

WAYLAND'S SECRET!
Part II of III

Ultima V Forsan

Forbidden Alchemy



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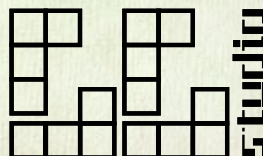
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Forbidden Alchemy

Darren W. Pearce

FACED WITH OVERWHELMING odds, courage is rather like a river that bursts its banks in those who can call upon incredible reserves of strength. So it was that Edward, Jane, and Sebastian had theirs sorely tested as the Dead Horde swarmed them, the cultists of the mysterious Blood Father closed ranks, and the chanting high priest let forth curses in their direction, spoken with a pus-flecked tongue, that dribbled with bile and dark-formed cadence.

Several of the Dead learnt first hand the strength of Sebastian's mettle, the young knight, emboldened by the proximity of his comrades struck swiftly, before Friar Edward could even fire a second volley of shots. The knight's sword became thick with the dark diseased blood of the horde, as he chopped, and hacked at the thick bodies before him. He swung his shield around with a bone-jarring crack and painted it with the ichor of the damned. It wasn't long before he'd forced a significant gap in the sharp-clawed, black-toothed, flesh-gorged ranks of his foes.

With an opportunity before them Edward was the second to turn the tide of battle, the Baconian Friar's two guns sent projectiles into his enemies. Wayland's Smithy was awash with spilt blood,

viscera, and misshapen corpses as the Dead were blown to smithereens.

Jane threw her bow to the ground, tore her sword from its scabbard and with renewed vigour against the horror before her, struck hard and fast. She ignored the devilish tongue of the black robed high priest. A few Dead got in her way and were swiftly sent to oblivion, her goal were the living, and now covered in the blood of her foes, she seemed to be far more dangerous to these men, than they were to her.

The crimson-covered spectre of the archer, as equally at home with that sword of hers, sent a pang of fear into their mortal hearts.

She met the first one with a vicious thrust, he doubled over, spat blood and convulsed as she left him to die on the floor. The second took a shot from Edward's pistol to his ankle, bone cracked, the smell of burnt flesh ripped into the air. Jane's head smacked into a third cultist's forehead, broke the dark robed woman's nose, before Jane's sword sliced horizontally down and spilt more blood.

"The lass' possessed of some fire there," Edward noted and chuckled with it. "I'm oft not one to distract during a fight, but ye've got to admit -- she's got mettle a plenty to wade into that lot."

"I think Father," Sebastian smacked his shield forward and then followed up with his sword into the throat of a fourth cultist. "Now is not the time for a battle commentary. Best we concentrate on the enemies at hand, then talk of victory over a mulled wine later eh?"

"Alright," Edward huffed and let another volley loose. "We've a high priest to deal with, and a site to investigate afore that."

Jane ignored them both, she was consumed by a pure and unbridled desire to end these Dead, their masters, and to ask questions of the dying. Normally she'd put herself at range, draw on the strength of her bow arm, not this time -- this was an hour for blood and steel, boldness, and shattered enemies.

The last defending cultist faced Jane with as his hand trembled on a dagger, she came forward like a panther. He stabbed at her twice, she twisted and rammed her sword into his chest so hard it came out of his back. Her strike continued with such momentum that it took her clean across the intervening ground, caught the high priest by surprise and the tip buried into the man's side, a mix of blood and pus burst forth under pressure, like a lava blast from the side of a volcano.

"Ye gods, what filth animates your master's ruined flesh?" Jane said and tore her blade from the dying man's chest. She redirected it to hack at the high priest, who still tried to level curses in her direction. As she swung again and again at the man, he spat his vile syllables at her like knives. The dark intonation in a language she did not understand tried to unbind her spirit, to break her will, shatter her mind.

Jane was furious, and her anger acted as a shield against the worst. His blasphemous tongue darted out, the tip of her sword took it off, and finally as he lunged at the woman with his own cruel weapon -- a dagger made from the thigh bone of a child, she took his head off and most of his shoulder as his flesh tore like paper. Sebastian finished with the last of the Dead and turned around slowly, "Did not the priest speak of a 'willing sacrifice'?" He asked and kept alert for more of the ravening horde.

"I believe he did," Edward huffed and slowly lowered his pistols, the tips once more glowed in the torch-lit clearing of Wayland's Smithy. "Something about a soddin' Blood Father, and a willing sacrifice sets the edges of my nose a'twicking with thoughts o'conspiracy and more. So be careful around that entry to Wayland's Smithy, Jane m'lady."

Jane turned to look at him, fierceness, Independence, and willfulness in her eyes. Then with a smile she nodded, stepped back from the corpse of the high priest and cleaned the blade on the grass, and gravel.

All eyes turned to the entry to the inner part of the barrow, and Sebastian's sharp hearing picked up the sound of heavy breathing.

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“I don’t wish to worry either of you, but do you hear that from within?” The young knight quirked a brow and pointed with his blood-drenched sword.

“I do,” Edward nodded and he quickly dug out ammunition, reloaded his guns and kept them prepared. “I’ve a feeling that our willing sacrifice might just be another casualty of our war against this darkness.”

Jane remained silent and crouched down, cat-like, her eyes fixed on the entry.

THE SOUND OF breath in ragged gasps came forth from inside, now they could all hear it, one breath, two, three, and then more. Rapid, staccato, disturbing. Thin fingers latched onto the first curve of stone, embraced it like a lover might, then a distended-looking corpse-like pale skinned shape curled from within, a macabre birth from the entryway of Wayland's Smithy. Lank dark hair matted around a once-human face, the so-called willing sacrifice had been a young woman from the local area. But now, all traces of humanity was gone, her skin carved with symbols that seemed to drink in the light, butcher the sanity of those who glimpsed them, and gleam with an unearthly sheen. "I don't know about you, but that high priest has a strange idea of what makes for a willing sacrifice," Friar Edward observed, quite disturbed by the undulating symbols across the pale skin of this naked woman. "This looks more monster than maid." "I concur with you good Father Edward," Sebastian steeled himself behind his shield and moved closer to the friar. "Do you perhaps have any ideas on what kind of spawn of the dark powers this might be?" "None," Edward said. "Reva might know, but as you probably can see, she's not bloody well here."

“Gentlemen,” Jane said and moved back to her bow. “Argue later, concentrate on the monster -- now.” She lay the sword down and took her weapon of choice in her hand, felt how comfortable it was compared to the steel she’d held earlier.

The monstrous creature that left the barrow stood up, near seven feet in height, it loomed upward as it uncurled from a half-crouch. Mutated by something terrible, the woman that once was, was definitely no longer there. A hideous scream rent the night, the torches around them guttered but managed to hold strong.

Jane gripped her bow against that sound and then with a swift motion she sent an arrow into the creature’s chest, just below the right breast that sagged there, pale and near-translucent. It might as well have been shot into porridge for all the effect it had, the monster turned its head and a black tongue lolled forth from within a mouth lined by pallid lips.

