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Nigel, with one mighty wrench, tore his enemy from the deck and hurled him down upon his back. His own head was whirling, and he felt that his senses were slipping away, but already his hunting knife was out and pointing through the slit in the brazen helmet.

Give yourself up, fair sir, said he. The dagger tinkled down upon the deck.

Seaman and archers ran forward to find Nigel half senseless upon his face.

They drew him off, and a few deft blows struck off the helmet of his enemy.

Sharp featured, freckled, and foxy red disclosed itself beneath it. Nigel raised himself on his elbow for an instant.

You are the red ferret, said he. So my enemies call me, said the Frenchman with a smile.

I rejoice, sir, that I have fallen to so valiant and honourable a gentleman.

I thank you, fair sir, said Nigel feebly.

I also rejoice that I have encountered so debonair a person, and I shall ever bear in mind the pleasure which I have had from our meeting.

So saying, he laid his bleeding head upon his enemy's brazen front and sank into a dead faint.

So Tom Holland, that beautiful passage of prose, the introduction of the red ferret in the book Sir Nigel, which you recommended to me.

You regard that as one of the great landmarks in Western literature, don't you?

I've completely forgotten the red ferret, and I don't know how I could have done.

Yeah, so my father read that to me. It's by Arthur Conan Doyle.

Yes.

And actually, Arthur Conan Doyle thought that Sir Nigel and the other in the same series, the white company, were better than Sherlock Holmes.

And I'm sure that from the reading you've just given, the listeners will agree with that verdict.

And doubly.

So Sir Nigel culminates in the Battle of Poitiers, the great victory won by the black prince, save of the French, when they captured the French king.

And it filled me with a kind of boyish patriotism, all that kind of stuff.

And I became obsessed by the Hundred Years War.

So it was one of my great kind of childhood enthusiasms.

But it was also the subject of another book that I loved as a child, which gave a very different perspective on the 14th century and the Hundred Years War, which was a distant mirror by Barbara Tuckman,

who probably best named for her books on First World War, so Guns of August and the Proud Tower. And she cast the Hundred Years War, unlike Arthur Conan Doyle, as a period of unbelievable suffering.

So marked by gangs of mercenaries and free booters, kind of pillaging and destroying.

And you've got the black death and everything in the background.

So for those people who don't know, Tom, the Hundred Years War, we are in the 14th and then the 15th century, starting in the 14th.

It's England versus France.

It is the Titanic, certainly for English schoolboys of a certain age.

It's the colossal Titanic showdown between these two diametrically opposed chivalric enterprises.

It's the longest war in European history.

So it's actually, it's not even 100 years, it's actually 116 years from 1337 to 1453.

In Barbara Tuckman's book, she describes how Edward III, who's the English king, and Philip VI, who is the king of France when England and France go to war,

but neither could know that they were opening a war that would outlast both of them, that would develop a life of its own, defying parleys and truces and treaties designed to stop it,

that would drag on into their son's lives and the lives of their grandsons and great-grandsons and great-great-grandsons to the fifth generation,

that would bring havoc to both sides and become as its damage spread through Europe, a final torment of the closing Middle Ages.

Craig, that's a bit bleak, isn't it?

Yeah.

So basically it comes in two halves.

If you think of it as football match.

Yeah.

The first half, five minutes before, you know, halftime, England basically 10 nil up, and then somehow it ends as a draw.

Then the same thing happens in the second half.

So in this episode, we're going to do the build up to the Hundred Years War, and then in three episodes that follow, we're going to do that first half.

So it features Battle of Cressy, Battle of Poitiers, the collapse of France, and then ultimately Europe into this kind of milestone of violence and horror.

But it's a very dramatic story.

It's also, Tom, is it not the high point of longbows, the black prints, the red ferrets, chivalric gestures, you know, and debonair nights, maidens, tournaments, all that stuff.

That's all here, isn't it?

Yes.

So this is absolutely, for example, the kind of the classic medieval war.

Yeah.

So if you like nights, if you like longbows, this is absolutely the series for you.

You might think because France and England fight it for over 100 years, and because today we think of certainly Britain and France as basically being pretty much par, don't we?

I mean, they're kind of pretty much equal weight.

I mean, that's not at all the case.

And that's why it's so thrilling from an English point of view, is that actually England is a minnow compared to France.

Okay.

So France in the early 14th century is by far the richest country in Europe.

It's by far the most populous.

It's got kind of six times the income of England, three times the population,

and there are records of French visitors coming to England, and they're amazed at how small it is.

Well, France has got its magnificent cathedrals, and it's, you know, Paris is the largest city in Western Europe,

and it's kind of London, and England must feel like a backward.

