

# The Star Cairns

Session 2 6-4-99 Ooops!

Next Session 13-4-99

With luck and fair weather on their side while searching through the long hills of the Northern Abor Alz the party discover a natural basin in which is centred some form of turf-covered cairn. Since they notice four figures, presumably guards standing on the cairn they take cover and send Astra on ahead to scout. Utilising her cloak of Elvenkind and her ability to Move Silently Astra is able to approach the cairn undetected. On the way she notices a large area of grass has been trampled down and there are definite signs of horses having grazed here. She scouts around for about ten minutes until she treads on a stick. One of the guards investigates but since there's nothing there he returns to his post. Astra returns to the main group to report.

There are four men keeping an attentive watch. Two of them are typical Domain of Greyhawk types and the other two are more typical of desert nomads. They are armed and armoured with the same general type of kit, although there is no sign of any uniform or insignia, they have studded leather and short swords. The darker skinned pair carry bows. The party discuss the situation and seem generally convinced that this is another Adventuring party. Andrea wants to approach them and talk. Astra, remembering a bit of Baklunish folklore, suggests that it may be "Ali Baba's cave" and maybe they can plunder the place while "the main group" are away! After a few more minutes of speculation they decide that Astra will cloak and move to a position close to the cairn. After giving her time to do that Andrea, Hemegretham and Raven will walk down the hill followed by Ash.

## **"There'll be a welcome in the cairn-side"**

This they then do. Striding confidently down the hill they are instantly spotted by the guards and one of them shouts "Begone strangers!" while drawing his sword. "Why?" is Andrea's reply, causing the bowmen to nock arrows and open fire as one of the guards shouts into the entrance "Intruders! Get everyone up here!" Two arrows fly toward the party, one hitting Andrea for light damage, which doesn't improve her mood. One of the two bowmen, in his excitement, manages to shoot himself in the foot and as Astra Charms the nearest guard two more men, armed with spears, appear from the cairn and take up defensive positions at the ground level. Hemegretham shouts a warning before unslinging his longbow and firing a warning arrow at the cairn. The warning arrow embeds itself into one of the bowmen killing him instantly - Oops! Led by Andrea the party unsheathe weapons and advance menacingly reasoning that if they're that easy to kill it doesn't matter how many of them there are.

Astra's "Charmee", unable to see the object of his attention becomes completely confused and drops his weapon (DM note 1). Meanwhile another five armed men burst out and join the spearmen at the foot of the cairn. Astra casts Unseen Servant and manages to tip up the Bowman's quiver sending arrows all over the place as an even larger group exit the cairn, including a man in robes who is protected by two guards with large wooden shields. Consumed by bloodlust the party make contact with the large group of armed men and start doing what they do best.

Astra moves closer to the guards and commands the Unseen Servant to unfasten some belt buckles but these guys are belt and braces types and they don't even notice. The party notice a wave of magical energy pass over them to no effect. Astra and Raven guess a Sleep spell, not much good against Elves and Hemegretham and Ash make their saves. Hemegretham swings his sword neatly decapitating the nearest enemy while Andrea runs another through finishing him with no problem before heroically throwing her sword away as Raven misses.

The overwhelming forces against them (about 26 by now) get their attack and inflict 3 hp on Hemegretham and 5 hp on Raven as a fan of brilliant multi-coloured light washes over them. Andrea, Hemegretham and Raven fall unconscious to the ground. Astra immediately casts Alter Self causing her to resemble one of the guards in the opposing party. She approaches the robed guy and taps him on the shoulder with the concealed Bladestar suggesting that they should take them prisoner, presumably instead of murdering them in cold blood. Unfortunately for Astra she didn't invoke Bladestar's Charm ability while doing this so the reply of, "Good idea, get them below." was entirely unforced. Ash wisely surrenders and is blindfolded and taken below with the others who have been disarmed/armoured. Astra sticks with the spellcaster on the way down and doesn't manage to notice where the prisoners are taken. She sees however the efficient way in which the group scout the area, discover the horses and generally search around. A double guard is set as Astra follows the robed one through a star shaped opening and down a spiral staircase into the depths of the cairn.

