
Storming the Bastille



A Choose Your Adventure Story

You are a young French person of the middle class. You feel sorry for the common people in France who are not as lucky as you are. They are taxed too much. They are treated unfairly in the courts. Some of them can't find jobs. It seems as though all the good jobs go to the people in the upper classes.

"The nobility enjoys the good life here and the common people suffer," you tell your friend.

"Well, that's the way it has always been," your friend says with a shrug.

You have read John Locke's books on government. You also read popular French writers like Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu. They all say that people can do something about improving life in a country. "I say we should get rid of the king," you mutter.

"Wait now," your friend says, "Once the fires of revolution are lit, who knows where it will all end? Remember, we are bourgeoisie. We have a nice life. If the

revolution comes, will we get burned, maybe?"

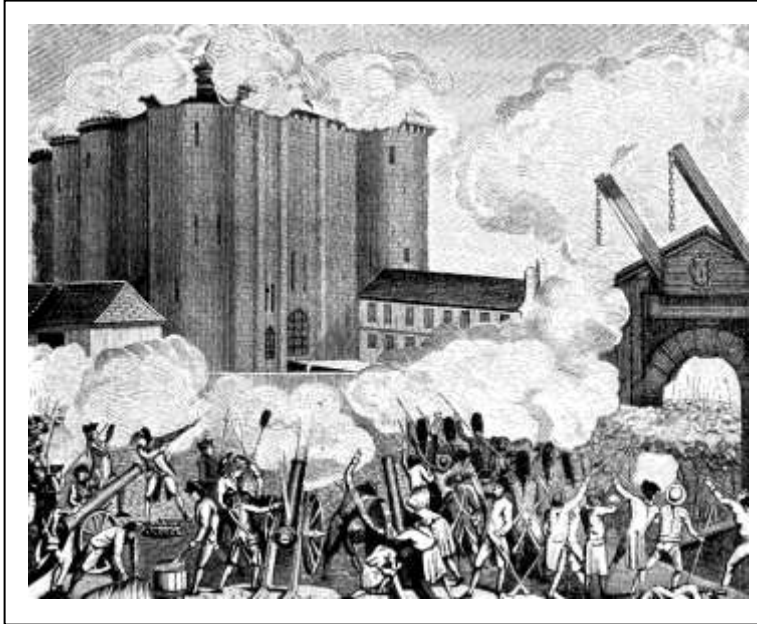
You think about your friend's words. You would like to join other angry young people working for the overthrow of the king. On the other hand, you don't want to see a bloody revolution. You want France to be a fairer place to live, but you don't want violence and suffering.

"I'll tell you where a wonderful new experiment is happening right now," says your friend. "The United States is voting on a new Constitution. Let's take a trip over there and see how it's working."

You find the idea thrilling. Your own French Marquis de Lafayette helped the Americans with their revolution. Now he is trying to bring constitutional government to France.

"I cannot leave France just when great things are about to happen," you say. "I have some skill as a writer. I could write pamphlets promoting justice."

The following week a dramatic thing happens. A mob of people storm the Bastille. The Bastille is a fortress-like prison in Paris. Everybody believes the king has stored a considerable amount of ammunition there. You have heard that hundreds of poor people are locked away behind those grim walls, too. The Bastille seems to stand for all that is hated about royal authority in France.



But, to your surprise, the defenders of the Bastille don't put up much of a fight. The large mob has frightened the cowardly

king's men into fleeing for their lives. You are happy you are part of this great action. You are making history. What a wonderful moment lies ahead! All the poor prisoners will come out.

The cell doors swing open. But only seven men come out. Four are thieves, two are mentally ill, and one is an old man!

You join the crowd of angry people moving toward the prison. The sight of the great stone fortress fills you with dread and rage. The Bastille has turrets. It looks like an ugly castle of injustice.

"What a thrill to be part of this," a friend cries. Her face is flushed with excitement.

"Boldness! Courage!" everyone is shouting. You are all encouraging one another. Your heart pounds madly. Perhaps the king's soldiers will fire at you from the Bastille. Maybe you are about to die for the cause of justice!

Still, there is wild hate in the eyes of the crowd. Will there soon be blood running in the streets? Later your fears are realized, the governor and some of the guards of the Bastille are killed (the governor stabbed to death) under chaotic circumstances, despite having surrendered under a flag of truce, and their heads paraded on pikes.

You wonder if you should spend a few weeks with your cousin in England. It would give you a chance to see how things are going from a distance. But then you might miss the excitement of the revolution!

■ If you stay in France, turn to page 3

■ If you stay in England, turn to page 4

You must remain in France as history unfolds.

The insurrection at the Bastille and this new spirit of popular sovereignty spread throughout France. You too want to see justice done, so you join the people who roam the countryside in July and August of 1789. You are with a mob that burns a wealthy man's mansion. Being part of such an act of destruction bothers you. But the man has been unjust. You are convinced that such actions are necessary. This hysteria, known as the Great Fear, spread across the country but gradually burned itself out.

