

The Star Cairns

Session 31 29-8-00 The Fifth Cairn.

Next Session Tuesday 19-9-00 (sorry for the delays guys) At Brian's place.

Back at camp it is mid-morning. Astra thinks the spiders may be Phase spiders and would then have the unpleasant ability to dematerialise on demand. They also carry a very nasty poison if she remembers correctly. Joe goes on about toad tactics for a while until Astra asks him why he's going on about toads all the time when the party has decided to leave them well alone. "Sorry, my mistake" is the blank reply. Andrea wants to release the disembodied apparition "from its torment" but since she doesn't have the first idea of how to proceed in this she eventually pays attention to Zeppo who suggests just leaving it alone. Alvin gives a brief lecture concerning the nature of Ghostly creatures. In general they can be expected to both hate and envy living things in many cases seeking to either destroy the living or transform them into accursed creatures like themselves.

Various theories about the departure of the Demon are discussed, Astra considering that maybe it disappeared at the end of the Ethereal phase however since they had not been keeping track of the plane shifts, nobody can be sure. Zeppo casts CLW on Alvin as Andrea recounts her harrowing experience "dancing" with the Devil! Heme congratulates her on her pluckiness. Very plucky, he says, stupid, but plucky. The two warriors glare at each other in a way that only old comrades can.

Astra is wondering about the possible time distortion effect they noticed and Andrea suggests scouting the cairn area and somehow timing the experience. The mighty Hemegretham has also been flexing his intellectual muscles for a change and suggests that perhaps time is passing away on the other planes. They decide to go to the cairn after the daytime heat has diminished somewhat to check their theories. In the meantime while most of the party doze, during the hottest part of the day Andrea goes hunting again. Only slightly hindered by the assistance of Zeppo she returns with 2 large juicy Lizards. Heme is not impressed.

A discussion ensues about the possible time distortion and how to measure it. Heme has some good ideas on how to control the pace of a count while Zeppo is quite keen on using candles to measure elapsed time. Astra considers how to mark the candles in some sort of graduated manner until Joe comes out with the fine idea of using the width of his dagger. This is then done with four candles and the party proceed to the stone disc. It is early evening and the shadows are beginning to lengthen, casting an eerie light over the desert heat haze. Andrea, Alvin and Raven stay outside as Astra, Heme, Zeppo and Joe enter... Nothing much happens until they realise that they only have one piece of the Doomheart on the disc! Alvin and Astra swap places and the disc team disappear from sight. Following the pre-arranged plan Astra waves a countdown from the outside and they both light their candles simultaneously.

In the Border Ethereal time passes uneventfully until the transition to the Ethereal. Across the other side of the disc our friends notice a group of small, green-skinned humanoid creatures with long dark hair cautiously eyeing up the party. The creatures gesture with their many weapons and jabber away in some unknown tongue. Slowly they advance until they are peering round the central cairn. Alvin casts Detect Evil and scans the group, receiving no indication of evil. Zeppo wonders whether it would be a good idea to attempt communication although Heme warns that going in peace can mean coming back in pieces. Eventually Zeppo and Joe decide to approach carefully hands away from weapons. Cautiously advancing to about halfway they see the creatures become agitated brandishing their spears and swords, shrieking loudly. Zep and Joe get the idea and slowly retreat without taking their eyes off the group. A "Mexican standoff" is the situation until the transition into the Astral, when the group of creatures abruptly disappear. The "inside" team wait out the Astral period while discussing the possible time effect. Heme poses a deep philosophical question to Joe regarding the use of candles to measure time if one has no candles. Fortunately for everyone's sanity the disc phases back into the Border Ethereal and they are able to cross back to desert and the others. Comparing candles they see that time seems to have passed more slowly inside the stone disc.

Back at camp Joe suggests that Astra use Alter Self to turn into something edible so they don't have to eat lizard again. As Astra stares at him in revulsion he suggests just turning maybe an arm or a leg into a piece of lamb or pig. "You're insane Joe!" she says horrified at this rather tacky suggestion. "I'm sorry, it's the heat" is the rather sweaty reply.

