


Of the Plantagenet Chronicals

Part 3

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

- **Ben Jaffa** - Theatrical smokes and curtains.
- **Valentine Plymmyswoode** - Scholar of Arcane learnings.
- **Ned Culpable** - Apothecary's 'Apprentice'.
- **'Sandy Bell'** - Borderland Reeve
- **Thomas Blitheman** - Poet. Playwright. Dabbler. Gentleman.
- **William Cecil, Lord Burghley** - Chief Advisor to the Queen, Lord of the Treasury.
- **Sir Henry Percy** - Notable patron to the arts, philosophies, and Valentine Plymmyswoode.
- **Black Tom** - Wharf gang leader, and possessee.
- **Roughs** - various
- **Tirdad Vaheed** - Spirit, and possessor.

Act 1 Scene 1 - Consultation and Assemblation

 here was much discussion on that evening between Valentine Plymmyswoode, Thomas Blitheman, and then amongst all and sundry pertaining to the spirit perceived to inhabit the body of Black Tom and the chances of summonation back into the Skull, via a Valentine Plymmyswoode crafted ritual, with full reference to the Latin book that appeared to contain something much the same. Thereafter if Black Tom was still a menace to Society and all Good Thinking Subjects of Her Majesty, then he and his followers could be dealt with in a more normal but robust fashion.

Valentine had taken the opportunity to visit his patron, Sir Henry Percy, at his town house in London just before Sir Henry was due to depart for his Petworth estate, his other home in the south. After some examination of skull, box and book, and much discussion with Valentine, Percy agreed there was good chance the spell would bind the spirit to the skull, although he would want for more time to investigate and access his library in Petworth to be certain. Valentine lamented, alas, there was little time to stop Black Tom, so reassurance must wait. They parted on good terms, with Sir Henry's encouragement for Valentine to inform him of further developments.

It was agreed that all should assemble at Valentine's humble abode, there to provide support of undetermined nature in his efforts. But it was upon the shoulders of Valentine that this magical task fell, albeit with no little advice from Thomas, a man also more interested in the Arcane and Magicks than he might have admitted in less learned company.

Act 1, Scene 2 - SOGOF

Valentine crafted his ritual, using detail learned from years of study, the correspondences indicated by the Heptarch, and more, indeed those very correspondences from the book recovered with the skull and subsequently found upon the second visit to the catacombs, missed upon the first as their importance was unknowable of the time. Amongst those that awaited his crafting time hung heavy when there was little to occupy minds but admiration of Valentine's keen topiary about his humble abode's gardens.

After much deliberation Valentine decided to undertake the ritual over hours and partly daylight rather than entirely overnight as might be traditional, albeit deep within his cellar to ensure nothing untoward would disturb him. Those unessential to the ritual (everyone else) distributed themselves as they saw fit about Valentine's house and grounds - Thomas nearby in the cellar, so he would be able to shout words of advice and encouragement at vital moments if required, Ben rested upon the stairs by the door to the upper floor, ready to either flee upwards or lunge down in assistance as circumstances delivered. Sandy and Ned remained above ground, the wider view to take, for the greater ease of running like buggery in the general direction of away if it all went horribly wrong carefully kept between themselves.

A circle of containment had been drawn upon the cellar floor, with sigils and squiggles all about that might have been Latin or perhaps some other language, for the forms were strange and only Valentine and Thomas understand them as Enochian. The skull was placed within the circle upon a small plinth, while Valentine and the book remained outside with all the Correspondences Valentine needed set about him on working tables. Candles were lit, incense fanned about the cellar in thick clouds, blood, sprayed onto flaming braziers, and all proceeded. For hours. And hours. And...

The hours crawled by for all but Valentine, immersed within the details of ritual until finally it drew close to fulfilment. His companions withdraw from the cellar and above stairs, only Thomas watching, and Ben at the head of the cellar stairs, crouched to peek as he could, ready to plunge down into battle should the need arise, or run as the very Devil was likely after him if matters took, well, a more *regrettable* course.

