

ADVENTURES ON THE POWDER RIVER #2

CASTLES CRUSADES

THORNS FOR BEER



STEPHEN CHENAULT

Peter Brody 2007

THORNS FOR BEER

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An overland adventure designed
for characters for 3-5 Characters
Mid-Level



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THORNS FOR BEER

Thorns for Beer is an encounter area for 3-5 characters in the mid-level range. It is designed as a plug and play encounter; either run by itself for a few hours of fun or as an encounter inserted in an ongoing campaign. Thorns for Beer is part of an ongoing series of encounter areas, Adventures on the Powder River. Thorns for Beer is a follow on to the To the Damenheit Bridge encounter area, picking up upon the Willowbreak Way track. The village itself is portable to any locale but is designed for use in the Darkenfold Forest. The encounter area serves as a good base of operations for the Adventures on the Powder River series, or as a place and play for one night's use.

THE WILLOWBREAK WAY

Willowbreak Way is an old road winding its way south through the Darkenfold Forest. Free of growth, shaded by the forest canopy, Willowbreak Way offers the traveler comfort from the sun, rain, snow or sleet. The track itself is narrow, only a dozen or so feet wide, hardly enough for a single cart, or a few horses. Though the villagers in Willowbreak do not use it often, they do keep it in some state of repair; they clear the scrub that tends to grow in such places, leaving behind deep green grassy in the loamy earth. The track winds through the forest in a southerly pattern, following the course of the river for the most part, though veering from time to time into the deeper woods.

The track opens up before you, winding through the dark green of the wood. To your right, the river moves sluggishly along its course. A few birds call in the distance; a murder of crows gathers in the tree above you, cawing loudly at your unrequested presence.

It is only about 12 miles to Willowbreak, taking about a day's travel. If the characters force march they can reach it in 6 hours. One or two random encounters are possible, particularly if the characters move slowly.

FISHING THE POWDER

Several miles down, the track winds up a small knoll that overlooks the Powder River. As they top the knoll they spy a canoe in the river, about 100 feet down river and about 60 feet out toward its center. The canoe is anchored in the water, pulled tight and turned around, rocking in the slow moving water. The figure of a man is plain to see. He's stretched out in the back of the canoe, so that he is facing the party, though his broad brimmed straw hat is pulled over his head and he appears to be asleep. A fishing pole hangs lazily over the canoe's side, more in the water than in his hands.

The man's name is Jared Hale. He lives on the outskirts of Willowbreak in a small cottage. He comes up the river to fish for small mouth bass and cut-throat trout. Like all the denizens of this small forest community, Jared is cautious of strangers, but he does enjoy news of the wider world beyond.

He is presently sleeping in the canoe.

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If the characters decide to pass him, by he wakes up as they are wandering back down into the knoll. He makes no attempt to hail them and once they have passed, he goes back to sleep.

If they characters call out to him he wakes with a start, pulling his hat back and instinctively reaching for the canoe's paddles. Taking them in hand, he shouts a greeting back to them. Jared is a slow talking, deliberative fellow and will talk with the characters. He speaks carefully, not knowing whether they offer good or evil to his friends and neighbors. He tells them how close they are to Willowbreak (only about 3 miles now) and answers any general questions they have.

At no point does he offer to bring the canoe into the shore. If pressed to do so he uses his line as an excuse.

If asked about an inn or tavern he says the following:

"Oh aye. That would be Greelys. Its a good place when opened, but young Greely Ironpot has it closed-up, or so I heard, and the door locked these past few days. No one knows why. He's a slight of a young man, spooks easy, so I'm guessing he saw something go bump in the night. I've not been to town for a few days so he may have opened it back up, though I don't think so... So if you need to wet your whistles, Heidi up by the hedge row gate brews a fare piece of beer and makes some sough dough bread you'll want to lathe with butter. She can help you if need be."

Jared will talk for awhile; pressing a few questions to find out what they are doing here, where they are going and what are they are after. He tells them any of the general questions they ask about the town. However, after 15 minutes or so he begins to grow tired of the conversation and begins to talk about his fish. Within 20 minutes, he's messing with the line and wishing the party a good day.

THORNS FOR BEER

The track ends in a small open glade that abuts the river and a large hedge row. The hedge row has a gate built into it. Beyond it lies the sleepy town of Willowbreak, rooftops and chimney's plainly visible as one approaches the hedge.

THE GATE

The North Gate consists of a large single door, about 8 feet wide, built into a frame which the hedge grows around. The door is locked, though it has a small door built into it about face high.

