

Chapter 4: ALTERNATE KRYNNIS

I looked around again at the bustling, enormous, wondrous city of Palanthis, untouched by Cataclysm or war. I saw it with brand-new eyes.

We hadn't gone back in time after all, I realized. It was still the same year it had been when Hayrn and I had last left Palanthis: 383.

But Ansalon was whole. No Cataclysm had occurred. Istar was triumphant, a world empire, with Solamnia and Ergoth as its dominions.

Time had not changed. But history had.

“There Is Another Shore, You Know, Upon the Other Side”
by Roger Moore, *The Dragons of Chaos*

The River of Time is a vast, constantly flowing current that carries with it all the people and events of the ages. Like any great waterway, the River has many tributaries, little streams that branch off the true timeline to create alternate Krynnis. To the people of these worlds, theirs is the true timeline and the events that brought them to the present moment. Some of these Krynnis are very recognizable. They are worlds where only minor events are different, and it is hard to see the changes. Others are drastically altered: worlds where the Cataclysm never happened or Takhisis's armies won the War of the Lance. And still more alternative Krynnis lie somewhere in between. All these places exist outside of the knowledge of all but the most learned mages, priests, and scholars, because travel to these other Krynnis is rare, difficult, and dangerous. There are few either foolish or brave enough to risk losing themselves in time.

KINGPRIEST ASCENDANT

Though he prayed alone in the temple at the heart of the basilica, Kingpriest Beldinas felt the power coursing into him from those of the Faith. He felt it flow through the golden crown he wore on his brow . . . and he at long last felt the presence of the god he had summoned. He rose to his feet to look down upon the altar before him, and spoke:

“Paladine, you see the evil that surrounds me! You have been witness to the calamities that have been the scourge of Krynn these last days. You know that this evil is directed against me, personally, because I am the only one resolved to fight against it! Surely you must see now that this doctrine of balance will never work!”

“I will rule in glory, creating an age to rival even the fabled Age of Dreams! You gave this and more to Huma, Paladine, who was nothing but a renegade knight of low birth! I demand that you give me, too, the power to drive away the shadows of evil that darken this land!”

Beldinas channeled the full power of the Faith into the presence before him. He felt it try to draw away, and reached out to encircle it, draw it inward. He felt the power that was Paladine struggle as he drew it closer, but the Kingpriest would not be denied; if he failed, there would never be another who could follow in his steps.

Every fiber of his being was suffused with power, and still it came. He raised up his spirit in mighty walls to contain Paladine within himself. The metal of the altar burst into flames, the fiery shape that had been foretold. The omens had come true. The Kingpriest was no more.

Tonight he would reach beyond those of the Faith. Tonight, every creature on Ansalon would know the will of the Godpriest.

On the main course of the River of Time, the Kingpriest of Istar demanded that the gods give him the power to impose his will upon the world, and in return for his impudence, they cast a flaming mountain down upon him and his people in the mighty Cataclysm that shattered the land. In another world, though, the Kingpriest would not be denied. So mighty was his power that he reduced most gods to pale shadows and claimed dominance over the only one who remained. In binding the power of Paladine to his own spirit, the Kingpriest ascended to become the Godpriest.

In this world, from the golden spires of Istar to the cold peaks of the Vingaards, the will of the Godpriest is law. The Brotherhood of Querists and the Knights of the Divine Hammer enforce the dictates of the Faith and push the boundaries of Istar ever outward. Their devotion to increasingly strict beliefs and aggressive expansion has brought them into conflict with the ancient minotaur kingdoms and threatens to break the long peace with Istar's neighbors in Solamnia. Meanwhile, those wronged by Istar in the past strike back from without and within, from the mocking annoyances of the kender's Game to the much more dangerous plots of the Burning Robes.

No matter where heroes travel in this world, Istar and the Godpriest are a constant presence. In Istar itself, any violence or unusual behavior results in questioning or enslavement and, at worst, a quick execution. Characters of good alignment might soon wish they were lawful, and even those who are lawful good must strive to be better if they hope to meet the standards of the Faith.