The ritual was complete as Valentine spoke final words, rubbed the Lyone skin upon the Topaz Stone until Magickally his hair straightened up taking life all full of the Magickal. He scattered bark and leaf of plants various into a small brazier part filling the room with sweet smoke chanting all the while and a wave of nausea washed across all those nearby. It is without fuss then, that within the pentagrams, circles and symbols drawn upon the smooth floor a smoke formed from nowhere and swirled to coalesce and become not one, but TWO forms! Those forms swirling and indistinct for moments until they cohered to forms of almost men. One a slight man, pale, and indistinct, the other a darker complexion, larger and its very existence seemingly more solid.

Before any could react there was a dispute between the two spirits held within the magicks, in the air within the pentagram there was light, but little sound and fury leaked out, for to Valentine and Thomas it seemed a battle in Magick and force of wills upon some spiritual plane progressed as they swirled within the walls and limits of the summoning. Quickly it was apparent that the smaller paler spirit was the less able, it weakened until with a piercing scream wholly upon the spirit plane (echoes of which twisted like knives through the minds of those who observed, Valentine, Thomas and Ben, for but a moment) it was devoured by the larger, darker spirit. In a moment the lesser was gone, and the one spirit coalesced into something resembling a man be-robed most foreign. It looked about as a man would, eyes observed all, before its gaze settled upon Valentine, its summoner.

Thence a common language was established, that of the eastern Mediterranean, of the Arabians there dwelling, but with some argot, or perhaps age that made some things difficult to understand, both to Valentine and the spirit for each's language was not quite right to the other.

It was clear a verbal game of cat and mouse ensued, although who was of which role was unclear. Under Valentine's questioning the Spirit agreed it was from the Catacomb, and it was once, some long but undetermined time ago (for it is unsure of a way to count the seasons beneath the ground) it was a man named Tirdad Vaheed in the service of a great ruler far, far from here, wherever *here* was. In the course of its service it fell and was overtaken by one who deemed itself a servant of Allah, a Malak (or 'Angel' Valentine translated to himself) who identified as '𐤌𐤓𐤕𐤕', (*Hesed*) who placed it in the catacombs to guard the well therein, until the time came and the Malak returned to release it, or its need as a guard and required actions might become clear.

Valentine pressed the spirit upon its intent if released from the pentagram. Would it return to the well to which it was originally placed, and not Black Tom? The Spirit considered this with care, before it agreed to do so, although Valentine was not entirely convinced of its truthfulness.

Of what happened in the pentagram with the other spirit it was unclear. Was the other spirit one of the skull already, perhaps that of the original owner? Or something additional swept up in the Magicks in some way, summoned by accident or misfortune? Either way it lost whatever altercation observed, and the remaining spirit was unable, or unwilling, to enlighten other than to state it 'was already there'.

Upon the machinations of those in the Sodality, most obviously Carluccio and Treningham, the spirit recalled being coerced by Carluccio and his assistants, occasionally to feed upon those they offered by way of making it stronger but more bound to their desires, and their wishes when it was finally able enough to escape its confines and do Carluccio's bidding for so long as it could resist being dragged back to the Catacomb's by its obligation.

When the ritual in the Catacombs had been disrupted it had taken opportunity of the edges between and fled, landing upon a weak man as host, Black Tom, and thence used him as a vessel for its talents and growing powers, powers that grew as it grew used to the limitation of the man it possessed. It desired to find a way to become once more as it had been in life, in this place to understand what and where and when it was, and to find a way to break free from the obligation that bound it and flee back to the lands it knew. Back to places where it understood the paths it may take to rise again amongst fellow men.

After some hours of conversation, half answers, and convolutions that Valentine considered might be misunderstanding of the old dialect spoken, or tautological twists to be economical with the truth (of which Valentine thought the more likely) little more was to be gained from the spirit, either from its inability or greater desire not to answer. Valentine decided to risk ordering it to return to its obligation of guarding the holy well, in the assumption and hope that its assurance it would return there and not back to Black Tom was true. In Enochian he formed the phrases, words and names he must use, and spoke the unequivocal, ordering it to return to its duty guarding as it had been ordered by *Hesed*, with the name spoken in the Enochian he had heard from the spirit.

It vanished.

And Valentine Plymmyswoode wondered where he was, and who he was, as he stared around a smoke filled cellar at unfamiliar faces. He knew there was something important happening, but really could not recall what it was, who *he* was, or who *they* were.

