

The Hunt for Kontalie

Cover Sheet

Adventure by Phil Judd

1st Thaw '97 - 29th Thaw '97

Player Characters

Saydar	Necromancer	Orc	Male	Mil Sci
Red Brian	Non-mage	Dwarf	Male	Leader
Liessa	Mind	Human	Female	
Adam-Jones	Earth	Giant	Male	
Flamis	Fire	Human	Female	
Basalic	Earth	Human	Male	Scribe

Plane - Andara/Drommick/Feret

Places visited

Andara

- Tanth
- Urjil's castle
- Centrade in the Peric Plains
- A fort to the east of the Peric Plains
- Erint City
- Fingerscop
- Vinescop

Drommick

- Hills with planer gates

Feret

- Herif
- Kontalie's cave

Employer - Marcus - from the InterBarony Bank

Major NPCs encountered

- Urjil - a vampiric arms dealer
- Captain Ferris - captain of the eastern fort
- Rhy'el - Planer mage at Vinescop
- Malloc - Devil and Guardian of the planer portal keys
- John Little - sheriff of Herif
- Kontalie - red dragon and Mind Mage.

Mission

To find Kontalie and present him with a writ for monies owed to the Bank.

THE HUNT FOR KONTALIE

Adventure Summary

1 Thaw '97

Met with our employer who explained we were to travel to the Plane of Andara and find the dragon Kontalie who owed the InterBarony Bank quite a bit of money. The loan had been outstanding for over 99 years and other parties had been out looking for him with no luck.

4 Thaw

Got to the large city of Tanth, on Andara, with our employer by means of a Planer Mage summoning. Note, a license is required to use magic in this city. Astrology readings indicated that Kontalie was off-plane and we needed to find a certain Planer Mage. Our first stop was at the vampire Urjil's castle. He is an arms dealer. When we arrived we discovered that Urjil's castle was surrounded by powerful wards. Urjil didn't know where Kontalie or the Planer Mage was but agreed to use his resources to see what he could find out.

5 Thaw

Flew eastwards to Centrade in the Peric Plains. Kontalie had been involved in a war between Peric and Erint on the Erint side. Centrade was another large city and contained five concentric walls. Found the Military Intelligence HQ and found some information on Kontalie. He came from a small family of three, the other two being an uncle and a sister. They're in Oasis Vale in the Spine mountains. His usual tactic was to fly over the battlefield (100ft high and 30mph) and use TK Rage on the armies below. He also had a tendency to be innovative and over-confident - a 'flair for the dramatic' we were told. He also has a tendency to be independent. At one point he attacked a calvary unit that was riding under a draconic banner but that distraction allowed the opposition army to win. It may be possible to approach him from below and behind while he was flying. He bears grudges and is keen to sign on for cash.

We also discovered there was a large roc in the Spine Mountains so he headed east to the fort there. On arrival we introduced ourselves as roc-hunters and arranged for some horses to be used as bait.

6 Thaw

Attracted the roc. It had a 100ft wingspan and a speed of 60mph. A fight ensued but the roc got away. Saydar was much the worse for wear so he was put in for Healing at the fort.

7 Thaw

Used a Crystal of Vision to locate the peak where the roc made it's home. Rained most of the day.

8 Thaw

Saydar released from the Healers. Rained all day.

9 Thaw

Flew off towards the peak. Managed to trap the roc. Encountered an Earth Elemental who was watching us. Defeated an air elemental that was protecting the roc as well as killing the roc. Left with the head of the roc before the Earth and Air Mage turned up. It was quite likely that they were

building a castle at the top of the peak.

Went back to Centrade and collected the bounty for the roc and arranged for the head to be preserved.

12 Thaw

The head was finally ready and a party was held at the inn to show it off.

13 Thaw

Received a message that contact had been lost with the Eastern fort. According to the Crystal of Vision, the fort had been completely removed at ground level. There were no sign of bodies or wreckage.

An investigating force went to have a look while we flew south to Erint City and visited the Sages Guild. Made an appointment to see a sage the next day.

14 Thaw

Saw the sage. He told us that he didn't know where Kontalie was now but he used to hang around this region a lot. He had a standard contract with the army for general fire support but left two months short of the expiry date. His home was abandoned and the humans who were living there with him (who are now deceased) had no idea why. Apparently he sent them on an errand and when they got back he was gone. It looked like he had packed up and fled. Unlike most dragons he was friendly towards the humans, even allowing some heroes to ride into battle on him. Kontalie had a mother and a sister. His mother was assassinated by dwarves and bits of her were still being worn around the dwarven stronghold. His sister, known as Contessa, lived near the top of the vale and during one visit had tagged along with Kontalie on a job, but wasn't interested in being employed. Kontalie had no major enemies and had been paid in advance for the latest contract.

Left Erint and went around the bottom of the Spine then flew north towards the Fingers. Stopped at a small town between South Fingers and North Fingers

15 Thaw

Reached Vinescop. Found the planer mage we were looking for. He had sent Kontalie to the plane of Drommick.

16 Thaw

Transported to Drommick. The place was very desolate. Discovered that the plane was 10 miles thick, and 10,000 miles a side. The devastated area was circular about 220 miles radius centered to the north. Desolation caused by maurauding gargoyles. Went north and discovered a ruined village. Stayed in the keep that night and were attacked by gargoyles.

17 Thaw

Determined that the centre of the disturbance is a group of hills so we went to have a look. They were a group of three hills in a triangular formation with something in the middle. There was a large gargoyle like thing in the middle.

Explored the hills and discovered a ring of stones on the top of each one. Each ring was a planer portal with destination planes of Feret, Garrat and Ilit. Then we went into the centre and discovered another ring of stones. A ring of goblins surrounded the stones. Inside was a Namer Devil from the Seventh Plane of Hell and the keystones for the three portals. The devil, Malloc, was bound to the circle but scheduled to be released in three months. Also his bonding was such that he was compelled to prevent us finding out where Kontalie was, even to the state of using deadly force. The last party had got this far but had been destroyed. By careful questioning we were able to determine that Kontalie had gone to the plane of Feret. Once we had that we returned to Tanth on Andara.

18 Thaw

Reported to our employee then made our way via runeportal and fireflight to Vinescop.

19 Thaw

Collected the planer mage and blinked back to Drommick. Took the planer mage to the Feret planer gate and got him to divinate it. While he was doing that we were attacked by several gargoyles and a djinn. These were defeated then, once the portal had been analysed, the planer mage sent us through.

We materialised on a piece of land 200 yards in diameter, surrounded by a canyon. A guardhouse was on the other side. Questioned the two guards and discovered Kontalie's cave was located two miles outside the local village of Herif. Flew to Kontalie's cave and presented the writ.

Kontalie was prepared to pay back the remaining principle and maybe a bit more but thought the accumulated interest was pure extortion. Agreed to bring back our party employer to act as negotiator in an effort to get a compromise. Blinked back to Tanth.

20 Thaw

Returned to the cave, via Vinescop and Drommick only to discover Kontalie was gone and wasn't due back for a week. Decided to wait.

28 Thaw

Still no sign of Kontalie and indications were that he had done another runner and we had hardly any clue where he was. Searched his cave for treasure but didn't find any. Returned to Tanth.

29 Thaw.

Arrived back on the plane of Feret for another attempt at finding Kontalie. Went to question the local military base commander but he refused to see us initially but, with the help of the sheriff, managed to do so. Unfortunately he had no idea either. Gave up, returned to Tanth, reported to our employer, picked up our payment, and were banished back to Alushia.

