

# The Seventh Pope

by Pauly Hart

Alex and Emma were enjoying their night just like every other night they'd stayed in Savannah Georgia. They hadn't cared for the Paula Dean Restaurant experience but they had a lot of fun at Treylor Hitch and Corleone's. They had some time to kill before going back to The Mansion on Forsythe, so they were hanging out at Spankys on River Street. It was pretty crowded. The music was loud and the air was thick with that common late night heat that Savannah offered its visitors every day in July.

Emma had a Painkiller in hand. She had asked for Cruzan coconut instead of that nasty Pussers rum everyone wanted to use. Alex had his Rum cream on the rocks - extra rocks. They were slightly buzzed and enjoying it all.

The first push came from the outside. They were at the bar near the back so they could see it more than feel it. At first everyone was surprised and animated. Some laughed at the mild shoving until one woman screamed bloody murder. Like... Actual bloody murder... Not just the lame catchphrase people say when they exaggerate all of their stories. No, someone was actually being murdered and it was a bit splashy.

The moment many of the people in Spankys realized what was happening was the exact moment that things went sideways.

The mob moved as one, back in towards the restaurant, almost crushing everyone on the back wall. Alex grabbed Emma and yanked her hard, into the bar area, barely escaping the people.

From their point of view it was a hot mess. There were three groups of people. Emma, Alex, and the one bartender were inside the bar area. There were the people already inside the restaurant, crushing each other towards the back, and then there were the people coming inside the restaurant. Oh. And I should mention a very small minority: One person gnawing on the neck of another person having pinned them to the ground. There was a great deal of thrashing from the victim and a great deal of crunching from the attacker.

It was around five full and really long seconds of this. One group watching the other while also watching the insane act of cannibalism in front of them. The group who were coming into the restaurant weren't exactly people maybe. They were rotting and decomposing *former* people. Many of them still had loose dirt in their clothes from the graves they'd escaped. That's exactly what they were. The risen dead.

It should have been expected by everyone involved. The risen dead obviously knew what their own perceived reality was, everyone in the room knew Savannah was haunted, and the bartender always expected something crazy to happen. Around the six second mark, the crowd of the risen dead who were coming into the restaurant lurched forward as one. If

there was ever a need for a “ready-set-go” in the minds of the people already inside the restaurant, this was it. For at that very moment, all of the *still alive* humans freaked the fuck out.

If there had been any way to shrink the mob more up against the wall than it already had been, it was impossible. Yet it happened. People really just are bags of meat after all. The mob shrank back further towards the wall and then in one insane moment, the risen dead ran straight into them.

The bartender, a short girl with bangs, handed a wooden baseball bat to Alex. She had her purse in her hands and was fumbling through it. Bringing out a 9mm she raised it towards the cannibal eater. One shot and it fell over. She couldn't reach her arm over the bar to see the victim on the floor so she didn't think to dispatch the victim. She wasn't thrashing anymore anyway. Motioning to Alex and Emma she vaulted over the pass-through area, where the servers picked up their drinks. She strode towards the entrance, shooting two more of the dead in the face on her way. Alex went after her, and fended off a lurching man in a priest's frock while Emma clamored over.

They raced behind the bartender who was running along the cobblestone street, dodging a leaning dead person here, and a crawling one there. She rarely shot the gun, as most of the faster ones had been at the bar. They ran west towards the Lincoln ramp. From the Boar's Head Tavern, a window broke and a man fell out onto the street, bouncing the awning of the candy store below it. The large black man in an apron got up slowly. He saw the three escapees and raised his knife.

Jill raised her hands and explained that they weren't dead and they just wanted to get off River Street. There were a lot of dead here, walking east from old Fort Wayne and The Pirate's House.

Accepting the idea that they were all on the same team, they slowly made their way up Factors Walk towards Bay Street. There was a close call around the Lincoln Ramp at the blind curve when one of the dead fell off the wall in front of them. It took the cook and the bartender all they had to pull Alex off from beating the corpse into a fine jelly. Emma was the only one weaponless but she did a great job of leaping away from the limping dead when needed.

Savannah is a Necropolis. There were no graveyards as easy markers. The whole town was a hodgepodge of cemeteries here and there, built upon. The old town dead were buried where they fell often, after Yellow Fever, massive fires, and bloody wars. If they need to build, they just move the headstones, not the actual bodies.

As they made it up and onto Bay Street, it was chaos. The dead were walking out in front of large semis and there were wrecks everywhere. People were being eaten alive and the stench was awful. They barely made it over to Abercorn around from The Hampton Inn. There were people in every window looking down. One man held a rifle from on top of the inn, but he was not firing on anyone, not yet at least. The four wondered how long it would take him to start.

At the Bryan Street Parking Garage it was quiet and there was no movement. They stopped for a moment to gather their wits. The bartender's name was Jill and the cook's name

was Tyrone. Before she was a bartender, Jill worked for a tour-guide company and knew a little about where the dead were buried. Oddly enough, even though growing up here, Tyrone knew nothing of the history of the place, but he sure knew his way around. At Jill's suggestion they would walk straight south towards the cemetery. Everyone thought Jill was crazy but she had a good point.

Tyrone mentioned they were all religious folk. And if they had bothered to pay attention, all of the dead were either priests, nuns, or other Roman Catholic workers. Not really workers, but you know... Regular Catholics, Anna mentioned. And then it made sense. Jill told them that Colonial Park Cemetery hadn't allowed any Catholics in it at all. It would be the safest place in town. They talked it out.

There was the Jewish cemetery area over at Bull and Oglethorpe. An entire block. There was the "Old Negro Burial Ground" over at the Masee school and Potter's field was right next to that. They couldn't rely on either of the last two... Just because you were African American didn't mean you weren't Catholic.

Wait. What about the Hudu?

Tyrone told them.

The Hudu were African Spiritualists who were also Catholics. His aunt was Hudu.

Like Voodoo? Alex and Emma were completely lost.

Like a spur from original Catholics. Jill was helping.

Colonial Park Cemetery it was.

Every single area in Savannah had the dead buried under it. Buildings wouldn't be safe from them. And they were seeing it. Men in white collars with dripping faces inside buildings stalking the living. They couldn't risk going indoors.

Emma had her phone out checking it. The top news on every site was the risen dead epidemic and something to do with The Pope.

Jill had been right, it was deserted. It was creepy and they could hear the various screams, gunfire, and explosions all around town. Emma pulled her phone out again. They all crowded around it.

As strange as it was, FOX news had the best coverage. There was a press conference with Pope John Paul III... Wait... Wasn't he dead? Anyway, he was pleading with everyone to not kill the risen dead. He was calling it their first resurrection. He begged the reporters in the room when they all began shouting questions at him. There was a scuffle and a man shot into the air from the crowd. He was quickly taken down by the Swiss guard, oddly with their halberds. The head rolled loosely on the floor before the camera cut away.

But things got even weirder, even more quickly. From behind the curtain a commotion and Pope Paul III was thrown to the ground by what looked to be another Pope. There was a sick snapping noise and suddenly the new dirtier Pope lifted Pope Paul III's severed head into the air.

It was Pope Benedict the 16th... The Seventh Black Pope.

He was back... And this time... He was here to stay.