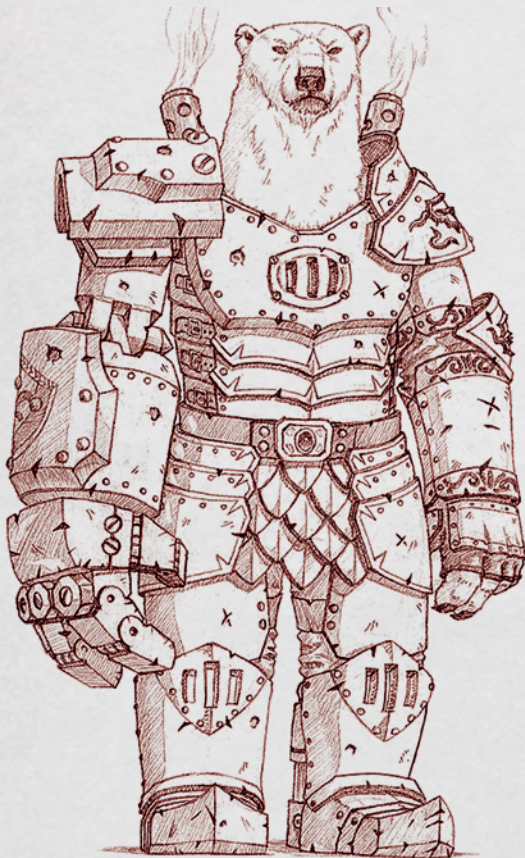


THE BEAR'S DEN



In a region of the southern seas far from the Known Lands, known for being even more barren than usual for that part of the world, there is a small oasis of civilization that is open to all ships who cross the area. Situated in a small, crescent-shaped island with a particularly deep lagoon, the Bear's Den is an all-purpose outpost for travelers, much like might be found in the wilderness in the Known Lands. Lodging for a small number of guests is available, as well as food and drink and basic adventuring and seagoing supplies, not limited to rations, small metal fixtures for use on a ship, and various other items that are extremely difficult to come by.

Because of the scarcity of materials in the region, the Bear's Den is considered "neutral ground" by those who frequent the waters in the region. Anyone who causes a disturbance there will be banned, and the value of the goods they offer there is too high to be lost on account of minor disagreements with other captains and their crews. Some have attempted to seize control of the area and its suspected stockpile of goods, but other crews have always come to the Den's defense.

The location of the Bear's Den is well known to all crews who frequent the southern seas, even those who do not generally travel in its general location. There are few enough safe havens amid the scattered islands that those that do exist are generally well documented to everyone with any knowledge of the seas at all. The symbol of the Bear's Den is a red crescent flag with a black bear footprint on it, and the highest point on the island his home to a tall metal pole that flies a large banner with this symbol. Although it is hard to make out from any significant distance, those who are on the lookout for it can find it easily with a spyglass once they are in the appropriate region

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PURCHASING GOODS AT THE BEAR'S DEN

The following items are generally available at the Bear's Den, either immediately (in the case of very common items like rope, backpacks, basic tools, etc.) or within three days' time:

- Items from the Mundane Items table are available for 115% of standard prices.
- Simple ranged and melee weapons as well as bows and light armor are available for 150% of standard prices.
- Alchemical goods are available (only after waiting three days, as these are made to order) at 200% of the standard price.

Because of its distance from the mainland, the Bear's Den does a brisk trade in barter as well as traditional coin. They cannot offer as much for goods as merchants on the mainland, of course, but no one expects them to because their rates are quite close. The Den stocks a surprisingly wide variety of normal adventuring goods at only slightly more than mainland prices. The items that Uros Cern and his partner, the crafter Abayomi, sell look a little rough around the edges, clearly having been crafted there on the island, but are as sturdy as anything found in the finest shops in places like Strangemont or Balaquim.

Surprisingly, the Bear's Den also purchases items from travelers. Again, the prices they offer are not as good as the mainland, but there are no other independent merchant outposts that will purchase things outright. Cern, the proprietor, enjoys fishing and is quite good at it, so there is always fresh food available for travelers to purchase. Some days it is fried fish, some days it is stew, some days it might be some game from elsewhere on the island, but there is always something there. Abayomi periodically brews very large quantities of ale, which is also available for purchase at any time. The Den itself has enough room to lodge eight guests, but there are tents available at no charge for other ship crew members who may want to sleep off of the ship while it is moored in the harbor. There are a great many maritime stories that involve a raucous party on the shore of the Bear's Den.

