grab for power. In the early years a number of lesser houses used the disputes as an excuse to settle old scores with rivals, and bloody feuds spilled across the moors. Both the Cathors and Mateus had their hands in these clashes from the beginning, manipulating allies and enemies alike into battles that would serve their ends. Once the field had been winnowed of lesser pretenders, these two houses engaged in a more overt and vicious struggle. Corpses soon littered the streets of Berck, Merin, and any place the supporters of the Mateus and Cathors met.

Mateu assassins killed several Cathor claimants and their allies, going so far as to murder Lord Governor Klinior of Five Fingers in 423 AR, who had secured safe havens for the Cathor family. Though House Mateu initially had the upper hand, it underestimated the degree to which the Cathors had been preparing. Greater numbers of castellans began to rally to Baird Cathor, remembered as "the Headsman." He was heroic and bloodthirsty in battle, a terror for the Mateus and their allies. Fearing for their very survival after the executions of a number of their kinsmen, the Mateus retreated to their stronghold in Berck, withdrew all claims to the throne, and offered public apologies and pledges of support to Baird Cathor. His crowning was treated as a resumption of the proper house of Ordic royalty.

Baird Cathor I, while admired for his victory in the War of the Castellans, was a poor king. He indulged in baser appetites and became infamous for his obesity in his latter years, requiring assistance to leave his chambers. After ruling for twenty-four years and accomplishing little of note, he died in 449 AR.

THE SECOND EXPANSION WAR

King Baird's eldest son was crowned King Stagier in 450 AR. Unlike his father, Stagier was a natural leader and was immediately active in the affairs of state. In the early years of his rule he focused admirably on strengthening the realm, including efforts to eliminate corruption within the Ordic Royal Navy. His concerns were warranted, if insufficient to prevent the troubles that consumed the latter half of his reign.

For years Ordic pirates had preyed upon Khadoran shipping lanes with the tacit approval of the crown. King Stagier ignored Khador's demands that Ord reign in its criminals and respect the ocean going trade of its neighbors; he did not believe his nation should be held accountable for the actions of lawless criminals. King Stagier's failure to intercede incensed Khador. In 464 AR King Mikhail Vanar ordered his navy to clear the way for Khadoran shipping, violating Ordic waters and firing on any foreign ships deemed suspicious. The Ordic Royal Navy responded by sinking several Khadoran ships. These clashes were followed by others as the conflict escalated to open war. Soon thereafter King Mikhail ordered the invasion of Ord.

Given the difficulty of assailing Ord's northern border, King Mikhail employed a different stratagem. During the largest naval engagements since the Battle of the Thousand Sails, the Khadorans managed to land an invasion force south of Corbhen. This army marched on that Ordic city and seized control, intending to use it as a staging ground for marching on Berck to cripple the vital Ordic port by land.

The full scope of the Khadoran threat was revealed when a smaller army from Volningrad laid siege to Midfast, tying up its garrison and effectively isolating the capital. The force at Midfast was obviously diversionary, as it was clearly insufficient to seize the city. Yet as long as it applied pressure, the Ordic Army could not risk repositioning Midfast's soldiers. Corbhen was temporarily abandoned while the king and his generals debated their options.

Meanwhile the Ordic Royal Navy clashed with Khadoran warships, hoping to cut off Khador's supply lines. The occupation of Corbhen, while alarming, was not a crippling blow to Ord; the city was isolated and not one with essential industry. The threat to Berck, however, was more perilous. King Stagier faced the unenviable choice of protecting either Berck or Merin but not both. He sent a small army down the Rohannor River to blockade the road between Corbhen and Berck, knowing these forces were insufficient to hold out for long against the Khadoran army.

By this time Cygnar's King Hector Sunbright II learned of the conflict and, in the interest of his own kingdom, ordered his forces to join the conflict in support of Ord. He sent his northern fleet from Ceryl to fight alongside the Ordic Navy, further disrupting Khadoran supply lines. The bloodiest fighting was left to the Ordic ships, yet the arrival of the Cygnaran forces was a boon to Ordic admirals and enabled them to push back the Khadoran fleet.