Anyway, Tom, I'd sort you off, sorry, from you again to tell us about one of your visitors.

Well, yeah.

So he says how of the four or five regions into which one could divide the kingdom of France, the poorest would offer more revenue, more towns and cities, more nights and squares than the whole of England.

That's kind of the thing that Macron says now.

Well, it is, but the French, at that point, are entirely justified in looking down at England.

It pains me to say it, but it's true.

Because France is, I mean, it's not just that it's richer and more populous.

It's also renowned as the home of chivalry.

So it has soft power as well as hard power.

The king of Bohemia, who's gone blind at the age of 40, but continues to be a great knight, which is very, very red ferret kind of territory.

Rather than hang out ruling Bohemia, he goes to France because he loves it so much, because he sees this as the true home of chivalry.

Everyone speaking French has their second language.

You mentioned the cathedrals, so the Gothic style of cathedrals that we have in England.

I mean, that comes from France.

You mentioned Paris by far the largest city north of the Alps, by far the most prestigious university.

It has, by medieval standards, a very, very effective civil servants, much more effective than the English one.

So it's, I mean, it's absolutely the gorilla in the room of medieval Christian kingdoms in the early 14th century.

It's the United States in the 1950s or something, isn't it?

I mean, it's just sort of so glittering, so powerful, so modern.

So tell me about the kings of France, because they're a kind of slightly peculiar bunch, aren't they?

It's the dynasty of the Capetians. They've been there since, what, 987?

Yeah, I read from your notes.

So the kings of France can ultimately claim their origin all the way back to Clovis, who's this Frankish warlord who seizes what had been Roman Gaul.

But the current dynasty of kings in France comes to power in 987, as you said.

They get elected, a guy called Hugh Capet.

And what's great for the Capetians, the heirs of Hugh Capet, is that to a degree that's really unparalleled in medieval history, son, follow son, follow son, follow son, kind of 14 kings rule in succession.

That's great, because it means that you're not kind of slicing and dicing the inheritance, and there are no inheritance battles.

And what that in turn enables the kings to do is to expand their power, because what is kind of our understanding of France, say, is a coherent national entity in nation state.

This doesn't remotely correspond to what France is in the early Middle Ages.

The kings of France in the 11th century, the 12th century, are ruling a 10th of contemporary France. So they call it the royal domain. That's where the king has direct rule. That's around Paris, is it? Around Paris, stretching down to Orleans. It's really very small. The rest of it, so that's about nine tenths, is ruled by his vassals. I mean, they acknowledge his supremacy, but effectively they're independent. And some of these are very famous because they intrude on English history. So most obviously Normandy. So that's where William the Conqueror comes from. He's the Duke of Normandy. But also the Duchy of Anjou. That's where Henry II comes from. Of England. Henry II of England. And so the Anjavan kings, Henry II, Richard I, John, I mean, they are ruling as much of France as the French kings are. So they've got Normandy, they've got Anjou. They also have, because Henry II marries Eleanor of Aquitaine, they get Aquitaine, which is basically a huge chunk of southwest France. But they're under the French king, right? They owe him their allegiance or whatever. And some of them, but say not for Aquitaine. So Aquitaine is effectively independent. They acknowledge no overlord. I mean, they recognize that the king of France is the king, but that doesn't mean that they pay homage to him. And that means that France is kind of inherently vociferous. It's a kind of patchwork of duchies, of counties, where the relationship of the rulers to the French king is often kind of, you know, there's a whole shades of that. And once in the 13th century, a succession of brilliantly able kings are able to not only expand the royal domain, but also to effectively eliminate focuses of opposition to their rule. So the most obvious one, of course, is the Anjouvan kings, Henry II, that dynasty. And the guy who gets kicked out, who ends up being called Lackland, is John. So Normandy gets annexed, all the Loire provinces, all that's left is a tiny chunk of what had been Aquitaine. I mean, basically Gascany, centred on Bordeaux, a kind of tiny strip of land stretching southwards from Bordeaux. And that's pretty much all that the kings of England have left of them. We talked about the Albert Jensen Crusade. And the Cathar Pogosts, yeah. So the French kings use that to basically annex directly to their royal domain, Longa-Doc, Toulouse, all that kind of area. And also brilliantly in the 13th century, the French annex Champagne and Brie. So they can have champagne and cheese parties.

Yeah, very nice. Wine and cheese. Lovely.

That's great for the French kings.

So basically, by the start of the 14th century,

large chunks of France are directly under the rule of the French kings.

I mean, not all of them.

So there are large principalities.

So there's Gascony that we mentioned.