As the creature moved further away from the dark entryway of the barrow, it bent again, almost backward, hands became like legs and the head turned with a sickening crunch to view the trio from a new vantage point. The arrow that stuck into the monster’s chest, now broke, and the point poked up out of its back amid a trickle of black blood.

“God preserve us.” Sebastian said and moved to guard both friar, and archer.

The young Hawkwood knew that it lay upon him to shield his companions from the worst, their skills were not in close quarters, but in other areas. And whilst Jane’s display of swordsmanship against the Dead, and their cultist masters, was somewhat impressive, her skill with the bow would serve them better in this instance.

“Keep at range,” he warned both his friends. “I’ll draw the monster to me, deal with it as best I can. For England, the Queen, and God.”

He did so, and the monster was eager to engage him. He heard the scrape of claws down his shield, felt the impact as the monster’s toothy maw slammed against it as he strode forward. He engaged

the once-woman with all the fervour and courage demanded of him as a Knight of the Garter.

Bravely, thought Jane, and not once did she think him arrogant or stupid.

Edward was duly impressed and moved to a new vantage point, he ran around the back and vaulted onto the top of the barrow cairn. He used Wayland's Smithy as his new place from which to send gunfire into the creature's back.

A gruelling fight followed, and Sebastian had to battle to save himself from a gruesome death. The monster was quick, oddly so for such a jagged frame, and it took the combined efforts of all three of them to bring it low. Whilst not quite a Tyrant, this beast took arrows and pistol shots galore from both the archer and the friar. The knight chopped and hewed his way through the thing's thick skin, blood splattered his armour and stank with the echoes of decay, and rot.

It seemed like they fought against it for over an hour, and Sebastian sank to his knees once the thing crashed to the ground, broken. He gasped for air and tore off his helmet, to cough harshly at the stink that flowed forth from the defeated monstrosity. A creature that now hissed and bubbled on the earth, it turned the ground sour where it lay.

"Are you alright laddie?" Edward clambered down off the top of Wayland's Smithy.

"I will be," Sebastian said and waved his right hand to the friar.

"The smell is rough, the beast is like a dozen unwashed serfs on a heady summers morn."

"Ah, I know that smell alright." Edward peered into the shadow of the entry. "Jane, if you want to stay out here, I'll take a look inside. I think we're done for cultists, Dead, and whatever that blasted thing was for now."

"I hope so," the archer answered and began to collect what arrows she could, many of them hadn't survived the creature's best attempts to prolong its existence. "I'll keep an eye on Sebastian here."

“Grand, grand,” and with that said the Baconian Friar vanished from sight into the dark below the stone monument. “I’ll not be long.” His voice echoed from inside. “Ooof, it reeks in here too.” Whilst Jane and Sebastian remained outside, the Friar ventured further in. The smell was as he’d mentioned previously, terrible. It clung in the air like a fetid cloak, and as he picked his way over masticated bone, chunks of gristle, animal carcasses, and human remains -- he discovered a makeshift altar at the back of the room. He ventured no further into the dark without aid, he took a sip from his flask, picked up a discarded torch and lit it. As the flames of the brand blossomed he was able to fully take in the whole room.

The altar was an unpleasant thing of black stone, covered in dark marks, blood of dozens of sacrifices, and worse. He approached it carefully, he dared not touch the foul thing. He did spy out of the corner of his eye a pack, perhaps it once belonged to the cultists who dared to perform their dark rituals here.

Father Edward set the torch into a convenient gap in the stone and poked the pack with his foot, perhaps he expected a trap, or a snake, or a pustule covered arm to lurch out of the ground at him. Nothing happened though, so he gingerly took it, and opened the container to sift through the contents within.

He found a few parchments that detailed blasphemous ritual, and other objects that pointed to the dark purpose of the cult. No mention there of the Blood Father, but there was a curious scrawled letter that he could just about translate. He gleaned from this several words, chief amongst them were castle and Goil.

“Castle Goil,” he said to himself and waved the letter before the fire to see if the flame revealed anything that might have been hidden there. “Nothing else, but what of Goil..”

Edward had a choice, he could keep the blasphemous relics and the pack, pass them on to others more learned than himself -- or send them to the flame, and torch the pack.

He picked up the torch, tossed it onto the pack and retreated out of the interior. Choice made, some doors should remain firmly

shut against the dark -- it was best to leave this out of the hands of even Reva Flynnne.

Smoke followed him, and the flicker of flame as he emerged back into the moonlit night.

Jane saw the look on his face and put down a cloth where she'd been cleaning her sword. "Is all well with you Edward?"

"Aye lass," he said and shrugged. "Nothing in there save for blasphemy, the relics of the damned, and things left to rot. All's been put to the flame, but we're not lost. I've a feeling we've to take a trip to Scotland next."

"Oh why?" Sebastian looked up from where he'd been cleaning his shield, where he'd managed to wash off some of the ichor with the help of a water skin. "A clue to the cult perhaps?"

"I found a letter, was buggedger if I could translate all of it. But I saw castle and Goil, now it's been years since I was there, I was but a lad when I visited that place, not yet even a monk of my order. But I can tell you, the Laird was a good man back then. It worries me that Goil is mentioned in dark rituals and writings that I found. So that's where I'm going next."

"To Scotland then," Jane said without a thought. "It's settled, I'm coming with you."

"Lad?" Edward looked to the knight.

"Oh yes, of course I'll ride with you to Scotland. I've never been, but it's a knight's task to stay true to his friends and to fight against the tide of darkness where ever it might be. If Scotland is where we need to go next, then Scotland is where I shall follow you both."

THEY DECIDED THAT no more could be learnt from Wayland's Smithy, and after they piled the dead into a haphazard collection of limbs and bodies, they set fire to it. At least it would not attract wild animals, the undead, or worse. The trio found their mounts and moved on swiftly now, as the night continued to remain fairly clear, and the moon as full as can be.

The wind dropped colder as it got later, and they made their way via horseback towards the North. They had a twelve day ride to get to Scotland, through the Kingdom of Jorvik, with the mighty City of York (Jorvik) as a possible place they could rest, water, feed, and take stock.

Their horses could manage about thirty miles per day, and they saw no need to push their mounts with constant gallops through the English countryside.

So day after day passed, and the three companions spent their time in idle conversation. They talked of a great many things during that time. Edward was curious of Sebastian's order, and Jane likewise had heard tall tales of the Garter. The young knight was eager, and cautious as he explained as they rode.

Their minds were also firmly on their goal, and the mysterious name of the Blood Father echoed in their thoughts as they made camp night after night.

It was on the sixth night of their laborious journey, camped under the shade of a magnificent oak, with the glimmers of life all around them. Villages, settlements, cities gleaming in the distance with firefly-like torches, that Jane prepared them an excellent feast of well cooked rabbit, herbs, and even a few root vegetables they'd been able to barter with from a local farmer.

"It was grand of that farmer's wife to give us these few potables," Edward said and grinned at Sir Sebastian. "Even though it was you who had to work for them."

"I minded not," the knight tucked into his meal. "Chopping wood, carrying buckets of slop, and aiding the good lady with some more of her chores was more than enough payment for the bounty she bestowed upon us."

