

(ftf 25/11/2023)

ACT 4, 'TIS THE DAMN SEASON. 22ND JULY 1582 AND ON

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY:

- Vicomte Jules du Plessis.
- Captain Richard Blake a friend and acquaintance of Vicomte Jules de Plessis.
- Kerr Avon, noted man of physic and philosophy, also a friend and acquaintance of Vicomte Jules de Plessis.
- Tipo - Delgado's Lad, Spanish.
- Rodrigo Delgado - Walsingham's Intelligencer.
- Spanish Mercenaries and Men-at-Arms, various
- Those No Longer Living, various

A hearty breakfast is prepared after a night of unexpected revelry pertaining to an odd moment felt by some (of most, Kerr Avon and Jules du Plessis, in most different ways) but unexplained amidst conversation, and thence much Spanish Wine.

Next morning breakfast preparations are interrupted as the finest cooking smell swift about the land from camp fire and pan by an unexpected guest.

Enter Bear, hungry, stage left.

In time, amidst the loss of parts of breakfast, the bear is seen off more the worse for wear by the many blades, leaving those about, mainly Jules du Plessis, with little more than injured pride and the odd scratch. Of the bear, bloodied, no more is heard aside from its crashing departure trailing bacon.

Exit bear, stage right, bloody and on fire.

The day settles, and midst a change in weather to misty drizzle the ride to the ruins of the old church begins, and across the day. Later, as they draw near to the place Delgado identified they disturb a wild dog worrying a corpse. Shredded remains scattered about, this was unlikely to be a peasant, but the odd remains are difficult to identify what might have been. An air of caution descends upon the riders.

Said caution is soon rewarded. Over the next rise in ground Delgado declares the Church to be. They pause to dismount, not least for the smell of woodsmoke faint in breeze, and crawl up to skyline amidst scrub and bushes.

Indeed, there above on a rising , craggy hill is the ruined church, and thereto smoke rising in hint of camp fires, and silhouetted against the sky figures watch. It was to their good fortune that the approach guided by Delgado did not reveal.

A scout is sent, the Jules du Plessis sneaks in as the misty day closes, close enough he gains to the path and peeks into the camp there to spy perhaps some 15 men or more scattered through the ruin, clearly there for a duration.

With but four and a lad, one of whom is sorely used (Delgado, for reminder), the odds are not in favour, hence a plan is hatched by all for an illusion of the Madonna to be created through the Arts of Magick and Mysticalness known to Kerr Avon.

Evening descends and all are in place, sneaking to just below the ruin upon the main path and Kerr Avon scribes upon the rough rock track, chalks sigils and signs upon the rocky side , whispers in language strange as all hunker within a mystic circle of protection. Abruptly, the lady is amongst them, an unearthly glow she stands, this unearthly Madonna. With Avon's gestures and words in languages unknown she walks up the path and through the Spanish camp.

As the Madonna is amongst them the Spaniards cry out, all attention is focused upon her form. Some are shocked, some rage, some flee, some fall to knees to pray, others faint away entirely in the moment. Whatever their action the moment of distraction is done and led by Richard Blake our men sneak into the ruins of the camp, lurking in shadows and about.

It is only a moment, and all seems success, when one wary Spaniard spies our fellows and du Plessis engages various in a brief one-sided play of swords much to the Spaniards detriment.

Way open our fellows enter the ruined church proper, cautious now for it is apparent this is no simple Christian church of yesteryear, but some place older still, and used by those before the devilish Popery of Catholicism took it as a place of worship before its ruin.

Creeping through the ruins two guards deeper in are spied, pondering the noise and kerfuffle without. Approaching, du Plessis see them off with minimal enthusiasm as they realise they are all but alone.

Guided then by Delgado to the rear of the altar and ancient statue dark hidden but towering above, there is surprise to find a hole of crumbling rock where Delgado had last hidden the vial. A moment's view suggests the hole leads to a long closed and sealed crypt.

Down, down then to hidden stairs just below the surface flags long sealed, and into cavernous tunnels. Yet from one way a flickering glow leaks, and upon turning that corner candles flicker, arrayed about a tomb sarcophagus cracked open, offerings scattered, bones mingling.

Thence in sight further up this hall of crafted stone, another alcove, candle glow the same, and another, and another. All open tombs, all as if disturbed, and at hall's end an exit to corridor short, and a turn to the right.

With trepidation our party tip toe forward to catch glimpse about the corner of stairs and a chamber up to the side and an ethereal figure moving in flickering candle glow. But then awareness comes, and they are surprised by lumbering twisted forms towards them come, undead groans as they shamble forward.

Battle there is, seeking to engage and find this cursed vial of unnatural death, now it seems in the hands of the ghoulish thing residing deep within. But our heroes flee, all but Captain Blake who hides in shadows and amongst the detritus waiting for the stumbling undead to pass, all but one who mayhap has his scent.

All others are pursued to the very entrance of the crypts, but not beyond by the ghastly forms. Blake meanwhile makes up handsomely along the corridor their to confront the Ghoulish Master of all and edge it in sword-play, even yet with one of the undead horrors creeping up behind him!

In all ends a close run things as Blake's fortitude falters, having sorely wounded the Ghoulish thing, as it has him, as the first of the turning undead arrive back to defend the Master. In fortune brave du Plessis gallops up behind and finishes both as Blake's sore wounds finally leave him wobbling.

Thus the day is saved, the vial retrieved for later delivery to others in fair England, and our cast exit, some books and oddments in hand from the Ghoulish hoard, for later reading.

Emerging into the gentle dawn of the abandoned church (now firmly spoken of as haunted by a vision of the Madonna by locals) they retrieve horses from ever reliable Tipo, ride for the coast and luxuries of Blake's 'Kestrel' - hearty tots of Rum or plundered Spanish vintages all around.

Vivat Regina!