To Valentine's acquaintances it became clear that his memory had somehow been lost, not just of recent events, but of who he was, they were and everything recent. Ned thought that familiar faces might be best to jog his memory, and returned quickly with Valentine's housekeeper and old Nanny from another cottager down the road, and an apple pie, his favourite. It seemed to help, for he recalled his own name barely an hour later! Over subsequent hours his memory returned patchily, much to his relief.

Act 2 - Down to the Wharfs

Near Brown's Wharf an unattended fast cart was in the hands of an unattended fast cart thief. A little way down from the tavern favoured by Black Tom's gang as their headquarters the cart was in a side turning onto the wharf. It was pulled up and quickly turned, ready to roll. Luckily there was none to notice it was heavily laden with Jaffa, Bell, Plymmyswoode, Bodie and Doyle, each to their own by way of arms and armour.

Behind the Tavern a hundred yards away a nest of back alleys and narrow tracks writhed around the store houses, dwellings, and businesses. A couple of innocuous individuals drifted off from the cart and into the alleys, they headed towards the rear of the Tavern to scout out the back access and lay of the land.

Thomas Blitheman sidled down one of the back alleys, cautiously stepped over piles of rotting rubbish, broken barrels, and the occasional dead dog. He counted himself lucky that any noise of approach he made was cunningly covered by Ned Culpable in the alley behind stamping on angry pigs and overturning a cart of assorted tin-ware and glass bottles. Or at least, so it sounded.

Comparatively silent as a ghost Thomas popped a peek around a corner and spotted a couple of likely lads walking back and forth behind the Tavern target. They consulted at the noises off, and one wandered off to investigate. The other waited patiently in Thomas's way before wandering off for a piss. Thomas took opportunity and had a good look at the tavern rear - couple of windows, high delivery door for carts, barrels perhaps, side window, low roof to lean-to. He wandered on, careful to avoid all the noise from the alley over...

Report made, signal given, the cart rolled out and was urged down the wharf at a brisk trot. Two roughs from Tom's gang stood up in alarm and demand that the approaching cart begone, but it was moments later they were cutdown in the rush from the cart and toward the front door, a pistol shot taking one, and a sword thrust the other as he turned to flee.

The last man outside had barely time to mount the steps to the tavern door before another pistol shot downed him half in and half out the banging door to shouts of alarm as he collapsed inside. Guards from the rear charged down the side alley attracted by the noise, but another pistol shot boom out down the alley, filled it with powder smoke, and the remaining man in the alley was caught front and rear with no way out.

Meanwhile, Ben Jaffa smashed the hastily secured front door down with a charge, to discover several of the gang already out the window at the rear. Engagement with those left within was short and resulted in surrender. Outside, apart from perhaps two away through the window, all the gang was downed to barely a scratch.

Threats of violence quickly loosened tongues, and it was confirmed that those seen mostly comprised the gang, barring the couple of escapees, and a few hangers on not present at the time, but word would spread and they would flee, for there was none to lead now. The implication was obvious, and a brief search discovered a cellar below, where strung up was battered Black Tom, now very much an ordinary man, with revenge taken by the gang members. Cut down he confessed all and his horror as the power he had for a few weeks suddenly was drained from him scant hours before. Of what happened to him and the spirit that inhabited his form for weeks he had little memory and no understanding.

Act 3 Scene 1 - A Summons

A lad, a note, a summons to the offices of 'Blythe' for all our acquaintances of good standing. There Blythe greeted them from behind his paper laden desk, but for visitors there was but one chair. And a very comfortable chair it looked. It took but a moment for all to understand that perhaps the chair was not meant for the five of them. To much surprise across the courtyard to the rear strode William Cecil, Lord Burghley, chief advisor to the Queen, tailed by a flock of clerks, assistants, petitioners and minor Court notables, all chattering, waving notes, and trying to get his attention. The sudden silence was deafening as the door slammed at the rear of the offices, and a single heavy tread proceeded up the corridor to Blythe's open door.