Jane offered an impish smile and nodded. "Her daughter seemed to like your chopping technique."

"Oh yes, she did." Edward nodded with a chuckle. "Her eyes were on stalks as you swung that mighty axe about, bet she thought one of the old legends had come to life there."

Jane burst out laughing and earned a sour, but amused look from the young knight.

"Mock all you like, but we now dine like kings and queens thanks to my 'technique' with an axe." Sebastian dug his knife into a hunk of steaming potato. "And do not think I've forgotten Lady Jane, it was you who cooked us this meal, even though it was not required of you."

"I did it for my friends, I wanted to. We've shared such adventures already, I am only too happy to contribute some of my father's skill to this endeavour." Jane replied, she mixed a blush with a half-smile and turned to look at another night's sky.

"You've a grand skill lass, I'm all full, and there's more we can store for the morrow's journey." Edward lay back on his blanket,

put his head against his own pack and sighed. "It'll be odd to return to my homeland. Not been there in a long time."

With their supper consumed and more banter to follow, they talked into the night. Then they settled down to rest, before they had to repeat this once again.

Six more days lay ahead of them in the grand journey to follow. They broke camp early in the morning, just before first light, and once again took to the road. Their horses took them across the valleys and lands which lay before them.

Edward was somewhat eager to be in Scotland, especially Castle Goil, so he led the small group through a shortcut between two massive forested areas, bypassed York and put them squarely on a road north towards the Highlands that beckoned in the distance. The seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth days kept them busy as they crossed paths with knights errant, a small community of pilgrims, and even a lonely monk on the road toward York in the distance. They skirted these groups, kept their distance, and travelled on. The Highlands in all their majesty loomed closer one mist covered morning upon the eleventh day, Edward sat forward in his horses' saddle and chuckled. "There, see that, the peaks of the mountains in the day's early mist. That's love right there, there's no land more bonny than Scotland. Och, the glens, the fiefs, the beauty of it. Still gorgeous now, even after we beat back the Dead at Hadrian's Wall."

"I heard about that battle, it cost more than half of your able-bodied folk of Scotland did it not?" Sebastian looked into the grey-white distance, the blanket of fog was impressive, but not enough to blot out the highs of the land before him.

"Aye lad, terrible, but ye know even though we lost most of the Lowlands, we still own this land." Edward nodded to himself. "She's still ours."

Jane adjusted her cloak and hood, she took a deep breath and felt the difference in the air. "It's wonderful Edward, a beautiful place even though she's dressed in a gown of mist."

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“Wait until you see her without,” Edward replied with a throaty chuckle. “The gleam of sun, or moon upon the Loch Goil, ahh lassie, there’s no sight to warm the heart or incite poetry than that. Save for perhaps the fire of a Highland lass’ hair, and the glint in her eye come bedtime. Or like a wild mare just waiting to ride across the moors, grace personified.”

“You have such a wonderful turn of phrase my friend,” Jane observed with a smile of her own. “I look forward to seeing such a sight as the light upon the loch, but perhaps I shall leave the Highland lasses to you both.”

Sebastian remained quiet on this subject, he drank in his friends light-hearted banter.

THE TWELFTH DAY loomed upon them and now they crossed the border from England into Scotland, the sense of landscape changed with it. Gone were the small English settlements, and hamlets, with the people still toiling in the fields. This was a rugged, but beautiful landscape, with a glorious splash of colour as the purple tips of heather danced in the wind.

Here and there upon their way to Loch Goil, they saw the ruined skeletons of broken settlements in the Lowlands. These were like grave-markers, examples of the Dead's relentless advance before they were finally stopped in their tracks at Bannockburn.

Edward made no comment on this, and out of respect nor did Jane, or Sebastian. It was another day's ride to Castle Goil and the monk was eager than ever to move on.

A small patrol chanced upon the trio as they rode across the countryside, they'd just headed across a patch of ragged grassland, through a small river, and now they were onto the road again which led to the loch. Here and there they saw the shapes of Brochs, incredible feats of indomitable architecture. Built before the current populace claimed Scotland as its home. It was from one such Broch that the small patrol seemed to have come, and now they stopped the travellers from going any further.

“Hold there one moment,” a heavy set man with a thick accent rasped at Edward. “You and your friends, why come you to our bonny land?”

“Father Edward Connelly, monk, wanderer, and scholar of the Baconian Order. These are my friends, the valiant Sir Sebastian Hawkwood, and the gracious Lady Jane Redmere.” Edward tipped his hood off and revealed his beaming face. “I know you Sir Jonathan Salter, knight o’ the Broch o’ Gillen.”

“Well bugger me, Edward you old goat!” Jonathan’s face split into a smile. “I remember you when you were a tiny fart of a man, no more than well, as big as yon lass’ left boot.”

“Bah, I was bigger than that!” Edward grinned.

Jane looked to Sebastian and back to Edward. “These are friends of yours good friar?”

“Oh aye lass,” Edward nodded enthusiastically. “At least he is, don’t know the two whipper-snappers with ye. They new lads?”

“Aye, pretty wet behind the ears, but good lads both.” Jonathan nodded back. “Lady Jane, Sir Hawkwood, the pleasure is mine.”

“And mine Sir Knight,” Jane replied with a gentle tilt of her head. “Any friend of Edwards must indeed be a man of great skill, and superb character.”

The two men with Jonathan looked at their commanding officer, back at each other and then said nothing. Their lack of words could have been taken for amusement.

“Please good lady, you do me more honour than I deserve,” Jonathan was quick to deflect as he blushed a deep shade. “So Edward, where are ye off to, why’re ye here?”

“Business of the order in Loch Goil, investigating something from England that’s brought me here old friend. Perhaps I could trouble ye for an escort, unless ye’ve upset the Laird?”

“No, Laird and I get on just fine, he’s good pals with the ruler o’ our Broch actually. I’d be honoured to escort ye all to Castle Goil.” Jonathan replied and moved his horse to the head of the group. “Follow me then.”

“Grand friend,” Edward winked at his companions. “Just grand!”

Their small company now bolstered by the three knights made excellent time down the road, they passed a few more burnt out settlements. At night they camped in a copse of ragged trees, and with Jonathan's watchful eye upon them slept as safely as they could in a land that might still harbour remnants of the Dead Norman Horde that railed against the great wall.

By the morning they were close enough to see the shape of Loch Goil's magnificent Scottish castle in the distance. By the eve of the thirteenth day they rode by the side of the loch as the sun turned orange, and reflected beautifully in the water just as Edward claimed it did.

Up from the loch perched on the higher land was the castle of Goil, a beautiful construction, picked out with flags of the ruling clan de Bruce. For many years it'd been a second home of sorts to the clan, their family, and friends. Edward remembered happier times here with his parents and felt a pang of sorts for the old days.

The small group turned eastward and up a ruddy road toward the castle proper. Half a mile later they stopped by the first guard house and waited patiently.

After a while a woman strode out to greet them, her ginger hair shone in the dying light of the sun, and her skin was covered in small scars, likely from battle. She looked the group up and down and blinked at Edward.