That's Southwest.

Yeah.

The remnants of the Duchy of Aquitaine.

There's Brittany.

There's Flanders, which is part of the French kingdom.

What's now Belgium?

So they've got their own dukedoms, haven't they?

Brittany.

Flanders is a dukedom as well, is it?

Yes.

Or a county, yeah, dukedom.

So they're sort of trying to hold out against the,

it's like a colossal, I was about to say a game of risk,

but it's actually obviously a game of thrones, Tom.

Yeah.

So game of thrones is a great parallel.

I mean, that's what we're calling this episode.

Yeah.

If you think of Westeros and all the various, the Seven Kingdoms.

I mean, that's kind of the relationship.

The Seven Kingdoms of Westeros.

The Iron Throne.

The Iron Throne.

So the Iron Throne claims the kind of supremacy

over all the Seven Kingdoms.

And just on the Iron Throne.

So the person who is on, as it were, the Iron Throne, they call him the most Christian King, don't they?

And he is Philip the Fair.

Is that right?

Philip the Fourth?

Yeah.

Is he an Iron King for an Iron Throne?

He pretty much is an Iron King for an Iron Throne, isn't he, Tom?

Yes.

He is a hard ruler.

Right.

So he's King from 1285 to 1314, whether he's faced by foreign rivals or cash flow problems.

I mean, he hits solutions hard.

So actually he loses a battle to the Flemish infantrymen and it's called the Battle of the Golden Spurs because so many Golden Spurs are taken from the defeated knights and they get hung up.

But Philip isn't having any of that.

So he goes in and he smashes up the Flemings, exacts massive reparations, appropriates the city of Lille.

So this is when Lille becomes part of the Royal Domain and therefore France in the long run.

He expels the Jews from France because obviously they're rich so he can grab their money.

Right.

He destroys the Templars, the Knights Templar.

Oh, yeah.

And he burns that bloke in front of Notre Dame.

Yeah, he does.

Jacques de Malais, who was the godfather to his son and he's doing this again because he needs the money.

So just to spell the Jews, he's abolishing the Templars.

So he gets their cash and he even has a crack at the Pope.

He sends French troops into basically to bully the Pope on a face of the eighth and they hold him hostage

and the Pope is so shocked that he dies.

And this sets in train a series of events that culminates in the movement of the papacy from Rome to Avignon,

which is not part of the Kingdom of France, but obviously, you know, is very much on the doorstep of the French kingdom.

So again, there's a sense that the papacy has become French.

And François, who is the great chronicler of the Hundred Years' War, in his account of the conflict at the beginning,

he describes France under Philip the Fair as being gorge, contented, strong.

It's people rich and prospering and not one of them knew the word war.

So it's absolutely a golden age.

Now, how does this leave the King of England?

I was about to say, let's talk about the real heroes of the story in Avignon.

Well, so the kings of England, who back in the Audre Van Period, the time of Henry II and Richard I, had viewed themselves not just as the equals, but basically the superiors of the kings of France.

Their horizons have very shrunk because they've lost all their holdings in France.

And so England in the 13th century has become very marginal.

So this is King John, Henry III, Henry III is messing around with Simon de Monfort.

And then Edward I and II, I suppose.

Is that right? That is pretty much the kings we're talking about.

Yeah, Italians will describe them as the little king of England compared to the giant that is the king of France.

I mean, it's not all bad, I guess, from the English perspective,

because obviously having a king who is the king of England and king of Varsways of France

means that England relatively gets neglected.

So a king of England who really is only just the king,
aside from the tiny strip of Gascony, is basically the king of England.

I think it helps to consolidate a sense of national unity.

So Sir Nigel, I mean, a more modern Nigel would very much applaud this, right?

They would say, this is England for the English.

Yeah.

Forget the, it's literally little England.

It's like, forget the foreign entanglements.

Let's just concentrate on our own sense of national identity.

And who cares about all the French stuff?

Is there a bit of an element of that, do you think, developing?

So England as a kingdom that's on an island is geographically more homogeneous.

But you mentioned Sir Nigel.

I mean, the English are famous throughout Christendom in this period for their xenophobia,
their kind of hostility to going abroad.

And obviously this is true of the mass of the people.

Yeah.

The nobility is still very, very attracted to French examples.

But even among them, these are the heirs of people who came over with William the Conqueror.

They're starting to lose French as a first language.

That's interesting.

And so Frasso, when he's writing about the dealings of English diplomats with the French in the
14th century,

I mean, he says that often when the English run into trouble,
so pretend that they don't understand what the French are saying.

Increasingly, they have English names.

Edward.

Yeah.

