

The Star Cairns

Session 32 19-9-00 The Fifth Cairn.

Next Session Tuesday 26-9-00 At Brian's place.

It is dawn in the Desert. Raven is not feeling very well after his encounter with "The other side" and decides to remain at camp. Zeppo wonders whether to stay and look after him but is swiftly dissuaded from this course of action by the others. Andrea impatiently suggests they leave, "But leave the Toads well alone!" delivered with a glare at Joe who this time agrees. As they prepare to depart they notice Astra already heading into the desert. They hurry and catch her up. About halfway to the stone disc Andrea sees a large cloud of dust on the horizon. Andrea warns Heme and Joe to cover their shining armour as she notices bright flashes in the cloud. They lay low for a while and see it head off toward the Southwest.

Arriving at the stone disc Andrea looks for tracks and finds nothing special so they step across into the Border Ethereal. Some discussion ensues concerning which plane might be the "evil" one and a consensus is reached that the Ethereal is the one to worry about. "So when it shimmers, we run" says Astra. They head down to Toad Hall with Andrea in the lead. Unfortunately she forgets to use the rope and slips on the slime bouncing to the bottom in a loud undignified manner. (No change there then). Zeppo slithers down holding onto the rope and uses his Healing to repair her minor injuries. Looking around they notice the usual remains of a Toad battlefield so they descend to the next level where Alvin casts Detect Evil, sensing the following:-

South – Transient, fading in/out Evil, Southwest – Memory of Evil, Northwest – Nothing, Northeast Memory of Evil, Southeast – Nothing. Alvin prefers the idea of a Memory of Evil so they decide to head Southwest.

A pentagonal room is revealed, containing a small couch with faded red satin pillows and a small marble topped table upon which sits an elaborate gold Candelabrum. There are six new, unlit red candles placed in it. There are exits to the West and Southwest. As Alvin begins to scan the room for Evil, Astra touches one of the candles. Instantly an appalling apparition rushes from the Southwest exit. A tall female figure clad in fine robes clutching madly at her flayed head, a bare screaming skull, shrouded in strange multi-coloured flames. Far off in the distance an awful screaming is heard as of a woman in dreadful agony. The sight of this thing is so terrible that even the nerves of hardy Adventurers might crack and indeed only Heme and Andrea manage to master their fear as the creature passes through the room. The others terrified beyond the ability to think flee in horror, Zeppo toward the West and the others rush before it to the Northeast. Swiftly, Andrea follows Zeppo who is trembling in the dead-end corridor. Heme races after the others finally catching them in Toad Hall where they are beginning to regain their senses. Of the apparition, there is no sign.

Andrea leads Zeppo up to Toad Hall as they try to calm their shattered nerves. Abruptly there is a cold shimmer as the cairn transcends space and time. Four of the smaller toads emerge from the Southeast exit and begin foraging, apparently not interested in the party. Andrea wants to leave since she is convinced that the Ethereal is where all the bad guys are however they decide to stay put, posting Joe up top as sentry who confirms their presence in that which he has come to know as the Ethereal plane. Time passes and eventually another shimmer heralds the transition to the Astral plane. Feeling somewhat better for a rest Alvin says it for them all as he cries "Lets kick some Evil butt!" They return to the Candle room, this time ignoring the Candelabrum. A brief search of the table and couch reveal nothing so they head into the Southwest corridor. They see a pentagonal room, empty except for a small chair and a great stone table. The table appears blackened as if by a great fire and the air above it wavers occasionally. Alvin casts Resist Fire on himself and advances cautiously. He sees an oval area on the table that appears to be full of swirling red mists and a vaguely rectangular area that is free of soot. Bringing his hand closer he is able to get within 1 ft of the mists before the heat becomes very uncomfortable. Astra has some theories about needing to turn back time as they proceed through the Candle room just in time to dissuade Joe from touching the candles.

They cross the landing and head to the Northeast, encountering a pentagonal room that is seemingly the lair of thousands of small ice-blue toads, that hop and crawl across everywhere except for a pair of low stone pillars of a type the party has encountered (and indeed broken) in previous Star Cairns. Alvin manages to lob a copper coin of top of the nearest column but notices nothing other than Joe insisting that there's no way he's going into a room full of Toads! The others, led by Alvin, skirt the wall taking care not to damage the Toads however they notice that whenever they step anywhere near them, the small creatures appear to fade and become insubstantial. Passing through into the next room they see a peculiar sight. Seated at a large stone desk is the insubstantial figure of a Suel man hunched over as if writing. A horde of the little blue Toads sit gazing at this apparition in rapt attention. There is no reaction by either the Toads or the man as the party enter. Noticing an exit to the South they check it out finding another of the dead-end corridors. Joe overcoming his fear of Toads joins them and experimentally places his hand inside the spectral figure, noticing nothing other than a chill feeling as he does so. There follows a brief cold shimmer but nothing seems to happen. Alvin takes a good look over the man's shoulder and decides that whatever he is writing is a form of script, not Runes. They carefully return to the central landing and decide to investigate the Northwest exit.

They see a pentagonal room arrayed with many broken down decrepit bunks. Rather more alarmingly they surprise a group of Servant Spirits that instead of attacking fade away into thin air with fearful looks upon their hideous faces. They notice a tatty curtain to the Northwest which Heme tears down revealing a stone seat with a hole in it, all the comforts of home. Alvin points out that there is still one exit that they haven't explored, the Southernmost one. Passing through the central landing they head South into a most extraordinary room. In the centre is a descending spiral staircase however the most eye-catching features are the three large "windows" positioned centrally in the Southwest, Southeast and North-eastern walls. (DM note). Examining these large porthole type windows they see:-

Window 1

A glassy plain that seems to stretch into infinity below a pearly grey sky.