"I've not seen you since you were a lad," Anna de Bruce laughed. "Edward Connelly, blow me sideways. I was a slip of a kid when I last saw you, and we played in the mud over that very wall!"

Edward gave an embarrassed grin. "Anna," he said quietly. "Good to see you as well."

"You ran your naked backside all around this courtyard and screamed that not even God would catch you," she looked at the monk's robes. "Looks like he caught you by the arse and dressed you too."

Jane stifled a laugh, but the men couldn't help it, everyone save for Edward shared in some small humour from this revelation.

“Now you’ve seen fit to share with the whole courtyard my errant youth, might we impose on your Laird’s gracious hospitality. I’ve a matter to discuss with someone here, and it’d be grand if we could get in out of the cold. Not for me, since I don’t mind the wind whistling around my legs. But my friends here, they might relish some warmth, mead, and a better place to rest than grass?”

“Aye, you can come in. I’ll tell the Laird that he has guests later, he’s a bit under the weather at the moment, and I’ll see to it that you get some good rooms. Don’t want to billet your friends in draughty castle accommodation.” Anna de Bruce gave a wicked chuckle and turned on her heel.

“We’ll come in for the night as well Anna, if you’re fine with that?” Jonathan asked of the woman as she made to return to the castle.

“Aye Jon, ye and yours are welcome too. Stop gabbin’ and get in here.” Anna replied and carried on with her route to the castle gate, which rolled upward as the mounted travellers approached it with her.

WITHIN THE CASTLE'S inner courtyard they were able to leave their mounts at the stable, the six of them stood for a moment and heard the wind howl through the stonework before they followed Anna through a large door. Edward knew where it led, some of the best rooms in the castle, the guest wing of Castle Goil. He could only imagine how they might have changed over the years, and whilst the castle was a relative simple design, the interior echoed the de Bruce's desire to bring Scotland into the deeper mysteries of the Renaissance going on elsewhere in England, and the rest of the world.

"I'm impressed," Edward mused as he walked along the hall behind the ginger haired warrior. "It looks like Aileen de Bruce is having quite an effect on the world around her."

"Aye Edward," Anna nodded and turned her head to look at the rest of them. "If you don't know, and by some of your blank looks. Not you Jonathan, stop smirking there -- Queen Aileen de Bruce is forward thinking. She's trying to drag the rest of these mud wrestlers out of their insular existence."

Jonathan hid his smirk with a cough and just ignored Anna the best he could.

“That is good,” Jane interjected. “I’m sure that Friar Edward would be happy to assist in that, perhaps it might even further our goal here.”

Sebastian examined a nearby tapestry, one that marked the heroic battle of Hadrian’s Wall. “I agree with Jane.”

“Sorry, we’ve not been introduced yet. Edward I know, and these buggers I know, but you are?” Anna tempered her brogue for the guests.

“Lady Jane Redmere, and this is Sir Sebastian Hawkwood.” Jane replied with a curtsy, and a tiny grin.

“Hawkwood, well that’s something. A royal Hawkwood o’England here in our little castle.” Anna snorted a little and shook her head. “I’m not one of those royals,” Sebastian said with a snort of his own. “I am a Knight of the Garter, and not a pompous royal arse as you might say.”

Anna warmed to that somewhat and said with a sly smile. “There’s hope for you yet then.”

The warrior led them to rooms and made sure they were comfortable, she then took Edward to one side and dragged him off down the corridor away from everyone else. Whilst they were in the shadow of a large red and gold curtain she placed her hands on her hips.

“Alright, spill it Edward, what’s going on?”

He looked back and forth and nodded. “You always were a sharp one Anna, and as beautiful as you are bright. You know my order, you know our penchant for inventions, secrets, and the like. I’ve a friend who delves into other areas, she put me onto what appeared at first to be a fantastical tale. But after investigating things with my two new friends, well, lets just say that we’ve found a bugger of a thing. Fought something I cannot explain, t’was not a Tyrant, nor was it typical undead. This was something nastier than those buggers can be.”

Anna listened and her nose wrinkled now and then when Edward spoke of the Dead.

“There’s more, I found a parchment and upon it was written blasphemous ritual and words. Amongst those words, Castle Goil.” Edward confided in her, but he secretly watched her reaction.

It was shock, not shock at discovery, but shock at the castle’s name. Her face paled and he saw her shrink visibly. “You think it might involve the Laird?”

“I think so, and I fear it might be worse than that.” Edward nodded several times. “This monster was made from a human woman, her soul twisted, her body twisted by cultist’s dark power.”

Anna’s pupils dilated and she shook her head. “Our Laird’s been sick for a few days.”

“Oh?” Edward fixed her like a hawk upon this revelation. “What symptoms?”

“Fever, blood, coughing. We thought it might be something on his lungs, but the healer couldn’t find any trace of a sickness that he knew. He left some medicine for the Laird, and he’s been taking it, but getting worse.”

“Who was this healer?” Edward’s heart sank.

“A man, trusted by the clans for years. Kevin McDairmid, he wouldn’t have done something like this would he?” Anna gripped her friend’s arm.

“I can’t honestly say yes or no, I don’t know the man.” Edward said honestly. “We’re dealing with a cult here, people we know might be part of it, friends we’ve known for years. Respected members of the community. If the cult is doing something now, then their agents will show their true colours.”

“Oh God, what if it’s too late?” Anna fought back a wave of revulsion.

“Then by God we’ll put the Laird out of his misery before anything can happen.”

Famous last words often spoken in the heat of emotion can come back to haunt you, Edward knew this, and when he heard a wail of screams come blasting into the corridor from downstairs -- he knew that he might have spoken all too soon.

Voices roared through the castle, echoes of words such as, “He’s gone mad, he’s gone mad. Save us.” Reached both their ears.

“He?” Anna said and ran toward the sound.

“Wait Anna, damnit.” Edward ran after her, his robes flapped around his ankles in a most ungainly manner.

The sound had drawn the attention of Edward’s companions, as well as the knights from the Broch. As Edward ran after Anna back down the corridor to the source of the wails, the terrified voices, and now screams -- he yelled to Jane and Sebastian. “Bring your weapons, remember Wayland’s Smithy. Anna, grab a bloody sword!”

Anna barely heard him but his orders registered somewhere and as she shot past a statue, she pulled a claymore off the wall next to where it stood. The weapon was bigger than her, the woman’s muscles stood out against her simple sleeveless jerkin as she hauled it off the stand.

“Perhaps a smaller one might have been easier?” Sebastian remarked as he rushed back to get his sword and shield. “One day we’ll go to a place and we won’t have to use these.”

Jane looked back and forth, ran back into her room and took up her bow with half a quiver of arrows, the ones that had survived from Wayland’s Smithy.

CHAOS REIGNED IN Castle Goil's lower hall, armed men and women ran toward the outer courtyard, some with spears, some with halberds, and many with swords. They had fear in their eyes, but a stalwart determination as well was kindled within. Anna, Edward, Sebastian, Jane, and Jonathan plus his men joined their rush to see what was going on in the dark of the courtyard beyond the great doors.