Edward would be the classic example, or indeed Thomas, a splendid name.

Well, Edward is a really interesting one because that's obviously an Anglo-Saxon name, isn't it?

Yeah.

And the kings of England, the Plantagenet kings are now adopting Anglo-Saxon names.

They've become anglicised in a way that they wouldn't have been a few generations earlier.

They are, although the kings of England are, in a way, a special case,
because they do continue to speak French as their first language.

Right.

And also, they absolutely still see themselves as heirs of France and as major continental players.

So there is something of British Prime Ministers in the wake of the Second World War still wanting
to believe

that they are the leaders of a great power, of a superpower.

Things like, certainly, Edward I are very reluctant to acknowledge their diminished status.

And to be honest, they certainly have continuing stakes in France in a way that, say, the French King
does not in England.

So they have stakes in both the two autonomous principalities, Flanders and Brittany.

So Flanders is the great centre of weaving.

Yeah.

And the weaving depends on English wool.

That relationship between England and Flanders, I suppose, Belgium, northern Belgium, is a fascinating one, isn't it?

Because we did a podcast about Burgundy with Bart Van Loo and he was talking about how in the 15th century

there was a sort of almost a natural English-Burgundian alliance.

Because that economic relationship about wool is so important, does that mean that in this period there's an automatic political relationship as well?

I think not for the counts of Flanders and they are counts.

Sorry, I said dukes earlier. There's so many dukes.

He's very confusing.

That was my fault, Tom. I dragged you into a duke morass.

The counts of Flanders, they're counts, they're not interested in wool and weaving.

But this is kind of proto-industrial revolution happening in Flanders.

And so the cities that is the home of the weavers are becoming more and more autonomous, more and more significant.

That means that the kings of England who supply the raw material are finding that this gives them a way of affecting and influencing opinion in Flanders.

So they can kind of impose trade blockades.

And this is a weapon that over the course of the 13th century into the 14th century, they're not reluctant to use.

And so that gives them a point of leverage over,

Flanders is by far the richest of the various regions of France.

So that does give them a kind of throttle hold.

Kings of England have a very close relationship with the dukes of Brittany because the brilliantly named Alan of Brittany.

He'd come over with William the Conqueror and been given lands.

And so this is part of inherited, one of them is the Duke of Brittany is the Earl of Richmond.

Oh, right.

Richmond is the seat of Rishi Sunak.

So in Yorkshire.

And the entirety of holdings in England that the dukes of Brittany have, that probably is giving them a greater income than they're getting from Brittany itself.

And an example of how intimate the relations between the Duke or family of Brittany and the English King is provided by a guy called John Jean in the early 14th century, who's the uncle of the Duke of Brittany in that time.

But he's also a peer who sits in the House of Lords.

He fights with the English armies against the Scots, actually against the French as well.

He's Godfather to the future, Edward III.

So there are absolutely very, very important links there.

Yeah.

I think Brittany should still be part of England to be quite frank with you, but that's a niche opinion I know, go on time.

Well, but also just to reiterate, the English Kings do have direct holding.

So they do have Gascony and also from the time of Edward I, they have this region called Pontieu, which is just south of Calais, which they've kind of inherited by marriage.

So what about Aquitaine?

So Eleanor of Aquitaine famously, you know, tremendous heiress, brought all these lands, all this money.

We still got Aquitaine?

We have, but very precariously, kind of clinging on with our fingernails.

I say our, the English Kings are Henry III, who's a bit of, to be honest, not the most charismatic and forward thinking of English Kings. He basically arrives at a compromise that is in effect a disaster.

So in 1259, he signs a treaty, the Treaty of Paris, which means that the French Kings acknowledge their rule over this kind of the rump of what would be in Aquitaine, Gascony.

But in return, Henry III is obliged to pay homage for it.

This is signed with the aim of establishing kind of concord and peace between the two Kings, but it doesn't have that effect because in the long run, and Henry III hadn't realized it, but Edward I is much more kind of swaggering, son absolutely does.

What this means is that his subjects in Gascony can appeal over his head to the French King. So in other words, he's not mastering his own domain.

And also it's humiliating for a King to pay homage to another King.

That's absolutely what Edward feels.

And so Edward II is the hammer of the Scots, the guy who conquers Wales.

I think there's absolutely a sense in which he is looking to expand the borders of England within the island of Britain as a way of compensating for his diminished status on the continent. That's interesting.

So in other words, the Scott hammering is just a massive form of...

Displacement.

Displacement, yeah.

So a couple of questions before we go to a break.