THE HUNT FOR KONTALIE

Basalic

1 Thaw '97

The party employer for this mission was Marcus, an employee of the InterBarony Bank in the country of West Tantric on the Plane of Andara. A customer of theirs, one Kontalie, owed the bank over 1.6 million silver pennies (including penalties) and the loan had been outstanding for 99 years and 9 months. The Loans department wanted the matter cleared up before the 100 year mark, otherwise the Bank may be forced to write the money off. As Marcus explained, that would not be good for the bank's profits or their reputation.

The debtor in question turned out to be a red dragon/shapeshifter/mind mage. He had often hired himself out during human conflicts and the last known job was the Erint/Peric Plains conflict. One of his known contacts was a vampire arms dealer known as Urjil. According to the bank records Kontalie had taken out a 100,000sp loan but had only paid back 50,000sp before disappearing, seventy years ago. An investigating party had gone to his cavern in Mt Aspiring, located in the Erint Mountains, but he wasn't there and there was no sign of a forwarding address. Twenty years later, a mercenary team went looking for him but were killed while checking out underground contacts in Orctown, part of the city of Tanth.

The next, and final, mercenary team went searching thirty years ago. They had found out about the last job and the employer, Yettal Dirent, who they questioned. I thought it more than coincidental that his year of death was the same as the year that the mercenary team were talking to him. Was Kontalie trying to ensure that anyone who knew of his whereabouts was silenced - permanently.

The last that the bank had heard of that team was that they were in Vinescop and that they were going off-plane to a plane called Drommick, to further their investigations.

We would arrive on their plane somewhere outside the city of Tanth, where the bank's Head Office is located. Marcus also mentioned it was illegal to cast magic in town without a license. The penalty would forced labour on the mana pumps which supply mana to the city. Just about everyone is a mage and there is a very strong Mages Guild. Also a Planer Mage would be at our disposal.

To get to the plane we would be Summoned with a fixed duration spell, something of the order of about three months according to Mike, after which we would automatically return to Alusia. Twelve charges of invested Planer Counterspells would be provided as well as a signalling device so we can be recalled. Marcus explained that we would be acting as freelance contractors to the bank which prompted Saydar to ask if we should do other debt collections as well.

Our payment would be up to 15,000sp if we could recover the funds. The bank is prepared to wipe out the 5.3 thousand sp penalty. If we only locate him that would be 10,000sp.

Once Marcus left, we introduced ourselves to each other.

Saydar - a 5'6" tall orc with black plate armour. His left eye was jet-black obsidian with blood oozing from the sides. He carried a large staff which also had blood oozing from it. He's a Necromancer,

Military Scientist, Healer and Ranger.

Red Brian - a dwarf with red hair and red plate mail. He told us he was a member of the College of War, which only had one spell. His main weapon was the Great Axe and he was also a Military Scientist, Healer, and Ranger.

Liessa - Tall human female with red hair and blue eyes. She is a Mind Mage, mainly a troubadour, some Healer skills and is pacted to an extra-planer entity.

Adam-Jones - 12'4" giant. His cloak and tabard is coloured purple. He was also wearing thick armour. Vines were growing on the armour and on him. He told us not to look him in the eye for too long as Death stares out of his eyes. Main weapons is a giant spear and shield. He's an Earth Mage with high ranks in Strength of Stone and Armour of Earth.

Flamis - Medium height, short blond hair, and wearing her favorite one-piece orange/red skirted outfit which served as magical armour. She's a fire mage, my wife, and the present incarnation of the Eternal Consort.

Basalic - That's me. Tall, reasonably muscular, and wearing leather armour. I'm an Earth Mage as well as a caverns ranger and amateur philosopher in rocks. Recently I've been learning about different sorts of weapons and military tactics.

After some discussion, Red Brian became the party leader, Saydar the Military Scientist, and I was the scribe.

It was decided that we weren't leaving until the 4th as there were some things that we wanted to try here. Red Brian tried out Starflower's Lost and Found service, but drew a blank, which according to her suggested that either our information was inaccurate, or Kontalie was not to be found on the map we had been provided with. Meanwhile I purchased three 20pt Healing potions.

That night some of us went down to Newhaven to the Skull Tavern which Saydar owns, presumably for a strategy discussion over a few beers. It was felt like a pleasant place and the beer was good so I was loathe to leave. I soon found out that playing drinking games with a dwarf is not a good idea.

2 Thaw

Went back to the farm for last minute arrangements before returning to the Guild.

.2.

Later on I found out that both Saydar and Flamis had obtained astrology readings. They turned out to be the following:

What is Drommick like?

No feet or hooves inhabit this plain,
No one 'twas here does now remain,

They've all gone to a better place,
They've all gone with unseemly haste,
The eyes that watch, the eyes that see,
The eyes may put an end to thee,
A traveller's rest this plain is not,
A path to truth, a realm forgot.

What dangers await in our quest for Kontalie?

Dragon's Eyes, Dragon's Friends, Dragon's Breath, Dragon Cunning,
Dragon's Lair, Dragon's Circle.

Who would know where the dragon Kontalie is?

She is as omniscient as your prey itself.
She is as thicker than life itself.
She is as one with the air itself.
She is as loyal as death itself.

Where shall we go to find the dragon Kontalie?

You seek him there you seek him here
He hides with excessive care
The stars above and spirits below
Will not reveal him to his foe
Over clever he may be
But then again we'll wait and see.

What is the plane of Drommick like?

A blasted place where death awaits
To tarry long may be your doom.

Where shall we go to get to the plane of Drommick

What grasps the Cup? One is the leader of four.
What's in the Cup? One to lay down many.
Where is the One? Ones in the Cup.
Ones in the Pig. The Cup and the Pig are in the One

Who is the planer mage who knows of Drommick?

Hole Crossed, Star Crossed, Bloods Red, Minds Red, Age Great,
Power Great, He's One, Only One.

Urji the Vampire, how is he involved?

Dwarfs delight is his desire
Profiting from each sides fire,
Caring not whom gets what,
Only interested in his pot,
Dealing wheeling, men beware,

Who pays the most he does not care.

4 Thaw

It was time to go. That morning we met with our employer. He wanted to know how long we wanted the duration of the Summoning to be. We finally decided on a three month duration before we were yanked back to Alusia. So we wandered down the road, out of Seagate, for about five minutes, where a peasant farmer was waiting. Marcus handed him some money and he left. Marcus explained that he was marking the transfer spot before extracting a small wand and twisting the top off it.

A few minutes later we found ourselves elsewhere, in farmlands near a walled city. Standing nearby was a guy dressed in black robes and reminded us of a wraith. Marcus told us that was the planer mage.

After Brian received the recall device, another of those wands, we headed towards the town. We had to pass through an arch in the gateway which had lights flashing on it as we went under it. A man sat there making notes in a big ledger book. Must have been some sort of detect aura device.

Tanth proved to be a very large city. Saydar was of the opinion that the Planer Mage we were looking for had a heraldic symbol that had the standard stars and hole of the College but also contained a cross and had red in the symbol - a nonstandard colour. So we stopped off at a heraldic shop to make enquiries. The old guy there hadn't heard of such a symbol but promised to make enquiries and do research. While we waited, we went to a nearby pub called the 'Happy Landings'.