Cygnaran soldiers landed at Berck and aided the Ordic Army in securing the river before these combined forces intercepted the Khadorans on their march toward the great port. The battle north of the river was hard fought. Unable to gain ground and harassed by Ordic and Cygnaran forces, the Khadorans withdrew to Corbhen to sit out the winter and await reinforcements from the north.

Midfast remained under siege, which continued to divide the Ordic Army. With the coming of spring a large number of mercenary companies entered the war on both sides of the conflict.

Cygnaran nobles who disapproved of King Sunbright's intervention had been applying great pressure on him. Having "done enough" by helping push the Khadorans back to Corbhen, Cygnar abruptly withdrew its support with little coordination with Ordic admirals or generals, thereby imperiling the war effort. This left King Stagier in a difficult position with a rapidly depleted treasury and insufficient manpower, thus extending the war for another long year. He succeeded in surrounding Corbhen, however, and forced the occupying Khadorans to endure considerable suffering. Ordic Navy ships fought bravely to keep supplies from the city, and their blockade was the undoing of the Khadorans, who sued for peace in 468 AR and promised to withdraw. Corbhen was liberated, and the starving Khadorans were sent limping back to their capital.

It was a costly and difficult victory, and public sentiment had turned against the king. This was exasperated when King Stagier sought to restore his bankrupted treasury by imposing arduous taxes on the common man. The end of his rule was marked by considerable unrest. He passed in 485 AR.

THE SOLITARY KING

Stagier's son was crowned King Stagier II—an ill-fated sovereign whose ineffectiveness led to concessions reinforcing the rights of the castellans and limiting the power of the monarchy. Stagier himself suffered from periodic bouts of madness and hysteria that his family hushed by keeping him out of the public eye. These reclusive habits earned him the epithet "the Solitary King."

It was left to the castellans and the merchant houses of Berck to restore the kingdom's finances. Though they succeeded in growing industry and restoring trade and commerce in the major cities, they did so while lining their own pockets and those of their supporters. Graft and corruption became widespread, as many of the checks and balances of Ord's government were thrown into disarray. The great divide between Ord's rich and poor reached its height in this era, with poverty afflicting many of Ord's cities while the greatest merchants and most powerful nobles became even wealthier. The Thornwood War of 510–511 AR between Cygnar and Khador had little impact on Ord beyond fattening the coffers of several Ordic mercenary companies who joined in some of the later battles.

King Stagier II was frail in his final years—he feared poisoning and ate little—and died emaciated in 513 AR. The realm's nobles were relieved to discover that his son King Merin IV, who was crowned that same year, appeared to have none of his father's eccentricities

and was willing to leave governance to the Hall of Castellans. The politics of the capital and the great houses continued unabated; the king had limited impact on the kingdom although he did not embarrass himself or his family. His reign was uneventful—a blessing according to most of the nobles, who were content to have an amiable and harmless head of state.

THE MENITE KING

When King Merin IV was inexplicably assassinated in 531 AR, it caused quite a stir. His death seemed to benefit no one except his brother Fardini. While King Stagier II had sons, Fardini insisted the eldest was too young to rule and seized the throne. Fardini's actions provoked considerable apprehension in the capital. He was quite different from his older brother, having converted to the Menite faith with tremendous fanaticism. Immediately King Fardini spoke of sweeping reforms and his intent to purge the kingdom of wickedness. "The Menite King" did not focus his attention on enemies abroad but within, beginning with a crackdown on Five Fingers. Both the Ordic Army and the Ordic Navy were sent in to root out crime and vice in a city that had been built on both.

This move had little popular support, particularly as such a flagrant attack on the criminal circles of Five Fingers was akin to striking a hornets' nest. While hundreds were made to answer for their crimes, the city's high captains employed their considerable wealth to fund covert investigations of the king himself, aided by Thurian nobles who did not appreciate this intrusion.