Presumably, if you're the English King, no matter whether you're Henry III or Edward I or whoever, because France is so rich and so culturally prestigious, you would much prefer to expand your domains in France than to be conquering... Scotland.

Yeah, Canaveral or Edinburgh or whatever.

You know, it's not just Scotland and Wales.

It's England as well.

It's seen as being...

Well, it's not France.

I mean, who wouldn't want to have a bit of France?

So France is the kind of the metropole, if you like,
and these places are peripheral powers.

It's richer.

It's more prosperous.

It's more prestigious.

And it's the home of chivalry.

Okay.

And certainly the English Kings feel they want to be a part of this.

They would much rather have Normandy or Anjou than they would have, say, I don't know,
Southern Scotland or Wales or maybe even Surrey.

Just on the English Kings.

The English Kings think of themselves as English or as French or both.

They think of themselves as Kings of England.

And so they are absolutely identifying themselves as we will see
with the legends of England, of Britain, with King Arthur or that kind of thing.

But they see themselves as well as being players in French politics,
as being peers of the great figures of the French court.

So they are absolutely torn, I think.

I mean, I don't think they'd be conscious of themselves being torn
because I don't think that they would be thinking that English and French
are absolute categories in the way that we would.

So these are not nation states?

These are not nation...

I mean, England is much more approximating to a nation state than France is.

But this is not really how the Kings of England see it, I think.

That question that I just asked, they wouldn't understand the question
because they would say...

Probably not.

You can absolutely be English and French

because French is a sort of different category, almost.

Is that right?

Would that be right?

Just like you can be Norman and French or Breton and French.

Absolutely.

The massive people in England think of themselves as English.

But the Kings of England are operating in a more elevated, more complex,
more historically informed sense of themselves.

They're part of a wider international global elite, aren't they?

Well, they're Kings, by definition.

But the tournaments and all that kind of thing.

I know this is a stupid comparison.

They are the sort of Davos get-togethers, I suppose, of the day, right?

They're very rich people go to and they have a lingua franca, which is French.

They move in a different kind of cultural universe from the people that they rule.

So rather than kind of meeting up and talking about what does AI mean for global finance, they would compete in the lists, tournaments, all that kind of thing.

Exactly.

One other thing I want to talk about, which is wine.

So you mentioned, we still have Gascony, we still have Bordeaux.

So presumably wine is quite a big factor in all this, is it?

The wine trade must be significant.

We are importing Claret to whatever is that why we have the obsession with Bordeaux in England?

Yes.

So it's about 80,000 tons of wine are being exported annually to England.

And so again, that gives incredible leverage.

So the two kind of great export industries of France, the Flemish wool and the wines of Bordeaux are both absolutely intimately fused with England.

But it's unstable relationship because of this issue of the paying homage

and because of the power imbalance between the two and because of the aspirations of the

because the French court obviously has an aspiration to kind of spread French power over France and the English kings have an aspiration to preserve and indeed widen their own.

Claw it back.

Yeah.

So that's the basic instability, would you say?

The aspirations of the rival courts.

Yeah.

Brilliant.

Well, we should take a break, I think, Tom.

And I believe we're going to come back in with one of my very favorite English kings.

Not a good king, it's fair to say, but an interesting king

because we're going to come back in with Edward II.

Is that right?

Yeah.

Described by one of his biographers in 1900 as an absolute nanny.

An absolute nanny.

We're going to return with an absolute nanny, Edward II.

So come back after the break.

Welcome back to The Rest is History.

We promised you we would return with King Edward II.

And we have, Tom has just said to me in the break,

tell everybody about Edward II because clearly he doesn't know anything about him.

So Tom, to educate you and the audience, Edward II was a useless king.

Doesn't he appear in Braveheart?

He's in Braveheart, isn't he?

It's Cuckolded by William Wallace.

He does.

He's married to Sophie Marceau in Braveheart.

In reality, he is indeed beaten at the Battle of Bannetburn in Scotland.

Edward II said his father at the first is an incredibly formidable fellow, the hammer of the Scots.

Edward II, useless, great domestic instability at home.

There's all these favourites on the endless favourites.

Waves of them.

This is very 266 and all that.

There's the dispensers.

There's obviously noisilatoriously Piers Gavrston with whom he was supposed to have been infatuated.

And Edward II's weakness.

Now, why is that a problem?

Why does that destabilise things?

Obviously, from the French point of view, I mean, that's great that he's so weak.

Why would that change the relationship between England and France, Tom?

So, Scotland has since 1295 been in alliance with France.

This is the old alliance.

And essentially, by its terms, it's stipulated that if either Scotland or France get attacked by England,

then the other country will invade England.