The ales served there were quite nice, and so was the food they served up. Flamis decided to try this drink that was served inside a large, hollowed out, yellow fruit. I remembered Aqualina showing us one of these, she called it a 'pineapple'. Flamis said it was rather sweet and very delicious. I suspected it was also rather potent. When I asked, the innkeeper told me it was a 'pina-colada'.

After a while, the herald himself found us. No he hadn't found anything definite but our description had been rather vague to begin with. Certainly there was nothing matching it in the immediate vicinity. However there was a possibility that it may be in the Eastern regions.

After he left, we discussed the possibilities. Had the planar mage been disbarred from the Guild and created his own crest? Marcus told us that there were dragons in the eastern areas, mostly in the Vale. Instead of being solitary like Alusian dragons, they were organised into groups called 'flights'. Maybe one of them would know. The dragons in the Vale also co-existed with the elves there.

Saydar believed that contacting the vampire Urjil may shed some light on the whereabouts of Kontalie. The other possibility was to retrace the other mercenary groups steps and try to obtain the same information that they did. Red Brian pointed out that Urjil's castle was on the way to Centrade so it finally decided to do both. So we headed out of town and prepared to fly.

Two fireflight hops later we could see the castle ahead so we landed on a nearby riverbank and proceeded on foot. We had to hack our way through bush from the river for a while until we reached a path.

The path led us to a small hill. On top of the hill was the castle. Around the bottom of the hill was a fence. Between the fence and the castle was a grassed area, providing no cover whatsoever. A gate allowed access up the path. As we progressed, both Adam and I could tell that the grassed area was completely covered in rather lethal wards. Only the path was safe and we could see watchers in the castle above.

As we got further up the path, two people came out and approached us, one elf, the other human. Adam soon determined that the elf was a mind mage and the human was a namer. When they wanted to know what we wanted, Saydar told them we had stuff to sell and that we needed to speak to Urjil. Finally we were conducted inside and told to wait.

After a while it got dark. A short while later, Urjil and another person that Brian identified as an Air mage arrived in. Saydar told him that we were looking for Kontalie in order to employ him. Finally, after some negotiation, Urjil agreed to use his resources to investigate the possibility of finding the missing dragon. During those negotiations we discovered that Urjil was attempting to duplicate Guild healing potions.

We talked a bit more about the possibility of obtaining various weapons such as lightweight glaives for a short time later before leaving. We ended up making a camp down by the river.

.3.

5 Thaw

We flew to Centrade in the Peric Plains. It turned out to be another large city and it contained five thick concentric walls. Just after we landed some people came out to meet us. So we went inside and spoke to some guards. After working our way up the chain of command we spoke to a lieutenant who conducted us to the Military Intelligence HQ. This turned out to be a plain, un-marked, building somewhere between the third and fourth ring.

Once there we spoke to a wizened old guy behind a desk (aura read Mind Mage - not surprising really). Saydar told him that we were here to kill Kontalie and was there any information that they could give us about him. So he sent off an assistant to fetch the file.

While we waited we asked for a clearer map. So he opened a drawer and pulled out a large, detailed one and we studied it in an attempt to memorise the landscape. There were griffons and a large roc, 200ft wingspan, in the mountains. In comparison, Kontalie's wingspan is only 50ft. The roc had been terrorising the eastern area, killing horses so there was a 100,000sp bounty on it. Some of the party were greatly interested in this and started asking questions but were told that Captain Ferris, at the eastern fort, would be able to tell us more.

Just then the Kontalie file was produced, We gleaned from that that he came from a small family of three, the other two being an uncle and a sister. They're in Oasis Vale in the Spine mountains and I suspect they'd probably be rather annoyed if Kontalie was killed.

When asked about vulnerable spots, we were told that under the right foreleg could be a possibility. His usual tactic was to fly over the battlefield (100ft high and 30mph) and use TK Rage on the armies

below. He also had a tendency to be innovative and over-confident - a 'flair for the dramatic' we were told. He also has a tendency to be independent. At one point he attacked a calvary unit that was riding under a draconic banner but that distraction allowed the opposition army to win. It may be possible to approach him from below and behind while he was flying.

Other things we were told was that he bears grudges and is keen to sign on for cash. That lead to the question, just what does he do with all his money. It raised the possibility he could be bribed.

We stopped off at the 'Horse and Cat' inn for lunch. By now the talk of our quest was going around. Personally I'm not sure that this is good as some of them may be spies and pass on the news to Kontalie. I'd rather not face an enraged dragon. Anyway some of the guards, and the innkeeper, wanted dragon parts for mementos. Scales, claws and teeth mostly.

Flamis and I were considering going shopping while the others got down to some serious drinking. However, we soon discovered that this town is more of a rather large military outpost. Most of the inhabitants of this region are nomads, much like the tribesmen in the Sea of Grass. This, plus a few forts along the borders, are the only permanent structures.

After leaving a message at the local branch of the bank, we left the city and flew towards the eastern border. Once the fort was spotted, we landed nearby and were met by horsemen. Saydar introduced us as roc-killing specialists. So we were taken into the fort and conducted to the Captain.

Finally a plan was hatched. Saydar asked for a bunch of horses to be gathered at a point north of the fort in order to attract the roc. Any other horses in the vicinity were to stay well clear. Flamis tried using her Crystal of Vision in order to locate the roc's lair but did not have any success. Meanwhile Saydar had produced several crystals and was using each one to determine when the attack would occur and what the result would be. He was able to pin it down to between one and two hours after dawn. In the last one he could see several battlescars on the ground but there was no sign of a dead roc. Fortunately no dead adventurers either. Saydar proclaimed that we'd won. Personally I think he's optimistic, but looks like we will survive. If this works I bet this will really get Kontalie's attention.

6 Thaw

So, at dawn, we headed to the intercept point. The troops gathering the horses had marked their location with a column of smoke so we homed in on it. Once we landed they left - in rather a hurry. After setting up a bunker with one of Adam's Wall of Stones we settled down to wait.

There was still no sign of the roc by the time the Wall of Stone was due to wear off, so I prepared to cast another one on top as an overlay. Suddenly I was surrounded by a Ring of Stone. Bugger! So I climbed out of that and recast. Much more successful. Curious though, the ring wouldn't counterspell. While this was going on Saydar had used a Bone Construction to make some sort of hide near the horses and was sitting in it. The rest of us were either Indetectable or in the bunker.

About a quarter of an hour later we saw the roc coming in. It was BIG and very fast, about 60mph - nearly fireflight speed. It swooped down, casting a large shadow over everything. Just as it

approached, Flamis triggered her shock-bolt rings. The roc shuddered, overshot the horses, and plowed into the ground leaving a rather large furrow behind it. On the way it managed to ensnare part of Saydar's bone hut around one leg.

We rushed towards it as it staggered to it's feet but were unable to prevent it taking off again. So Saydar scrounged a Fireflight off Flamis and took off after it. A dogfight in the sky resulted for a short time until Saydar was caught by the roc. Things looked bad for a while but he was able to extricate himself but was not successful in bringing it down. Last we saw of it, it was heading back towards the mountains - empty clawed.

.4.

Saydar was much the worse for wear with quite a few lacerations and both arms were mangled. While Liessa did what she could I collected up some of the feathers that the roc had left behind, mostly down feathers. Many of the horses were too badly wounded to be saved so I put them out of their misery. Analysis of the aura of the feathers told us that the roc had an MR and WP of 18.