Window 2

A dark range of black mountains obscured by a raging storm.

Window 3

In a landscape of tar pits and charcoal stands a winding road of bones.

Joe suggests poking a magical sword through one of the windows. A suggestion rapidly vetoed by Astra. "Anything BUT a magical thing" she says warily. Someone throws a stone through the Window 1, which disappears into what seems to be a liquid as a totally regular circle of ripples spreads outward. Fixing a mirror to a pole Astra gingerly pushes it through Window 1 revealing the odd sight of the party staring from a window suspended in mid-air! There is a shimmer as the cairn moves onward through its cycle. Suddenly Window 2 changes to an undersea view. They notice a large shape pass by in the distance and move on to re-examine Window 3. The Priests examine the bone road more carefully and all are horrified by the revelation that the road is not just built upon the bones of Adult Humans and Elves but also those of children. Andrea's jaw tightens as she hopes one day to meet the vile scum that created this abomination.

They proceed down the stairs, talking excitedly, arriving in a pentagonal landing much like the one above. There are exits to the Northwest, Southwest, South and Southeast. They examine the Southeast exit and discover a room containing a small iron table with a bone scroll case and a strange U-shaped piece of metal. With mounting excitement they recognise the metal as the same type used in the two other pieces they have found. Surely this must be the third part of the weapon! Alvin casts Find Traps and detects nothing. He and Astra remain in the landing area as the others follow Joe's exhortation to "grab it and get out of here!"

Suddenly there is a whirl of activity from behind Alvin and Astra as the vile Demon surges with unholy speed from the Southwest room. Alvin turns and sprints towards the others as Astra casts a Magic Missile spell at the spawn of the Abyss. It strikes in a shower of sparks wounding it but the beast is just too big and too strong and it continues bringing its hands together as a fan of flame leaps out, engulfing the diminutive shape of the defiant Elf. As the inferno surrounds her she falls like a broken mannequin, mortally wounded, to the floor. Zeppo and Alvin heedless of their own safety rush to attend her as Heme, Andrea and Joe charge the brute head on! With an obscene grin the thing gestures at them and the whole group feel the fell power of dark magic wash over them. Joe, Zeppo, Heme and Andrea are stunned into incomprehension by the Confusion spell. Alvin struggles against an urge to attack Astra finally overcoming it only at the expense of attacking Zeppo. The creature lunges forwards and strikes Hemegretham a mighty blow sorely wounding the big man. Joe manages to snap out of the spell effect and bravely rushes the Demon. It strikes him mightily and he realises that he can't take even one more blow and live. Despite this he still stands and fights. Andrea and Alvin manage to throw off the Confusion and as the small figures of Joe and Andrea trade blows with the hell spawn, Alvin rushes to save Astra, Healing and casting CLW in a desperate attempt to arrest her descent. Andrea takes a serious claw wound as the thing tries to grab her but she manages to spin away out of its reach. Zeppo snaps out of the spell as a hard-pressed Joe is forced to retreat from the first line of battle. As Zeppo desperately casts Prayer the monster slashes at the fallen Astra with its razor-sharp claws ripping her heart from her helpless body. Staggering back under the onslaught Alvin casts Magic Missile and again the beast is wounded as Andrea charges only to see it disappear into thin air. Silence...

Zeppo casts CLW twice on Joe who can barely stand with his awful wounds and Alvin CLW's Heme who is groggily coming out of the Confusion but Astra's mutilated body lies broken and twisted upon the scorched stone floor.

Alvin leaps into action and rushes in to claim the strange item and the scroll case. Joe hefts Astra's body onto his shoulders and with the others in a tight defensive circle they exit the cairn as rapidly as possible. On the surface the Cairn is in the Astral phase and Andrea again calls out to Aaron the Astral Deva. The others pick up the call but there is no sign of the Angelic entity as with a cold shimmer the Cairn moves into the Border Ethereal. As they hurry back to the camp Andrea expertly covers their tracks arriving somewhat later than the rest.

Back at camp Alvin opens the Scroll case finding several sheets written in the Ancient Suloise script. Since none of them can read this Raven agrees to use Comprehend Languages. Zeppo and Alvin sombrely bind Astra's brutally battered remains as they pile her belongings at her side. Andrea sheepishly picks up Bladestar and feels herself accepted by the strange magical blade despite the air of sadness that she feels emanating from the weapon. Raven dictates the scroll to Alvin, which proves to be an instruction manual for the Doomheart, detailing its powers, risks and assembly instructions. Alvin records all of this in Elvish, deliberately reversing some of the assembly instructions. They then destroy the original.

As the light fades and the myriad of stars begin to appear a grim-faced Alvin promises to return one day for a certain Necromancer and a certain Demon!

Reason for XP	Andrea	Astra	Alvin	Hemegretham	Zeppo	Joe	Raven
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Opponents							
Spells		10	50				
Proficiencies			30				
Ideas	10	50	50				
Problem Solving							
Role Play	50	50	70	60		60	
Treasure							
Finishing							
Fun Factor	50	40	30	30		60	
Bonuses							
Penalties							

Total (This session)	110	150	230	90		120	
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Grand Total	6885	8305	5870	4860	5480	2820	5010
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DM's Notes:- NE = 1, SE = 2, SW = 3