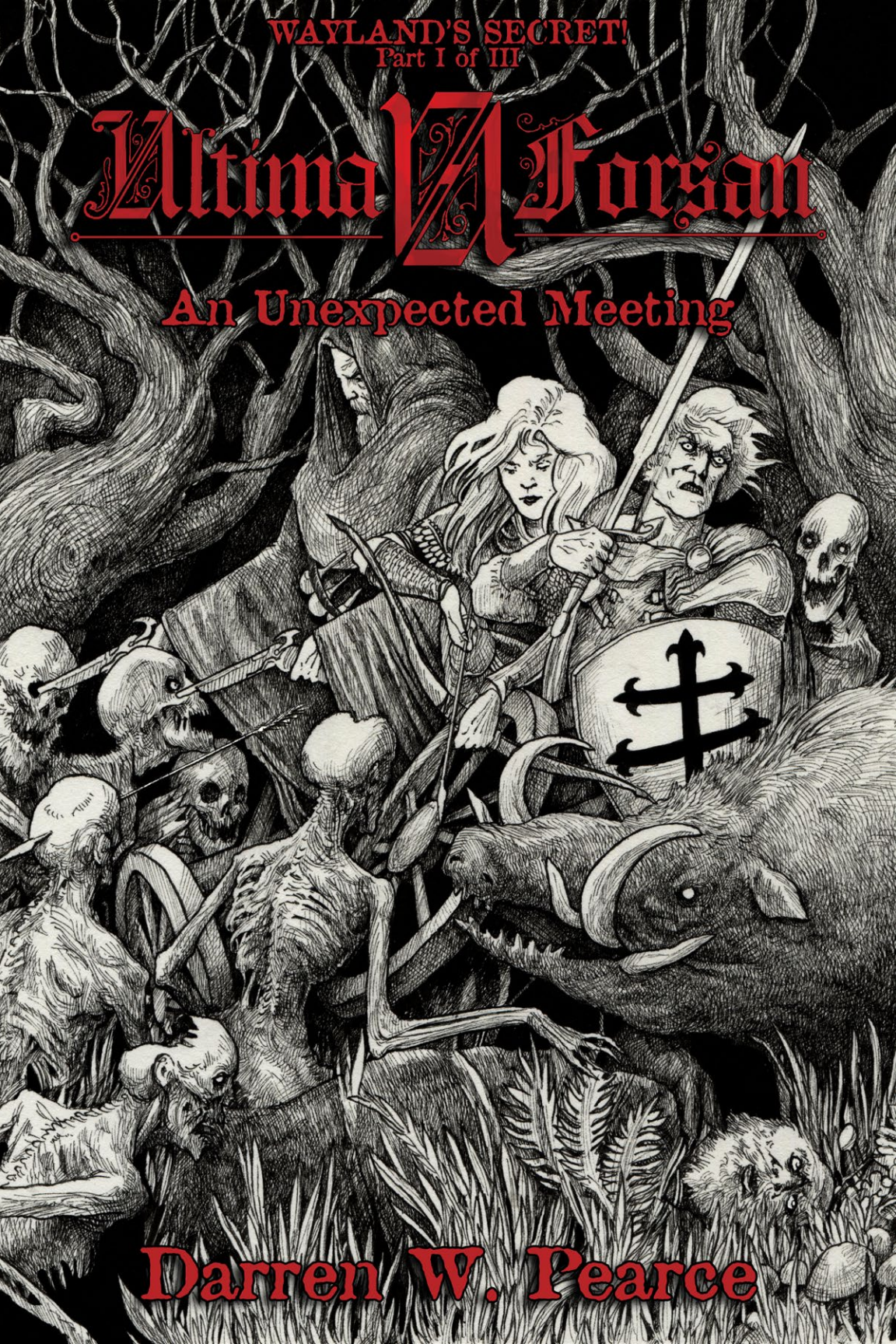


WAYLAND'S SECRET!
Part I of III

Ultima V Forsan

An Unexpected Meeting



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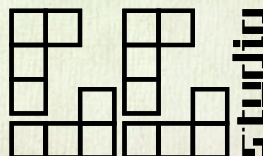
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An Unexpected Meeting

Darren W. Pearce

THE FOUR TRAVELLERS were greeted by the early morning light, as the coach rumbled on over the ragged ground of a barely maintained roadway. As the sun gently rose to push away the mist, the remnants of the night slipped off into shadow. The landscape of England was still beautiful, regardless of the terrors that lurked beyond the rolling hills, forested undulating ground, and castle dominated skyline. Three men and one woman were the vehicle's passengers, tucked in safely behind glass, wood, steel, and thick cloth curtains they were unaware of the change from night to day, save for the slight glimmer of light as it began to filter in.

It was idyllic, peaceful, serene almost and the coachman pulled his coat's lapel up to ward off the morning chill. He took a sip from a heady drink in a metal flask, adjusted his cocked hat, and took his eyes off the road for a bare second.

He died almost instantly as a creature leapt from the raised roadside, followed by a dozen others, his throat torn out and the flesh ripped asunder. A massive shaggy monstrous beast slammed into the side of the coach, it splintered wood, shattered the glass, and the sheer force of the impact managed to slam the vehicle over onto its side. The horses let out a scream as their harness

snapped, the pair of them fled the attack as quickly as they could, flecks of spittle trailing from their mouths -- eyes wide in fear. The coachman was devoured by the undead, they tore at him, stripped his skin in mere moments, his screams caused a flock of crows to take flight, blasting from the trees like a black cloud. The Fell Beast, a boar, rammed its head against the underside of the coach, goring at it as though it were a real animal, it snarled and gave a groaning roar in a feral manner -- eyes bloody, tusks caked in gore, and pinkish foam slavered from between its jaws. Two undead leapt from the road and onto the coach, they clawed at the broken door.

A single shot rang out, a cloud of smoke followed with a flash of light. The first undead fell backward with most of its rotten face torn away by the shot from within. A second shot swiftly followed the first, and managed to rip the ear off the second corpse, it gurgled in frustration and fell backward off its perch as a third shot blew part of the coach door into the air in a cloud of splinters.

A man clambered out not long after, dressed in simple robes, his hood thrown back. His face sported a rake of scars across the left side, his beard slightly silver where it had grown back over time. In each hand he held a marvel of the age, a repeating pistol with a beautiful carved handle. Smoke coiled from the right hand pistol, it flickered into the air like a dragon tail.