For English kings who are looking to France, that creates an inherent sense of instability in the north.

In Shakespeare's play, Henry V, Henry describes the weasel, Scott.

This idea that you head off and the weasel will come and nick all your eggs.

It's the kind of idea.

We've had the red ferrets, now we've got the Scottish weasel.

So, Edward II, again, as you said, you mentioned Braveheart, is married to a French queen.

She is the youngest daughter of Philip IV, who we mentioned, Philip the Fair.

And they have a son who they call Edward.

Surprise, surprise.

Shockingly, Isabella's, so the queen is called Isabella, her uncle wanted Edward to be called Louis.

No, no, you couldn't have an English king called Louis.

They, unfortunately, hate each other.

So, is she the she-wolf of France?

That is the name that is given to her.

She's not quite as she-wolfish as that reputation might suggest.

She's actually very kind of pious.

But she really hates, comes to hate, Edward II, with disastrous consequences, as we will see.

Because the sense the French have that Edward II is messing up,

inevitably means that they see it as a chance to kind of snip away at Gascony,

despite the Treaty of Paris saying that they won't do this.

And so, Philip the Fair appoints a commission.

He's investigating what he describes as the violence, the looting, the rapine, and the anarchy in

Aquitaine.

So, basically, he's kind of saying, this is a failed state.

Therefore, we have the right to come in and an exit for the good of everybody.

Is it a failed state or is that all, is this fake news?

It is fake news.

I mean, it's not in a great state, but it's not so bad that Philip would be justified in annexing it.

Right.

And so, what Philip then does is to demand that Edward come and do him homage for it.

And Edward keeps trying to kind of, again, weasel out of it.

And this gives the French the chance to move in.

So, 1324, they invade Aquitaine and they overrun pretty much all of it, except for Bordeaux.

And the following year, Edward II is informed that unless he comes and does his homage immediately,

then the entire dusty will be forfeit.

The French king will inexit completely.

And he's also informed by papal back channels that he should send his wife, his queen Isabella, to do the negotiating.

So, she's a member of the French royal family.

That's a very bad idea, because she's kind of party priest, isn't she?

I mean, isn't she?

She is.

She can't be relied upon.

Yeah.

And an additional problem is that there's a guy in Paris called Roger Mortimer, who is in exile from England, who also hates Edward.

She goes to Paris and immediately shacks up with him.

Oh, dear.

So, this is ominous for Edward II.

He then commits the cardinal mistake of deciding that rather than going and paying homage himself,

he will send his son, Edward.

So, Edward goes over to Paris and Isabella and Mortimer snaffle him and refuse to send him back.

And they prepare to invade England.

And they're busy kind of preparing for the future.

They go to a place called Hainot, which is kind of border of Flanders and France.

And there, the young Edward meets with a young girl called Philippe,

Philippe Havana, second daughter of the Count of Hainot.

They get on tremendously well and they get kind of pledged to each other.

He's 12 and she's similar age?

She's 12 as well.

Right.

Philippe is so keen on Edward that when Edward leaves, she bursts into tears.

Oh, that's quite a nice story, Tom.

Yeah.

Isabella and Mortimer invade England, taking the young Edward with them.
They overthrow Edward II.

Edward II abdicates, he then ends up horribly murdered in Berkeley Castle.

Just as a quick spoiler, in case you ever do an episode on Edward II,
is it or is it not correct that he is murdered by having...

I mean, you talked about the papal back channels.

It's not some issue with a red hot poker and a back channel.

That is the story.

I mean, there are various accounts.

Actually, Ian Mortimer, the historian of medieval England,
who wrote a fabulous book about both Mortimer and Edward III,
has a theory that Edward II never actually died.

Oh, yeah, I've seen that.

Yeah.

He's written lots of very angry articles about him.

I'm not entirely convinced by that, but maybe we'll come to that
if we do an episode on Edward II anyway.

So, basically, Edward II gets disposed of.

Mortimer and Isabella are the effective rulers of England,
and they use the young Edward III as their puppet.

So, are they in cahoots with the king of France?

That's the question.

Yes, they are.

So, basically, England has been reduced to a French puppet at this point, has it?

To some degree, yeah.

Yeah, effectively.

And Edward, absolutely, has been reduced to a puppet.

And he hates this.

Young Edward III.

The young Edward.

I mean, he's an absolute...

He's more than a lad.

He's a jock.

He's a jock.

He really is.

He's like the captain of the rugby team.

Yeah.

So, I mean, he's obsessed with tournaments.

So, he has absolutely all the best gear, best armor, just everything.

I'm just looking at Ian Mortimer's book, The Perfect King.