In the Hall of Castellans, King Fardini found his efforts blocked on multiple fronts as castellans found ways to deny tax revenue to fund his government. In 536 AR definitive proof was discovered linking King Fardini to the assassination of his brother. In an unprecedented turn of events the king himself was tried before the High Assembly, found guilty, and executed for breaking the fundamental laws of Ord. A brief tide of anti-Menite sentiment swept Ord in the wake of Fardini's execution but quickly faded after the Menite priesthood and communities disavowed any connection with him and publicly condemned his actions.

ENTERING MODERNITY

After Fardini's execution, Stagier II's eldest son was crowned King Alvor Cathor IV. Eventually known as "Alvor the Stout," he was adroit at politics and inspired confidence in the castellans. King Alvor restored dignity and gravitas to the Ordic throne during his long thirty-eight year reign. He was known for his stirring speeches, his private meetings with the monarchs of other kingdoms, and his willingness to negotiate compromises between rival castellans.

For all his merits, the king was neglectful of the masses, showing little concern for the poor, whose living conditions had not improved in the last century. Nor was Alvor receptive to his Thurian subjects, whom he clearly considered beneath him. The nation at large did not demonstrate much in the way of genuine grief at his passing in 574 AR. Despite his long rule the king died relatively young when his heart failed him. His legacy seemed secure, as he had raised three sons to manhood.

King Alvor IV had not capitalized on many of the opportunities during his reign, most particularly the declining fortunes of House Mateu. This once powerful trading house fell into disarray and heavy debt by 550 AR due to a variety of financial losses and failed investments. Rather than ensuring this old rival was quashed conclusively, the king endorsed laws that came to House Mateu's rescue by imposing heavy tariffs on foreign competitors. Castellans who supported House Mateu as a necessary counter against the rising power of Cygnar's Mercarian League persuaded King Alvor IV to this course. While concerns about the League were well founded, these tariffs paved the way for Izabella Mateu's restoration of her house after she assumed control in 570 AR.

The king's eldest son was crowned King Alvor V in late 574 AR with considerable pomp and ceremony. Alvor V had been groomed to take the throne and had long waited to prove his mettle. As a prince, he had earned considerable respect among Ord's armed forces, and his reign was expected to be fortuitous and long. He made it immediately clear that he intended to make the strengthening of the navy his first priority. Just three months into his reign he joined the flagship in a tour of the western seaboard to survey the state of the fleet and coastal fortresses. A fluke storm struck the royal squadron and swept them out to sea. The flagship floundered and sank, resulting in the loss of all aboard.

So it came to pass that King Brogan was crowned while the nation was still stunned by the deaths of his father and brother. Brogan, a learned and eloquent speaker, was a man of serious demeanor and hoped to be a worthy representative of the Cathor line. But two months into his reign a section of the royal palace collapsed during a torrential and unseasonable storm and buried King Brogan. For the third time in less than half a year, Ord's king was dead.

THE BANDIT KING

The third son of Alvor IV, crowned King Baird Cathor II, was met with less enthusiasm. As a young prince, he had already been associated with scandal; it was well known that he had led an intemperate youth of excess and debauchery, spending his formative years in the seedy alleys of Five Fingers in the company of commoners and criminals. As the third son, Baird neither expected nor anticipated taking the throne, and all who knew his history considered him unsuited to the role. Expectations of enduring an embarrassing king pervaded the capital when Baird refused to abandon his old ways.

With willful disdain he ignored his advisors and frequently left the capital to carouse in the Port of Deceit. In doing so, he left his family behind, as Baird II had entered an arranged marriage in 562 AR at the age of twenty. He already had three children by the time he took the throne: his first son Baird III was born in 565 AR, his first daughter Carlutia in 569 AR, and his second son Brogan in 570 AR. His last daughter Sandra was born in 576 AR, two years after he was crowned. His wife died of consumption in 580 AR, though rumors alleged he had a number of illegitimate children outside of wedlock. In the absence of the king, oversight of his family fell to his eldest son and heir, Baird III. Despite his vices, Baird II was a doting father when present, and over time he cemented the loyalty of all his children.