"Hurry now," the man said in an accent thick with the brogue of Scotland's fair kingdom. "We've a dearth of the undead pressing us, and if it's all the same to you, I'd prefer not to become their breakfast."

The undead, numbering half-a-dozen or so looked up from their recent feast, the coach shook again as the boar smashed into it one more time. "Damnable beast," the friar grumbled. "You hear me, you'll not take Edward Connelly this day, nor those who I deem to be under my protection."

"So that's who you are," a soft but firm voice echoed from inside the coach. "The priest is dead, splintered through the gut. Our

knightly friend is alive, but stunned.” After this revelation, a woman clambered out alongside the monk. He didn’t have time to take her full measure, but she was young, no more than twenty two summers at least, and lithe. Her dark green cloak and hood hid a pleasing shape, and a cascade of bright flame-red hair. In the time it took him to smile, she pulled a longbow out from the luggage rack of the coach, strung it, and sent two arrows into the Dead as they moved toward the coach from the butchered corpse of the coachman.

“Jane Redmere,” she said with a single nod. “Tis a pity we could not have made introductions sooner, but the fatigue from my journey sent me into the arms of sleep too soon. Still, if we survive, our talk will be so much the richer for our experience.”

“If you say so,” the Baconian Friar smiled a little and unleashed shot after shot into the boar below them as the coach rocked a few more times. “I’d prefer to talk after we save our arses.”

“I must concur with the friar,” a third voice joined the two from inside the coach. “I would beg of you a favour, either of you. Then I will be more than happy to converse, but I find myself travelling lightly, my sword should be on the roof where I stored it.”

Jane looked over, shot an arrow right through the left eye of a charging undead, she caused it to pitch over in the mud. “I will see if I can assist you, sir knight.” She stepped a few paces, bow still taut and kicked one of the undead off the side as it climbed up.

“My thanks, some expediency would be preferred.”

“I have the undead to contend with as well, one moment good sir,” Jane dropped her bow onto her right foot as she let the string go. The bow relaxed suddenly, and she took the knight’s longsword with scabbard out. As she did so another undead leapt onto the side of the coach -- Jane reacted quickly and smashed the pommel of the sword into its face, there was a satisfying crunch of bone and it rocked backward to fall off into the mud.

With the undead cleared for now she dropped the sword down through the door, and then went back to unleashing her arrows against the remaining Dead.

“My thanks!”

As arrow met dead flesh, as shot rang out, there was another sound -- the sound of something being torn off from inside the coach. Then as the boar, covered in blood from many gunshots, staggered back to make another run at the underside, the bottom of the coach splintered and cracked.

Out from the cracked wood charged a man, dressed in a shirt, breeches, and soft shoes. He carried the sword that Jane had dropped, and with his hand around the door handle, a makeshift shield from the left hand side coach door. He went straight at the boar and brought the blade down with a powerful strike, cleaving into the Fell Beast’s mutated flesh, it drew forth gouts of thick blood rank with the plague’s touch.

“Careful lad, do not get that filth on you. The last thing I want to do is cut your head off!” the friar said and took aim at the remaining undead. “Let the sir knight deal with the big beast, you and me will finish off these foul abominations. And then,” he grinned widely. “We’ll crack some of that er, religious mead I keep for ah, ceremonial reasons in my bag.”

“I should not drink with such men in my company,” Jane managed a wink with a flash of her jade coloured eyes. “But for you, friar, I think I can make an exception.”

The knight shouted over the din of battle, “Sebastian Hawkwood,” as he brought his blade down again and again, he used the door to fend off the worst of the Fell Beast’s ghastly tusks as they sought to rake him and gore his flesh. “I know it is a royal name, but please, do not genuflect to me. I am just a humble knight,” the boar’s head sailed off to the left and he turned around to look at the pair. “Of the Order of the Garter, under the command of Queen Phillipa.”

Jane and Edward exchanged looks and set about turning the tide of battle, with Sebastian’s help. Between the knight, the friar, and

the archer they made quick work of the creatures. They did not escape unscathed of course, for those battles tend to only happen in the tomes of legend, but for the knight, his wounds were not cause for concern even after the three of them stood by toppled coach and surveyed the Dead. They were riddled with arrows, and peppered with shot.

Jane was unscathed and so was Edward, and as true to his word the friar produced a bottle thick with the honey drink known as mead.

"As a friar," he said and drank deeply. "I know the cleansing power of alcohol such as this, and as a man, I cannot tell you how much I wanted this drink since we set off on that bedevilled coach ride." Sebastian shook his head, "I have made a knightly vow, I have sworn not to touch alcohol. I do not need my senses dulled thank you good friar."

"As you wish, my lady perhaps you'll be up for a wee sip then?"

"Oh I shall," Jane, rather unladylike at this point covered in mud and gore took the bottle and downed a quarter of its golden contents. "That good friar, is the best mead I have tasted in such a long time."

Friar Edward grinned and put the stopper back into the vessel, "So glad to hear it, now I don't want to be a man to cast shade on our little celebration, but we've no horses, and the nearest habitation is a small town that's still a good few miles away from where we are in that direction. That and I don't want you downing all my mead in one go." He punctuated that with an impish smile.

SEBASTIAN LOOKED TO the coach, and his belongings, he pulled out his armour, which fortunately for him wasn't plate, and retreated back inside the coach for a short while. When he emerged again he was dressed in leather, chain, and his sword was now firmly across his back, his shield held loosely in his left hand. Jane took a moment to look at him, with his short blond hair, and expressive blue eyes -- he was just a few years older than her, and seemed to be in good shape.

"You will be able to keep up with all that leather and chain-mail?" she said counting her arrows, "Only seven arrows left that are of any use. Still, it is enough, what with your guns friar, and Sebastian's sword."

"I shall", the knight nodded proudly. "I have climbed rock walls, trees, and run for miles in my plate armour."

"I have heard such tales," Jane replied with a slight incline of her head. "Who was it now who could do such things?"

"Sir Benjamin of York," Sebastian adjusted his posture and rolled his shoulders slightly. "He made a name for himself slaying monsters, coal black hair, one eye. He died a few years ago whilst defending a family against a Tyrant."