Horbucks, Greaves, Lances, Bassinets, Withvisors, Gauntlets, Trousers, and Bridges.

I mean, I've got trousers.

Many other items are personal, I'm already aware.

Decorated acotons.

What's an acoton, Tom?

No idea.

Gilded lances, tournament armor, decorated with images of flowers and animals, leopards and crowns.

Took part in five tournaments at the age of 14.

Yeah.

So, it is...

I mean, it is kind of like high school football.

Right.

He's the guy with all the kit.

Yeah.

He's whatever it is you do in American football.

You just basically run into each other.

Touchdowns, is it?

I don't know.

Whatever.

Yeah.

So, that's basically him.

And so, you can imagine that he doesn't like being put in the shadow of an upstart guy like Mortimer.

No.

And things don't go well with the Scots.

You amazed me.

So, 1328, Mortimer goes off to try and whip the Scots into shape and it goes disastrously wrong.

It's all very humiliating.

Mortimer ends up signing a treaty with the Scots that effectively ends the wars of independence that have been raging since the time of Edward I, in which Edward III is obliged to acknowledge the independence of Scotland.

And he does not like this at all.

Nobody in England likes it.

They come to call it the shameful peace.

Right.

It essentially...

It inspires Edward to think, well, I've got to get rid of this guy.

So, in 1330, a group of his friends...

So, Edward III is a great one for friends.

He likes to surround himself with the lads.

1330, all the guys, all the boys, the boys get together and they stage a coup and Mortimer gets toppled, he gets executed and Edward III, Lance, he fulfills his destiny.

I think that's a very good voice that you do, but I'm really glad you're not going to do the rest of the podcast in that voice.

No, I'm not.

And it matters because these guys who have basically helped Edward topple Mortimer are

people who will play a key role in the story of his reign.

He doesn't forget what he owes them and it's like the Rugger team that win whatever it is.

What do Rugger teams win?

Cupers.

There is an Oxford and Cambridge and Oxford rugby match.

They're blues.

Total lads.

So, Edward is, you know, he's putting things back together and at the same time as England is starting to recover its mojo, things are going really badly wrong in France.

This is great news.

So, the thing I always remember from The Distant Mirror, and it's very dramatically done, is that, and you mentioned this earlier, that as Jacques de Malay, the head of the Templars is being burned on the orders of Philip IV in front of Notre Dame.

The story is that he curses Philip IV and summons him to meet with Jacques de Malay before God's judgment seat, before the end of the year and eight months later, sure enough, Philip dies.

The power of the Templars, Tom.

Yeah.

And Tutman writes wonderfully about this, toward contemporaries, the cause was indubitably the Templars curse that had floated upward with the smoke from the pyre in the red light of the setting sun.

So, you can see why I like that book.

And straight away, the Capetian line, you know, which had been so fertile, sun, succeeding sun, succeeding sun, it starts to wither.

And this is so game of thrones.

So, Philip IV has three sons.

They all succeed each other in rapid succession and none of them have any sons.

So, the first of them is a guy called Louis, Louis the 10th.

He rules for just under two years.

So he does have two children and the first of these, Jean the First, John, brilliantly, this is something very weird that happens twice.

He's born posthumously, five months after his father's death, so everyone's been waiting to see if it's going to be a boy.

It is a boy, but he only rules for five days before dying.

So that is officially the shortest reign in French history.

I mean, that is short.

But also, he's only a baby when he...

Yes.

I mean, you pop out and then you die and that's basically the limit of your reign.

Yeah.

He lives for five days and reigns for five days.

Is that right?

Yes.

Five or four days anyway.
Who's going to succeed him?
He has a sister who's four years old at the time called Jean, Joan.
Joan, yeah.
But she gets...
You know, you can't have a four-year-old girl.
So, she gets elbowed aside by her uncle who then rules as Philip V. He rules for six years.
He dies, then gets succeeded by his brother, younger brother Charles IV, who again...
He rules for six years, dies in 1322 and with his death, there are no more competitions.
There are no more at all.
So then the question is, who is going to rule?
Who's going to succeed?
So there are three candidates.
Right.
Because France is the big prize now.
I mean, everybody wants to...
France is the big prize, yeah.
So there is a grandson of Philip IV.
Well, that's good news.
And that is Edward III.
Of course, through Isabella.
So you've had Louis, Philip and Charles, the three kings of France who've all just died,
and Isabella, who's their sister.
But this is terrible from the point of view of the French.
They don't want the King of England.
They don't know him.
He's the King of England.
It's no good.
And so they basically say, well, you've inherited the throne from a woman that's no good, even
though that's not the law at all.
They're just making that up.
They've made up this new...
That's the Salic Law, right?
That's...
Salic Law comes in later, but retrospectively, it gets fitted to that.
That's what it comes to be cast as.
Yeah.
But this is a complete and utter con.
I mean, he should have been the king.
He has a very good claim to it, yes.
Great.
Good.
I'm glad we've established that.
But the fourth, the grandfather of Edward III, he had a brother and a half-brother.