Liessa and Saydar flew back to the fort while we brought back the remaining horses. After all I suspect they're rather valuable out here. No saddles were available so we had to ride bareback. As a consequence we were rather sore when we got back. As I said to Flamis later, I don't know how Aqualina can stand riding bareback or even why she prefers it.

It was mid afternoon by the time we rode in. Flamis spent the rest of the day doing Flamesight rituals on the roc down. One vision was of the roc flying down a canyon and receiving a flood of arrows from both sides. The archers were wearing the colours of the Empire. Another was the roc flying towards a tall peak, taller than the ones around it. The next was it waking up after sleeping in a hole in the snow. Surprisingly no nest. The last one was it flying towards the same tall peak with a horse in each claw.

7 Thaw

Minus Saydar as he was still being healed up, we went back to where we had ambushed the roc in order to figure out where the peak was. Figuring the direction where the roc went Flamis used her crystal to find the peak. Finally she believed she found it about eighty odd miles away although most of it was obscured by cloud. So we headed back to the fort. That afternoon it rained.

8 Thaw

Rained all day. Saydar was finally released from the healers.

9 Thaw

The weather had cleared up so we flew off towards the peak. After a while we could see it ahead, but the top was still obscured. We saw several griffons flying about.

Finally we landed on a nearby rock ledge. Just then Liessa detected an air elemental. This inferred that there was an Airmage about and that led to the speculation that the roc was a pet. So it was decided to use one of Adam's Earth elementals to build a roc trap. This basically was a large cavern with an entrance just wide enough to take the roc with it's wings furled. A smaller side entrance was also cut

to allow us to get out of the way. Meanwhile I was trying to cast Strength of Stones but wasn't having much success. Top of the list to practice when I get back.

Two hours later, the earth elemental had completed the cavern. At that point Liessa detected another earth elemental, just watching. Our elemental went to talk to it and discovered that it was keeping an eye on things for its master. So that made at least an Earth Mage and an Air Mage up on the mountain. Someone theorised they were building a castle.

Saydar went to the end of the cavern and used something to summon the roc. Soon the roc arrived, closely followed by the air elemental. The air elemental's thoughts were 'Protect roc'. We noticed that the roc's foot was bandaged. A mind was detected 300ft up.

Flamis zapped the air elemental with a dragonflames and the elemental responded with a rather vicious windstorm, knocking most of us over. The earth elemental was thinking it needed to help protect the boss's pet, but not having any specific orders, it was a bit confused.

Adam charged out of the side entrance, pushing Flamis and Red Brian with him. He then went for the air elemental and managed to knock it out of existence. Just then, an invisible air mage shot a lightning bolt down the corridor, where I still was, and floated away to the side. All I could do after that was to drink a 20pt Healing potion and crawl out of the wind.

Meanwhile the roc had entered the cavern. Liessa managed to get a mind control on it. Several Dragonflames and Mental Attacks later, the roc slumped to the ground. Since the roc was no more the earth elemental was even more confused.

We decided to take off with the head of the roc, as proof, before the two mages turned up and headed straight back to the fort. There we told them about the two mages.

.5.

The fort's inhabitants were more than a little impressed with the fact we had done over the roc. After a celebration we fireflighted back to Centrade to collect the bounty and arrived there mid afternoon. We were met by some guards and conducted to the Intelligence building. There was a slight problem getting to see the boss but, after Liessa threatened the person behind the front desk with having to hear Flamis's lisp for a while, we were admitted.

Once we showed him the head of the roc, and had it authenticated, we were paid - in gold bars. The next thing that Saydar wanted was someone to preserve the head and stuff it. The officer said that he'd find out, but it could take a while.

We left the head there for safekeeping and went to wait at the Horse and Cat. The innkeeper was rather impressed with the pinion feather we brought in and immediately cleared the top shelf of bottles and offered them to us. He then, with Flamis's help, affixed the feather to the wall. He then announced he was changing the name of the inn to the 'Tar and Feather'. It wasn't long before the new sign was up.

Saydar started working his way through the bottles from the top shelf. Meanwhile Red Brian and I sampled the dwarven spirits while Flamis tried the elven ones. Some bottles found their way into their packs. Saydar was also collecting samples of all sorts to add to the collection at his pub. Meanwhile Liessa started composing the story of the slaying of the roc.

A short while later a messenger arrived and told Liessa that the curator of the local natural history museum was keen to do the job. It would take three days. Liessa gave the go-ahead.

While the artist was doing the new sign, Saydar asked for a roc to be drawn on the sleeve of his armour. This was done. Later on in the day we noticed that a lot of men also had rocs on their sleeves.

Rooms were arranged for the night and after a delicious meal we decided to use them.

12 Thaw

After a couple of days hanging around the tavern, and impressing the locals, the message arrived that the head was ready. So a big party was organised that night to show it off.

The place was completely packed and the innkeeper was doing a roaring trade. I was a bit concerned that fights could break out but everyone was very jovial. There was one minor skirmish, but it was quickly quashed. Liessa was kept busy singing the ballad of our exploits.

13 Thaw

Sometime that morning the lieutenant arrived and informed us that they had lost contact with the eastern fort. So Saydar took a look with his crystal of vision. At first we couldn't see it at its known location but, as we looked closer it became apparent that the entire fort had been completely removed at ground level. There were no sign of debris, fire, or bodies. The lieutenant told us that they were sending out a large investigating force. I suspected that it had something to do with those two mages, which we discovered that their Intelligence people already knew about, so I suggested that they divinate the entire area.

Meanwhile we went south towards Erint City. Partway there we spotted four people on shadow wings flying to intercept us. We figured they were border guards so we landed. After receiving border passes we took off again.

By mid afternoon we spotted a city at the edge of a lake. We could see that landing areas were nearby so that was where we landed. A group of guards were there and, after paying a landing fee, we told them we were seeking information on Kontalie. They recommended we go to the Sages Guild.

On the way in to the city, we passed a cemetery so Saydar and I went to check it out. The nearby church was decorated with symbols of an agricultural deity and I went there to find out where Yentl Dired's grave was located. The inscription on the headstone was 'Beloved father of Karis. Died accidentally at 89'. No clues there.

Later on we found the Sages Guild building. Outside the main door was a couple of guards with

poleaxes that definitely weren't there for show. They wouldn't let us in until Saydar slipped them some coins. Once inside we found the indexer. After explaining our problem he told us that the best person to help us was a Mr McTonth but he wouldn't be available till tomorrow. After arranging a message to be left we headed to the town hall in order to find living descendants of Dirent. Nearby was the local branch of the Interbarony Bank so, while the others checked out a few things there Flamis and I tried to trace the descendants. Unfortunately we drew a blank so, after we reported back, Liessa went to try. She had better luck returning with the address of a great granddaughter. Meanwhile I spoke to the branch manager. He had never heard of a Yentl Dirent.

We headed off to the address that Liessa had obtained. It was getting late by the time we got nearby so we found rooms at a nearby inn.

14 Thaw

That morning we managed to see the descendant. She told us that Dirent had worked as an adjutant to Army Services and that he had died by falling down the stairs. As far as she knew it was an accident.

.6.

After thanking her, we headed back to the sages' library and arrived just as it was opening for the day. Saydar banged on the door, and we were let in and shown to a waiting room. When our guide told us to take a seat, Saydar tried to shove one in his sack. Somehow I don't think that was what he meant.