Istarans are also encountered outside Istar. Istaran troops patrol the wilds, expanding their borders to claim any land they feel is “neglected.” Querists ignore all boundaries in pursuit of anyone who has committed particularly egregious transgressions against the Faith. Finally, there are Istarans who abhor the path their nation is taking, and go elsewhere searching for those who would help them put the country back on course.

The heroes of the campaign may be the ones they are looking for. The course of a campaign set in this world is ultimately decided by whether characters choose to support the Godpriest or join those who would overthrow him. To fight the Godpriest and the power of the Faith means confronting an enemy who is nearly omnipotent, but those who win will free Paladine — winning the thanks of not just a god, but also of all who would worship a broader pantheon.

When the troops of Cathan and Beldinas arrive at Istar, the Kingpriest's advisor, Quarath, opens the gates and gives them access to the city. In madness and desperation, Kurnos slays Quarath, whose death is the catalyst that sends causes the River to shift from its course. The demon is about to kill Beldinas as well when Cathan sacrifices himself instead.

Beldinas demands that Paladine resurrect his fallen friend, and the monk is granted the power to return Cathan to life. The people declare that the resurrection of Cathan — now known as Cathan Twice-Born — is the sign that Beldinas is the chosen of Paladine. He is crowned the new Kingpriest.

One of those witnessing Cathan's resurrection is a young squire, Loren Soth, who has a spiritual epiphany and devotes himself to good with renewed fervor.

924 IA - THE NEW COUNSELLOR

Kingpriest Beldinas chooses a new First Son, an ambitious cleric named Odarian, who becomes his closest counsellor in the years to come. He vows to remain forever pure of the darkness that tainted Kurnos and to use all the power at his command to eradicate any evil that would threaten Istar. Those who worship dark gods are hunted by the Divine Hammer, an order of knights gathered by the Kingpriest. While the wearing of the Black Robes is not outlawed, those who practice the darker side of arcane magic are encouraged to leave the city.

930 IA - BROTHERHOOD OF QUERIST FORMED

At the behest of First Son Odarian, the Kingpriest establishes the Brotherhood of Querists, priests who investigate those accused of worshipping evil sects so that none are unjustly accused.

932 IA - AGAINST THE MINOTAURS

Again at Odarian's advice, Cathan Twice-Born and the now-massive armies of the Divine Hammer venture into minotaur lands, off the empire's east coast, on a crusade in the Kingpriest's name. Coordinated tactics allow the Hammer to overcome great numbers of the minotaurs before the bull-men can use their ships to attain a greater mobility than the armies of the Hammer. Bloody raids begin to thin the ranks of the Hammer, and they are forced to retreat to Istar as winter approaches.

936 IA - EDICT AGAINST DARK MAGIC

The Kingpriest signs an edict ordering the Conclave of High Sorcery to cease teaching the ways of the Black Robes and to provide the names of all current practitioners. The Conclave refuses to acknowledge the edict.

938 IA - HIGH SORCERY DECLARED ILLEGAL

Querist investigators claim that attempts on the Kingpriest's life are the work of the Conclave of High Sorcery. Proof emerges when the archmage Fistantulus is slain by the Divine Hammer, after a long and bloody battle. Beldinas declares the Towers of High Sorcery to be heretical moon-worshippers and enemies of the Faith.

939 IA - NIGHT OF BURNING ROBES

Rumors circulate that Istarans are being abducted from the streets and taken to the Tower of High Sorcery in Istar for use in dark, wizardly experiments. Querists investigate, but are unable to penetrate the Grove surrounding the Tower. Over the course of a week at the height of summer, an increasingly angry mob gathers around the Tower, chanting for answers and revenge.