The rivals of House Cathor took years to understand they had misjudged their new king and that he could not be dismissed so easily. In the first decade of his rule the king showed a strange knack for knowing what plots were being hatched in his absence. Allies and agents representing his interests had an uncanny ability to arrive at just the right moment to speak in his stead, well informed and equipped with the necessary information to steer matters in the king's favor. Those in the capital began to realize they had inherited a king well suited to the subtleties of the Ordic court.

King Baird Cathor II is sometimes an inscrutable sovereign, preferring to act through intermediaries and misdirection. He rebelled against the tactics of his father, showing no fondness for the castellans and instead favoring the common man. Some of his political techniques are decidedly Ordic, including arranging the marriages of his offspring to broaden or solidify his power. He married his heir to the daughter of one of his most contentious northern castellans whose family had historically supported the Mateus. He married his eldest daughter to the heir of the lord castellan of Murio, whom he subsequently groomed to lead the Shield Division of the Ordic Army. In a controversial move, the king married his youngest daughter Sandra to the moorgrave of Almare, a Thurian. While this incensed the castellans and created scandal, it spread goodwill for King Baird II among the southern Thurians, who proved to be useful allies.

Baird II demonstrated his willingness to take risks in 588 AR when he enacted extensive changes to the kingdom's system of tax collections. While working within the budget approved by the Hall of Castellans, the king exerted his power over tax collection to target the wealthiest castellans, including House Mateu, and reduce the burden on the poor. This earned King Baird the epithet "the Bandit King," as the nobles immediately decried these measures as theft. Alienating the castellans was a polarizing act, one that might have been political suicide for any other sovereign.

King Baird II endured despite the rifts prompted by these actions, even as he saw House Mateu rise in influence. Castellans enraged by the higher taxes joined with Izabella Mateu to block the king's causes in the capital. The king responded by repealing the tariffs on foreign interests imposed by his father that weakened House Mateu against the Mercarian League.

The clandestine war between the Cathors and the Mateus has heated up ever since. While most of the struggles between the two houses have been limited to the political arena, occasional assassinations and eruptions of violence between armed retainers on either side are not unknown. While charges have never been levied or definitive proof unearthed, the Mateus believe one of the king's staunchest supporters, Castellan Stagier Salvestro, was responsible for the murders of three members of their family, including Izabella's brother Angello. Retaliatory strikes have claimed lives on both sides.

THE MERCHANT WARS

Even as House Mateu battled politically with the Cathors, it also engaged in an escalating trade war with the Mercarian League. These conflicts periodically resulted in confrontations on the open sea. Both the Mercarian League and House Mateu created sizable shipping fleets, ostensibly cargo ships but protected by heavily armed escorts.

These merchant vessels and their trade routes have become so vital to the economies of both Ord and Cygnar that their respective flotillas are sometimes escorted by navy vessels. This has led to isolated incidents of hostility between ships of each navy protecting their respective merchants. Generally each government has turned a blind eye to these clashes, accepting thin justifications of piracy or Cryxian attacks. These conflicts have in turn increased the animosity between House Mateu and the Cathors; King Baird II views such clashes with the Cygnaran Navy as a direct threat to Ord's national interests.

The Mateu-Mercarian rivalry escalated in the early 590s AR when House Mateu failed to prevent the League from securing holdings in major Ordic ports. The greatest coup for the League came in 592 AR when it leveraged debts and applied financial pressure to gain controlling ownership of the Berck Imports House. The castellans keenly felt the loss of this proud and ancient Ordic shipping concern to foreign owners. House Mateu saw this as a personal affront and expanded their efforts in markets across Ord and Cygnar.