Knocking produces a grunt and shortly a face peering through the small door. This is a guard whose job is to size up people coming and going and after only a few questions he'll let them in. His name is Riculs.

If asked about the village he mumbles for a minute but shortly confesses that the river god has cursed his palette as something is amiss at Greelys the town watering hole. This is all he knows.

WILLOWBREAK

Willowbreak is a small town of roughly 300 inhabitants. Another 100 people live within a few miles of the town, in small forest cottages, or fortified houses. The Willowbreak Way ends at the North



Gate. A single dirt road snakes through the town. Several trails lead off into the forest west and south, some to houses, and some to deep forest hunting trails.

The village is partially walled with a mixture of hedge, stone and wood. The wall is built in a great arc covering the village north, west and south; the eastern side of the village is protected by the river itself. A hedge, called the Hedge Row, 12' ft. high and 8' ft. thick, protects the northern end of the village. It begins in the Powder River, winds around and arcs along the western flank of the village, opposite the river. The hedge ends in a large pylon of rocks, 10 feet high, capped by a tower. The rocks serve to anchor the wooden palisade that stretches along the south western part of the village and the southern part of the village, ending at the river.

There are two gates. The North Gate is a wooden structure with two doors built into the hedge. The South Gate is built into the palisade. Both doors are double wooden affairs. The wooden palisade has catwalks, the rest does not.

The houses inside line the dirt road, with a few dozen built off the road, nearer the walls. All the houses are wooden, built of split rails or cut lumber. They are shingled for the most part, though some have thatching. They are arranged in no particular order, strewn haphazardly about. Chickens, cows, goats and the like are in the town, Some animals are fenced, others tied up.

The people are generally friendly. Like Jared, they are cautious of strangers, until they have learned their intent.

- Total Population:** 300 +
- Human:** 300 +
- Gnome:** 0
- Halfling:** 0 +/-
- Dwarf:** 1 +/- (a prospector not in town)
- Elf:** 10 +/-

Government: The village has no government. The villagers gather in a Meet once a month to talk about upkeep for the wall and the road and setting the roster for the gate guard.

Military: Willowbreak has a town militia of about 80 able bodied men and women. They rely on bows for their defense, wielding their short bows as 1st level fighters. The militia has no real commander, however. There are several rangers in the town, experienced in trapping and they usually take charge. Bolthildr, an 8th level ranger, is their leader.

Economy: The people of Willowbreak make their living hunting, trapping, fishing, and trading with the wild tribes of the Dark-enfold. Several peddlers come from Elne, bringing tools, some weapons and the like, carting back the pelts, etc. Bent's Trading Post down river is a major trade partner for the people of Willowbreak.

Religion: The Og-Aust are worshipped in and around Willowbreak. A large cromlech set up on the south side of town serves as their holy place. Here the wandering hermit

Braelich visits from time to time.

Language: Vulgate or Common.

Major Guilds: There are no active guilds .

PERSONS OF NOTE

Area 1 Heidi Oddny: Heidi lives in a house close to the Hedge Row, between the road and the river. Her house is very large, consisting of one common room, about 60 feet long and 25 wide that ends in a wide porch overlooking the river. Tables and chairs abound, set in no particular order. The common room often has several locals in it drinking her very fine beer she brews behind the house. One large fire place dominates the north wall. Her other room is her own living quarters, closed to the public.

She offers the following in her common room

- Sough dough bread, by the loaf: 1cp
- Fresh brewed butter, by the stick: 1cp
- Beer by the mug, by the pint: 1cp.

Heidi is an attractive young lady, about 30 years of age, with thin dark hair and dark eyes. She is not particular about her appearance, though she is not unkempt. Very friendly, she loves to drink and is a very able drinker (possessing an 18 constitution). She gives information freely but is not particularly interested in news from the outside world. Heidi has lived her entire life in Willowbreak. Her parents are both dead, having died when she was very young.

If Greelys is mentioned she explains the following:

“That damn fool boy. Cursed the gods and got it in the gut. Place is all closed up until he feeds the fish their just due.”

If pressed what she means, she says:

“NUNT my fair faced patrons. The river god Nunt. His minions haunt the western banks of the river even now.”

She is willing to help the players some, telling them of Greely's cursing of the gods; his sisters and so on.

Area 2 Gils Sandburn: Gil lives in a small house just off the road. It is a small house with only one room, a fire place, cook pot, bed and chair. He skins and prepares his meal from his single chair. He welcomes visitors, always anxious to learn what they may know.