After a short wait we were conducted into the sage's office. He told us that he didn't know where Kontalie was now but he used to hang around this region a lot. He had a standard contract with the army for general fire support but left two months short of the expiry date. His home seemed to be abandoned and the humans who were living there with him (who are now deceased) had no idea why. Apparently he sent them on an errand and when they got back he was gone. It looked like he had packed up and fled. Unlike most dragons he was friendly towards the humans, even allowing some heros to ride into battle on him. Kontalie had a mother and a sister. His mother was assassinated by dwarves and bits of her were still being worn around the dwarven stronghold. His sister, known as Contessa, lived near the top of the vale and during one visit had tagged along with Kontalie on a job, but wasn't interested in being employed. Kontalie had no major enemies and had been paid in advance for the latest contract. Which led to the biggest mystery surrounding him: just what does he do with all that money? Had he struck up business relationships with other immortals, such as elves? Usually he was paid mostly in gold and gems as well as gaining other items in salvage.

We then showed him some of the astrology readings. One of them could have been referring to his sister, and that she could know where he was. Another indicated that the planer mage that we were looking for could be somewhere in the Fingers. Finally the sage went to see if they had any records on a plane called Drommick but, after a while, returned with the news that they had no information.

We left Erint and headed east, parallel to the mountain range, intending to go around it before going north to the Fingers. As we flew along we could see more fortified buildings. As Red Brian put it

'they're more interested in de-wall than de-fence'. It took us several fire-flight hops to get there and at each hop, I attempted to put a Trollskin spell in one of the runes on Red Brian's armour. It took four gos but finally the spell 'took'.

That evening we arrived at a town near the border between South Fingers and North Fingers. A small army was camped outside. Once we landed we were approached by some big guys in furs and rather chunky armour who wanted to know what we wanted. Once we assured him we weren't Northern spies we went in the town called Fingerscop. From what I could ascertain the country had been split in half and they were fighting each other. Probably for similar insane reasons as what triggered the Western Kingdoms conflict.

The inn we reached was called the Horses Arse and was run by another beefy looking fellow. We managed to get four rooms for 25sp as well as dinner which turned out to be gruel and mashed veges. The beer wasn't very good either. That's the trouble with war. It plays havoc with farming and food supplies. Besides the landlord's attitude and the state of the place would not want me to stay here again. I was considering an early night, but Flamis invited Red Brian up to our room and spent a while discussing and trying out cooking techniques. At least they served up something edible.

15 Thaw

We flew off. A short while later we could see the signs that a big battle had been fought below us. The area was extremely messy. Finally we reached Vinescop. It was raining rather heavily so I put up two Walls of Stone to provide some shelter. We had landed a bit short but it wasn't worth flying again so we waited a bit before hitching a lift on a passing turnip cart. After arriving I gave him a couple of coins for his trouble. He told us that the war between the North and the South was going well. Apparently the North had a big victory recently.

It was still raining rather heavily and we were completely soaked by the time we reached the town. The guard there suggested that we see the local elves about the planar mage we were looking for. Another person that might know was Brian the Firemage, although he was reputed to have a rather short temper and fry people on the spot. He then recommended the Boar and Cup Inn. Flamis looked very interested in that name, and explained to us as we walked there that it fitted the astrology reading exactly.

This place was a lot better than the last one, being warm and dry. The entranceway was lined with oilskins hanging on pegs. I later found out we had arrived during the middle of the rainy season. The first thing we did was to hire some rooms where we could change and dry off before proceeding down to the bar for food and drinks.

Saydar started asking the barkeeper, rather loudly, if he knew of any planer mages about, especially one with red in his symbol. At the same time Liessa reached out with her mind, just as the place went very quiet. Liessa picked up the thought 'They're looking for the elf' before the place was vacated rather quickly. All that was left was us, the barkeep, and an elf in dark robes, sitting silently at a table in the far corner.

Saydar strode up to the elf. At the same time the barkeep reached for something underneath the bar.

I noticed that the elf was also keeping his hands under the table, probably ready to trigger something. Liessa and I had the same idea and we commenced to ply the elf with his favorite drink. Soon we had his co-operation.

He had dealt with Kontalie about eighty odd years ago and had taken him to Drommick twice. It looked like Kontalie was checking the place over. On the second trip he had transported a Namer as well. Last time he had seen Drommick it was a huge wideopen plain of fertile farmlands. Finally Saydar negotiated transport over there with a month bounce-back for 1000sp to commence tomorrow morning.

Flamis and I went off to do a bit of shopping as well as leaving a message at the local branch of the Interbarony Bank. The first thing we brought was an oilskin and a couple of large hats to keep us dry (Flamis's fancy armour already did a good enough job of keeping rain out). I ensured they were sealskin as I figured Aqualina would be livid if she caught us wearing dolphinskin. That cost us 12sp.

16 Thaw

That morning the planer mage transported us to Drommick. When we arrived we noticed that the place was very desolate. I checked the aura of nearest piece of vegetation and ascertained that we were where we wanted to be. However, the soil didn't seem very fertile, instead it felt too dry. Some small ruins were in the direction where the elf said a farmhouse had been so we headed off down there to investigate.

Upon arrival I scanned the area for magic but didn't find a thing. Meanwhile Saydar had discovered something had died here and found a leg bone. I determined it had been dead for eighty years and was human. Marks on it indicated it had been gnawed at by something like a small child.

Saydar questioned the spirit and discovered that it had been killed by a large grey creature, some kind of goblinoid. There were more than a hundred of them ravishing the land and they appeared to be the minions of a red dragon. The dragon had come from the north and so had the creatures, killing all the farmers and destroying the buildings. The soil had been infected with a strange substance. Their ruler lived to the north.

While I took a soil sample, Adam summoned an Earth Elemental which told us that most of the devastation was to the north and the humanoid were to the east. The elemental believed they were humans. This plane was finite and flat, about 10,000 miles on a side and we were almost exactly in the centre. Dotted along near the edges of the plane were dragons, mostly isolated from each other. The nearest one was to the southeast. And we had no idea which one was Kontalie.

.7.

Giants also inhabit this plane. A group of three are to the northwest. The elemental stated there were 50 odd in total, none closer than 1000 miles. The next closest was about 11,000 miles. The earth elemental had earlier said that the plane was 10 miles thick so I asked about what was on the other side. More people and more dragons.

Adam dismissed the elemental while Flamis began a flamesight ritual. She saw grey creatures with batwings attacking. From her description it seemed to be a gargoyle.

From what we were told, the devastated area was roughly circular, about 220 miles in radius centered roughly to the north. So it was decided to check out the central region to see if there was anything unusual there. As we took off we could see grasslands about 10 miles to the south.

When we reached the area we saw a ruined village with a keep nearby. So we landed in the village square. Nearby was a dry well. Liessa couldn't detect any minds in the area. So we headed for the keep. The gates were wide open and, after a short while, we came to the conclusion that the inhabitants had packed everything up and left. The entire keep was bare, even down to the wine cellar. Saydar found a couple of skeletons on top of the keep.

While Saydar and Red Brian went on a recon flight, Flamis did another fire reading and saw a battle, humans try to fight off the gargoyles. When the other two arrived back they reported that they saw a discoloured area to the north-northwest. By now it was getting late so we found a defensible area and made a camp.