In many ways some of them wished they hadn't. The laird, a man once in the gentle embrace of a graceful old age was naked in the middle of the courtyard, his skin shredded and bleeding, his eyes bulged almost out of their sockets. Around his feet were three dead bodies, two were his servants, with blood trails that led from the Laird's private wing to the heavy stone flags of the outer area. The three had been butchered quite effectively, their entrails looped around their mutilated bodies. Laird Conner de Bruce's hair had fallen out in places now, and sharp spines protruded from the crown of his head, like thorns. It seemed, like the woman at the monument in England, that he was in the middle of some monstrous change.

“How is this possible.” Sir Sebastian shouted over the screams which came from the once-human laird. “Our cultist friends again, Edward?”

Edward snorted and gave a nod of affirmation. “God yes, I believe so Sir Sebastian. A terrible thing to happen to a once great man, a man who would have given his life now to stop the monster he’s become.”

Anna was upset, but also angry, she mustered her courage and held her ground.

Jane moved to a higher vantage point and knocked an arrow, she closed one eye and took a deep breath.

The jagged piece of glass that once-Laird Connor had used to wreak havoc upon the servants now dead at his feet was once more taken up, the creature looked at it, and then laughed.

Jonathan could not believe his eyes, and his sanity rocked a little from this monstrous being. He ran at the creature and screamed. “For de Bruce!”

As he did so the monster snapped forward, a sickening crack resounded, and spines of bone broke forth through the creature’s chest. At the same time it embraced the charging knight and dragged him in like a Venus Fly Trap. He screamed in agony as the sharp spines pierced his leather jerkin, cut through to his organs, and then his scream was cut short as in an eye-blink the ragged glass worked quickly across his throat -- his head hung on by a thread as blood bathed both dead man and monster.

“God preserve us!” Sebastian dug into his robe and shook his head. “Stand back, this thing is no mere Dead!” He took out a sphere and turned the delicate clockwork mechanism three times, it began to click and turn. With a growl and a hurl he tossed the ball at the monster’s feet. “In the name of the Lord, be at peace! Shield your eyes!”

What followed, thanks to the secret science of alchemy and the knowledge known to the order was a tumultuous explosion. Chemicals held in suspension, carefully selected, and partitioned off in the sphere ignited with a fury that could have come from

the Lord himself. Fire, smoke, thunder, and light all combined in one gigantic area to turn the stone beneath molten, and the beast caught in the explosion was set alight, blown asunder, and charred into a grotesque statue of melded flesh and bone all at once.

Those close enough to be caught in the shockwave from the blast, which included a few of the castle's guards, knights, and the two knights who served Jonathan were knocked off their feet. Those who did as Edward ordered blinked in the aftermath of his explosive device's work.

"By God man," Sebastian said as his ears rang with the explosion. "Remind me never to irk your order."

"Science," Edward said sourly and shook his head. "A wonder, and a weapon."

Anna sank to her knees and let the claymore drop with a clatter. "Conner," she said quietly and then shouted. "Why you bastards, the man was like a father to me."

"Grief and shock." Edward observed and he walked over. "Anna, it's me Edward. Lass, come now. Time for that later eh, you're a warrior daughter of our glens. Conner wouldnae want you to blart like a bairn over his corpse."

Anna steeled herself and nodded. "I'll be fine, just give me a minute. Then we have to talk."

"Aye we do, because I want to find that bugger healer you told me of and wring his bloody neck." Edward put out his hand to the warrior.

The rest of the courtyard was stunned, they just watched their laird become a monster, and then a wonder of the Baconian world detonate before them. It was a lot to process all at once.

Jane lowered her bow and leaned on the stone balcony before her. Anna took Edward's hand and ordered one of the guards to take up the claymore she'd dropped. "Edward, you and your friends come with me. The rest of you, clean up this courtyard."

There was a lot to do and Anna once more took charge.

Edward was pleased about this.

ANNA LED THEM to a secluded room in the castle, sat down and her shoulders drooped. Edward, Jane, and Sebastian filed in and took up positions there before a low burning fire. The light of the flames cast warm shadows around the frugal room, only a few furnishings broke up its barren look and cold stone walls.

“I want Kevin McDairmid dead Edward, I’ll even pay you and your friends to do it.” Anna said harshly and glared at the fire.

“You do not need to pay us for this my lady,” Sebastian said with a shake of his head. “If this McDairmid is the source of what transpired today, it will be my pleasure to hunt him to the ends of the world if needs be -- and end him.”

Jane nodded and added. “I feel the same way, only less dramatic of course.”

Sebastian frowned in her direction.

“Anna told me that Laird Conner grew sick, and fell into a fever and so forth. A healer came, one the clans trusted. Kevin McDairmid. He left the laird with a potion to help him recover.” Edward grumbled and paced the room. “I would bet my friar’s arse that the concoction was some blighted alchemy tied to this damnable Blood Father.”

“I think you are probably right,” Jane nodded and regarded the fire as Anna glared at it still. “Perhaps Anna will let you examine what remains of the potion?”

Anna turned her head at her name and nodded numbly. “Aye, why not?”

Edward mused on this and then sighed. “Tis an idea, do you know what happened to McDairmid, Anna. Where did the bugger go after here?”

“He said he’d got business in Ireland now as I come to remember it, I wished him well.” Anna sighed and looked to the fire again. “I hope his damn ship sinks on the way and the bastard drowns.” “It will likely take us some time to charter a ship to Ireland, Edward. Perhaps we might be best served here for a while?” Jane observed and looked to Sebastian.

“If Anna wishes for us to stay, I see no reason why we cannot investigate this castle for clues and then perhaps if you both are willing, we go to Ireland?” Sebastian saw Jane’s look and answered as he watched all three of them.

“Anna?” Edward ventured.

The Highland Warrior pondered this and smiled against her heartache. “Aye,” she replied with a soft whisper. “It’ll be nice to see Edward’s face around here for a few more days, my heart screams revenge, but my head tells me to listen to your counsel. You’re welcome to stay as long as you need. Come morning I’ll see to it that you have access to Laird Connor’s rooms and what remains of his medicine vials.”

“Thank you Anna,” Edward smiled a little sadly. “I’m sorry for Connor.”

“We will mourn him as tradition demands, not as the monster he became in his final hours.” Anna replied.

“Aye we will lass, aye we will.”

Sebastian and Jane moved to the door.

“Goodnight Anna, thank you for your hospitality.” Jane said and slipped out.

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“I echo what my friend said,” Sir Sebastian Hawkwood gave her a formal bow and left Anna and Edward alone for now. “Goodnight.” He followed Jane through the doorway.

Edward kissed Anna on the top of her ginger-haired head, smelt the smells he remembered as a young boy and smiled to himself. “Night lass, don’t stay up too late brooding. It’s not what Conner would have wanted for ye.”

Anna tapped the friar’s left hand, her fingers lingered a while before they let go. “Goodnight ye old goat.”