Though young, only 22, he's an extremely skilled hunter, having spent much of his youth deep in the woods. Though he is not a trained warrior, possessing no fighting abilities beyond that of a 1st level fighter, he does have ranger skills equivalent to those of a 10th level ranger.

Gil Sandburn (*This chaotic neutral human tracker's vital statistics are HD 1d8, AC 16, HP 7. His primary attributes are wisdom, dexterity, and constitution. His extraordinary attribute is dexterity 17. He wears a leather coat and a cloak; using a short bow and wicked looking long knife when on the hunt. He has a magic amulet that grants him a +4 on his AC. The amulet is hidden on a strap he wears beneath his shirt.*)

He hires himself out as a guide and ranger if necessary. He requires no money, only a share of whatever the forest yields. He is trustworthy and capable, knowing all the lands in and around Willowbreak. He is familiar with the country from Bent's Trading Post to the Inigg Gorge. He speaks elf and eshle fluently. If mistreated or maligned while working for anyone, he guides them though a circuitous route through the forest. He then leaves the party on the edge of the Wingnut Bottom Land, a particular foul and dangerous part of the wilderness.

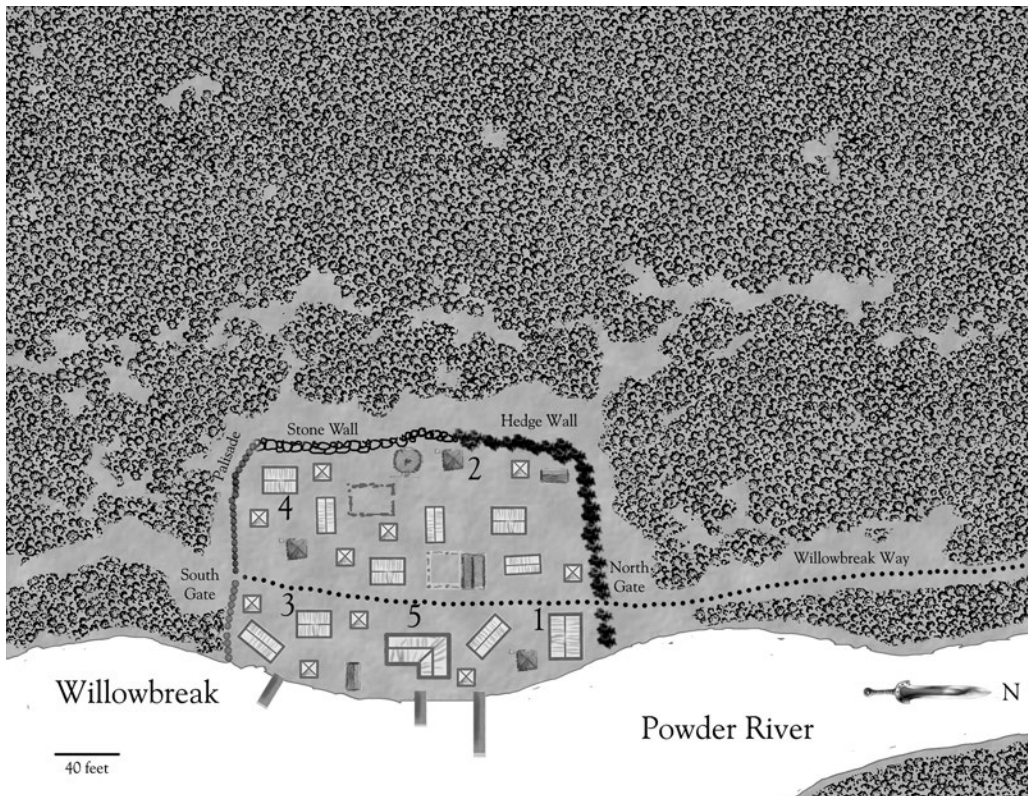
Area 3 Steinar's Store: Eruc Steiner runs the only store in town. It's a small store, consisting of the front of his house. The store

is lined with shelves and crowded with displays of all manner of items. Most normal equipment can be found here, tucked away, hanging in baskets from the ceiling, buried, or hidden in trays stacked all over the place. It's dirty and disorganized but Eruc seems to know where just about anything is located. Prices are normal as per the book.