THE SECRET OF THE BEAR'S DEN

Uros Cern and his partners are nowhere near as altruistic as they would have their customers believe. They do find it a good and decent thing to ensure that sailors in their desolate little corner of the sea have everything that they need to survive, and they are willing to accept either coin or barter, whatever a needy customer might have available, but their motivations are far more mercenary than they appear, and their prices are not a function of necessity, but rather avarice.

SELLING GOODS AT THE BEAR'S DEN

Items and goods may be sold at the Bear's Den under the following circumstances:

- Used or recovered items such as weapons, tools, or other equipment will be purchased by the Den for 40% of their normal market value (instead of the typical 50%) or bartered for with other items for slightly more.
- Trade goods, art objects, jewels, and other items that may normally be sold for 100% of their value can be sold at the Bear's Den, but only for 80% of their fair market value.

Years ago, Uros was on the run from a party of adventurers who had discovered he had not been taking only his fair share of their spoils. As a result, he found himself alone on the southern seas with a small boat to call his own and very little else. He made a meager living for himself by forging out in the wake of storms and salvaging what he could from larger ships that were destroyed by the elements, or by picking over whatever might be left when a pirate battle took place. It wasn't anything extravagant, but it did let him survive without having to really work, which was the one thing he hated above all else. In the wake of one such scavenging outing, Uros noted that a particularly large ship had been dashed on the rock by a storm near a small island. On a lark, he went to see if anyone might be shipwrecked, reasoning that they might be feeling quite generous to their rescuers.

Uros's gambit paid off far more than he could have imagined. There was only a single survivor, an unconscious man who had washed up on shore with a terrible head wound that would doubtless kill him without attention. Uros realized from the man's attire that he was in fact a very powerful wizard, and further realized this was an incredible opportunity. To his meager credit, the thought of killing the man while he remained unconscious to take his personal possessions, worth more than Uros would make in six months of scavenging, did not even occur to him. Instead, he spent the next six days on the small island, using everything he knew from his time in the military and what he had learned about herbalism and the local flora to keep the castaway alive and recovering. Just when Uros feared his efforts might have been in vain, the man finally awoke.

Jerrus Lefevre was a former citizen of Le'Ciel who had sought adventure in virtually every corner of the Known Lands, but who had unfortunately met his match on the deck of a sailing ship when, in a drunken attempt to quell the fury of the storm, he was struck by lightning before his protective spells had been completed. The strike was truly spectacular, nearly killing Jerrus and ultimately causing the ship's demise as well, but fate had spared the adventurous spellcaster and stranded him on a distant island. Lefevre was aware that his life was only saved thanks to Uros and, in a somewhat uncharacteristic fit

of generosity, offered Uros three favors in gratitude for saving his life.

For once, Cern thought very carefully about his answer before he gave it, asking Lefevre several questions about his capabilities as a spellcaster. His first request was for a sizeable sum of money that he could use to begin a new life wherever he wished, which was well within Lefevre's means to provide. Moments before asking for his second favor, transport back to the mainland, Uros had an idea. On a whim, he instead asked for two permanent teleportation circles, one on the island and one in Balaquim, allowing him to move back and forth between the two as he wished. Obviously annoyed at such a costly series of requests, Lefevre nevertheless kept his word and provided them, then promptly went on his way, never to be seen by Cern again.

The ferran golemoid knew that his newfound fortune would allow him to live the luxurious lifestyle he desired, but also that it would not last indefinitely. For that, he would need additional income, and the teleport circles were the key to how he would achieve that. Having spent several years roaming the southern seas, Uros knew how difficult it was to secure supplies in that area. Unfortunately, he also knew the value of the circle and that there were plenty of individuals who would take it from him if it was not kept secret. So over the next few months, even as he enjoyed his newfound comfort in Balaquim, Uros transported materials through the circles to the island where he found Lefevre, and used them to construct a small, meager outpost. Less than a year after discovering the injured man, Uros was set to open for business.