"A sad end to such a great man."

Edward listened and then as he grew impatient with the history lesson, since he was a practical man, and that included keeping his hide intact from bites and gashes, he coughed. "Right, history lesson over, time to go. We've a few miles walk to Glastonbury as I said, but as luck would have it, John Hawkwood had a keep built atop the Tor to act as a sentinel against the tide of the undead, and those damnable Fell Beasts."

The trio scavenged what they could from the coach and began to make their way in the direction of the small Town of Glastonbury in the distance, watched over by the silhouette of both Tor and keep, the former being the hill upon which Hawkwood's bastion stood as a grey stone watchman over the lands of Somerset.

They passed through the English countryside, to bear witness to the ravages of the dead and worse, little pockets of once-pleasant rural farmland now stood as empty as the eyes of bodies picked clean by carrion birds, or devoured by the hungry dead, and exhumed by flesh-starved claws with hurried clumps of earth left behind like tiny burial mounds.

"The undead left nothing but empty shells," Jane commented as they crossed a once lush field, now the crops had all withered and decayed. "No one was brave enough to come claim the dead who did not rise back to devour their families."

"It is the way of it my lady," Sebastian became wary, his pace changed, his stance altered and he did not relax until they had crossed the whole field. "I do not trust this place."

"There could be undead hiding in the carcass of those farm houses, or they could have picked the place clean and moved on." Friar Edward observed and then fell silent.

It seemed like an eternity as they waited for something to come to claim them, some fell monster to leap unbidden from the fouled soil. They crossed the field and made it to the stone wall on the other side, they passed through a gap there and left the farm behind them. Glastonbury still taunted them in the distance, it seemed so far away still.

"How many miles is it?" Jane finally asked Edward.

"I can't remember to be honest lass, it's been a while since I've been this way. No more than five by my count now." They must have walked five or ten already.

The sun had gone past its zenith, and it wove across the sky like a brilliant tapestry, it headed towards the dimmer light of evening. Every shadow seemed to hold a greater danger, and took on near-mythic proportions as the travellers reached the border of Glastonbury. They had a few hours before night overtook them, and the border was a welcome sight as the edges of the town itself. It was not a large place, but it was beginning to expand once more after the ravages of the plague (and the Dead that followed).

The sentinel warriors, mercenaries who guarded the edges of settlements like this spotted them as they made their way over. A rank of archers lined on the walls kept their bows firmly trained upon the trio, right until they came into proper view distance and the crest on Sebastian's shield revealed the Hawkwood heraldry. "Weapons down!" A statuesque woman commanded and stalked out of the gate to the town. "Forgive my men sir knight, they are edgy due to the increase of attacks on our southern defensive line." Her men relaxed a little when it was obvious that the trio were neither undead, nor bandits.

Sebastian shook his head, "Diligence sir knight is nothing to be sorry for, or forgiven. I would be more concerned if your men had not been spotting us with arrows as we approached."

"Well," she smiled at this, ran her fingers over her short brown hair to tidy it. "If I had known you were coming, well, we would have been more prepared. I have not seen a Hawkwood crest in a few years, might I ask your name?"

"Sir Sebastian Hawkwood, and you?" Sebastian managed a bow, even though he was tired from all the travel.

"Sir Gracelyn Leeton." She bowed back.

"Jane Redmere, and this is Friar Edward," Jane offered, not wanting to be left out of introductions at all. "We were due to arrive on a coach, but our coach was attacked by the undead -- and a Fell Beast, a plague-mutated boar no less."

“Charmed.” The Friar said.

“Aye,” Sebastian added. “We were the only survivors, the priest, who we never learnt the name of perished.”

“Terrible,” Gracelyn shook her head and gestured for the trio to follow. “Come through, we’ll get you some food, and drink. You look travel worn, and in need of rest.”

“And a bath?” Jane said hopefully. “It feels like I have not bathed for days.”

“And a bath.” Gracelyn added with a slight smile.

WITHIN THE WALLS of the town, the trio found a welcome that they did not expect. Sebastian's lineage seemed to open doors wider than any imagined, and with Gracelyn leading them from the front, they looked an impressive sight to the town's folk. Here too in Glastonbury centre they could see the magnificent high walled keep as it looked over the landscape around it, the building now looked even more impressive the closer they were.

Gracelyn took them to a small inn, the Tor. It was a pleasant place, a little rough around the edges, as most of the town was. It was obvious that it had been hit hard by both plague and the risen dead, now however all the signs were that Glastonbury, and the Tor Inn had started to regain their footing somewhat, and were slowly crawling out of the mire.

A bald, ruddy-faced man in an apron observed them all from behind his tatty bar. "Hello Gracie," he said. "What have you got there?"

"These are my new friends, they need the best room in the house father, this is Sebastian Hawkwood, Lady Jane Redmere, and Friar Edward."

Each one of them gave the man a greeting as he regarded them with a mixture of fear, elation, trepidation, and awe.

"As Gracelyn says," he replied with a hurried bow, he pushed a dirty cloth off to one side, it slid over the bar top with a less than graceful 'plop' sound. "I'm Jasper Leeton, her father."

"A tavern owner's daughter, come knight?" Edward grinned. "Now are you sure you don't have Highland blood in your veins lass?"

Gracelyn chuckled a little. "No Edward, we were born here in Glastonbury, lived here all our lives."

"She's right," Jasper said. "I best get some food and drink on, and see to it you can have the best rooms here. Oh and anything else?"

"A bath?" Jane said with a hopeful half-smile.

"A bath it is, you're in luck, we've just had a fresh load of hot water boiled, and there's a lovely copper tub upstairs. I'll get one of the lads to pull it into your room, and you'll think you're in heaven!"

Jane blinked and a tiny sly smile crept over her face, "Copper," she said. "That is fit for a queen, are you sure?"

Jasper blushed, "No trouble lady, no trouble at all."

He smiled at his daughter, then he made good on all he'd promised. He gave orders to the cook, primed the other staff and settled back behind the bar with a nod.

Meanwhile Gracelyn led the trio to a table and joined them there.

"So, tell me more why you were all on a coach to Glastonbury?"

She asked and spread her elbows on the table, the clunk of her chain armour thudded against the beer stained wood.