For weapons and armor, he has limited supplies, possessing a few suits of leather, armor and ring mail. He also has one suit of dwarven chain mail and six wood shields. He does have plenty of bow strings, several stout hunting bows (short bows) and arrows in great quantities. He does not have any crossbows. He does possess several swords (broad, long and short). He has one magical 2-handed sword that he keeps locked away. If any ask he will show it to them and sell it to them for 8000gp.

Area 4 The Tinkers: Arnmorth of Breilington is the town fix-it-all. His home and shop are by the west wall, near the tower. He is skilled at repairing armor, leather, wood, and most other substances. He can mount gems and set jewels as well. His prices vary for repairing equipment, generally charging 10% of the cost of an item to repair simple problems, 25% for more complex problems.

Arnmorth comes from Breilington, a major port city. There he worked as a sculptor, serving the Duke of that place. He left after an affair with a powerful magistrate's (read Paladin) wife with who he sired a son. Leaving the woman, son and sentence of death behind, he fled to deeps of the Darkenfold where he took up residence. Arnmorth has grown very fond of the town and its people, having lived here for 17 years. He is in his mid 40s, strong, with dark hair and eyes. He is quick of wit and enjoys a good joke. Unknown to any but Gil, Arnmorth is the one who carved a large statue of Amenut the Frog God (one of the Og-Aust) on a rocky island further down the river.



Area 5 Greelys: Greelys is the town tavern and eatery. A sign hangs outside the tavern; carved on a large wooden sign is a plate, a fork and knife, over which lies a beer mug.

The wooden building is made from cut and treated timber, the planks of it overlapping to make shingled walls. The roof too is shingled with wood gutters that gather and collect rain water in barrels spaced at each corner. Greelys is large, able to sit 100 people, crowded onto long tables. A huge central fire place, flanked by four pillars, dominates the center of the room. There is no bar, but a large back room serves as a kitchen and brewery. The walls are decorated with all manner of trophies, from swords and shields, to animal hides and heads. It smells of fish, beer and sweat. Windows line the walls, though these are usually closed. A



large porch overlooking the river is accessed through a back door. There is no actual bar.

There is a very small secret door by the fireplace, that leads to the outside. It opens next to the chimney. Greely was making for this when ensorcelled.

Greely's is run by Greely Ironpot. He's a young man who inherited the bar from its previous owner. He has run it for several years, putting great emphasis on the fish he sells. The trout, bass and other fish serve are his pride and joy. Greely himself is jumpy, very religious, and scared of the dark. He is fast to anger but quick to forget. He never takes his anger out on any patron or potential patron. He usually hurls pots and pans all about and curses like a mad hatter. He is stout from doing almost all his work himself. His sisters, both very large and buxom lasses, run the place with him. They serve the beer and food he brews and cooks. Their names are Rjupa and Veny.

Greelys Menu

Meal with Fish: 2cp

Meal with Fish and Bread: 5cp

Meal with Fish and Pork: 5cp

Meal with Fish and Beef: 5cp

Bread, loaf: 2cp

Mushrooms: 1cp

Vegetables: 1 cp

Fruits (seasonal): 1sp per piece (apple, orange, bundle plums, etc)

Beer, pint, 1cp

Ale, pint: 2cp

Wine (imported from Elne: 1gp per glass

Area 6 Temple: Here the villagers go to call upon the Og-Aust, to ask them for aid in their various endeavours.

CURSED BY THE GODS

Greelys is locked. The doors are closed. The windows are closed and Greely himself and his sister's are nowhere to be found.

Three days ago, Greely shouted curses at the river god Nunt. After a week of pulling foul fish from his nets, Greelys yelled that the god Nunt was the son of a motherless whore. He also shouted that he hoped that his river would run red with the blood of all those who paid him homage (which ironically, included himself).

Needless to say, Nunt was not amused with this cursing. Although the god was normally unaffected by the affairs of men, he decided to make an example of Greelys. He sent a wicked minded fey, called Oyvind Pal, to punish the inn keeper.

Oyvind Pal did just that. Two nights ago he came to the inn, and cast the doors wide. In the midst of much thunderous noise, he called upon all to leave that valued their lives. He then cast a hold spell on Greely saying only "You do not value your life, or so you speech has taught us." After all left, he took up Greely and bound the doors and windows shut. He then lay a curse on the doors, stating that until Greely paid homage to Nunt, the inn would stay forever closed.

ENTERING GREELYS

Entering is no easy task. Oyvind cast wall of thorns three times inside the inn. The resulting explosion of plant growth crushed up against the doors, windows, and shutters. Close investigation reveals plant growth everywhere inside the inn; thorn-laden branches protrude from beneath the door and window.