Though there is no response from within the Tower, the Kingpriest answers the call and focuses the will and belief of the people through his spirit and the *Miceram*, his Crown of Power. In the Night of Burning Robes, the Kingpriest wages a battle with the magic of the Grove and Tower. When the Grove is reduced to ashes, the wizards of the Tower emerge to engage him. Engorged with power, the Beldinas dispatches them and destroys the Tower of Istar.

940 IA - AGAINST THE KENDER

Condemning the irreverent disposition of the kender, the Kingpriest calls for a second crusade against them. Led by the Divine Hammer, an army of the faithful marches toward Hyllo as any wandering kender flee into their homelands. As the Divine Hammer crosses Solamnia, they encounter Lord Soth of Knightlund, now a gentle Knight of Solamnia who convinces them that the kender will come to worship in their own way and time. The Crusade disbands and the knights return to Istar — where they are denounced by the Kingpriest and imprisoned.

943 IA - MINOTAURS STRIKE BACK

The worship of Paladine at Istaran temples comes to be known simply as "the Faith."

The Third Crusade takes the Divine Hammer back into the heart of the minotaur kingdoms, where they ravage Mithas and destroy the Temple of Sargas. The Blood of Kothas puts allegiance to their god before their hatred of their ancient enemies in the Blood of Mithas. Capturing the knights, the minotaurs publicly execute them, one each day for three months. Last to die is First Son Odarian, who led the crusade. The Kingpriest and the people of Istar honor the Order of the Divine Hammer with a week of fasting.

945 IA - AGAINST THE ELVES

Answering the kender's pleas for help, The Silvanesti elves mount a growing resistance to the Faith from hidden encampments in the southern deserts. The Kingpriest announces a bounty on the Silvanesti and a ban on trade with them. Knights of the Divine Hammer and sellsword crusaders scour the empire elvenkind are all but eliminated from Istar.

946 IA - GNOMES JOIN ISTAR

Seeing how things are going, the gnomes offer alliance with Istar, and the Kingpriest accepts, granting them the city of Clockwork in exchange for the aid of their inventions.





947 IA - KINGPRIEST ATTACKS WIZARDS

The Kingpriest journeys to Daltigoth and leads a multitude of followers to that city's Tower of High Sorcery. Drawing upon all his power, the Kingpriest wrenches the moons themselves out of alignment to weaken the wizards inside the tower. The Divine Hammer assails the Tower when the wizards are at their weakest, and any who fail to escape are executed. When the Kingpriest's concentration falters, the wizards release magic that destroys both the Tower and a majority of the city. The Kingpriest survives, but loses an eye when struck by a piece of debris.

As preparations are underway for a fourth crusade to take place the following summer, an army of minotaurs lands on Istar's east coast. More than a dozen towns are pillaged, as well as the city of Lattakay, and their temples razed to the ground. The watchtowers of the Divine Hammer are destroyed, and soldiers preparing for the crusade are redirected to construct and man new towers.

948 IA - SLAVERY REINSTATED

Announcing that some races are heretics by nature, beyond redemption, and can do good works in the world only through forced servitude, the Kingpriest reinstates the previously outlawed practice of slavery. Kender and minotaurs are immediately enslaved whenever found in Istaran lands, as are heretics against the Faith.

949 IA - NEUTRAL GODS OUTLAWED

A popular tract circulates among the people, suggesting that bringing greater good into the world risks the emergence of a greater evil. When this tract finds support among temples to the neutral gods, the Kingpriest declares them heretical faiths, "red stains on the white spirits of Istar." The doors of the temples are barred, and worship of neutral gods is outlawed.

950 IA - HIGH CRUSADE

The Kingpriest himself leads a High Crusade to Palanthas, where despite the opposition of some on the Solamnic Council, the Tower of Palanthas is destroyed and the Great Library burned to prevent the further dissemination of its "evil teachings."

Astinus of Palanthas disappears, and is never seen again.

952 IA - THE PURIFIED APPEAR

The Kingpriest announces that his new personal protectors will be the Purified, Silvanesti subjected to a long Querist ritual led by the Kingpriest himself that cleared their minds not merely of evil intent but of any intent whatsoever except the will of the Kingpriest.