Saydar questioned the skeletons and discovered that twenty guards had been left to look after the keep while everyone else packed up and left. This was before the attack occurred and the attackers had been sent by a red dragon. The dragon was somewhere to the north. The lord had left on a visit and was intending to return. There is something important to the NNW. It was a forest inhabited by fey folk, and was important because of a geological feature.

Flamis had a look at the area with her crystal and it seemed to be the remains of a dead forest - possibly petrified. On my urging she sent the point of view straight up as far as it would so. We could just about see the whole plane. There were no signs of oceans.

We settled down for the night. During the first watch we were attacked by a horde of winged goblins which poured through the balcony and the side window. We could also hear them scratching at the door. Red Brian was trying to ward them off with his axe and made some good hits. Meanwhile, Saydar blocked off the balcony with a bone construction.

More burst through the window. I was attacked by one and scored a good hit on it. Just then another one leapt on the one that was attacking. Turned out Liessa had mind-controlled it. Flamis was busy blasting them with Dragonflames. Adam was getting bowled over. I decided to change my opponents, hit one, then saw it die from necrosis, much to my annoyance. By now, a gargoyle had got in close with Liessa and it was looking rather bad, until Flamis blasted it with dragonflames.

Finally we managed to fight them off. What was left fled to the north. I DAed one of the attackers and confirmed that they were gargoyles. I couldn't find any magical influence on them. So we healed each other up and settled back down for the night. No other attacks occurred.

17 Thaw

We managed to determine that the centre of the disturbance was a bunch of hills so we went to have

a look. They were about 70-80 miles WNW of the keep. The cloud layer was low, about a 50ft ceiling which made flying very hazardous, but we went anyway.

Twenty minutes later we saw the hills. The tops were covered in cloud. There were three hills arranged in a triangular formation with something in the middle. The mind-controlled gargoyle was thinking of a large gargoyle like thing in the middle so, before we advanced, Saydar created a Spectral Warrior.

.8.

Once ready, we climbed up the slope. Just in case a dragon was waiting for us, Flamis cast PMFs and heat-proofing spells on us. As she did so, she noticed that the mana level was a bit stronger than normal. It seemed logical that we were heading for a high mana zone.

Finally we reached the saddle. The mist had closed in and visibility was rather limited. Looking over the edge of the saddle revealed only more mist in the valley below. This place didn't look like a volcanic crater, more like an impact crater. As we looked around, Liessa dropped a Mindspeech on us all. Soon we saw a path going up the nearest hill and running along the top of the ridge. So we followed it up the hill. At the top we saw some large obelisks 5' wide and 10' high. There were eight of them arranged in a ring and a ninth lying on it's side in the middle. I checked the middle one's aura and discovered it was a planer gate, the destination being Feret. All the outside stones also had planer magic.

After disposing of Liessa's pet gargoyle we kept walking around and headed up the next hill. This had an identical ring of stone on it with the destination being Garrat. The third was Ilit. Paths led to the center from the top of the three hills and the midpoint of each saddle.

As we debated what to do, another gargoyle flew past from the centre. It seemed to be scouting for whatever was out here - probably us. I was about to throw a boomerang at it but Liessa launched a phantasm at it, knocking it out of the sky. Then Adam and I put Unseens on everyone and we waited for their next move.

After a few hours Liessa detected two other gargoyles in the area (turned out to be three). They picked up the body of the fallen one and flew off back towards the centre. From their thoughts, they were taking it back to a 'large gargoyle', 10ft tall and black, located in the middle of another ring of standing stones, although this one had three standing stones in the centre.

Liessa did a limited precog to see what would happen if we went down to encounter it and her vision showed we were talking to it. So that's what we did. The slope down was rather steep at first but soon levelled out. There weren't any loose rocks about and we soon came to the conclusion that this place wasn't natural. There wasn't any magical residual about either.

Shortly Liessa detected more minds ahead in the mist. They were arranged in a fifty foot diameter circle and there were twenty four of them evenly spaced. As we approached the circle dissolved and formed into an arc. Then a voice spoke up saying "Come and talk. I don't get many visitors".

The humans in the party dropped off their UnSeens and we went closer as the minds, revealed to be more gargoyles, formed into lines. Soon we could see the obelisk, which was exactly as Liessa had described it as well as the creature inside. According to its aura, it came from the 7th Plane of Hell and was a Namer. The stones in the circle had the same auras as the three portals which led us to believe that these are the keys to activate them.

He told us that his name was Malloc and wanted to know what we were up to so we explained we were searching for the dragon Kontalie because he owed the bank a lot of money. Malloc was rather surprised that we'd have the nerve to tell a dragon that he owes money but he told us that he hadn't seen him in 50 odd years. He knows where he is but can't tell us as he's been bound not to. However he can tell us as he'll be released in three months.

It soon became apparent that Malloc's bonding was such that he would have to use deadly force to prevent us from getting Kontalie's location as well as being unable to communicate it. The pillars he was in had rune magic on them and this place was constructed here because it was at the intersection of three ley lines so it was rather easy to set up planer gates here. This whole area was a planer place of power. The devastation was the result of the gargoyles that lived in this area before he arrived. He was sure he couldn't help us release him from his contract, in fact he'd have to resist all efforts, even though some points of the binding were less than honourable. He would be forced to 'object' if we tried to remove a portal key. The portals could also be activated by a Greater Summoner or a Planer Mage.

As far as he knew, Kontalie appeared to be lying low. Also the earlier bunch of mercenaries had been here and they had tried to force the issue by trying to remove a key. None of them survived. They died 20ft outside the circle closest to the Feret keystone.

He would allow Saydar to question the spirits of the mercenaries but, only if Saydar appeared to be non-threatening, and that Malloc vetted the questions. So Saydar removed his weapons and shuffled to the spot. By not referring to Kontalie directly he was able to ascertain that they were trying for the Feret keystone, and were convinced that what they were looking for was on that plane.

So we took our leave and used the planer recall device to return to Andara and reappeared just outside Tanth. So we trooped into town and reported to Marcus at the bank what we had been up to.

Marcus told us that if the debt couldn't be recovered then there was a good chance that he wouldn't be promoted and whoever got the job would likely write off the debt. So he agreed to check up on the likely candidates to see if any of them were connected in any way with Kontalie. He would arrange for us to use a runeportal to get to Eastern Erint since we needed to get back to Vinescop to see a certain planer mage.

.9.

18 Thaw

So we headed to the bank's administration building and used their rune-portal network to get to Persephonis, a town in East Erint. After wandering out of town we started fireflighting towards

Vinescop. After a couple of hops we could see black clouds ahead. Much to Flamis's disgust it was raining at our next stop. Thank goodness for the oilskins I bought, especially since it was raining heavily at the end of that hop. Then I had to put up a Wall of Stone so Flamis could use it to shelter before casting for the last hop.

Finally we reached Vinescop and sheltered under a guardpost until the coronas wore off. Then we headed into town and reached the Boar and Cup where we found Rhy'al, the planer mage. He was rather surprised to see us back so soon.

After explaining what we had found we asked him to come back with us to check out the Feret gate and see if it could be activated. He finally agreed to do it for 1000sp and another 1000sp if it got dangerous. Finally we arranged to be transported the next day.

We arranged for rooms and, while the others hounded the bar, Flamis did a Converse with other Selves ritual. Unfortunately most of the questions got the 'You seek him here, you seek him there...' answer we had before. The only information we could get was that area around the Feret end of the portal was pleasant farmlands. Because she got 'diddly squat' as Flamis put it, even in response to quite general questions, she concluded Kontalie had to be there.