Greely and his sister's have been ensorcelled with a powerful sleep spell. They lie in the room, not far from a trap lay there in a charmed slumber. Waking them is not impossible but requires some effort, shaking them, etc.

The characters can break their way in, but it won't be easy. The door must be pulled down in addition to the wall of thorns beyond that. This requires a successful strength check (CL 6). The thorns are brown and brittle, the wall of them having died upon casting. Hacking through them is not impossible but it is hard work. Each round someone pushes into the room and through the thorns they must make a dexterity save (CL 4) or suffer 1 point of damage.

Spells can affect the area. A dispel magic must be cast three times to destroy each of the three layers of spell craft. A knock spell will destroy 1/3 of the growth and so on.

Careful investigation of the chimney may reveal the hidden entrance (CL 6). This opens into a tangle of briars within eyesight of the sleeping figures.

Once awakened, they speak of the curse of Nunt and the binding of the room. They beg the party to seek out Oyvind Pal and make recompense for them. In return they shall have a lifetime's worth of free food and drink and a place to stay whenever they find themselves in Willowbreak.

THORNS FOR BEER 5

They direct the party to the river where a golden thread lies, leading out across the water to the eastern bank. "Follow the thread and it will take you to Oyvind Pal and there you'll find what pay he demands to lift this curse."

For their part, they begin clearing the tavern of bramble and briars.

In fact the god Nunt cares not what happens next, judging that any outcome sees Othud punished enough. Oyvind knows this but treats with the characters in hopes to get them to do something for himself; it is what he wants them to do, for he desires someone's help in his own schemes. If the characters call it a day, they can return to the bar later and have their well earned drink, if not they should find the thread.

FINDING THE THREAD

On the back side (of the inn), a trail leads down from the back porch to the river itself where a long net lies bundled and bunched up on the shore. Dead fish are scattered everywhere. A simple search of the area reveals a small golden thread that originates at the net and slips into the water, stretching across the wide river.

The thread is obviously magical, humming slightly at the touch. It cannot be broken and it cannot be reeled-in. Pulling it lifts it out of the water but it quickly floats back down. It is not tied to the net, but rather merges with it.

Several small fishing boats are pulled up on the bank in the general area and 2 canoes as well. These are clearly marked with the sign from Greelys. Oars are strapped into the boats.

If the characters chose to cross the river, doing so is easy enough if they take one of the boats. It takes only about 5-10 minutes to cross, following the thread they find themselves approaching the east bank of the river toward a thick patch of bramble and briar.

As you search for an area to beach your boats a portion of the briar patch breaks free and a humanoid figure steps out and into the water. It has bark for skin but the creature is covered from head to toe in briars and thorns. His mouth is a gaping maw in the knotty tangle of vines and he seems to have no eyes, ears or any other human feature.

Paraphrase or read the following: "How now? Who comes a-following the golden thread? Have you come to make amends for Othud and his poor tavern or just on your own curious?"

Oyvind treats with the characters and tries to convince them to travel down river to fetch an item from a giant who has taken up residence on the river. The giant, Radgar Brownshirt, dwells upon the river, fishing it and terrorizing men and beasts. He has many treasures in his possession but only one of value to Oyvind, a small amulet of a frog. He desires this, all else the characters can have. Once done he promises to remove the curse.

The characters are welcome to attack the fey. If so his stats are below. Doing so brings no wrath from the gods nor concern from anyone else.

Oyvind Pal, Fey (*This chaotic evil creature's vital stats are 6d8 HD, AC 18, HP 39. His primary attributes are physical and mental. He attacks by shape shifting into a mountain lion and attacking with 2 claws for 1d6 points of damage and a bite for 1d8 points of damage. Oyvind Pal is made of wood, his skin is wood and his blood is the sap of trees. He possesses the following powers: charm animal 1/day, greater sleep, affecting twice the normal hit dice and that places the victim in a catatonic state for 10 days, speak with animals, barkskin 2/day, wall of thorns 3/day, summon magical beasts 3/day, animate plants 4/day.*)

CONTINUING THE ADVENTURE

The characters can take up the quest against the giant or move on about their way. Whether by trail or boat, the road leads to a trail that winds down into the greater Darkenfold, following the banks of or upon the course of the Powder River. Look for Part 3, River Walk next.

The Overland Adventure Continues in the next Adventures on the Powder River . . .