

The Star Cairns

Session 29 18-7-00 The fifth Cairn.

Next Session Tuesday 25-7-00 At Brian's place.

Early morning in the Abor-Alz and we find the party en-route to the next Star Cairn, Astra is somewhat puzzled. "Why are we going to the fifth one?" she asks. "Because I know where it is." Alvin replies in his usual democratic manner. Zeppo's Direction Sense keeps them on course and after a couple of hours they arrive at one of Alvin's possible sites, the central apex of a 'W'. "Where is it then?" asks Astra as sarcastically as possible however the Priest of Rao ignores her taunts and organises a search of the area. Eventually Astra becomes bored enough to suggest some ideas and they make a fairly detailed sweep of the locale. Zeppo and Andrea head off to the East to investigate a spot where two gorges meet as Astra puts forward her theory, that following the metal man is their best option since he is obviously patrolling the cairns. Alvin isn't impressed and maintains that he is now 100% confident of the location of the fifth Star Cairn having scientifically eliminated all other possibilities. Heme also doesn't see the point of chasing after a metal man that could be anywhere within this huge mountain range. As Andrea and Zeppo return having found nothing they decide to head south to Alvin's next location. "How long will it take?" asks Andrea. "I don't know, I've never been there before." Quips Alvin innocently. Astra casts an Alter Self and transforming herself into a Gargoyle leaps into the air, flying high enough to see for many miles around. There are no signs of anything interesting so she returns to the ground, transforming back to her usual self.

They travel steadily southwards using Zeppo's ability to keep them on course for most of the afternoon. Gradually they descend out of the higher peaks and ridges into an area of rocky lower foothills. As the temperature steadily increases throughout the day they realise that they must be approaching the Bright Desert. Eventually they emerge onto a rocky/sandy plain and stare out at the dry hostile waste wreathed in a scintillating heat shimmer that reduces visibility to less than a mile. It is a beautiful but desolate sight. Spreading out in a long line they head carefully off into the desert, walking for about an hour before Andrea spots something ahead. They approach a huge circle of white stone, which they estimate is about 200 yards in diameter. The extraordinary thing about it is the perfectly regular division between the stone and the surrounding sand and rock. Zeppo digs down into the sand for a foot or two and discovers that the white rock descends straight down. Andrea skims a pebble into the circle for no special effect as Astra steps on. Nothing happens. Zeppo casts Find Traps and walks onto the circle walking into the centre, scanning as he goes. Joe steps on and begins tapping for hollow areas as Alvin also steps onto the light area. Within a few seconds Heme and Raven are astonished to see the party disappear!

As Alvin stepped onto the disc a few seconds later the group notice a sudden chill and a shimmer in the air. The ground beneath them changes to a darker colour as looking back they perceive the solid terrain of Oerth obscured by a shifting multicoloured haze. They can dimly see their comrades anxiously searching for them but any sounds appear to be muffled beyond comprehension. It is quite clear that party members outside the circle cannot see those that are within. As Astra attempts to disbelieve it all to no apparent effect, Alvin notices a cairn at the centre of the circle. Zeppo cautiously investigates with the last of his Find Traps spell giving a clear run to the cairn and environs. Returning both Alvin and Zeppo notice that their packs are cold and examining the contents find both the Spear and the Soul of the Doomheart to be painfully cold to the touch. Alvin in a moment of decisiveness steps boldly into the haze and is seen to appear on the other side. Heme and Raven almost jump out of their skins, as the Priest/Magician seems to walk out from thin air! Andrea muses, "It's another dimension or plane or something." "I said that at least a minute ago!", says Astra walking over the divide. After a few experiments with tossing stones around the others follow as Raven tries to calm the horses, which although trained as war mounts, are not used to seeing their riders appear out of nowhere. Joe reckons that they shifted when Alvin and Zeppo had both been on the disc for a few seconds and he would like them to try again. Alvin steps onto the disc and waits for a minute but nothing happens until he is joined by Zeppo. After a few seconds they disappear into thin air! A few experiments are performed, lobbing stones back and forth. From inside to out seems to be ok but outside to in produces an insubstantial looking shade of a stone that cannot be touched. Returning outside they discuss what to do. Since it's early evening and they have plenty of light left they decide to start exploring right away. The whole group, including the horses, step onto the circle and within a few seconds they vanish.

