

The Star Cairns

Session 10 7-9-99 Dead unfair

Next Session 14-9-99 At Brian's

...Looking around the area Zeppo catches sight of a cowed figure, apparently observing them from the ridge. As they approach, the figure retreats down the slope. However when they crest the ridge there is no sign of anyone!

Heme races up to the ridge and characteristically begins to stamp all over any trail mumbling "where's it gone, I'll get it, whatever it was...". Zeppo arrives shortly after and commences the same sort of activity as a dismayed Andrea snaps out of whatever muse she was adrift upon and shouts at them to "stop it now!" She scrambles up to the ridge and starts to look for tracks as Astra cloaks up and disappears, heading stealthily toward the cairn. Andrea finally manages to find something other than Hemegretham's or Zeppo's tracks and establishes that a humanoid figure seemed to appear behind the ridge, walk to the top and remain there for a while before retreating down the lee side and apparently disappearing into thin air.

Meanwhile Astra creeps up to the cairn, concealed not only by her magical cloak and her stealth skills but also by sheets of driving rain. The Magic mouth spell triggers as she passes but since nothing further appears to happen, she peeps over the top of the entrance, revealing a lighted spiral staircase much like the first cairn. Cautiously she creeps down until rounding the final bend she is faced by a pair of Skeletons blocking the stair. Despite her invisibility, they turn toward her and lash out as she turns tail and flees. Fortunately for her they both miss and she quickly rejoins the rest of the party on the ridge.

The hawks in the party, led by Zeppo, devise a plan to attack the cairn and destroy the skeletons. They are about to carry this out when a bright light is seen emerging from the cairn as a humanoid figure with a brightly glowing head strides purposefully toward them. Astra legs it to the North, Andrea grits her teeth and Zeppo casts Hold on the thing, which is revealed as one of the cairn skeletons with a brightly glowing head. It stops a few yards away from the group. A disgruntled female voice is heard, emanating from the thing's head, "If you really, really must persist in disturbing me, then return tomorrow without your horses." With that it turns smartly around and marches back to the cairn disappearing within.

The party are still quite interested in attacking the cairn, maybe just to escape the torrential rain. There is a roll of thunder and Alvin hands out the Goodberrys, 2 for Astra and one for everyone else, when suddenly, there is a huge "Whumpf!" and the top of the cairn appears to explode in a huge ball of fire. A wave of heat surges from the cairn singeing even our heroes at 100 yd range. The fighters stand slack-jawed at this astonishing display of raw power and there is a brief silence as the more magical in the party perform a rapid spell level calculation. The party conclude that it might be a good idea to come back later. Despite this Hemegretham can't help but grumble at being deprived of his glorious death and Zeppo seems to think that, "we're just being a bunch of wimps!" "You calling me a coward?" growls Andrea, but in the end it is just too cold and wet and a Fireball is just enough of a deterrent to send them back to Fishtown. They make it back in the small hours and knock up the village, who being used to Adventurers, are happy enough to give them the hay loft and some bread, cheese and ale for a premium price.

Early next morning Andrea and Hemegretham go and ~~threaten~~ negotiate with a fisherman and his brother to hire two small fishing vessels to get them up the coast for 5gp per boat. Astra takes the opportunity to purchase some waterproofed tarpaulin (5gp) to wrap up her spellbook. The fishermen reckon 2 hours with this fine wind and promptly at 08:00 the somewhat groggy party bundle into the fishing boats. Two hours later gratefully deposited on land with only Astra and Andrea (again) feeling queasy, they wave goodbye as the little boats beat their way back up the coast.

Astra decides it's lunchtime, hardly surprising since she lost her breakfast, so they break out the rations. It's a nicer day than yesterday, although there is a stiff wind.

They approach the cairn at midday, on time according to Andrea's schedule and notice that there are no undead guards on top of the structure, although there are some patches of singed grass. They walk into the Magic Mouth spell's radius and notice that it repeats the warning only once before stopping. While they decide what to do a voice is heard shouting up from inside the cairn. "I suggest you come inside." This they then do, descending a spiral staircase, which leads to a large pentagonal room. The party members who have visited the previous Star Cairn recognise a familiar layout including the mysterious floating runes and even down to the exit corridors. What is more immediately impressive though are rows and rows of Skeletons standing impassively against the eastern wall. As Alvin's jaw drops, Columbus starts counting and carries on for quite a while. Astra's quick estimate is at least 50. Standing by the downward spiral staircase to the North is a group of five Skeletons that appear to be carefully guarding the exit. However the party's attention is drawn to the Northwest wall where a young woman stands, accompanied by a large Skeleton in plate mail and shield. The party notes her withered left arm, which she habitually rests upon a strange skull-headed rod, which she wears in her belt. Columbus finishes counting at 95 Skeletons. "I am Ylleck," she says. "What do you want?"