The stakes were raised in 596 AR when a Berck Imports House ship, the *Seacutter*, became the first to return from the southern continent of Zu. The Mercarian League was able to secure the first and primary access to exotic goods from Zu and made use of Berck Imports House to sell the goods in Ord. Though Ord receives considerable income from taxing this trade, the fact that it is controlled by a foreign company is seen as a major failing among the castellans. House Mateu has spared no expense to gain access to Zu by any means, legal or not.

In the decade since the discovery of Zu, clashes at sea and increasingly aggressive attempts to establish permanent outposts there have increased. All involved, including the governments of each nation, know the potential wealth of such an endeavor is tremendous. Khadoran concerns have begun to fund similar expeditions, and bloodshed and strife seem destined to follow attempts to open new markets and exploit resources on as-yet-uncharted shores.

TURMOIL ABROAD AND OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN

King Baird II has maintained a generally positive relationship with Cygnar throughout his reign, a considerable feat given the different natures of the kings who have come and gone in that southern kingdom. Baird took the throne during the last two years of Vinter III's reign, but the two sovereigns had minimal contact. During Vinter IV's reign, Ord and Cygnar maintained cordial but cool relations.

Continuing a long tradition of Ordic neutrality, King Baird II politely declined to involve his military beyond defending his own shores and townships during the Scharde Invasions, which actually profited some in Ord; several of the larger Ordic mercenary companies sold their services to Cygnar. These mercenaries were hired to defend local townships as well as to join in several of the larger operations of the war.

Ord's exposure to Cryx during these conflicts demonstrated to ranking officers of both branches of the military that their armed forces were antiquated. Attempts to bargain with King Vinter IV regarding the sale of weapons or warjacks were only marginally successful. Cygnar continued its policy of selling decommissioned chassis to Ord, but it was not until Leto Raelthorne took the Cygnaran throne that more meaningful exchanges between the two kingdoms were arranged.

King Baird II has never made public his thoughts on the Lion's Coup of 594 AR when Leto seized the throne, but it is thought he prefers Leto over Vinter. Baird and Leto have never met in person but communicate through envoys. In recent years this distance has been reduced largely thanks to the efforts of Prince Brogan, the Ordic king's second son, who has risen through the ranks of the Ordic Navy. The prince has developed a rapport with Cygnaran admirals in the interest of modernization, and he frequently travels between Berck and Caspia.

The Llaelese War brought pressure from Cygnaran ambassadors entreating Ord to lend its might against Khador, but the king politely expressed his sympathies and declined. Even after the Llaelese War, the battles between Cygnar and Khador continued, becoming a more protracted, grueling engagement known as the Second Thornwood War. Even this was not sufficient to persuade the Ordic sovereign to risk joining the war against Khador. After learning of conspiracies in Five Fingers in 606 AR that allowed Cryxian forces to penetrate the mainland, King Baird agreed with his younger son to engage in limited fleet actions alongside the Cygnaran Navy against the Nightmare Empire. Ord's king was still careful not to overcommit and leave his kingdom vulnerable.

King Baird II has walked a delicate tightrope. The kingdom has entered into an unexpected period of prosperity, finding ways to profit from the time of turmoil. Not only has Ord become the de facto center for trade between Iron Kingdoms it is also the home of many well paid mercenary companies. The Order of the Golden Crucible formally relocated its headquarters to Ord in 607 AR, largely as a result of negotiations initiated by King Baird II with key leaders of the formerly fractured organization. In conjunction with successful negotiations with Cygnar, this resulted in Ord strengthening and modernizing its armed forces even as it revitalized its internal economy.

Ord entered into the current era in a stronger position than ever, though its situation is perilous. Being poorer and less well armed than its neighbors, Ord is the least powerful of the remaining Iron Kingdoms. Only time will tell if it can continue to prosper despite its shortcomings or if it will fall prey to the conflicts around it, as did the ill-fated Kingdom of Llael. Much may depend on the success of its efforts to establish colonies abroad.