THE GAME BEGINS

Stories circulate among the kender that points can be scored by embarrassing Knights of the Divine Hammer, acquiring swords of the Purified, and any of a multitude of tasks. The source of the Game and its rules is unclear, as are what rewards the kender might collect from playing, but they participate with enthusiasm nonetheless. The High

Querist and the Divine Hammer issue a joint order that any kender caught playing the Game is to be immediately put to death.

954 IA - TIGHTENING CONTROL

Querists become regular observers of sects worshipping good gods with neutral tendencies. Any minor deviances in their practices lead the Querists to call in the Purified and the Divine Hammer to dismantle one sect after another. Some Istarans begin to quietly express concern about the increasingly strict edicts of the Kingpriest. Among them is Cathan Twice-Born, second in command of the Hammer.

956 IA - SECOND HIGH CRUSADE

The Kingpriest announces he will undertake the Second High Crusade to Losarcum to destroy its Tower of High Sorcery. Before he can do so, the wizards destroy the Tower. Querists warn the Kingpriest that were all five Towers to be destroyed, a formidable level of uncontrollable magic would be loosed upon the world. The Kingpriest declares the Tower of Wayreth to be sacrosanct, an "eternal warning to those who would worship the power of the night."

957 IA - THE IRON REVOLT

Cathan Twice-Born and the aging Lord Soth hatch a plot

963 IA - KINGPRIEST ASCENDS

The Kingpriest summons Paladine and demands that the god grant him the power to complete the cleansing of the world. When Paladine refuses, the Kingpriest binds the god's spirit to his own, ascending to near-godhood and sparking the eternal Godspyre at the heart of the Temple. Drawing upon his newfound power, the Godpriest quells the earthquakes that have ravaged the Lordcity, then extends his power even further. For one night every creature on Ansalon feels the touch of his will. One in three die; Istaran clerics declare that these were weak in the Faith.

Following the Day of Ascension, the Godpriest must expend much of his willpower containing Paladine within himself.

964 IA - BURNING ROBES WIZARDS DISCOVERED

Charged with power granted to them by the Godpriest, Cathan Thrice-Born and a dozen of the Purified journey to shattered Losarcum to investigate rumors of mages meeting in the ruins of the Tower of High Sorcery. There they first encounter the mages of the Burning Robes, who have vowed to bring Istar to its knees.

ORGANIZATIONS

KNIGHTS OF THE DIVINE HAMMER

The Order of the Divine Hammer remains the strong right arm of the Faith, charged with protecting all lands under the banner of Istar and all the devoted who live there. This is an enormous task, requiring an ever-growing number of knights, so both local clerics and traveling Querists keep watch for any boys coming of age who display a high degree of strength or martial skill. Those who do are guided to the nearest Hammerhall.

Although the Knights of Solamnia are often called up as examples in the training of a Knight of the Divine Hammer, the young knights are never allowed to forget that the only vow they are required to take is one of devotion to the Godpriest and the Faith. Unlike the Purified, who draw strength directly from the Godpriest, the might of the Divine Hammer comes from within, and from the bond with their fellow knights.

Where the Purified and Querists often make Istarans uncomfortable, faithful citizens find the presence of a local garrison of the Divine Hammer comforting. The Knights know both the strength of the Faith and the realities of the everyday world.

Hammerhalls can be found across the nation, from the grand marble and gold keep of the Lordcity to encampments along the borderlands. The Divine Hammer fills similarly diverse roles, from maintaining a ceremonial guard at the gates at the Arena of Istar to undertaking raids into minotaur lands.

BROTHERHOOD OF QUERISTS

Once the people of Istar called to the Brotherhood of Querists to prove they were innocent of accusations of evil. Now it is often Querists who make the accusations. While

the Querists were once defenders of the people, as the decades passed they became judges who heard all sides of a claim, then made a final verdict before handing the guilty off to the Divine Hammer for punishment or the Temple of Istar for Purification. Finally, when the Kingpriest acquired the secrets of reading minds using the magic of renegade mages, he entrusted it to the Brotherhood and gave them a mandate allowing them full authority to judge and punish any evil they found.