Edward left her alone in the firelight of the room, closed the door and traced his way to bed. When he finally closed his eyes he was tormented by the sight of the woman from Wayland’s Smithy, and now Connor de Bruce, Laird of Castle Goil. How many more would perish before he was able to find the secret of this Blood Father, would he and his friends be next?

Finally he fell into a deep and dreamless sleep.

As the Scottish Highlands slumbered, things that walked in the dark were abroad, and a twisted abomination leapt upon its prey - it ended the life of the badger with a rip, a tear, and a howl of bestial rage.

Such was the way of things these days.

FIN!

AT LAST...

Forbidden Alchemy is a story set in the universe of “Ultima Forsan”, a game setting developed for the Savage Worlds rules. The “Ultima Forsan” universe exists for the game and for the gamers, and what follows is a roundup of gaming information for those readers that would like to start playing straight away. We hope the readers not (yet?) interested in gaming will find the additional informations on the story background interesting.

Thanks for reading, and have fun!

Ultima Forsan: Wayland's Secret II Bonus

Wayland's Secret II is a follow on adventure from the first one, but there might be reasons why you don't want to use the same characters, or perhaps you've only picked this up as a stand-alone adventure-story. So we're going to treat it like so, ignoring the established story characters, and putting the player characters right in the thick of it.

HOW TO RUN WAYLAND'S SECRET II AS AN ADVENTURE

Just as we did with the previous adventure, we're going to break this one down into key scenes. The first scene needs a little setup to get it ready for play when using new characters, or if you're going from Wayland Secret I you can just bring your established adventurers and NPCs along for the ride.

SCENE 1: NIGHT FIGHT

The battle at Wayland's Smithy happens in the first part of the story, but since we're looking at starting here from scratch – this is how you get the players involved into the scenario from the get-go. Pick a player character that has strong ties to someone, a friend, a powerful NPC in their local community, a Baconian Monk with a lot of interest in the occult and determined to stop the darkness from spreading. If you're continuing from part 1, you can ignore most of this setup and move right into the battle with the Barrow Woman.

The players are drawn into the scenario by this NPC, they're asked to travel to Somerset and to investigate a place known as Wayland's Smithy. If you're interested in the actual site itself.

The barrow serves as a focal point for a dark ritual which for the purposes of this adventure has already concluded, leaving behind a surprise for the player characters sent to investigate the ancient mound. A group of ravenous undead are waiting for them, and an aberration-like monstrous humanoid, the remnant of the 'willing sacrifice' victim.

The player characters arrive at the Witching Hour and see the site in relative darkness; only a few torches remain lit. There's a group of undead here who will ambush the player characters, diving out of the tree lined roadway up to the barrow teeth bared.

You can handle this fight regularly, with about 4 or more undead as normal monsters, throw them down as Extras and boost the numbers a little to 6-8, or you can use Pinnacle's Quick Combat rules and have a whole horde come chomping down on the player characters.

UNDEAD

These are a group of flesh-hungry undead, probably from a nearby farm, possibly in the tatters of their former peasant clothing.

Husks (1 per hero, +2)

Attributes: Agility d4, Smarts d4 (D), Spirits d4, Strength d6, Vigor d6

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d4

Pace: 4; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 7

Special abilities:

* **Claws:** Str+d4.

* **Bite:** Str+d6.

* **Dead:** These creatures have all the Special Abilities of the Dead.

* **Shuffling Gait:** Husks cannot run.

BARROW WOMAN

This encounter begins the moment that the player characters have defeated the undead, or in the case of the adventure part 1 – killed the cultist, his followers, and the undead. They will meet the Barrow Woman, a horrible twisted half-formed pale-skinned Dead monstrosity with lanky black hair, naked as the day she was unborn, and covered in pulsating marks.

She'll come out of the barrow entry and unfold before their eyes the moment they go anywhere near it. She's guarding the secrets within, or perhaps she's just been left to kill anyone who snoops around. She's also an experiment of the Blood Father's dark alchemy.

The Barrow Woman (Wild Card Abomination)

Attributes: Agility d8, Smarts d6 (A), Spirits d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Notice d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 8

Special abilities:

- * **Claws/Bite:** Str+d6.
- * **Dead:** These creatures have all the Special Abilities of the Dead.
- * **Extended Limbs:** The creature's claws have Reach 1.
- * **Fear (-2):** The creature's twisted body and devilish stare cause a Fear (-2) test.
- * **Go for the Throat:** When fighting unarmed, Possessed instinctively go for an opponent's soft spots. With a raise on their Attack roll, they hit the target's most weakly armored location.
- * **Hardy:** Possessed do not suffer a wound from being Shaken twice.
- * **Improved Frenzy:** Possessed may make two Fighting attacks per round without penalty.

* **Weapons:** Possessed can use weapons, and they can often be seen brandishing melee weapons to kill the living before devouring them, most of all if in life they were soldiers or fighter. She should be a tough fight, certainly no pushover. Once she's dead, she'll quickly turn into a bubbling mass of fetid flesh, and twisted limbs.

It frees the player characters to carry on with their mission, the exploration of the inner part of the barrow.

Within the barrow they'll find the following clues.

* A bone-bladed dagger, though the blade is made of bone it's pitch black and covered with a mix of blood and strange herbs.

* A flint altar, covered in scratch marks, bloodstains, stains from unknown chemical compounds and herbs.

* Several bloody clubs – quite possibly from cultists who've beaten victims to death within the barrow.

* Bodies of at least seven local area victims, many in various states of dismemberment, many missing vital organs.

* A leather satchel/pack that contains the clues to the next part of the player's journey. In the story you don't really find out what's in the satchel beyond blasphemous writing, and the two important words that Edward makes out: Castle Gail.

For players that want to dive deeper into the contents of the satchel, there's a bunch of documentation written in the dark language of the Blood Father's Cult: a version of Latin which has certain key shifts, a few changes, and should be extremely hard for anyone beyond the members of the cult to translate. It details an experimental form of Blood Alchemy and Transmutation which can be applied to a human host, the first example of that is called the Barrow Mother. The player characters will have fought her to get this far.

The notes are incomplete, so the rituals and the alchemy can't be learned by the player characters, not as though they should be

learning these kind of dark arts in the first place. But what it does do is point them directly toward Castle Goil.

If they're players from part 1, then Edward or any other involved NPC will want to investigate this immediately.

If not, then they should remember they've got a friend who wants them to look into this matter.

SCENE 2: TO SCOTLAND

The journey to Castle Goil, by the side of Loch Goil in Scotland, is one that takes around 13 days give or take, with an average speed on horseback of roughly 30 miles per day. During this time there's a lot of countryside for the players to encounter various friends, or foes in. You might want to leave the characters alone in their travels for a few days, depending on where they are in the countryside. You can also throw encounters at them once per day, and once per night as well if you want to make things more interesting, yet preserve some kind of structure.

Roll a d6, and on an odd number something happens from the table below.

