

Court in the Act

Welcome to the Court of St James's Palace, London, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. All present have but lately arrived from the Royal premier of Master Shakespeare's latest rib-tickling comedy, *Two Ladies of Venice*.

Now, the Queen makes merry and entertains her courtiers, guests, would-be husbands and envoys from foreign powers with a sumptuous banquet. But while all prepare to feast and frolic, dark clouds gather, the sound of war-drums is heard in the distance – and that dear old man the Archbishop of Canterbury, who surely had never an enemy in the world, is found brutally murdered...

In *Court in the Act*, the Court revels will be played out over the course of a single evening. As well as the Queen and her courtiers, guests include French, Italian and Spanish envoys, playwrights Shakespeare and Marlowe, gallants Drake and Raleigh, the exiled Mary Queen of Scots, and many more – including, of course, the humble servants whose labors allow the Court to run smoothly. However, not everyone is as they seem. Some (well, all) of those attending have mysterious secrets and will do anything to prevent them from being revealed.

May the Revels Begin!

What do you get with *Court in the Act*?

- A step-by-step guide on how to run the game.
- Character booklets for each guest, including background, goals and objectives, rules, and special abilities.
- Item cards for each guest.
- Handouts, nametags, and other essential items.

How many people are needed?

Court in the Act is for 13 to 21 guests—plus one host (the game coordinator who plays the Chamberlain). The step-by-step guide explains which characters to omit if you have fewer than 21 guests (you need at least 13, however).

Court in the Act has 14 male and 7 female characters (the court of Elizabeth I was not a very inclusive place). But in this game, players of any gender can play characters of any gender. This is inspired by Shakespeare's plays, which are full of mistaken identities and cross-dressing.

And if you have even more guests, we include an extra character for *Court in the Act*.

How does *Court in the Act* work?

Court in the Act runs for three or four hours and suits a buffet meal. The host acts as organizer, responsible for making sure everything runs smoothly. The host does not count toward the maximum or minimum number of players.

The guests are all present at the Court of St James's Palace. They each have their own goals, and how they achieve these goals is up to them. *Court in the Act* is an evening of intrigue and secrets!

What age is *Court in the Act* suitable for?

We suggest *Court in the Act* is suitable for ages 15+ as it contains plotlines around extra-marital affairs, an illegitimate child, and references to belief in the occult and demonic power.

Where can I purchase *Court in the Act*?

Court in the Act is available from <https://www.freeformgames.com/>. We accept all major payment methods.

When you buy the game, you'll be taken to a page where you can download it immediately.

We will also email you a download link and password, so you can collect your game later if that's more convenient.

What if I don't like *Court in the Act*?

We offer a cast-iron, no-quibble guarantee. If you're not completely satisfied with *Court in the Act*, let us know within 30 days and we will refund you.

Photos and stories from Court in the Act



“I hosted *Court in the Act* (my 6th Freeform Game) for my birthday last summer, to riotous success. Many members of our cast of 18 had not played one of your games before—though a few were veterans—and most had not even met before that night! Nevertheless, everybody got right into the game and had a lot of fun.”

John Jennette, United States

“I just ran *Court in the Act* for my 21st birthday, and it was a huge success!”

**Kellie Vickers-Willis,
Australia**



“We’ve played roughly 10 of your games, and **Court in the Act** was one of the best. We like it when there’s something unique and memorable about the game, like resolving the Spanish invasion at the end. And plenty of opportunities for dressing up!”

Petter Olsen, Norway

Click here for more stories and photos:

https://www.freeformgames.com/blog/project_category/court-in-the-act-stories/

Prologue

**Gather round, ye gentles—I'll unfold
The scene of England, in those days of old
When Good Queen Bess unto the throne did come,
And Albion's state so nearly was undone.**

Background

Sixteenth-century England is divided by religion. For two generations, Catholics and Protestants have struggled for the upper hand. First, King Henry VIII denied the authority of the Pope in Rome, establishing his own Church of England. Next, his only son, the young Edward VI, and his advisers directed the Church toward the Protestant teachings of the heretics Calvin and Luther and persecuted those who clung to the Catholic faith. Edward died in his teens and was succeeded by his older sister Mary, a Catholic and married to King Philip of Spain. She declared England Catholic once more and persecuted those who clung to the Church of England. When Mary died without an heir, the Crown passed to Elizabeth, surely the most unlikely candidate for monarch: her mother, Anne Boleyn, had been beheaded by Henry and declared a witch, and Elizabeth herself was ruled illegitimate and charged with treason during her sister Mary's reign. Thus it was that she came to the throne in a most insecure case,

and she at once made further enemies by returning the nation to the Church of England which her father had established.