Now the Querists answer only to their own righteousness, and the Godpriest himself, as they travel across Istar in search of evil. Some Querists still show a degree of understanding toward those who have only slightly strayed from the path of the Faith. Indeed, in their role as judges of others, they understand that even they can never hope to attain true purity. But others are bitter about the stain on their spirits and do not tolerate it in others, as attested by the well-used gibbets and blackened fire pits across the empire.

KNIGHTS OF SOLAMNIA

The Knights of Solamnia have a complicated relationship with the Faith. They are among Istar's oldest allies, and often fought alongside the Divine Hammer. However, as the years passed, the Grand Circle of Knights became concerned about the changing nature of the Faith, particularly once the Kingpriest declared his opposition to worship of neutral gods. Istar had long been jealous of Solamnia, and for decades its merchants put pressure on clerics of the Faith to send Querists there, believing that none outside the Faith could possibly live up to a code as strict as the Oath and Measure. Even once the Querists acquired magic that let them enforce the Kingpriest's Edict of Thought Control, they still found that the majority of Solamnics were as good as their word, if not better. Thus has Solamnia remained inviolate, even as Istar crossed it to wage war with the kender of Hylo.

As Istar was indeed doing its part to smite evil and increase good in the world, the Grand Circle had a hard time resolving to declare opposition to the Faith. But with the binding of Paladine and the ascension of the Godpriest, those on the Council who had previously objected to such a notion now find their resistance faltering. Were the Knights to openly declare war on Istar, the Faith and its people would no longer be dealing with the lightning raids of the minotaurs or the guerrilla warfare of the kender; it would be facing an army as large as its own . . . and possibly more skilled.

THE BURNING ROBES

The Conclave of High Sorcery has been secluded in the Tower of Wayreth for nearly a decade, locked in endless debate over how to confront the near-omnipotence of the Godpriest. But there are many in the ranks of wizardry who will not wait before they strike back at those who have marked them for death.

The Burning Robes are wizards of all Robes who have named themselves for the mages massacred at the destruction of the Tower of Istar. A network of cabals



THE GAME

“You haven’t heard about the Game? Boy, I must have scored about a thousand points already. Maybe ten thousand if you count that ship that sank in Lake Istar, but it never really was clear if it was longswords or longcoats in the hold and besides, it’s not like it sank because I was there. I mean, it certainly is an interesting thought but I suppose that it just doesn’t make sense to think that a ship would sink only on account of me. I just wanted to see if there really were sea elves strapped to the bottom of the boat to push it around and you see what happened was —”

“Oh, the Game. Right. Well, nobody really knows who makes the rules, but they sure know how to make those Istaran priests mad. ‘Course, that’s not hard, but the Game makes it pretty amusing — except to the Istarans.”

“Anyway, I just heard about a new set of rules this morning. Just like always, you can score points for hiding the weapons of Istaran knights: one point for a sword or three daggers, and two points for one of those big hammers their officers carry around. Now though, you can score double points for putting the weapons in a pile of grain in the market square of any Istaran town. The other big addition is a big one: twenty-five points for putting out one of those big fires burning on the Godpriest’s head. Well, not the Godpriest’s actual head. I mean those statues they have all over the place in Istar. So what if you dumped a bunch of grain onto one of those fires and stuck a hammer in it? That has to be worth about a hundred points, right?”

scattered across northern Ansalon, members of the Burning Robes train new apprentices while they continue their own studies in hidden laboratories.

Believing the destruction of the Towers of High Sorcery to be not only a blow to the power of arcane magic but also an unforgivable insult, the Burning Robes will settle for nothing less than the reconstruction of the Towers . . . and the complete and utter destruction of the Faith. Some cabals dedicate themselves to recovering what power remains in the wreckage of the Towers, while others make strikes at the Faith — often into the heart of the Lordcity itself.