Burghley walked in, settled himself in the one chair, and identified each there present by name, so as he said *'now I know you all and he will not forget.'* He came with a detailed knowledge of everything the last few weeks events have thrown up. He said had been briefed by Walsingham. However, one matter concerned him - Petrov, the Russian. He must be found.

After some skirting of the true reasons for such urgency it becomes clear, to Burghley's discomfort when he needed tell more, that Petrov needed to be found for he had a book, perhaps of ciphers, that protected a communication channel that Burghley would rather not discuss. It was of upmost importance. Walsingham had recommended them, as they are some of the last to see Petrov alive.

Someone would be in touch as needed, and simple identification of that someone would be via matching signet rings. Ned was to carry a signet ring from Cecil to identify a matching one the contact would carry.

Lord Burghley departed to a cacophony of attention seekers as he strode back across the rear courtyard...

Act 3 Scene 2 - The Russian Connection

The first start for investigating Petrov was to be his shop. Returning there it was indeed burned out, although as luck, and the bucket chain of the night would have it, the fire did not spread. Within the shop there was much fire damage, but on close and careful examination Ned noted that much was surface damage - the fire did not burn deep, nor hot, nor for long, despite all of the smoke damage making the shop rooms look destroyed.

A search of the premises discovered Petrov's ledgers were missing, and there was no unburned mark at their location Ned had noted on their previous visit - just a burned space. It quickly became clear too, that much of the apothecary's merchandise and materials were also missing, but not destroyed, apparently having been removed before the burn. Suspicions aroused, it would

seem that Petrov did indeed 'clear out' as he had threatened weeks ago, and burned the shop as cover, but with care, and an apothecary's exactness.

Conversation with the locals of the alley upon which the shop lay revealed that his body was missed initially by those that came to investigate the fire, and was only discovered the day after the fire. It was taken by Petrov's own, for there were others from the place called Russia, far distant land. They heard they had a church, and there his body was to be buried.

Asked of description of Petrov for those that had not (and indeed those who had, but briefly), he was noted as an average sized man with a shock of bushy black hair and excited beard to match, piercing blue / grey eyes, tattooed arms and a voice loud in anger, laughter and song in his own language on those rare days he indulged in the nearby taverns. This description did not contradict the memories of the last attendees to the shop.

Finally conversations slipped out odd mentions : that Petrov's lodgings were only two streets away; that on the night of the fire Petrov had deliveries and a cart or two came and went, coming with some things, leaving with others, but such was not unusual, nor that they were covered by sacks; that on rare occasions he would be down to the wharfs to meet ships from far away, Captains he knew, presumably for the rare materials he might use in his apothecary's business.

And so focus moved to Petrov's lodgings. Top floor on a corner building, but up the stairs passed a flushed man in disheveled clothes and pounding upon the door answered two tarts now living where Petrov had, for rent had not been paid, and word had his death. Neither girl noted anything much had been left there, but the mattresses of straw and reeds had not been changed. Invited in for a 'good time' there was some quick searching as the girls were paid for their time, but little good, for none indulged them.

Thomas Blitheman it was who discovered a pair of man's undergarments stuffed beneath one of the mattresses, and he took them for 'analysis'. He suggested that return later and payment of the tarts to go away for a few hours while he searched the lodgings more thoroughly might yield more result, but that remained to be arranged.

(To Be Continued....)

Epilogue Scene - After the Audience Has Departed

Master Blitheman, poet and playwright, was disappointed at being unable to sell his latest work to Burbage of The Theatre, despite the disastrous events surrounding the most recent production of 'Plantagenet Chronicles', that are detailed elsewhere. Never to be put off he explored other options in hawking it about the Taverns of London that are frequented by those of theatre and literary interests.

A garrulous man, Blitheman quickly fell in with an enthusiastic crowd all too keen to aid, read and suggest improvements to his plays and poems, new subjects, new ideas, but alas no-one with money much for backing. Indeed such was the enthusiasm of some that their suggestions came perilously close to blasphemy, or even treasonous words against the Queen, some he suspected might even be cupboard Catholics and rabble rousers, but had no proof. Blitheman resisted their more extreme suggestions and demands, keeping careful hold of his papers and manuscripts such that nothing in his name might slip away. However, he started a little list of those whom, if later necessary, well, they never would be missed....