Edward took his bottle out of his bag and put it in the middle of the table. "I'll start if none of ye have any objection?"

"None," Sebastian said with a grin, he was eager to learn of the friar's motivation. "I am as they say, all ears."

"None." Jane shook her head.

"Goodo. Right then, well. Mine's fairly simple, I'd heard that the keep was looking for someone who knew how to brew potions, was a dab hand with firearms, and somewhat skilled in the ways of the Baconian Order."

“Interesting,” Gracelyn interjected. “I wonder why that is?”

“My thought on it lass, I think Commander Hayward is looking to push against the encroaching undead. I feel it in my bones that they’re getting bolder, and the attacks have become more frequent. Our massacred priest, and coach driver are testament to that.”

Jane and Sebastian both nodded, but they didn’t add anything at this time. Meanwhile Jasper moved about his business in the inn, and patrons came, and went.

“Who’s next?” Gracelyn looked at Jane, then to Sebastian.

“The lady first, as is right and proper,” the knight gestured to Jane and then laid his hand across the back of the chair. “I will regale you with my reason once she has told us hers.”

“You are too kind,” there was a hint of sarcasm in Jane’s voice and she sighed. “Mine is not as grand as Friar Edward’s reason, mine is simply happenstance. I love to travel, I had heard that Glastonbury had a grand Tor, and the keep of course, so I put it in my mind to come see it. No ulterior motive I assure you, barring the fact that I do know the keep is low on archers. I think my new companions can attest to my skill with a bow.”

“That we can, that we can.” Edward, with no mugs forthcoming, opened his bottle and swigged from it. “For my rheumatics,” he grinned. “I promise.”

Jane chuckled, Sebastian shook his head, and Gracelyn fixed the man with a stare, “Is that Highland Mead?” she questioned.

“It is.”

“And you’ve not offered me any?”

“Do you like it?”

“Do cockerels crow in the morning, friar?”

Edward passed her the bottle and he nodded, “Take a gulp of that then, my father’s recipe, with a few twists from my own hand.”

Gracelyn did so and she savoured the taste, “Oh that is good, you have my thanks and my respect. You make a fine mead good friar, a fine mead indeed.”

Edward puffed up a little when complimented so, his smile grew broader and he nodded. "It's kind of you to say so Gracelyn, kind of you indeed."

"It is not just the friar's skill with alcohol we should commend," Jane interjected and took the bottle, she put one eye to the lip and peered in. "But his skill," she now took a drink and set the bottle back down. "With those guns of his."

"Ah yes," Edward took the bottle back and drained it down to the dregs. "I do have a penchant for the firearms of my Order, after all, they are ingenious buggers really." He put his hand to his mouth. "Oops, pardon the language ladies and sir knight, that one slipped out due to the mead."

Jane and Gracelyn exchanged amused glances before they said as one, "Forgiven."

Edward laughed and it was the first truly light-hearted moment in their travels, since they'd shared a coach together.

Now all eyes turned to Sebastian and he could have withered under the hot gaze of so many. He smiled at them, nodded and said, "I suppose it is indeed my turn, and upon my honour I shall endeavour to make this tale worthy of well, your attention."

"Get on with it laddie!" Edward chuckled.

"I am as you know, a Hawkwood, youngest son of the Queen. I joined the Order of the Garter, and I have pledged myself to fighting the undead, injustice, and terrors where ere they be found. To this end, I have come to Glastonbury to present myself to Commander Hayward and it is my sincere hope that I am allowed to join his company stationed there. They are many of them from a sacred knightly order, those who are renowned for battling the fiercest of Fell Beasts, and the undead. The Order of the White Stag."

Gracelyn's jaw fell open slightly and she leaned back in her chair. "I thought they were a myth, a legend to inspire knights to even greater feats of heroism."

"So did I," Jane regarded the young knight carefully now and studied him. "Your heroism does speak for itself sir Sebastian,

you went against that Fell Boar with strength, courage, and selflessness. Armed only with your sword, and makeshift shield wrenched from the door of the very coach.”

Sebastian blushed a little. “You do me a great kindness dear lady, but I am sure any other knight would have done as I did.”

“Lad,” Edward grumbled as a serving lad put down food and drink for all of them. “Take the blasted compliment.”

Gracelyn looked at them all and clicked her tongue at the back of her throat in thought. “I am honoured to be amongst such notable people, in your own way. Especially you sir Sebastian, for if you are to become a Knight of the White Stag, then you surely will have trials-a-plenty to face, and any knight willing to even face but one of those is worthy of all my respect, and I dare say, boldly -- admiration.”

“Grand, grand,” Edward stuffed a chunk of bread and cheese together. “Now how about we eat, drink, and talk later?”

“A good idea friend.” Sebastian joined the friar.

Jane followed suit, in much the same way.

FOOD, DRINK, and FRIENDSHIP it didn't get much better than this for the four of them. Jane slipped off a little later in the evening for her bath as their talk died down -- Jasper was a most attentive host, and he made them feel more than welcome. His daughter, Gracelyn seemed to be quite enamoured with the young Knight of the Garter. At around one o'clock they turned in for the night and slept in comfortable beds, the memory of the attack became no more than a niggles at the back of their collective minds.

In the morning, as was the penchant for England's weather, a sunny day did not greet them. Slate grey clouds provided a blockade against the rays of the early morning light, where God beams shone through in torn patches in the sky's armour.

"Today," Sebastian said as the three of them sat around the same table, early morning, alone in the inn's taproom. "We should present ourselves to Lord Hayward, the commander of Tor Keep." "Simon Hayward, Knight Commander?" Jane said as she dug around her egg with a fork.

"That is the one, a brave, noble, and worthwhile leader." Sebastian said wistfully. "I admire the man greatly."

"I'd noticed," Edward had finished his morning prayers, done his early morning chores, he'd helped Jasper chop wood before the rest of them had even risen from their beds. Now he tucked into a healthy repast of fruit, berries, and some nuts covered in rich cow's milk. "It's good to have a hero lad, I'm just joking with you." "I thought as much good friar."

"The Haywards were merchants were they not, before the plague?" Jane raised a brow.

"No good lady," Sebastian shook his head. "The Haywoods of the Middle Lands were lumber merchants, but these are the Somerset Haywards. They've always been in service to the Queen, much like myself, though mine is by right of birth of course."