BLOOD OF MITHAS

The Blood of Mithas is the dynasty ruling the largest of the minotaur kingdoms. Though long content to battle for dominance of their own people, the invasion of their lands in Istar’s Third Crusade was a blow to both the armies and the faith of the Blood of Mithas, as the Divine Hammer cut through their ranks to destroy the holy temple of Sargas. Yet more importantly, the invasion proved to be a terrible embarrassment to the Provenbloods of the kingdom, as it was their ancient enemies in the Blood of Kothas who eventually destroyed the invaders.

Even countless battles with the Blood of Kothas have not wiped out the memory of that time of weakness, and while they still battle for the minotaur throne, the Blood of Mithas has found a new enemy in Istar. Mithas-bloods are often found leading raids across Istar’s borders, sometimes burning whole towns simply for the sake of avenging a single death.

LOCALES

ĪSTAR

The people of the Faith and the nation of Istar are strong in the time of the Godpriest. Statues of Beldinas Lightbringer

stand at the center of all Istaran cities, topped with oil-fed braziers whose flames echo the Godspyre as a constant reminder of the power of the Faith. Close to the capital Lordcity, regular trade caravans run down wide, paved roads bringing goods from one city to another. Slaves tend to every need of the good people. The Knights of the Divine Hammer protect the nation from outside threats as they expand the boundaries of Istar ever outward. The Querists scrutinize every part of Istar for danger that might come from within, tracking even the most simple of evil thoughts that might risk throwing the entire nation into darkness.

It is a golden age for Istar. To say otherwise is heresy.

Lordcity of Istar: The Lordcity is called the “crown of the Faith.” Where once the city and its people strove to be perfect in the eyes of the gods, now they need only please the Godpriest. This is a difficult task at best, but in return the citizens of the Lordcity live in the cleanest and most orderly city in Ansalon. Generations of craftsmen have labored to make every building a thing of beauty, from the simplest shop to the complex of buildings and chapels housing everything from the offices of the Brotherhood of Querists to the Sacred Chancery of Istar — the largest in the world since the Kingpriest burned the Libraries of Palanthas and Tarsis. At the center of the city lies the basilica, the heart of both the city and the Faith. Day and night the basilica’s crystal dome glows with the golden light of the Godspyre, an eternal flame that burns where the Kingpriest’s once stood, marking the power now contained within the Godpriest.

Pilsinus Five days’ ride southwest of the Lordcity is an isolated mountain valley where the Divine Hammer brought the last captive Silvanesti spies, following the uprising of 945 IA. The elves were held at the camp for nearly five years until the Kingpriest came to employ a new ritual he had developed, a “gift of Paladine.” Within a month, the prisoners had become the first of the Purified

— warriors given strength by the Faith and unfailingly obedient to the Kingpriest, yet stripped of all emotion.

Though the Purified have little need for social interaction, they do require shelter when not on assignment and the chance to train with warriors of their own caliber. So Pilsinus has become a stark city of squat, stone buildings, containing armories, barracks, and training grounds for the elite warriors of the Faith. As the ranks of the Purified have grown so has the city now known as Pilsinus — the “City of the Cleansed” — which is now home to nearly 5,000 troops.

Clockwork When the Kingpriest declared many of the nonhuman races to be evil, he specifically excluded the gnomes. Though the gnomes had difficulty following the strict regimen of the Faith, they remained open to its ideas. More importantly, they provided the people of Istar with a wide array of effective, if temperamental, labor-saving devices that finally made the quality of life in Istar equal to that of older, wealthy cities such as Karthay. So while kender and minotaur were being clapped in manacles and enslaved, gnomes across Istar were told of a place where they would have large laboratories of their own, freedom to experiment, and the full resources of Istar. Most accepted the offer, and though the city wasn’t underground it was everything the Faith had promised.