Raven takes care of the horses as the others close in on the cairn. Astra scouts ahead and notices that the capstone is missing. "Perhaps it appears after we are inside." She says, cheerful as ever. She notices an unpleasant smell of decay from below, on the plus side however there does appear to be some form of lighting. Heme and Andrea decide to head down and just manage to keep their footing as they notice that the steps are covered in a thick evil smelling slime. Astra, following, is also just able to avoid slipping. Alvin suggests a length of rope should be let down and Joe hammers one of Andrea's pitons into the head of the cairn. They let the rope down the stairs and carefully descend.

Suddenly they hear Raven cry out as the sound of panicking horses pierces the air. Rushing back to top they see that the environment has changed. Instead of a diminished view of Oerth there is now just a veil of multicoloured mist that eerily around the perimeter of the circle. Andrea rushes to help Raven calm the horses as the others regard their new situation. There is a long discussion and Astra particularly seems very nervous of "the mists" however Joe is determined to try an experiment. Utilising his Rope Use he weaves a light rope to one of his heavier sheaf arrows. Taking aim into the mists he fires. Amazingly the arrow disappears into the void and after the rope runs out just stops, hanging the rope in mid-air. Joe tries to pull it back and retrieves about 20ft of the rope however the arrow seems to have been replaced by the branch of a tree that seems to be a part of the rope itself. Cutting his rope free Joe regards the branch with no small wonderment.

Despite the weird phenomena they decide to press on. Returning to the cairn entrance they are again surprised by a cry from Raven. The entire vista has again changed but now to a silver void speckled with shining white "stars." Andrea helps Raven calm the horses (nobody mentioned extra-planar events to them). Astra drops some stones on the perimeter of the circle so she can gauge if it is shrinking and they return quickly to the cairn entrance. Descending they find a typical example of Star Cairn architecture in the shape of a large pentagonal room. Unfortunately this one smells foul and the floor is covered with all sorts of unpleasant detritus, including what seem to be half-eaten bodies of some sort of Toads or Frogs. Unusually these creatures are adorned with apparently random additional limbs and eyes. Listening carefully Astra makes out slimy animal noises and a distant crackling sound. There are no floating runes visible. They see passages leading from each wall and decide to investigate the southernmost first. They discover a 30ft long corridor that suddenly ends in a blank wall. The texture of the stone is smooth and lumpy, somewhat like melted wax. Astra thinks that there might be a creature on the wall and warns everyone to take care however nothing seems to happen so Joe nocks an arrow and lets fly at the wall. The arrow clangs off with an arrow hitting stone wall like sound. Various secret door theories are discussed and eventually Zeppo tries touching a few items to the wall. First the continual light hook, second Astra's magical sword and finally the Soul of the Doomheart. All three produce no effect whatsoever. Andrea tries touching the rock with a Suel Gold piece. When nothing happens she traces an L-shaped rune on the wall – again nothing. Suddenly a shout from above is heard. "Not Raven again!" they cry but everyone rushes up to ground level to see that they are back in the environment where they can dimly perceive the outside world. Discussing the time that has passed Joe reckons it is more than 2 but less than 4 hours since they entered the circle. Astra thinks that the party should get out while it can and is strongly backed up by Alvin who doesn't fancy sleeping in such exotic territory. Joe is curious as to what might happen if they stay but the majority clearly want to leave and so carefully leading the nervous horses through the misty barrier they emerge into the Bright Desert.

They head back to the rocky foothills and find an excellent camp in a rocky alcove, easy to defend and with good observation points. The group are very hungry so Andrea goes off hunting and returns with 5 largish lizards. Spit roasted over the campfire they taste very good. Tents are pitched and they settle down to a pleasant night under the brilliant desert stars.