Foreign Relations

England is surrounded by powerful enemies—France and Spain, both Catholic nations, both deadly rivals, both keen to either topple Elizabeth or else bring her under their sway by marriage. She has been pursued by Philippe of France, the younger brother of the King, and also by Philip II of Spain, her late sister's husband. But to agree to either would surely bring the enmity of the other. Thus the delicate balancing act. Scotland is another threat, a Catholic nation historically allied to France, but Elizabeth's troops have defeated the Scots on the battlefield. After the Scottish Lords threw Queen Mary off the throne—in disgust at her dissolute lifestyle—and replaced her with her infant son James, Elizabeth kept Mary close at hand, as a prisoner in all but name here at the Court of St James. The Protestant nations of Europe, such as Denmark, are small and weak, and

diplomatic ties with England barely existent. For political judgement, the Queen as a mere woman is, of course, beholden to her counsellors—Sir Francis Walsingham, Lord Canning and General FitzBacon can certainly be relied upon for a wide diversity of advice, so radically distinct are their natures and policies one from the other.

Courtiers

Such political tension means that the Court is a murky place, full of intrigues and spies, with each party seeking to gain the upper hand. But it is also a place of brightness, of jollity and gaiety. The Queen is a young, energetic woman, and a great patron of the arts. Her virgin state leaves her free to flirt with any handsome noble, and gallants crowd about her like wasps around a honey-pot. And each year explorers return from the colonies abroad, particularly the new lands of Virginia, bearing strange and exciting finds to accompany their tales of derring-do. Sir Walter Raleigh is but recently returned from a trip to the new colony of Roanoke, and Sir Francis Drake is no doubt planning another of those privateering excursions so dreaded by Spanish merchantmen, while the Earl of Essex is a prime example of the stay-at-home school of gallantry.

Diversions

The new fad of play-writing is the latest craze to sweep London, with two rival

companies, the Globe and the Swan, enjoying full houses every night. The curtain rises tonight on a Court fresh from watching *Two Ladies of Venice*, the latest hilarious comedy by Master Shakespeare, playwright and actor of the Globe company, which the Queen has been patronizing lately. Master Shakespeare's career has enjoyed a meteoric rise of recent, displaying an extraordinary talent, and many now say that he is the superior of the Swan's Master Marlowe—himself a playwright of no mean genius. The other great movement of the age is that of arcane learning. Europe is enjoying its Renaissance, and London has its share of astrologists, hermeticists, alchemists and (some say) traffickers with unclean spirits. Foremost by repute is Dr Dee, a most learned man, reader of the stars to the Queen herself, his wisdom only deepened since his association with the Irishman Master Kelley. But the Continent has another league entirely of learning, and Signor della Mirandola, envoy of the Venetian Doge, is whispered to be as advanced in the occult arts as he is in more conventional fields of scholarship.

Conclusion

Events in England are surely moving toward some sort of crisis—everyone can sense it, like a current in the air. Very soon, maybe this very night, for good or ill, the fate of the realm will be decided...

Cast list

- **Elizabeth**, named Gloriana, a Queene
- **Mary**, Queen of Scots, a Dethroned Monarch
- **Philippe of France**, a Junior Prince
- **His Eminence Diego Menendez de Aviles**, Cardinal of Seville
- **His Grace Andrew Prim**, Archbishop of York
- **Robert Deveraux**, Earl of Essex, a Gallant and Peer of the Realm
- **Señor Juan Futin da Greve**, Ambassador of the King of Spain
- **Sir Francis Walsingham**, close adviser to ye Queene
- **Sir Walter Raleigh**, an Explorer
- **Sir Francis Drake**, a most Daring sailor and Champion Bowler
- **Lady Catherine Northwood**, lady-in-waiting upon Her Majesty
- **Lord Canning**, military counselor to ye Queene
- **General FitzBacon**, a commander of Irish mercenaryes and moss-troopers
- **Signor Pico della Mirandola**, a Philosopher of Venice
- **Doctor John Dee**, Adept and Magus
- **Master Chris. Marlowe**, an established play-writer
- **Master Wm. Shakespeare**, an Actor of some new-found fame
- **Master Edward Kelley**, an Associate of Doctor Dee
- **Mistress Jane Dee**, Wife to Doctor Dee
- **Mistress Nagel**, a serving wench
- **Hobbs**, a servant