Edward looked away and rolled his eyes, ah the young, the proud. He had a thought about humility, and then remembered his own youth before he became a Baconian Friar.

"I see," Jane wisely kept her thoughts firmly in her head as well.

"Well, it sounds like a good idea regardless. Perhaps I can see if the man requires an archer of some skill."

"About that," Edward offered the barest hint of a wolf-like grin, his elder face cracking into a wide smile after a short moment. "I may not have told the young Gracelyn the whole truth about why I'm here, but you two, we've faced down the gnawing horror of the Dead. That bloody boar, and I feel I can trust you."

This caught both of his companion's attention, breakfast suddenly forgotten, the egg idly abandoned Jane's gaze was firmly directed at the friar's.

"Go on?" Sebastian urged. "You cannot now leave us in the dark friend!"

"Ever hear of the School of the Night?"

Their blank expressions told the friar all he needed to know. "I thought not, well, I'm not going to elucidate overly on them. Lets just say, that I am not a member, but I have a friend who is, and she's tasked me with investigating something. If you are willing to keep this under your hood, and helm, I'll tell you more."

"I am!" Jane said eagerly, all thoughts of the keep and being an archer on its walls forgotten.

"You have my interest my friend, and my word as a knight. I shall not speak of this beyond us three." Sebastian inclined his head.

"Grand then, as I was saying -- School of the Night, secret stuff. There's a place, not too far from here, though we shall need horses of course. It's called Wayland's Smithy, a Neolithic Barrow dug between 3460, and 3400 BC. To most people it's a site where you bury the ancient dead, but to my friend from the school -- there's something else going on there. All signs point to a leyline convergence."

"A what?" Sebastian quirked a brow and tugged at some bread.

"Leylines, mystical pathways that old magic's supposed to flow down. It's all a load of rubbish to most people, but Reva Flynn assures me there's some truth to it. Something bad is going to happen, and she wants me, because I owe her the kind of favour that a man can never repay back, to investigate."

"It sounds like an interesting place, I am extremely fond of the ancient past." Jane said with a smile. "My father, he used to scrape at old burial sites before the plague and the risen dead came."

Sebastian pursed his lips and then replied, "You have my help, my sword, and my word as a knight we shall face whatever darkness this is and put pay to it."

Edward smiled the kind of smile that's only reserved for kings, he extended his hand and said, "I am honoured to have such stalwart new companions."

Sebastian shook the friar's hand warmly, and Jane did the same, then she bent down and kissed it, afterwards she let out a chuckle.

"That was odd," the friar laughed softly. "Well I usually only see knights do that to damsels, guess now I have seen all sorts. I don't know which fears me more, the undead or that show of affection." He winked at the woman.

"Well I have never been rebuffed so soundly," Jane winked back and then laughed hard. "I think I am going to enjoy your company

good friar, and you too Sebastian. Though I have a feeling our Gracelyn would like to enjoy more than your company.”

“What?” the knight blinked.

“Aye lad, it’s a bit obvious.”

“I...”

“She is already eyeing you as a potential husband, I think it was the story about your heroics and the Order of the White Stag.” Jane teased softly.

“I am chaste,” Sebastian floundered a little. “I am bound to my knightly vows.”

“You’ll be chased alright, I think she won’t give up, or be put off by those vows of yours.” Edward chuckled in a ribald manner.

“Good friar, are not stags virile creatures?” Jane said innocently, a tiny smile played across her lips.

“I believe so.”

“Oh please, I see what you are trying to do, the pair of you, and it will not work.” Sebastian countered with a slight hint of indignation in his voice.

With another chuckle Jane gave Sebastian’s hand a little squeeze, “Dear knight, you are too easy to make blush.”

Sebastian tried to look annoyed, but he blushed again. “So when do we leave?” He quickly changed the subject.

Edward studied the grey sky and the foul morning weather, he tapped his fingers on the wooden table. “Jasper and daughter will likely be up in half an hour, we need horses, it’s a bit of a ride from Glastonbury to Wayland’s Smithy. Yet with you two as my company, it’ll be a fine time indeed.”

Those words elicited a smile from Jane and Sebastian, they tucked back into their breakfast and finished it -- eager to be on the road and riding toward the mysterious barrow.

THE WEATHER HAD begun to clear by the time they'd finished their breakfast, so they stepped outside of the inn just in time to see the proud figure of Gracelyn Leeton walk down the road toward them. She waved, mostly for Sebastian's benefit, who true to form blushed once more.

"Hail and good morning friends!" she yelled, this startled some passersby and one man nearly dropped his basket of vegetables. "Sorry Donald," she said apologetically. "I forget that I'm not on a parade ground sometimes!"

"It's quite fine sir Gracelyn," he deferred and went quickly on his way. "I must be off."

She turned her head and nodded as he swiftly walked past, then continued on her way, her course set right for the trio. "How fare you this morning?" She didn't give them time to fend her off, not as though they would.

"We fare quite fine thank you sir Gracelyn," Sebastian said and tried not to look in her eyes, they were easy to get lost in. Doe-like, and quite expressive. He caught himself as he did look into them, and looked to the side with a cough. "And you?"

"I am more than fine, what are your plans for the day?"

Edward gave an impish grin and he chuckled, "Well, sir Sebastian was just saying that he would love to go for a ride into the Somerset downs. He has a hankering to see some of the old burial mounds that are rumoured to be near here, I hear tell there's one close to the White Horse in the hill?"

"Yes," Gracelyn nodded. "Wayland's Smithy, it's about a twenty hour walk. A lot shorter if you're to ride, I can see to it that you have horses if you desire?"

"Oh I am sure sir Sebastian would desire that, would he not?" Jane Redmere followed Edward's impish grin, and his example. Sebastian squared his shoulders and blinked. "He would indeed, I mean, I would indeed."

Gracelyn looked at Jane, then to Edward and then hid a smile behind a fake yawn. "I shall be off then, you will have your horses as fast as I can persuade the stable lad!"

Edward watched her go, in a very non-friar like manner. "She's a good lass, and I really think she likes you Sebastian."

"I concur," Jane said and leaned back against the support of the inn's outer beam which held up the canopy over the door. "If it were not for those pesky vows, eh?"

"She is a gallant knight, and her eyes are strong, wilful, loyal." Sebastian trailed off when he realised he was thinking beyond his vows.