19 Thaw

After arriving back in Drommick, we powered up with Armours of Earth and Strengths of Stones. Flamis also protected me and her from magical fire. Then we flew towards the group of hills.

Two hops later we could see our objective. There was no clouds so we had a good view. But something had changed. The three hills were there alright but there was a fourth hill in the middle where the hollow should be. Also there were no standing stone rings on the three hills. Had the gates gone or was there an illusion cloaking the area?

We did see the spot where we landed so we landed there again then, without waiting for the coronas to come off, headed on up. As we reached the ridge, all we could see was mist in the centre. There was still no sign of the stone ring but it suddenly appeared when we got within 150ft of the summit. After confirming that this was the right gate, by checking the aura, Rhy'el started his divination while we kept watch.

Half an hour later Liessa picked up a spread of gargoyles coming towards us from the centre. We couldn't see them through the mist so we prepared our bows. Adam and I tossed Trollskins on everyone. Flamis and Saydar argued over whether or not a Quickness should be triggered and who should trigger it. He didn't think that it was dangerous enough. In the end, Flamis gave up and triggered one of hers.

Finally we could see them - all twenty four of them that were in the hollow. Looks like the demon was trying to attack us with all he had. While I put up a row of Hands of Earth, the others let fly with spells and arrows. At least six of them had dropped out of the sky by the time they got into melee range.

It was all on at that point as we fought to block the gargoyles from attacking the planer mage. I was trying to make sure that they didn't get to Liessa and Flamis as they fired off Mental Attacks and Dragonflames respectively. Two of them charged in. The first one I managed to parry its weapon and disarm it with my broadsword, but that allowed the second to get in a very lucky shot which put me out of it for a bit.

The rest of them were doing rather well against the gargoyles and several had already fallen when a large windy humanoid appeared on the scene, armed with a rather vicious looking axe. We figured it was some sort of air spirit, perhaps a djinn. Adam went to face it and got severely knocked around.

By this time, Liessa had been knocked over by the gargoyles. Fortunately Saydar was able to dispose of them with necrosis. He also used the same technique to get rid of the one that I was currently wrestling with, just as I was about to stab it with my dagger. But Flamis was down, dealt a mighty blow by the djinn's axe after she had toasted it with dragonflames.

There was still one gargoyle left attacking Red Brian so I went to distract it so he could have a crack at the elemental or djinn or whatever it was. Meanwhile Rhy'el was busy cowering behind one of the stones, and trying to come up with the right Counterspell to banish this summoned creature. Air didn't work so he was trying Greater Summoner. Once the gargoyle was dispatched, I read the creature's aura and discovered it had been summoned by a Greater Summoner.

Liessa started tossing Healing spells at the others in order to get them back to consciousness. It was just as well we had those Trollskins up otherwise I doubt that many of us would have survived. I wanted Flamis up so she could continue toasting the creature. Meanwhile I started tossing Earth Hammers at it. Only two out of four worked but they did seem to have an effect. Unfortunately they also had the effect of making it mad, and I ended up being knocked out again with two mighty blows. As a consequence I missed the end of the fight. Adam was up again and after attracting the djinn's attention, did his best to keep it occupied, as Flamis cast at it. A great gout of flame struck the airy giant, and it evaporated into mist. "Yes," she cried, striking the air with her fist, and then winced in pain as her right arm reminded her of her injury.

With that it was all over. While Adam mopped up the surviving gargoyles we healed ourselves up. I gave Liessa one of my 20pt potions to replace the ones she had used then used a ten pointer on myself. Finally we waited while Rhy'el resumed his divination, and Liessa started work on Flamis's arm.

.10.

The Great Axe that the djinn had been wielding was also examined. Flamis and Red Brian came to the conclusion between them that it had been constructed by a Rank 9 Weaponsmith. The handle was covered with 'windy' symbols. There was also some enhancement magic in it.

There were no further interruptions as Rhy'el finished the ritual. Finally he announced that he was ready to send us through to Feret so we powered up with Prot Magical Fires, Walking Unseens and Trollskins, just in case we were immediately attacked at the other end.

Instead we found ourselves standing in a circle of stones and surrounded by a huge trench. The bit we were standing on was only 200 yards in diameter. The ground was soaked in planar magics, brightly lit, and bare of all plant life.

Over the other side of the canyon, it was also bare near the edge but we could see greenery further away. One clump was probably a forest. A small building was on the edge of the canyon to the south and there was a staircase going down from it to the canyon floor. Puffs of smoke could be seen rising from the building at semi-regular intervals.

Liessa reached out with her mind and touched another one. It turned out there were two of them in the building and they were sending smoke signals to warn of our arrival. So we fireflighted over and Adam used a Wall of Stone to block the smokehole in the roof. Then he and Saydar break the door down. Inside were two low ranked soldiers, Jobe and Mik, who had been assigned to portal watching duty. Usually it was a rather boring post as nothing had come through for quite some time.

We were able to finally convince them that we weren't immediately hostile and we were able to find out that Kontalie lived in a cave a couple of miles outside a nearby village, Herif, located at the intersection of two rivers. It seemed Kontalie was the local lord but even he wasn't immune to the local laws which were enforced by the sheriff, John Little.

We flew south, following a path through the forest. Because we couldn't agree on where to go we finally landed halfway between the town and the cave. There seemed to be no signs of an alarm from the town so we finally decided to head up to the cave by the method of someone started walking and the rest following.

As we approached we were intercepted by a man wearing highly polished armour who wanted to know why we were here. Then he told us that we needed to make an appointment to see Kontalie. However, once we had produced the writ, he agreed to allow us in but only if we divested ourselves of all our weapons and armour. Some of the party were very reluctant but Liessa volunteered to go in alone. The rest of us would stay in contact with Mind Speech.

So that's what happened. Liessa went in and presented the writ to Kontalie. It soon became apparent that Kontalie was tapping into our minds as well as he was answering questions that we hadn't yet relayed to Liessa. Basically he was prepared to pay back the remaining 50,000 and maybe a bit more but considered the interest charges to be pure extortion. I found it difficult not to agree with the dragon. We didn't have the authority to negotiate in the banks behalf but it seemed reasonable to go back and return with someone who can. Even if the bank only gets some of the money at least that's better than nothing. Kontalie claimed he never signed anything. Could this mean that the bank has been less than honest in its acquisition of this 'interest'?

Liessa offered herself as a hostage but Kontalie refused. So, once she came out, we triggered the recall item. Four minutes later we were back outside Tanth - just in time for lunch.

Upon arriving at the bank we saw Marcus and convinced him to go back with us to negotiate, hoping he'd be able to write off the rest of the debt if he became director. I asked him if Kontalie had signed

an agreement and he said that he had so I suggested that he bring copies of the relevant documents.

20 Thaw.

Marcus, and a bodyguard, showed up and we took the rune portal network to East Erint before flying to Vinescop. Again it was wet. For some obscure reason Saydar told the gate guard that the army was only a couple of days ride away.

It was lunch time by now, so after finding Rhy'el, and having lunch, he blinked us through to Feret. Once there we powered up with Fire Protections (normal and magical), Mind Speech and Fireflights and shot off to Kontalie's cave. When we got there we were told he had gone north for a week. The bodyguard was sent home while the rest of us settled down in the town to wait.