By 1792 you find yourself in a Paris throng of people when King Louis XVI loses his power. Everybody says he will take the queen, Marie Antoinette, and flee the country. But events move swiftly into violence. There are rumors that the king is plotting with other countries against France. He is arrested and put in prison.

Then the king of France is executed for treason. He is put to death by the guillotine in January of 1793. The guillotine is a new device which cuts off heads more quickly and efficiently than the old way of using an axe. In less than a year the same thing happens to Marie Antoinette.

France is now ruled by a Committee of Public Safety. You are a little worried about the men who run this new governing body. They are violent revolutionaries. One



is named Maximilien Robespierre. He labels anybody who criticizes him an "enemy of the people." You know what happens to enemies of the people. The guillotine waits for them!

"It's a reign of terror we are seeing now," you whisper to a friend. You both supported the revolution, but neither of you wanted all this bloodshed!

One day you watch the guillotine at work. The huge knife comes down, again and again, chopping off the heads of priests and nobles. Suddenly you see your old friend, the baker, guillotined. Somebody accused him! You are horror-struck. The guillotine is cutting down the innocent and the guilty alike!

In 1794 Robespierre himself is accused of being an enemy of the people. He is guillotined. Now the reign of terror ends at last.

A few weeks later you and a friend, the baker's brother, sit down at a café and discuss the tremulous year that just passed. You hear other news being discussed in the café about how an artillery commander in the French forces repelled a besieging revolt and saved the young French Republic.

Your friend wants to go off and join the army and be part of this dynamic young general's army. He wants you to join him.

■ If you join the army, turn to page 5

■ If you stay in Paris and take up your writing, turn to page 6

You travel to England and stay with your cousin. Your cousin supports the revolution in France as you do.

"The revolution in France is overdue," your cousin says as you drink tea together. "There must be constitutional government in France like we have in England."

"Yes," you heartily agree. You find you like life in England very much. You are hired to do a series of articles about France. The English newspaper pays you well. You had planned to stay in England just a few weeks, but now you have been here for almost four years.

Events have moved swiftly in France. King Louis XVI has been overthrown. The revolution has turned violent. Feelings against the French revolution are rising in England. It is time for you to go home.

Soon after you arrive in Paris, France and England are at war. King Louis XVI, accused of treason, had his head chopped off by the efficient new head-chopping machine-the guillotine. His wife, Marie Antoinette, follows in several months. You

shudder at the idea of the woman being beheaded.

There is a reign of terror in France that frightens you. If anyone criticizes the new government-called the Committee of Safety-he is accused of being an "enemy of the people." Such an unlucky person will soon go to the guillotine.

One day a friend criticizes you for an article you wrote. "You seem to like tyrannical kings," he says.

"No, no," you stammer nervously. But your former friend's eyes glow with anger. "I accuse you of being an enemy of the people!" he cries.

You are arrested at your home. Your trial is swift. You are one of a hundred who must march to the guillotine that day. You try to be brave. But you tremble when you glance up at the great knife that will soon fall on your neck. Fortunately, death is without pain.



■ Turn to page 7

You are excited to be part of something that for the first time you feel is just. Unlike running with the mob, this army has shown you how being part of a legitimate force validates all your wishes to be part of something.

The young general who defended France and motivated you to join is Napoleon Bonaparte. When he speaks, he inspires you. Your heart swells with nationalistic pride and you are passionate about defending this republic which your people have struggled to create.

Napoleon's first plan of attack is an invasion into Italy. Napoleon has told you that a surprise attack over the Alps (much like Hannibal many years before) would cripple this potential enemy. The fighting is brutal but Napoleon's tactics win the day and you now understand why he is called *le petit caporal* (the little Corporal) out of his camaraderie with his soldiers, many of whom he knew by name.



Over the years, more enemies of France will be met on the battlefield – Austria, Britain, Spain and each will be out maneuvered and out fought by this French army. Napoleon's success bring stability to your country for the first time in many years.

You have been a valued member of the Grand Armée and Napoleon has elevated you from a foot soldier in the army to become a writer and document his military and domestic accomplishments. You are even granted to be present when, in 1804, Napoleon receives his coronation as emperor.

You are awed by the spectacle of the ceremony held in the Notre Dame cathedral. The ceremony is awe-inspiring and you feel tremendously honored to be part of this experience, but as Napoleon takes the crown from the pope and places it on his own head, you think back to when this all began and ask yourself “didn’t we do all this to get rid of a king in first place?”

■ Turn to page 7

You decide that you have had enough violence in your life to become a professional soldier. So, you stay in Paris and continue to pursue your writing career.

France's troubles seem to continue but it seems as if it is only foreign enemies that jeopardize France's stability. In time, the young general who saved France has become a general and even a political leader as well. He has brought security, stability and leadership to France. Within France itself, there is prosperity and the people are grateful for what Napoleon has brought them: economic reform, peace with the Catholic Church, and an impressive new law code that, while not as sweeping in scope as the founders of the French Revolution would have intended it to be, does embody many Enlightenment principles such as equality for all citizens before the law, religious toleration, and advancement based on merit.