"I bet they are," Edward chuckled again. "I bet they are indeed." They only had to wait but half an hour and Gracelyn came back, she led with the help of three experienced riders -- three fine horses, two dappled grey, and one black mare. "These are the best I could find, the black one is for sir Sebastian. She's used to carrying knights, a fine warhorse, and a trusty companion on the road. She's mine."

Jane looked to Edward and back to Sebastian. "A gift, oh my." Sebastian took Gracelyn's hand as she passed him the reins, he kissed it, rather like Jane did to Edward. "I shall guard her with my life, and your loan of this fine steed is worth more than all the coin in all the realms."

“Oh now that’s smoother than a fine Highland whiskey!” Edward gave an encouraging nod. “What happened to the vows lad?”

“I am sure I can pray to God for forgiveness good friar, or you could perhaps have a word for me?”

Jane stifled a laugh and smiled, “Sir Gracelyn, thank you, these are wonderful and I am sure at some point if you can escape your duties here, you could come ride with us when we venture out again?”

Gracelyn nodded just the once, she looked at her hand. “If Knight Commander Hayward permits it.”

“I am sure he would lass, but for now, we must be on our way. It’s a journey that I don’t want to take all day.” Edward clambered up onto his horse and settled into the saddle. “Just like I remember as a child, only when I was a bairn, the view was much different from my mother’s knee.”

Sebastian climbed into his saddle and bowed his head to sir Gracelyn, meanwhile Jane leapt into hers in an almost acrobatic manner and stowed her bow with a fresh quiver of arrows. “Shall we?”

“Aye,” Edward flicked the reins and turned his horse toward the town gate. “See you anon sir Gracelyn.”

“Good luck,” she said, and then under her breath she added. “On whatever mission it is you are keeping from me.”

Jane heard her and chuckled. “I think she is on to your ruse friar.”

“Then let us ride out before she chooses to follow, not as though I’d mind, but I prefer three as a number to investigate this matter before I bring in the other knights around here.”

“Wise.” Jane replied and followed the Baconian Friar’s horse.

The trio cleared the gate and set off across the Somerset countryside, the horses afforded them more freedom to pick through the landscape, and now under a sun-drenched sky they made good time as they cantered and then galloped through the long grass. It was nine in the morning when they left, and the friar calculated they’d arrive at around seven in the evening -- as long as the Dead didn’t try to stop them along the way.

THEY RODE IN silence for the most part, punctuated by light-hearted conversation, and minor talk. Then as they got closer to Wayland's Smithy, they passed by hills and dales through the beautiful countryside marked by forests and rolling land. Small villages churned puffs of grey smoke into the sky on the horizon, they marked settlements where the indomitable spirit of the English refused to be cowed by the fear of the undead, even as night's dark cloak began to drape the landscape, it turned the ground from green to dusky brown and then grey.

Wayland's Smithy beckoned atop a hilly area as they entered from the south west, up a small track bordered on both sides by a drystone wall. The stars were full in the sky as they tied their horses to a large branch on the leeward side of the hill.

"It's best if we leave them here, for if there's the Dead up there, I don't want to risk the animals."

"Wise," Jane said and grabbed her bow, and arrows. "I bow to your wisdom Edward."

Sebastian took his shield and adjusted his scabbard. "I am ready friends, let us face the dark."

As they made their way up the hill to the entrance before the clearing where the barrow lay, they spied shapes ahead in the

dark. Outlined in the barest light from the moon and stars, a moon which was full of course.

"It seems like Reva was correct," Edward grumbled. "Something is going on here, and judging by those robes those are worshippers of some kind."

Jane settled in beside the friar, and Sebastian crouched low in the undergrowth to observe.

Out from the entrance to the barrow came a figure, horribly disfigured, perhaps by the plague -- a man of sorts, but his eyes spoke of countless evil deeds, his raiments were as black as the night sky. He gestured to the others and said in a slate-like voice. "Bring forth the willing sacrifice, let the rite begin, let the Blood Father be honoured."

"Blood Father?"

A screech burst into the night behind the three of them as a pack of the undead roamed out of the blackness.

The dark priest turned his bloody gaze upon the trio. "Kill them, let nothing disturb us this night."

"Blast it, why do these things always turn into massacres." Edward drew his pistols and growled. "We've a fight friends!"

Jane levelled her bow, knocked an arrow and let it fly against one of the undead. It caught the creature in the shoulder and pitched it around in a circle.

Sebastian's unsheathed his longsword, pulled his shield before him and charged into the fray. "For the Queen and England!" He yelled!

Two guns lit up the night as the assembled hordes of the dark priest surged forward, they blotted out the heroes from view, their fate unknown -- for now...

FIN!

AT LAST...

An Unexpected Meeting 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 Bonus

HOW TO RUN WAYLAND'S SECRET AS AN ADVENTURE

The best way to handle Wayland's Secret as an adventure is to place your heroes in the role of the surviving travellers, putting them right in the idyllic English countryside just prior to the attack that changes their lives. Each one of them is on the coach for a reason, and in the case of the story, that reason becomes clear later on as the characters interact – it should really be the same with your group of players aboard the coach. Turn Edward, Jane, and Sebastian into NPCs like Sir Gracelyn Leeton and her father.

For the purposes of this take on the adventure, we're assuming that you're doing just that.

The next thing is to break it up into key scenes, and by starting with the quiet coach ride, you can really hit the players with a big action scene early on.

SCENE 1: THE COACH

In this scene it's important to establish early on just how peaceful it is, because you don't want the heroes to work out that in a very short time, they're going to be attacked by at least six undead, and one very angry Fell Beast, in this case, a mutated boar. Of course if you want to make your players a little uneasy, you can describe the unearthly silence, and the long shadows.

As the undead attack, the heroes are inside the coach, so they should probably feel the impact of the animal slamming into the side of it. The door splinters, and glass flies into the coach itself before the strength of this massive monster topples it over onto the left hand side. You could call, as Games Master, for an appropriate skill check or attribute roll here – after all, they might

get some Fatigue from being rolled around inside the coach, tumbling against each other.

Optional: If you want to add some horror, have an NPC with them (the priest in the story) killed by a huge splinter of wood, or shard of glass, then cover the heroes in the priest's blood.