Clockwork was once like any other Istaran city, but now the gilding has been stripped away and melted down to make wire and the marble is blackened with soot from the city’s rampant machinery. Ostensibly, gnomes are citizens of the Faith with full freedom to travel Istaran lands, but the gnomes of Clockwork are typically discouraged from leaving simply by providing them with everything they need.

There have been occasional tensions between Clockwork and the Faith, particularly when the gnomes have undertaken potentially heretical Life Quests. Other problems arose when more rigid Querists assigned to oversee the city and its people proved unable to adapt to the mercurial society of the gnomes. But the current administrator, Querist Teliro, has proven to be a favored and successful overseer, bringing many new gnomish inventions to the Faith.

SOLAMNIA

Solamnia remains, as it has been for centuries, a diverse and peaceful collective of fiefs watched over by the Knights of Solamnia. Istar has long been jealous of Solamnia’s natural gifts — the natural defenses of the Vingaard and Khalkist Mountains to the east and west, the fertile plains along the Vingaard River valley, and of course the fantastically wealthy port of Kalaman. Istar was a cultural and economic rival of Solamnia long before the rise of Kingpriest Beldinas, and once Beldinas began aggressively expanding Istar’s borders there were many who urged him to look toward Solamnia.

In Solamnia, many are uncomfortable with the Godpriest’s self-assigned moral authority, particularly following his High Crusades into Solamnic lands to destroy the Tower of High Sorcery at Palanthis and the

march of the Second Crusade toward Hylo. Yet Beldinas has always been able to argue the moral right of his campaigns, and his words contain enough weight that the Solamnic council has not yet been able to raise a complete objection. Fortunately, Beldinas also has yet to find a fully justifiable reason to occupy Solamnic lands and annex them into Istar; kender from Hylo are allowed to move freely in Solamnia, but though Istar claims that the kender cross Solamnia only to enter the lands of the Faith and instigate trouble, the Knights have always been able to show that they are tireless in their efforts toward a diplomatic solution. More recently, when Loren Soth, the guardian of the largest Solamnic protectorate, was discovered to be behind a plot to unseat Beldinas, the Solamnic Council was able to prove that he acted independently, and even opened their borders to Istaran Querists for a full assessment of the lord’s nephew, chosen to take his place as protector of Knightlund. The new Lord Soth was found to be both pure of heart and dedicated to the Oath and Measure, and the Istarans had no choice but to return home.

Thus have the two nations remained in a fragile peace.

Palanthis In stark contrast to the gilded shrines and curving, marble avenues of Istar, Palanthis is a city of stone streets straight as a bowshot, broken by defensive works leading toward the Solamnic keep at its heart, built following the fall of the Tower of High Sorcery. The inns of the city are typically filled with visiting Knights and citizens of the fiefs, come to seek the guidance of the Grand Circle or on pilgrimage to Palanthis’s temple to Paladine, the largest outside Istar. Once many wizards and Aesthetics were seen in the streets of the city, but since the High Crusade they have become a rare sight, though few in Solamnia can say where the surviving scholars and mages may have gone.

Knightlund This is the largest of the Solamnic protectorates, covering a full tenth-share of the territory of Solamnia. In recent years, a new Lord Soth, nephew to the beloved elder Knight of the same name, has taken his uncle’s place as protector of Knightlund. Though no friend of Istar following the Kingpriest’s execution of his uncle, the young Lord Soth bears an even deeper hatred of the minotaurs and is making plans for a campaign of his own to their lands.

HYLO

Hylo is the last refuge of free kender on Ansalon, as Balifor has fallen to the Divine Hammer, and its people put to the sword or sold as slaves. It survives only because of the Solamnic Knights. Though stodgy, the Solamnics were pleasant enough, and once you get past their occasional capitulation to Istar, they make unequalled protectors.