In time, the motto of the French Revolution: liberty, fraternity, and equality are replaced by order, security and efficiency under Napoleon. You feel proud to be French and when you hear word that Napoleon plans to invade Russia you are now ready to join and take up arms in the effort.

So, in 1812 you join the Grand Armée just in time for the invasion of Russia. With over 400,000 troops, your army marches out with high expectations. You are ready for battle but get frustrated when the Russians refuse to fight and retreat farther and farther back into Russia. The winter is fast approaching and things go from bad to worse when the temperatures drop and the

retreating Russians burn their own field leaving your army with nothing. This "scorched earth" policy leaves not only very little resources but demoralizes your fellow soldiers.



Your supplies begin to run out and you wonder just what you have gotten into. Many of your friends have simply fallen during this never ending march and have died from starvation and exposure to the cold.

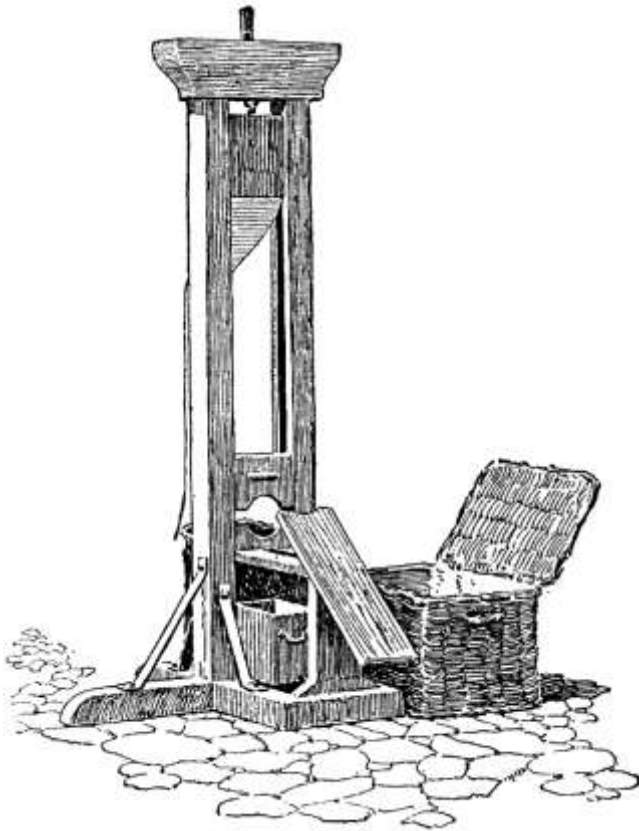
The city of Moscow is ahead and you are ready to begin battle. Amazingly, the Russians have even abandoned and burned their own capital city. As you wonder what is next in store for you, you see Napoleon give the order for the army to retreat back to France. Incredibly though, the general who vowed to always stay with his men and always be a man of the army, quickly retreats ahead of the army to try and sway the people of France that the Russia campaign was not a failure.

Unbelievably, the march back is even worse than before. The Russians begin their assault on your retreating army, you have virtually no food to speak of, and you are forced to march over the bodies of your fellow soldiers who died on the march to Moscow. You are sickened by what you have become, forced to use the bodies as walls in makeshift huts.

When you finally return you learn that you are one of the few to survive this ordeal. Only 10,000 out of 400,000 will live to tell their tale. You spend the rest of your life writing about your horrific experiences and remained scarred forever from the winter of 1812.

■ Turn to page 7

The French Revolution, much more than its American predecessor, gave wing to the ideals of all those who yearned for the equality and tolerance of Enlightenment to be applied to governments. France, the most powerful nation of its time, was in a far more influential position than the break-away American colonies and naturally captured the attention of those sympathetic to democratic ideals from around the globe. And the French Revolution did give birth to democracy as we now know it



The Revolution took its toll on France. With the final fall of the Napoleonic Empire, France was left exhausted. At the beginning of the Revolution, France had been the most prosperous country in Europe. Economic growth would be crippled for a quarter century after 1815. France lost the international and industrial lead to its arch-rival England and would never be the imposing superpower of the absolute monarchy. Although people had been given a greater say in their government, this manifested itself more by unrest than actual solutions. The gap between rich and poor was greater than ever, and growing with the advent of the Industrial Revolution. France had a hard time settling into republicanism, haunted forever by the gory mementos of 1794, and would have 4 republics and 4 times as many constitutions before settling into the Fifth Republic of today.

The impact that the French example had on other countries was equally as great and disturbing. For the two hundred years since the Bastille fell, countries from Europe, Africa, Asia and South America have been inspired by the French Revolution. Often, the revolutions that have resulted have been even deadlier than the original. The French Revolution, as the "Mother of Modernity" as well as the "Mother of Revolution" is responsible for the conception of the three basic and sometime intermingling political undercurrents of the past two centuries; democracy, communism, and fascism.