Outside the undead attack the coachman, so you can describe the grisly sounds the heroes might hear. Remember, they can't see out of the coach unless they look out of the top broken door, or the slat that allows them to speak to the driver.

Also, the coach is under attack by the boar at this point, so whilst they're trying to right themselves inside it and work out what's going on, the coach is being rocked by the massive beast's relentless charges.

They're going to want to get out of the coach before the boar smashes his way in. When they emerge, they can only do so through the top door. Unless they want to beat their way out of the underside of the coach, that is now being wrecked by the angry monster smashing into it, in which case they'll need to cause it enough damage to break the reinforced wood.

Once they're out they've got the undead to contend with. You can handle this a few ways; you can assume that every Dead attacker is a standard one from Ultima Forsan's Bestiary. Or you can say that they're Extras as per Savage Worlds: Deluxe's core rule, or you can employ the Quick Combat Rules from Pinnacle.

If you employ the standard, then I'd suggest only a few bad guys for the heroes to tangle with. If they're Extras you can up the numbers somewhat, and if they're using Quick Combat, you can turn the handful of attackers from the story into a horde.

The story has six, and that's a pretty good number. After all, they've got the Fell Boar to worry about, and he's not going to go down as easy.

UNDEAD (Husk 6)

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

Husk (6)

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.

FELL BOAR (1)

This mutated monstrosity is a big hulking variant of a boar, driven mad by the plague, and made stronger by its mutations. It won't back down, and it wants blood!

Attributes: Agility d6, Smarts d4 (A), Spirits d6, Strength d12, Vigor d12

Skills: Fighting d6, Notice d4

Pace 6; Parry: 4; **Toughness:** 8

Special Abilities:

- * **Berserk:** Once Shaken, a fell boar gets +2 in any Fighting and Strength roll, and +2 in Toughness, but its Parry is reduced by -2.
- * **Crushing:** If it moves of at least 6" before attacking, a boar adds +4 to damage.
- * **Fangs:** Str+d6.
- * **Fell Beast:** These Plague consumed animals share all Fell Beasts' Special Abilities.



Once the fight's over, they're probably going to need time to lick their wounds, well, they'll have a little time – but remember, the clock's ticking, and daylight doesn't last forever. If they're at a loss what to do, after they've probably got their belongings together, and possibly searched the priest's stuff too if you have one as a shock-kill NPC, you can mention to one of them they look as though they're not far from Glastonbury Town.

SCENE 2: OVERLAND

You can make this scene as long or as short as you want, it's a good few miles to Glastonbury, and it's going to be enough for the sky to darken when they get closer to the town itself. If you want to stretch out the journey you can include the abandoned farm from the story, it's creepy, and the long shadows, empty buildings, and forlorn barns are great places to freak the players out.

If they explore, then you can add in all sorts of dangers – perhaps there's more mutated animals in the pens, or undead lurking just out of eyesight.

They might want to stop and rest in the house, it's not a bad idea, doesn't happen in the story – but this is where roleplaying games are awesome. Here you can divert from the thing I wrote, and chart a new course. Whatever you decide to do, remember, if they spend a night here, then the Dead aren't far away – it shouldn't be the most restful of nights!

Regardless, your next goal is to get them to Glastonbury. It's likely that they've heard about Tor Keep as well, so you can use that as a means to gain their interest and gently guide them toward where you want them to go. Always remember that if they do go off the beaten track, that's not a bad thing really, there's no railroad here in the adventure. You'll just have to wing it, and on the fly GM'ing like this can be the best thing you do.

SCENE 3: GLASTONBURY TOWN

As per the story Glastonbury is just on the cusp of being rebuilt, repaired, and repopulated since the Plague and the Dead hit England hard. You can describe its semi-rural nature, strong walls, which are a mixture of wood, and stone as they're starting to replace the old wooden palisades with stronger material quarried from nearby. Crews of workers still work on construction, and the town's folk pitch in.

That's when they get inside the gate of course; firstly they'll have to deal with the mercenaries guarding the town, and Sir Gracelyn Leeton, daughter of the innkeeper who runs the Tor Inn.

Gracelyn will likely let them in unless they do, or say something incredibly stupid.

She'll take them to her father's inn, and introduce them to Jasper. It's here that they'll meet the NPCs – Edward, Jane, and Sebastian. They three of them have their motivations as outlined in the story.

* Sebastian is here because he wishes to join the keep's defence force, and secretly he wants to try out for the Order of the White Stag (Legendary English monster hunters and knight adventurers.)

* Jane is here because she's got a thirst for adventure, and loves living the life of a wandering archer. She's really hoping she can get to stay at the keep, joining some of the best bowmen in the country.

* Edward is the most interesting of the three, because he can be the lead-in for the heroes to travel to Wayland's Smithy.

You can give the heroes time to explore the town, bring it to life for them. The people of Glastonbury will give anyone a chance, especially heroes who're helpful, pitch in (Edward chopping wood for Jasper in the story for example), and comport themselves with honour and dignity. If Gracelyn takes a shine to them, the people will see it, and they'll become even friendlier. Doors will

be opened to the heroes; they'll be invited in for meals, and generally given a great deal of welcome.

At some point Edward is going to take an interest, and this can happen around the time the players might look as though they're running out of things to do in town. The moment it looks like things are going to drag on, or slow down too much, hit them with Edward's approach.

Rather like in the story he's clandestine about it, makes his move when there's no one about, and asks to speak to the heroes in private.

He outlines the following things.

- * He's in need of some heroes to give him a hand with something, he's not able to pay them much if they do ask for coin, but he'll be able to scrape a reward together afterward.

- * The School of the Night has indicated something sinister is going on at a nearby ancient site (Wayland's Smithy)

- * He has a friend in that school, an occultist. He may not name her to the heroes – she's called Reva Flynnne.

- * He doesn't know much, but he's going to visit the site in the next day. He'll procure horses and supplies if the heroes are going to come with him.

Edward would like the heroes to go with him. He won't push them hard, and expect, as a Games Master that they might decide to do something else. If they go to see Knight Commander Simon Hayward of the Tor Keep, he might well ask them to investigate the site – he's heard reports of cult activity there.

That's really the next step.