The conversation reveals that Ylleck's interest in the cairn appears to be academic. She is not at all interested with the lower levels and indeed has not even explored them, leaving a guard party of her "servants" to guard against anything that might emerge. Yes, she is a Necromancer and no it is none of the party's business what she is studying. Spellcraft users in the party judging by her use of high level spells such as Fireball assess her as a high-level Mage. While talking to the group she fiddles with a ring she is wearing and is able to detect Zeppo's (unintentional) lie that he hasn't participated in tomb robbing. (DM note 1). Astra notes that a Ring of Truth is a two edged sword in that the wearer is forced to tell the literal truth at all times - hmmm. Ylleck is prepared to offer the party a deal providing they keep quiet and don't disturb her. For the sum of 1000gp she will let them explore the lower levels. They are to keep out of any areas guarded by her "servants" on the top level, just the accommodation to the Northeast, and they may keep anything that they find. She says they may consider their options and are to speak her name when they have made their decision. Then she simply vanishes! The observant ones in the party would have noticed her whisper a word before disappearing.

"It's only money," says Heme, clearly having given up on the idea of flattening 95 animated undead and a high level Necromancer, although a man can dream.... Columbus, ever the hard bargainer, reckons she could spare at least 10 of the skeletons in order to help them explore the cairn. Astra points out some of the control complexities and secretly worries about Alvin's compatibility with a group of undead on the same side. The party doesn't seem entirely convinced.

They call her name and Ylleck reappears, removing a pair of half-moon reading glasses from her nose. Striding forward to Zeppo she removes her ring and grabbing his hand forces it onto his finger. "Every word I have said is the truth," she says and somehow Zeppo knows she is indeed speaking the truth. With a sarcastic smirk, she retrieves her ring and returns to the large Skeleton's side.

Unable to resist a 1000gp ticket to whatever lies below, the party cough up in gold and platinum the required sum. Ylleck re-iterates her conditions. The party is not to disturb her or enter any guarded rooms on the first level. Her guardians have already been re-programmed to ignore the group and will allow them passage to and from the lower levels. The deal is struck and she reaches out to the large Skeleton next to her. "And remember, I don't want to see or hear from you again. Goodbye!" As she touches the Skeleton's arm they both instantly disappear. The party is left standing with a large group of silent, immobile undead. Creepy...

Astra checks out access to the lower levels and the guardian Skeletons move out of the way for her. She returns to the group and they begin to explore the first level. They find the same layout as the previous cairn however here many of the rooms have been converted to crypts, with brick tombs built against the existing walls. All of these tombs have been broken open (DM note 2) and it's not going to take an INT score of 18 to realise where the inhabitants are now. Poking about in one of the empty tombs Columbus finds a silver bracelet, which Astra appraises at 150gp value. Astra herself uncovers a handful of silver necklaces, which she values at 200gp. Maybe that 1000gp was a sound investment after all, she thinks.

Having covered the first level the party descend down to level two finding a pentagonal hall painted in the by now familiar chevron design and another pair of the mysterious floating runes. The room is lit by a pair of torch sized magical fires and there are two exits visible. Remembering the secret doors from the previous Star Cairn, Andrea and Astra examine the walls detecting three secret doors. Close

examination reveals a slight scorch mark in the centre of each door. Recalling that Abjuration magic opened the doors in the first Star Cairn Astra tries touching Bladestar to the doors but nothing happens. She tries her magical sword as well but the doors remain closed. They explore the room to the North finding two rectangular stone slabs arranged on opposite ends of the room, with a taller round pillar and an exit near each one, the room is lit with a gentle blue light. As with the first Cairn, whenever somebody enters the corridor a voice is heard repeating a message in a language that none of the party are familiar with. Postulating that this might be the same message warning against bringing magical items into the room they try letting Columbus enter the corridor. Columbus, lacking any magical weaponry does not trigger the voice.

Reason for XP	Andrea	Astra	Alvin	Hemegretham	Zeppo	Columbus
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Opponents						
Spells					10	
Proficiencies	10	90				
Ideas	30	80		30	50	30
Problem Solving						
Role Play	70	40		50	50	50
Treasure						
Finishing						
Fun Factor	30	20		30	20	30
Penalties						

Total (This session)	140	230		110	130	110
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Grand Total	390	540	310	430	470	310
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DM's Notes:-

1. Braving the horrors and dangers of Clarshh's Sepulchre to retrieve the Cube of Force certainly counts as tomb robbery.
2. Well spotted Columbus. I got my improvised numbers wrong. You would notice a number of opened tombs consistent with the number of Skeletons. There are about 100.