28 Thaw.

Eight days had passed and there had been no message that he had returned. Clearly he had done another runner. This dragon has no honour! We headed up to the cave but there was no sign of him. Marcus had already given up and left.

Back in town, Flamis and Saydar settled down to do some rituals. The answers they got seemed to indicate that he was still on this plane but we could ascertain nothing else. A Crystal of Vision was used to probe inside the cave and the place was completely bare.

We went back up to the cave and question the man still on guard who was still convinced that Kontalie was due to return at any day now. The dragon had flown off with at least three humans, one of which was the Captain of the Guard, Captain Berith. One of the others was John Heron. The guard showed us around the cave and told us to be careful where we stepped. The area inside, and especially around Kontalie's pedestal was warded with Molecular Disruptions.

Now that we had other names, Flamis repeated her ritual. Fortunately the humans weren't covered by whatever means Kontalie was using to throw off divinations and she managed to determine that they were moving away from us in a southwesterly direction at full speed. Obviously Kontalie was lying when he said he was able to pay off the principle but Saydar said 'Even a broke dragon is pretty damn rich'.

It was decided to use an Earth Elemental to see if Kontalie had left any buried treasure, especially under his pedestal. A few discharged wards and elementals later one managed to reach it but found nothing that was treasure but did think the rock itself was strange. So I asked Adam to arrange for a sample. When I got it, I discovered that the rock wasn't magical in itself but it had been subjected to a process which left the top of the pedestal very smooth and polished, something similar to to what Flamis's gloves do. Shaping elements I concluded.

Finally we gave up searching as it became apparent there was nothing to find. If there was any treasure, Kontalie must still have it or it was somewhere else. Many of the party just wanted to search for treasure while a few of us were considering chasing after Kontalie and at least try to complete the mission. Personally I was thinking we were reaching the point of diminishing returns but we still need to do the honourable thing - whatever that may be.

More rituals were cast and the following answers obtained

Where is da loot (definitely one of Saydar's)
Most mine riches are held within
Although some are held with my kin
A little was given to my men
In order to help them defend

Where is nearest available treasure
Little to be gained without sweat
Little to be gained without threat

What is the nearest city to where Kontalie's companions are
Shadows fall, Herons call, Terrors fear,
Mothers ear, mountains breath, criminals death

What is the nearest inhabited place to where Kontalie's companions are
Where the great river, the great trench
Where the water goes into 15 places

Without a map of the plane it was impossible to determine what the last two readings meant. The second one was very vague and one possibility relating to the first was that he had swallowed his treasure or somehow secreted it inside himself. However quite a few of the others were convinced it was secreted within his cave so we went up there for another try. Adam summoned another elemental and told it to search the cave for more of the 'funny rock', rock that had been magically shaped such as the specimen I had previously obtained.

After a while it reported a hollow in the back of the cave, 15ft high in the back wall. It turned out to be at the point where the side ledge met the back wall. Saydar went up onto the ledge, inadvertently triggering the mind wards up there. Fortunately he resisted. Flamis followed him up and used her gloves to dig a hole. We soon determined that she was carving her way through a secret door and, just as the hole was big enough to crawl through, the door slab fell in. On the other side was a 15ft long corridor with a lever on the far wall. I was the first one through the door, while the others were arguing over who was going to be first, and got promptly zapped by the sleep ward.

Adam used a Tunnelling spell to punch a hole from the main cavern to somewhere past the tunnel wall. What we saw was a space with a runestick in it. Saydar went in for a closer look and a ward went off, dumping a load of sleep dust on him.

It was discovered a short while later that there was an identical tunnel on the other side and they both met in the T shaped room with the runestick. Liessa did a Limited Precog to see what would happen if she touched the runestick and got a vision of her standing inside what appeared to be a town hall.

With two party members asleep it was decided to retreat back to town until we woke up. As they left they noticed there was no sign of the guard. On the way they had a look inside the town hall and it looked like the same place that Liessa saw in the precog. The entire floor had a Mind College ward on it.

The party decided to blink back to Tanth with the two sleeping members. Upon arrival they headed for the inn we first stayed at and rested for the rest of the day. Someone had gone to report progress to Marcus and arrange for a Namer to dissipate the Sleep.

29 Thaw

It was decided to go back and have another go. Maybe the local military commander might know where Kontalie had gone. So we rune portalled back to East Erint then fireflighted north. On the way we spotted some tornados that seemed to be following us but we rapidly outflew them. Finally we reached the inn in Vinescop and were transported back to Feret.

Once there we noticed that there appeared to be no one at the portal guardpost. Fireflights were put on and we first hopped over to Kontalie's cave. No sign of Kontalie. No sign of the guard either. Next fireflight hop took us to the town square where we stood, still blazing away in our fireflight coronas. The square rapidly cleared of civilians. A few seconds later the sheriff nervously poked his head out of a nearby building and asked us what we wanted in town. In response to our answer he gave us directions to the militia fort just outside of town.

Soon, still burning, we were standing outside the fort gates. The guards on the wall watching us were looking rather nervous. We asked them if we could see the base commander. First we were asked if we had an appointment but, after some argument, one of the guards was convinced to pass on a message. As he did Liessa detected that the entire base was going on full alert for an imminent attack. They were even preparing a large catapult.

Finally we got the reply back that the base commander was too busy to see us so we decided to head back to the town. Fortunately our flames had dropped off by then. When we got there I checked out the ward on the town hall and discovered it was TK Rage. However we noticed citizens wandering in and out without any harmful effects so it must have some rather complex triggering conditions.

Our next stop was the courthouse and a visit to the judge. Again we had to get past a clerk who was insisting we need an appointment but we managed to get past. We got the impression that the judge was in his chambers, having a nap. The idea was to try and get some legal weight in order (as someone put it) 'put the heavy' on both Kontalie and the base commander to force them to talk to us. However the endeavor proved to be entirely fruitless.

As we were heading back, there was a sudden 'whoosh' overhead and a large rock thudded behind us somewhere in the town. We raced back to see what assistance we could be. The rock had landed in a group of houses. Fortunately nothing had caught on fire but some people had to be dug out of the rubble. The rock itself was shaped to fit in a catapult cupola and had the number '1' painted on it. Looks like the fort had a slight 'accident'.

The sheriff definitely wanted a word with the base commander after this so we all trooped back to the fort. On the way we found out that the sheriff was a Namer and he knew about the ward in the townhall.

When we got there the fort was still on alert although Liessa detected activity that the catapult was being hurriedly dismantled. The base commander still refused to see us but he would see the sheriff. Finally we were able to win the concession that we would be allowed in if we ditched all our weapons, armour, and enchantments. Both Red Brian and I offered to do this.

The meeting we had wasn't fruitful. The base commander had been concerned that our intentions were hostile towards Kontalie and the town. I tried to reassure him on that point. (Note: Let the local authorities know what is going on from the beginning - even if it's just a matter of courtesy). Reparation was going to be made for the 'accident' but he had no idea where Kontalie would have gone. It definitely looked like we were out of leads and chasing after him would not guarantee success.

When we rejoined the rest of the party it was finally agreed we had reached the point of diminishing returns. So we triggered the recall device and ended up in Tanth. After delivering our report and conclusions to Marcus, we were paid, picked up our roc's head then were banished back home.

So that was that. Not a very satisfactory ending but at least we didn't make a loss out of it. I'm not sure what happened to the giant axe, probably ended up in the Vaults. Now all I have to do is dig up enough money to pay Red Brian for that breastplate.

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