SCENE 4: TO WAYLAND'S SMITHY

The journey is going to be around 20 hours on foot, over rolling hills and dales of Somerset as the crow flies. They're probably taking horses, so you can cut that down by at least half. The idea isn't to count every step of the way, so if you want, you can even turn it into a cinematic description, harkening back to the old

Ultima Forsan
Gailand Secrets



red-line on a map effect from Indiana Jones. Edward will be with them, since this is his primary mission, and diverting from the book story – he's not likely to have befriended Sebastian or Jane yet.

The real meat of the action is at the Neolithic Burial site.

SCENE 5: WAYLAND'S SMITHY

The cult that operates at Wayland's Smithy does so during the night, so if they arrive by day, they're going to find only a few small clues that things aren't quite as they seem. Edward can offer some insight, or anyone with sufficient knowledge of the occult will be able to work it out. They won't be disturbed during the day though.

If you're interested in more about Wayland's Smithy, you can find a lot more information on this site, including photographs of the place and what it looks like now.

At night they're going to see a strange cult appear in the area before the entry to the barrow. They cultists number seven, and there's a grand master, who doesn't show up until a little later on. A roaming pack of undead are also in the area, you can use these four Dead bad guys to add extra danger to the encounter, or kick off a fight if you have to. The heroes might not decide to battle the bad guys as Edward's trio does in the story.

The cult leader will appear after ten minutes if the cult isn't disturbed, and bring with him the 'Willing Sacrifice' – a young man in his early teens, ready to be disembowelled for some sinister reason.

If the heroes don't stop this, then they're in for a horrific sight. The teen is gutted before them, and dark powers invoked. They're not sure what's going on, but if the ritual completes then the teen rises again as a powerful undead servant of the cult leader.

If they disturb the ritual then the cult leader will send his minions after them.

C CULT LEADER – SAMUEL FARNHAM (Wild Card)

He's a ruthless nobleman with dreams of grandeur, serving a mysterious dark power known as the Blood Father. It's quite possible that this creature is a Tyrant or something worse. The man is in his fifties and has been trained to fence; he hides a rapier under his robes.

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

Skills: Fighting d8, Intimidation d8, Knowledge (Occult) d6, Knowledge (Plague) d6, Notice d6, Persuasion d6, Taunt d6, Witchcraft d8

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 6; **Toughness:** 6 (1)

Hindrances: Mean

Edges: Arcane Background (Witchcraft), Strong Willed

Powers: *Confusion, fear.*

Equipment: Leather corselet under the robe (Armor +1), rapier (Str+d4; +1 Parry, included above), knife (Str+d4).

C CULTISTS

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

Skills: Fighting d4, Knowledge (Occult) d4, Knowledge (Plague) d4, Notice d4

Charisma: -2; **Pace:** 6; **Parry:** 4; **Toughness:** 5

Hindrances: Mean

Equipment: Knife (Str+d4).

U UNDEAD

These zombies are remnants of Samuel's former staff, when his manor was overrun by the Dead, he fled and fell in with the Cult of the Blood Father. He left his staff to their fate, and it's only thanks to his connection to the cult that the undead don't tear him apart. They want to though, they remember...

Husks: See above.

THE WILLING SACRIFICE

If the teen isn't rescued by the heroes, the unique Atrament that infected him during the "ritual", causes him to become a very strong Possessed, and to be under Samuel's control.

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

Skills: Climbing d6, Fighting d8, Notice d6

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

Special abilities:

* **Claws/Bite:** Str+d6.

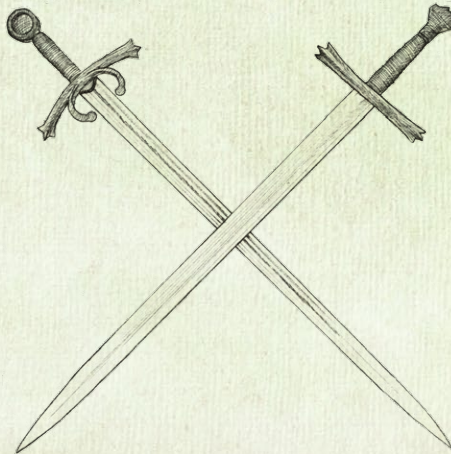
* **Dead:** These creatures have all the Special Abilities of the Dead.

* **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.



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FRID EDWARD
CONNELLY

SCENE 6: TYING THINGS UP

It's here that your version and the story really diverge, you don't know what happens yet in part 2 of this tale, so I don't really want to spoil things. I'll just say that you can take your heroes from Glastonbury and into the Highlands of Scotland to oppose another part of the Blood Father's plan.

The heroes will find nothing of value on the cultists; they're not foolish enough to carry belongings, anything that can identify them as prominent members of society. The heroes will find a note on Samuel instructing him to perform three rituals, one at each of the key sites – Wayland's Smithy being the first.

The notes are encrypted and will require several Baconian Friar's or someone who's extremely good at reading occult languages to decipher them. The notes will lead the heroes into part 2, and Bonny Scotland, or not so Bonny as you'll find out!

Bonus: Baconian Pistols

Edward's pistols are some of the incredible wonders produced by Baconian Friars. 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: 2 actions to fully reload; 6 Shots; may use Double Tap.

Ultima Forsan

Name _____
Race _____

Hindrances

Wild Arcane

Agility



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

Smarts



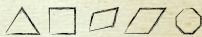
Gambling _____ Notice _____
Healing _____ Repair _____
Investigation _____ Streetwise _____
Knowl. _____ Survival _____
Knowl. _____ Taunt _____
Knowl. _____ Tracking _____

Spirit



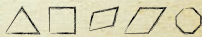
Intimidation _____ Persuasion _____





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
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_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

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

Gear

_____	_____
_____	_____
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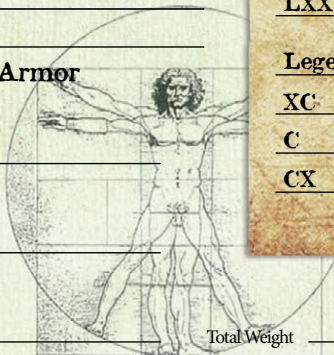
Armor

Head

Arms

Torso

Legs



Total Weight _____ Florins _____

Weight limit _____ Encumbrance Penalty _____

Fatigue

-I

-II

INC

-III

-II

-I

Wounds