Roll a d12

1. A curious effect, something like an ill wind, or a strange sound will draw the characters attention. Nothing else happens; it's just something sinister or odd.
2. A group of travelling monks crosses the path of the characters; they're on a pilgrimage to York.
3. A group of bandits tries to waylay the characters, this could turn violent, but the bandits aren't fools – they'll try and surrender if they get too badly beaten.
4. A lurching mob of ravening undead bursts out at the characters, it's not a massive horde so they shouldn't have too much trouble dealing with it.

5. A Fell Beast attacks the characters; some mutated animal sick and stricken with the plague. Perhaps a wolf or even something like a deer.
6. A ragged band of serfs, or even displaced villagers, they have a tale of woe to tell the characters – this could even become a side quest. An ignoble lord has thrown them out of their houses so he can develop the land, and so on.
7. A group of patrolling knights on horseback ride by, they stop and engage the characters in conversation before they move off.
8. Nothing happens, their journey proceeds as normal.
9. They discover the remains of a broken cart, dead bodies everywhere, there's a 50% chance that 1d4 of these bodies will rise again and attack the characters.
10. A travelling merchant is heading down the road, she could ask the player characters to escort her until she reaches the boundaries of York. It's on the way toward Scotland.
11. A man running from some danger, it could be undead, it could be bandits, or it could be worse. He'll run right past the characters screaming unless they stop – he's also quite mad, driven near insane with fear.
12. A Baconian Friar's body is found just off the side of the road, the man's body is still warm, and a trail leads to his killers. A small group of vagabonds is picking over the man's meagre belongings. What will the characters do?

The characters can also encounter villagers, friendly folk, not so helpful landowners, and farmers who they can approach for provisions should the need arise. Just like in the story, the characters can barter food for services rendered – chopping wood, milking cows, protecting the farm at night from wild animals or monsters.

We probably recommend throwing one such encounter with a friendly farmer in just before they hit the border of Scotland. This

allows for some great downtime and gives the characters time to get to know each other as well in a fairly relaxed setting.

SCENE 3: SCOTLAND, BONNY SCOTLAND

On the dawn of the 12th day of their journey the characters will cross the border from England, to Scotland. The scenery here is rugged, demanding, mist-shrouded and beautiful all at once. With huge swathes of bonny heather and mountainous domains as far as the eye can see. It's relatively unspoilt, and of course there's Hadrian's Wall dominating the skyline.

They'll be approached as they travel by Jonathan Salter and his men, he's a knight attached to a Broch (a kind of small cylindrical keep) built around the Iron Age.

He'll be curious why the characters are in Scotland, but he's a friend of their friend, so if they namedrop he'll be less cautious. The idea here is to give the characters a bit of a social interaction scene, but not stymie their advance in the story. You want them to get to Castle Goil, so the moment that Jonathan finds out they're off to de Bruce's minor stronghold next to Loch Goil he'll be more than happy to help. He's rather fond of Anna de Bruce; one of the warrior-daughters of the de Bruce's who serves as the head warrior of the castle and looks after the Laird, Connor de Bruce. Jonathan is a friendly enough man, not really worth detailing as a full NPC due to his fate later on in the story. If anything make him a minor NPC or even just an Extra. He's even friendlier if the characters are in the company of Edward as an NPC for the first adventure – they're old friends.

If you feel things are slowing down too much, once again, the Lowlands of Scotland do have their own dangers. There are a few minor raiding clans who're railing against Aieleen de Bruce's rule, and of course the Dead are always out there somewhere in the rough terrain.

Jonathan will take them via a safe route though and eventually they'll show up on the shores of Loch Goil.

SCENE 4: LAIR OF THE GOIL LAIRD

The Loch lies to their west as they approach the hill where the castle resides; the castle is on the eastern approach, just atop the hill with a commanding view of the loch itself. Jonathan will escort them to the top of the hill, past the first set of guard towers made of wood which have been erected to watch for the Dead and raiders.

They'll reach a second set of towers, and a few outer buildings along the flat of the hill. With the castle rising magnificently behind them – here they'll encounter the castle's first and foremost guardian, the warrior-woman Anna de Bruce.

Anna is a ginger-haired woman, strong and muscular from days of hard work, but not too tall. She's commanding, but friendly with it. If they're in the company of Edward she'll be immediately more open than she would be without the man, due to their connection at childhood. If they're just with Jonathan, she'll be open, but a bit more guarded.

Regardless, as long as they don't insult anyone and they appear to be decent folk, Anna will drop her guard enough to let them into the castle and take them to rooms.

It's here that she'll talk to Edward on his own if he's with them. If not, switch out Edward for Jonathan and prepare to let the characters have a few hours of downtime. They can explore parts of the castle in the guest wing, interact with the staff and guards there, who're stand-offish unless they're in the company of Anna or Jonathan, or the characters are exceptionally charming people. Anna will seek them out over time and talk to each one on their own if she can. She's curious about tales of England, and really interested in why they're in Scotland. They obviously didn't just come here by chance.

She'll pick out a healer type, or anyone who seems to have knowledge of medicine first – she might even be confined in someone regarding the laird being sick.

Her motivation here is to learn as much as she can, to determine if the characters are friend or foe. Over a few hours she might also

strike up a minor friendship with one or two of them, especially if they come across as genuine.

SCENE 5: THE STORM AFTER THE CALM

At some point in the castle's downtime, the laird is going to suffer the transformation from man to monster. He's going to become something terrible, dangerous, and deadly towards everyone in the castle. The scene is heralded by a great commotion in the outer courtyard, and everyone rushing to investigate what's going on. Women scream, children scream, grown men scream out in terror – something monstrous has happened to their laird!

He no longer resembles the elderly man he was; he's more like a Tyrant, or some abomination. His skin near translucent, his flesh caked in blood, sores, pus, and oozing bile. Strange marks cover him, and his hair whips like snakes.

The scene from the outer courtyard is terrifying; blood trails lead from the laird's private castle wing and the mutilated bodies of his servants lie at his feet. He's butchered them with a shard of glass he's used as a dagger. Their deaths did not come cleanly; one of them even twitches with blood gurgling over the cut in their ruined throat.

Before anyone can stop him Jonathan Salter charges toward Connor de Bruce and screams!

The monster catches him, halts his charge, and transforms – spikes of bone stab Jonathan through his body and then Connor cuts his head off with the glass, sawing at it gleefully.

The characters are called upon by Anna to help stop the monster their laird's become, before he murders everyone in the castle.

The battle should be brutal; this monster is lethal, but also highly vulnerable to firearms, and fire. Anyone using explosives against it will instantly inflict 3 Wounds against it, regardless of its toughness – one of the flaws in the Blood Father's alchemical concoction. It also can't use Bennies to Soak damage that's caused by fire, firearms, or explosions.

MONSTROUS LAIRD (Wild Card Abomination)

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6 (A), Spirits d6, Strength d10, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d10, Notice d6

Pace: 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 10 (2)

Equipment: Broken glass (Str+d4).

Special abilities:

* **Claws/Bite:** Str+d8.

* **Bone Spikes:** Bone spikes and plates protrude from the creature's body. +2 Armor; opponents who become adjacent suffer an automatic Fighting attack from the creature.