Early next morning our friends return to the stone circle on foot, Raven minding the horses back at the base camp. They cross onto the disc and soon dematerialise. They descend into the dim light and begin to explore, this time the west passage. They see a typical Star Cairn chamber however this one appears to be a lair to a colony of mutated Toads. All sorts of discarded materials have been pushed into broad piles where dozens of green-skinned Toads crawl and hop in a disgustingly slimy manner. The party are noticed and watched but nothing further happens. Joe says, "Let's shoot some of them." But Heme is not impressed and warns him not to mess about unless he wants lunch. Andrea and Astra are strongly behind the "let's search the other passages first" plan and so they withdraw. Investigating the Northwest passage they find what they take to be an ex-store room that has been smashed apart. The Northeast passage is the same as the south, a dead end. In the Southeast passage they find a pentagonal room, strewn with litter and filth, within which a number of larger Toad creatures regard them blankly.

Choosing action over discretion they agree to push their luck a little, and Heme, Andrea and Zeppo enter the room. This is enough provocation for the slimy beasts to attack with a fiery breath weapon! Heme, Zeppo, and Andrea are hit several times which cheers the big Fighter up no end. At last, he thinks, taking no damage at all due to his magical armour. Astra and Zeppo hurl their oil flasks into the writhing mass of flesh as Joe's blazing torch lands in the centre of the room. There is a loud "Whumph!" and the others just manage to step back as Heme and the Toads are obscured by the fireball. Hemegretham swings his mighty Bastard sword and cleaves one of the creatures in two as Andrea fighting skilfully in the two-sword Ranger manner efficiently despatches another. However the toad-creatures are not entirely stupid and switch their mass attack on Heme to sharp bites, none of which do him much damage although the numbers against him begin to take a toll. Bravely Heme holds his ground but discretion prevails and he decides to retreat as the Toads swarm at him. The party retreat to a semicircle surrounding the end of the passage intending to trap the Toads in the corridor. Unfortunately a few of the creatures are too quick and leap from the entrance before Alvin's Web spell blocks it. A quick and vicious melee ensues where Andrea, Astra, Zeppo and Joe are damaged by the fire breath weapon, although Heme fortunately positions himself to take most of the blast. Quickly slaying or wounding the brutes they make a run for the exit as the Web spell burns up behind them.

Arriving on the surface they see the silvery white, star phenomenon as Zeppo casts a CLW on himself and Astra. Alvin casts CLW twice on Joe and once on himself but they are not in very good shape as they spot a winged shape moving towards them from above. Before they have a chance to react there stands among them a solemn 12ft tall giant with a glowing silver skin, and large feathery wings. A cool wave of calm washes over them as they gaze upon what can only be an inhabitant of the higher planes. In a voice with the strength of thunder and the calm of a gentle breeze the being announces itself as Aaron, an Astral Deva on an important quest. Noticing the warp in the stuff of the planes it has paused to investigate. The party struggle to find anything to say to this higher being as it describes some of the environments that the cairn passes through:- Border Ethereal, Ethereal and Astral. It warns them of evil within the cairn before announcing it must depart. With a majestic wave of its arm all wounds are banished from the party as with a mere twitch of its mighty wings it ascends at staggering speed, vanishing in an instant. The air around them shimmers as the disc returns to the Border Ethereal. Silent and awe-struck, they leave the white circle and return to the *real* world.

Reason for XP	Andrea	Astra	Alvin	Hemegretham	Zeppo	Joe	Raven
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Opponents	90	30		180	30	30	
Spells		10			30		
Proficiencies	30	10			20	10	
Ideas	30	50		10	30	40	
Problem Solving							
Role Play	40	50		50	40	40	
Treasure							
Finishing							
Fun Factor	50	50		50	40	50	
Bonuses							
Penalties							

Total (This session)	240	200	0	290	190	170	0
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Grand Total	6105	7635	5340	4070	4970	2250	4750
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DM's Notes:-

1. Phew!