

# Court in the Act

## Introduction

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... Welcome to *Court in the Act!*

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 labours 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.

All those invited to *Court in the Act* are given a character. As they arrive they are greeted by the Chamberlain, and welcomed to the banquet. Each character has goals and objectives that they must complete before the end of the party. Everyone has their own goals – and not all goals are compatible. If one person achieves their goals, another may fail!

The guests have various items, such as weapons and money to help them. They may also have various abilities to help them uncover secrets and achieve their goals.

The guests can form alliances, blackmail each other, steal items and money and maybe even try to kill one another. Along the way they may solve some of *Court in the Act's* mysteries. Who was responsible for the Archbishop's grisly murder? What happened to the Roanoke colony in Virginia? Who really wrote Shakespeare's plays? Can the true heir be restored to the throne of Denmark? Will the Queen ever choose a husband? Will the Spanish Armada be thwarted? And is all well that ends well? Join us to find out in *Court in the Act*.

## May the Revels Begin!

# What is included when you buy *Court in the Act*?

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

## How many people are needed for *Court in the Act*?

*Court in the Act* has been written for 13 to 21 guests – plus a host and maybe an assistant host. The step-by-step guide explains which characters to omit should you have fewer than 21 guests (you do need at least 13, however). Here's how that works:

Number of guests	Male characters	Female characters	Characters that can be played by either sex
13	6	5	2
14	6	6	2
15	7	6	2
16	8	6	2
17	9	6	2
18	10	6	2
19	11	6	2
20	10	7	3
21	11	7	3

Note though that gender assignment is pretty flexible in this game. If you have a different mix of friends, feel free to have men play women's parts – that's how it would have been done in Shakespeare's day – or vice versa.

## How does *Court in the Act* work?

*Court in the Act* runs over the course of three or four hours and is particularly suited to a buffet meal. One person is the Chamberlain, and acts as organizer and coordinator, responsible for making sure everything runs smoothly and that all the guests have the information they need.

Your guests will all be present at the Court of Queen Elizabeth I, at St James's Palace in London. They have their own goals and agendas, and how they choose to achieve those goals is entirely

up to them. *Court in the Act* is an evening of double-dealing, intrigue, treachery, playwriting and even murder! As the evening draws to a close, the future of England will be resolved for good or ill, secrets will be out in the open and a mystery will have been solved. Then everyone has a chance to find out exactly what went on.

### **Where can I get *Court in the Act*?**

*Court in the Act* is available from [www.freeformgames.com](http://www.freeformgames.com). We accept all major credit cards – and PayPal.

When you purchase the game, you'll be taken to a page where you can download it right away. We will also email you a download link and password, so you can come back to the site and collect your game later if that's more convenient.

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

No product is perfect for everyone. We know that and you know that and that's why 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.



"I just ran **Court in the Act** for my 21st birthday, and it was a huge success! Even characters that had no clue of what they were doing were busy watching the duels and confrontations of those more comfortable with their characters. Only one death occurred (surprisingly, it wasn't the Queen!) but plots and blackmail ruled the night! Our murderer stayed completely under the radar and not a single soul guessed – too busy with courtly intrigues I suppose!! Thank you so much for a fun game that all present enjoyed. We look forward to hosting another!"

**Kellie Vickers-Willis, Australia**

"I hosted **Court in the Act** for my 18th birthday party, and it went down a storm. I was initially apprehensive that a large group of teenagers used to discos and the like might find the idea a little silly and geekish, and not want to get involved, but I couldn't have been more wrong. I have never seen some of my friends as excited as they were when they opened their invitations.

I'll admit that I ended up having to play around with the storylines a little – I had an excess of girls, but this actually proved useful as I could tailor the event to the guests I had. I also wrote an extra, purposely non-taxing, character for a particularly shy guest, who by the end of the night got so into it that he was awarded a prize for the Most Outrageous Death!

I had so many compliments for coming up with a unique way to celebrate my 18th that it was unreal. Even my college teachers were jealous that they couldn't come! I would definitely recommend this kind of party to others - they are great fun to host, and they get everyone involved. Inhibitions usually disappear within half an hour, and it's great if you have friends that don't all know each other very well, as I do.