❖ Uros Cern, Store Owner

Veteran Ferran Brute (Polar Bear) Male

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d6, Spirit d6, Strength d10, Vigor d12

Skills: Boating d6, Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Mechamagic) d6, Repair d6, Shooting d6, Streetwise d8

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8 (11); **Charisma:** -2

Hindrances: Greedy (Minor), Ugly (Minor)

Edges: Combat Reflexes, Golemoid

Gear: Two pistols, Plate Corselet (Integrated)

Uros Cern is not an evil being. He is, however, remarkably concerned with his own comfort and well-being. His departure from Ionara, while clouded in mystery to those who have known him since that time, was for running a black market goods scheme in the barracks where he was stationed. No one was harmed because of his efforts, but the Ionaran government nevertheless was prepared to place him in prison before he slipped out of the country, forewarned by a sympathetic insider. After making his way far enough south to ensure he would not be pursued, Cern fell in with an adventuring group that explored the uninhabited islands of the southern seas and seeking out whatever wealth could be found there. For some time, he was able to control his avarice, but eventually, Cern began concealing items he discovered rather than placing them in the communal pile to be sold and divided among the group.

When his actions were discovered, he was ousted from the group, leading to his discovery of the wizard Lefevre and his eventual creation of the Bear's Den as described above.

The Bear's Den is a profitable enterprise, and Cern has discovered that he enjoys it. His lifestyle in Balaquim is quite comfortable, and the money that the Den brings in is enough to maintain it. With his greed slaked, Cern's attitude has become more altruistic than ever before. When travelers he knows well fall on hard times, Cern is happy to extend them an open line of credit or even quietly give them aid without expectation of repayment. These are behaviors that would be completely alien to anyone who knew Cern in Ionara or in the years immediately thereafter.

❖ "Abayomi," Master Craftsman

Novice Human Male

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d8, Spirit d4, Strength d4, Vigor d6

Skills: Knowledge (Craftsmanship) d8, Lockpicking d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d8, Repair d10

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 2; **Toughness:** 4; **Charisma:** 0

Hindrances: Curious, Loyal

Edges: Gadgeteer, Mr. Fix It

Gear: Leather apron, crafting tools

"Abayomi" is the craftsman who makes the majority of goods available at the Bear's Den, or so most people believe (because they are told so by Cern or by Abayomi himself). While there is a shade of truth to the statement, the majority of it is a grotesque falsehood. To begin with, "Abayomi" is not his real name, and he is not even a he; he is a they.

Hamadi, Manu, and Sabah are triplets born in a small village in the outskirts of Balaquim. Although Yzeem is a nation with comparatively little hunger or poverty, the triplets had several older siblings and their parents struggled to feed everyone. When they reached adolescence, the triplets decided to ease the burden and made their way to the port city looking for a life of adventure. Obviously, at their age, that was not something that they found easily.

Despite the odds, however, the triplets managed to survive. They were cunning and lucky, and had a lot of experience making and repairing basic items from around their home and village. By the time they had reached their late teens, the triplets had gotten good enough that various ship crews used them to help resupply, and they had saved enough to buy a dingy little two-room apartment near the docks. It was a meager existence, one half-step above poverty, but the triplets were independent and felt as if they had succeeded in their goal.

That was roughly the time that they met Uros Cern.

Cern recognized the ability of the triplets to craft a wide variety of items from secondary materials for minimal cost, a process that resulted in sturdy items that had a very primitive look to them. Their goods were ideal for his burgeoning idea concerning the Bear's Den, and he approached them with a

deal. Every day, one triplet would come with Cern through the circle to a distant island and help him run a shop for pirates, explorers, and merchants, while the other two would remain home and craft items to be sold in the shop. The items would be sold at a reasonable mark-up from typical prices in Balaquim, and the triplets would earn a small commission on every item they sold. It was perhaps a few pennies less than what they might earn selling their goods in Balaquim, but the location was exotic and exciting, and they would be selling a much larger volume of goods. They talked about it amongst themselves

briefly, but there was no real doubt: the triplets were ready to commit to the project.

Each of the triplets spends every third day on the island, and while they are there, they take on the role of Abayomi. Abayomi brags that he can craft almost anything in three days' time, and makes a careful list of any non-standard items ordered by the Den's customers on the day he is there. Then, upon returning to Balaquim, the triplet in question spends the next two days creating anything needed on the list before returning with a fulfilled order on his next island day.



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