Hylo As they have difficulty getting a definitive answer from the kender, nonkender who visit the largest city in Hylo call it by the same name. After the Second Crusade chased most of the kender scattered across northern Ansalon back to Hylo, they quickly became bored with their homes. So they decided to rebuild it. The result is a city of eclectic structures, such as the house covered



in chicken feathers in an attempt to make it fly, or the “treehouse” with trees planted on its roof. Of course, the kender became bored with construction as quickly as with anything else, so the majority of the city is made up of half-demolished and half-constructed buildings. But that has simply made the city more interesting to explore.

Hop: Hop is one of many “playtowns” that have sprung up in the foothills of the Vingaard Mountains, where kender go to meet other players of the Game and swap stories about points they have scored. As the Querists and the Divine Hammer have been known to stage raids on playtowns, they tend to move around and often have their own special rules in an attempt to sort players from spies and agents of the Faith. In Hop, as the name suggests, everyone is required to hop around at all times (although they are free to choose between one- or two-footed hopping). This looks every bit as ludicrous as it sounds, particularly when bands of minotaur rebels pass through.

MINOTAUR LANDS

Nearly 2,000 years before Istar began its rise to power, minotaurs enslaved by the dwarves escaped to carve out a kingdom of their own in the lands of eastern Ansalon. Unfortunately, they proved to be their own worst enemies; within a century of laying claim to a those lands, they fell upon one another in a battle for dominance. The result has lasted to the current day: dozens of minotaur kingdoms, each ruled by the “Provenblood” member of a minotaur warband and all at constant war over who will claim ultimate dominion over the others. Though this endless war has kept the minotaurs from expanding their territory, it has also kept others wary of the perpetually chaotic region.

Though the minotaurs would occasionally venture out of their territory in search of supplies, even the minotaurs’ closest neighbors in Istar didn’t come to their kingdoms until Beldinas raised the massive armies of the Divine Hammer. Even when soldiers of the Faith reached the kingdoms in the First Crusade, the minotaurs saw outsiders as annoyances and lesser races that would be dealt with after they had settled their own matters, and the destruction of the temple to the minotaurs’ patron god Sargas in the Third Crusade only brought the minotaurs together for a few short months.

Mithas and Kothas The largest of the minotaur kingdoms are these two neighboring territories at the

heart of minotaur territory, named for the two sons of Ambeoutin, the last minotaur to rule over the united kingdoms. The Blood of Mithas and the Blood of Kothas each claim that rule should have passed to their branch of the bloodline and will not rest until they have proven their claim in combat.

Though an ongoing war is fought in the highlands on their mutual border, the dispute between Mithas and Kothas also plays out in the arenas of both kingdoms. Regardless of who is the winner of these battles in front of thousands of witnesses, the validity of the victory is always questioned and the war goes on. The smaller kingdoms encourage this rivalry, well aware that were the two to ever combine their forces they instantly would be the dominant force in the region.

Rathan: Protected from the harsh northern oceans by the inlet created by Cape Tailyon, Rathan is the largest of the minotaur port cities. The minotaurs are happy to allow ships from around the world to dock in Rathan and trade, provided that they acknowledge the minotaurs as rulers of both the port and the seas. Those who do so half-heartedly and are discovered by the minotaurs often find themselves spending a week chained to Beacon Rock.

The ancient forests north and west of Rathan provide stout timbers not only for the city’s shipyards, but for nearly every building in the city. After a fire reduced the Trade Quarter to ash and rubble a few years ago some reconstruction has been made of stone, but tradition and a plentiful supply guided much of the Quarter back to wood construction.

WAYRETH

Southwest of Istar, in the woods beyond the Kharolis Mountains, lies Wayreth and the last remaining Tower of High Sorcery. As the power of the Lightbringer and the Faith have grown, that power of arcane magic has waned. Protected by its constantly shifting woods that make it impossible for those not welcome to reach the tower, the wizards within work to advance their art but the confinement and close quarters has led to a great degree of squabbling not only between the orders but also between those who wear Robes of the same color. Even the Conclave is locked in endless debate, and every day more of the younger mages slip away to find the Burning Robes, mages who seek to advance the cause of high sorcery by destroying Istar.