* **Dead:** These creatures have all the Special Abilities of the Dead.

* **Fear:** The creature's twisted body and devilish stare cause a Fear test.

* **Go for the Throat:** When fighting unarmed, Possessed instinctively go for an opponent's soft spots. With a raise on their Attack roll, they hit the target's most weakly armored location.

* **Hardy:** Possessed do not suffer a wound from being Shaken twice.

* **Improved Frenzy:** Possessed may make two Fighting attacks per round without penalty.

* **Weakness (Fire):** The monster is highly vulnerable to firearms, and fire. Anyone using explosives against it will instantly inflict 3 Wounds against it, regardless of its Toughness – one of the flaws in the Blood Father's alchemical concoction. It also can't use Bennies to Soak damage that's caused by fire, firearms, or explosions.

* **Weapons:** Possessed can use weapons, and they can often be seen brandishing melee weapons to kill the living before devouring them, most of all if in life they were soldiers or fighter.

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Once the characters have defeated the monster then things will calm down, Anna will be distraught to begin with over both Jonathan and the laird. If Edward's there he'll calm her, if not, she might seek out a character to talk to, especially if one appears to be wiser or more learned than the others. Regardless, you can probably now move on to the last scene a few hours later. Anna wants to be left alone until morning, she invites the characters to seek her out at first light and that she'll send someone to their rooms.



SCENE 6: ANNA'S REVELATION

In the morning the characters are summoned, Anna is as good as her word, calmer now and collected. She's a clever woman and quite capable. She's slowly put two and two together as she's been brooding on this most of the night.

She will explain to the characters that her adoptive father, the laird, had been sick for a few weeks prior to their visit. They called for a healer, and a man called Kevin McDairmid answered the call – he offered to help, and he's a man the clans have trusted for years. Kevin had been treating Connor for several days before the characters turned up, and the laird got sicker and sicker when the man left. The people assumed that he'd either become Tainted or he'd caught some sickness that would be the death of him.

They made him comfortable, put him in his private wing, and left some servants to keep an eye on him. They hoped he'd pass in his sleep, or make a recovery. Of course many of them prayed to Almighty God.

She's at a loss now.

Clever characters will be able to link the Barrow Woman to the Monster Laird; they will be able to prove it given some time.

Anna beats them to the punch and asks anyone of a scientific or alchemical knowledge if they can search the laird's quarters. Any clues will help her.

If they agree then she'll take them to the laird's rooms.

A thorough search will reveal a few clues.

* A goblet of black bile which is consistent with the blood-like goo left by the Barrow Woman.

* A few broken vials thrown in the fire, these contain traces of alchemy used in the Blood Father's brutal alchemy.

* The site of the servant's murders, covered in blood, but there's less blood than there should be? Did the laird devour it?

* A blade similar to the one found in the barrow, this was used to secretly bleed the laird when Kevin was alone with the man.

* A small pouch of poisonous herbs, again, part of the alchemists' concoction used to trigger the monstrous transformation.

The clues all point to Kevin as the culprit, and Anna is furious at this, the man walked out of their lives not long ago bound for Ireland. She isn't sure if he left, but she offers the characters any kind of reward she can think of to find and bring him to justice. If the characters do nothing, then Kevin leaves Scotland non-the-wiser that he's been found out, moves to Ireland for the next stage. This concludes the adventure for now. There are plenty of side things to occupy the heroes in Scotland; they might even be summoned to speak with Aileen if she gets wind of the whole debacle.

You can end the adventure here, or you can spin it on for a while and have the characters search for Kevin near a small village by Loch Goil. If they catch up with him it's up to you how that whole thing plays out, Anna wants him punished. He'll try and escape to Ireland for the next stage of the plan if not.

IMPORTANT NPCs OF WAYLAND'S SECRET II

ANNA DE BRUCE

This rough and tumble, no nonsense, ginger-haired warrior-woman is pretty central to the whole Castle Goil story. She dresses in simple leather defensive garments, as light as she can get away with, but she's strong enough from her years in Scotland competing in various martial tournaments amongst her male peers, that she can wield a claymore one handed for a short while without getting tired.

Her preferred weapon is a Scottish cutlass, and she often carries at least a pair of throwing knives. She also gets riled if people comment on her height, just over five foot tall, she's not as tall as some of her male or female peers.

She's tougher though, a lot tougher.

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Anna de Bruce (Wild Card)

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d6, Spirits d6, Strength d8, Vigor d8

Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidation d6, Notice d6, Riding d4, Shooting d6, Stealth d4, Throwing d8

Charisma: -; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 7; **Toughness:** 7 (1)

Hindrances: Code of Honour, Loyal

Edges: Brave, Quick, Quick Draw

Gear: Leather corselet (Armor +1 to torso), cutlass (Str+d8), 3 throwing daggers (3/6/12; Str+d4).

Bonus: Baconian Clockwork Bombs

The bomb used by Friar Edward is one of the wonders produced by this order. Here are their statistics for Ultima Forsan, if you want to introduce them in your games.

NAME	RANGE	DAMAGE	ROF	COST	WEIGHT
Baconian Pistol	05/10/20	2d6+1	1	500	3

Notes: SBT, Heavy Weapon. Before throwing, can be set to explode after 1, 2 or 3 rounds. See also the standard Savage Worlds rules for Grenades.

Ultima Forsan

Name _____
Race _____

Hindrances

Wild Arcane

Agility



Boating _____ Shooting _____
Fighting _____ Stealth _____
Lockpicking _____ Swimming _____
Riding _____ Throwing _____

Smarts



Gambling _____ Notice _____
Healing _____ Repair _____
Investigation _____ Streetwise _____
Knowl. _____ Survival _____
Knowl. _____ Taunt _____
Knowl. _____ Tracking _____

Spirit



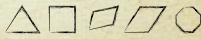
Intimidation _____ Persuasion _____

Strength



Climbing _____

Uigor



Charisma _____ Parry _____
Pace _____ Toughness _____

Background

Languages

Permanent Injuries

Edges

- _____ V
- _____ X
- _____ XV
- _____ Seasoned
- _____ XXV
- _____ XXX
- _____ XXXV
- _____ Veteran
- _____ XLV
- _____ L
- _____ LV
- _____ Heroic
- _____ LXV
- _____ LXX
- _____ LXXV
- _____ Legendary
- _____ XC
- _____ C
- _____ CX

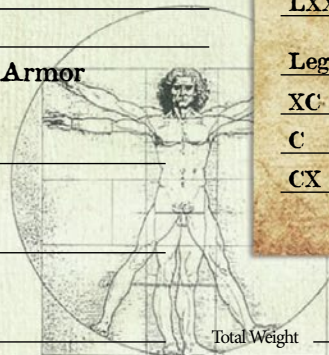
Weapon	Range	Damage	Wt.	Notes
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Power	Cost	Range	Damage/Effect
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Gear

Armor

Head	Arms	Torso	Legs
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____



Total Weight _____ Florins _____

Weight limit _____ Encumbrance Penalty _____

Fatigue -I -II INC -III -II -I Wounds