She notices a large pentagonal room about 100ft across at its widest point. A continual light spell shines brightly from above the stair. Each of the walls has a doorway which show evidence of once holding a door but are now empty except for the southern exit which has a brightly coloured curtain obscuring it. The strangest sight is a large black rune with a glowing red aura floating in the air, with a smaller rune beneath it. There are small glowing dots beneath each of the runes. The ceiling is about 30 ft high and shows a red chevron pattern that has been partially obscured by soot, fire damage, claw marks etc. There is also a downward spiral staircase at the northernmost point of the room. Astra follows the Mage into the NE corridor which ends with another much smaller pentagonal room. There are exits to the N and NE both of which are guarded by 4 men in studded leather, armed with short swords. The ceiling is painted in what must have once been a stunning portrayal of light-skinned, blonde haired warriors charging forward, backed up by fire-throwing wizards and horrible flying monsters which is now somewhat faded. (DM note 2). The robed character walks into the NE exit and notices Astra following him. "Return to your post," he says and watches her leave before entering. Hovering around the doorway Astra is able to get mixed up in the group carrying the party's weapons and armour which are dumped into the room. With her heart in her mouth she makes a grab for Raven's magical short sword and manages to conceal it. Exiting back to the main landing she urgently seeks cover, aware that her spell will expire any moment now. She chooses to enter the NW corridor which seems to be one of the few non-magically lit areas. She just makes the shadows as the spell wears off.

### **Prisoners**

Meanwhile our sleepy friends regain consciousness. They are in a magically lit pentagonal room with a couple of other prisoners, Gerald and Sullivan Henway. They say they are from Greyhawk and their caravan was ambushed on the way to Hardby. They are from a wealthy merchant family and are being held for ransom. They have been treated reasonably and fed well-enough. Raven is relieved to see that he still has The Sentinel although all of their weapons and gear are missing. Perhaps The Sentinel has some means of appearing more ordinary than it actually is. Ash casts her CLW's on Andrea and Raven bringing them back to full health.

Rather unusually for a prison the door is unlocked! Hemegretham takes a look and sees a 20ft corridor leading to another pentagonal room where two guards sit playing cards and drinking ale. There are two swords propped against a wall. Sullivan warns the party that the corridor is magically alarmed and that anyone entering from either direction causes a loud ringing sound. Hemegretham steps into the corridor and indeed the alarm rings. He stands there looking cocky and the guards tell him to bugger off back into the room. He just stares at them. One of the guards suggests getting the boss to sort this out and one of them leaves the room. Hemegretham returns to the prison having cleverly removed one of the opposition for a while. Let's just hope the boss isn't too cross. With their usual subtle aplomb the party burst out of the room and jump the guard as Andrea grabs a sword from the wall. She notices a magical tingle in her hand as a feeling of great strength and power floods through her. Never has she felt so mighty before and with her new found power she attempts to run the guard through at point-blank range! The sparkling blade is easily turned by the leather jerkin the guard is wearing! Raven politely asks Andrea to put the blade back against the wall which she refuses to do. Oh dear, something about cursed weaponry springs to mind? Raven slugs the guard unconscious as his giggling was annoying him. Briefly taking stock, they are on a lower level of an underground complex with a large gang of bandits between them and the exit. Now what? And where is Astra?

### **Who are these guys?**

Some general observations on the Bandits. (Yes, it's them).

They seem a rather mixed bunch of desert nomads, mountain barbarians and Greyhawk types but rather unusually for the average Bandit group a lot of them are a bit flabby and out of condition. They are generally well equipped in a variety of styles although a some of them have armour that doesn't seem to fit properly.

<b>Reason for XP</b>	<b>Andrea</b>	<b>Astra</b>	<b>Alvin</b>	<b>Hemegretham</b>	<b>Zeppo</b>	<b>Raven</b>
Opponents	15			30		
Spells		40				
Proficiencies		30				
Ideas				20		
Problem Solving						
Role Play	20	20		30		
Treasure						
Finishing						
Fun Factor	50	50		50		
Penalties						
<b>Total (This session)</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>160</b>		<b>130</b>		
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>290</b>		<b>290</b>		<b>90</b>

### **DM's Notes:-**

1. Don't adopt this as a general tactic. The results will be different each time and generally not beneficial. It just fit this particular situation rather well.
2. Character general knowledge would fit this sort of thing quite well with legends, stories and histories of The Suloise empire.