Next morning they plod out to the disc and pass through into the Border Ethereal. Descending to the second level they are surprised by two ghastly semi-transparent figures attired as servants. Faces contorted with hatred they strike as Astra tumbles back out of range. Fortunately the others dodge the cold claw-like touch. Zeppo brandishes "The Holy Sign of Zep" symbol but Trithereon must be busy at moment because the creatures continue to attack. Joe lands a marvellous strike but is dismayed to see his non-magical sword pass through the ghostly thing as Andrea continues to wave her swords around in a sort of an impressive windmill fashion amazingly not hitting anything. (Who needs a cursed sword?) Heme lays into the nearest creature slicing it up badly with his magical Bastard Sword as Raven and Astra strike with Magic Missiles. One of the nasty things vaporises as the other renews its attack with redoubled fury. Zeppo quickly casts Bless on the party as another volley of Magic Missiles from Raven and Alvin smash into the thing. Heme, Andrea and Zeppo charge but only Heme scores a hit. Fortunately it is enough to send this particular troubled spirit to its rest.

Alvin casts Detect Evil, finding to the South a muddled almost transient evil, to the Southwest a memory of evil and nothing special in the other directions. Entering the Southeast room Astra searches the tapestries and the sofa but finds nothing. They search the Demon room and find another of the dead-end corridors. Joe suggests perhaps re-making the scratched-out circle but the others, especially the Magic Users talk him out of it. There is a shimmering chill sensation as the cairn passes into the Ethereal so they decide to leave the area, just in case Astra's theory is correct. However across the tapestry room are a few small blue toads seemingly scavenging for whatever it is that toads scavenge for. Alvin scans them with his Detect Evil spell getting no reaction so they carefully make their way around the other wall, despite Joe's exhortations to destroy the "evil" toads. Up on the first level, the so-called "Toad Hall" they discuss the situation while an increasingly jumpy Joe walks aggressively into the Fire Toad entranceway. Loosing initiative he is hit by the breath weapons of at least 8 of the beasts. The fireproof Hemegretham quickly leaps into the corridor and drags out the smouldering remains of the reckless fighter. Zeppo does what he can and the combination of his Healing, Alvin's CLW and more than a little luck bring Joe back from the void. Alvin advises not moving him for 24 hours if they can manage it since there is a considerable risk of the sealed burns opening again which would result in death. Several of the more amoral party members offer to carry him out of the cairn, figuring a dead Joe would be better than 24 hours trapped in the fifth Star Cairn. However eventually Adventurers' honour prevails and they nervously set a guard at the upper and lower entrances of Toad Hall. Zeppo wisely remembers to place the gem of regeneration in Joe's, still smouldering, belt pouch.

Time and planar phases pass as the party nervously keep guard in the all too quiet cairn. Some hours later the silence is broken by sound of battle from up top where Raven and Heme are keeping guard. One of the spectral Servants attacks them and manages to claw Raven just as Zeppo and Astra pound up the stairs. Heme and Raven both strike back dealing the creature terminal blows however a dreadful icy feeling runs down Raven's spine as Zeppo rushes in to Heal him. Somewhat patched up Raven is ok but the touch of the thing from beyond the grave has aged him one year. They risk another few hours in the cairn until Alvin says they have a better chance of moving Joe. Fortunately they manage to get him up to surface level without killing him. The Cairn is in the Border Ethereal phase so they take the opportunity to leave, camping just outside the stone disc in the fierce desert sun. Joe regains consciousness and Alvin CLW's him while Zeppo also uses CLW to patch himself up. They return to camp arriving early in the evening. They spend a peaceful night and rise at the crack of dawn ready for whatever fate may choose to throw at them.

Reason for XP	Andrea	Astra	Alvin	Hemegretham	Zeppo	Joe	Raven
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Opponents	90	90		300	90	90	
Spells		10			40		
Proficiencies	10	10			10		
Ideas		30		30	30	50	
Problem Solving							
Role Play	30	40		80	10	50	
Treasure							
Finishing							
Fun Factor	30	30		50	30	30	
Bonuses							
Penalties							

Total (This session)	160	210		460	210	220	
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Grand Total	6775	8155	5640	4770	5480	2700	5010
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