Thank you very, very much for a wonderful evening. I hope to run another night like this one very soon."

**Gemma King, United Kingdom**



"I hosted **Court in the Act** for my 18th birthday party last year and it went amazingly well. We all dressed in costume – to varying degrees – and it was a great icebreaker for people who didn't know each other well or at all. Everyone's character allowed for so much interaction.

"At the end we gave prizes – bags of Ye Olde English chocolate coins – for various categories. These included best dressed, best speech, best deceit, best acting, best characterisation, and of course, the best death scene – we accidentally killed Shakespeare. Oops.

"Anyway, it was a great success and everyone loved it – even the people who were most apprehensive at the beginning. One of the people there has just called me to find out your site – they're going to do one for their birthday too!"

**Elise, Australia**

# Court in the Act

You are cordially invited to *Court in the Act*, an evening of double-dealing, intrigue, treachery, playwriting and murder to be held at

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on ..... starting at .....

## Setting

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Welcome to *Court in the Act!*

## Your Character

Your character, the person you will be playing, is indicated below along with enough brief details for you to dress for the part. You will receive more background information, your character's detailed goals, simple rules and a heap of cool abilities and items on the day.

## The Cast

**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 counsellor to ye Queene

**General FitzBacon**, a commander of Irish mercenaries 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

# 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

*England in the sixteenth century is a land 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 towards the Protestant teachings of the heretics Calvin and Luther, and persecuted those who clung to the Catholic faith. But Edward died in his teens without an heir. He was succeeded by his older sister Mary, a Catholic, her mother a Spaniard and herself married to King Philip of Spain. She declared England Catholic once more, and in her turn persecuted those who clung to the Church of England. Finally Mary died without an heir, and 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 during her sister Mary's reign and charged with treason. 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 in particular, 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, 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 was able to keep 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 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 towards 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...*

# Costuming for Court in the Act

These tips are suggestions only - you should wear whatever you find comfortable. However, photographs usually come out better if when you're wearing a costume!

You can find good tips on what Elizabethan costume was like in films like *Elizabeth* and *Shakespeare in Love*. This event is set at a Court occasion, so everyone would be dressed in their finest finery (apart from the servants, who would just be clean). And finery really means finery here – sumptuous fabrics, furs, silks, brocades – lavish make-up, dripping with jewellery – for men and women alike.

**Elizabeth** – a fabulous dress – no-one else is allowed to outshine her – and a crown

**Mary, Queen of Scots** – also a fabulous dress, but preferably in black as she is in mourning – wear a tiara too

**Philippe of France** – lavish doublet and hose, with an obvious-looking false beard

**His Eminence Diego Menendez de Aviles** – scarlet robes and a broad-brimmed red hat, a crucifix and Bible always ready to hand

**His Grace Andrew Prim**, purple robes, and a mitre and crozier if possible

**Robert Deveraux, Earl of Essex** – lavish doublet and hose

**Señor Juan Futin da Greve** – lavish doublet and hose

**Sir Francis Walsingham** – plain-looking doublet and hose

**Sir Walter Raleigh** – lavish doublet and hose

**Sir Francis Drake** – lavish doublet and hose

**Lady Catherine Northwood** – a fairly fabulous dress

**Lord Canning** – lavish doublet and hose, with an obvious-looking false beard

**General FitzBacon** – unkempt-looking doublet and hose

**Signor Pico della Mirandola** – lavish wizardy-looking robes

**Doctor John Dee** – scruffy wizardy-looking robes

**Master Chris. Marlowe** – not-so-lavish doublet and hose

**Master Wm. Shakespeare** – not-so-lavish doublet and hose

**Master Edward Kelley** – cheap-looking doublet and hose

**Mistress Jane Dee** – modest dress and a little jewellery

**Mistress Nagel** – a plain serving-maid's dress and apron

**Hobbs** – plain servant's breeches and white shirt

**The Chamberlain** – plain-looking doublet and hose