So the half-brother is a guy called...
So confusing.
They're all called Philip.
Don't tell me they're both called Philip, are they?
Yeah, they're both called Philip.
I'm really sorry about that.
Oh, come on.
So Philip of Evarot.
So why have him when you can have a full brother?
So he's the half-brother.
He's the half-brother.
So he doesn't get it, and he gets recompensed for this by being given the Kingdom of Navarre, which is in the Pyrenees.
That's lovely.
I would take Navarre.
Yeah.
And he gets married to Joan.
The four-year-old.
The four-year-old granddaughter of Philip IV.
And that's important because it means that their children, if they have sons, they will potentially have a claim on the throne.
So remember, if Joan has a son, he will be in a position to create mischief.
Is this a point at which listeners should start making notes?
Yeah.
I want them to bear that in mind.
The other one, so the brother is Philip of Valois, and he is the guy who serves as regent.
Charles IV's widow is also pregnant.
When Charles IV dies, and so again, everyone is waiting to see, will it be a son?
Because if it's a son, then the problem is solved.
But it isn't.
It's a daughter.
So she's no good.
Yeah.
So she's no good, and so Philip of Valois then becomes Philip VI.
He seizes the throne.
He doesn't seize the throne.
I mean, basically, he's...
The French want him to be king.
The French want him to be king because he's an experienced soldier.
He's not a newborn girl.
You say he's an experienced soldier, Tom, but is he an experienced soldier in the same way that Liz Truss is a well-known prime minister?
Because Jonathan Sumption describes him as a thoroughly bad soldier.
I mean, you can be experienced and bad, can't you?

Yeah.

So Jonathan Sumption, who's written a series of exhaustive histories of the Hundred Years War, describes him as the worst soldier, more so than any other medieval king of France, except perhaps for the mentally defective Charles VI.

He's also depressive.

He's also increasingly obese.

Frassa says of him that he was always ready to take the advice of fools.

So perhaps again, a Liz Truss.

Comparison there.

Yeah.

His wife, Joan of Burgundy, is a famous intellectual and therefore is loathed and detested by all the chronicles of the age.

So she's known as the lame evil queen.

The Virginia wolf of medieval France, Tom.

So basically, Philippe of Valois has become Philippe VI and has beaten Edward III to the crown.

And if people know about the Hundred Years War, what they might think is that this is the cause of the Hundred Years War.

It's Edward being cross about it.

That's not actually the case.

Edward does accept Philip VI as king.

And actually the Flemmings, who are always prone to rebellion against the French king, they have a rebellion and they say, look, we'll acknowledge you as king.

And Edward III turns them down.

Why?

Because, well, because Isabella, his mother, is still very much on the scene.

She doesn't really approve of it.

But also because he's busy trying to stabilise England.

He doesn't have time to go rushing off to invade France or anything.

Because trying to do this is a massive deal to try and take on the French.

It's a massive deal.

But the problem is, is that once Philip has become king, he is in the business of laying down markers establishing his prestige.

And so he starts to throw his weight around relative to Edward III.

He summons Edward to come and do him homage.

And Isabella, who's still, as I said, very much on the scene, is wildly contemptuous of this.

She replies to Philip that her son is the son of a king and therefore will not do homage to the son of a count.

Oh, good for Isabella, she's gone up on my estimation.

So Philip, faced by this refusal, does what Philip IV had done, which is threatened to confiscate Gascony.

And so Edward is not yet in a position to defend Gascony against this threat.

And so very reluctantly in 1329, he crosses the channel.

He goes to Pontieux, you know, his holding.
Head south towards Paris, going past the great forest of Cressy.
Oh, Tom, that's a very nice bit of foreshadowing.
Maybe scoping out the lie of the land there.
And he does homage in such a way as not to acknowledge that Philip is his leech lord.
So there are two ways of doing homage.
And he does the kind of the less embarrassing form.
And he then goes to a tournament that Philip holds at Amiens.
He's 16 at this point, and he absolutely smashes it.
He does brilliantly well in the tournament.
Oh, good for Edward.
So things might seem, on a stable footing, France and England seem to be friends.
There's no real debate over who's the king of France.
Things might seem to be going well.
But there remain two massive sores in the relationship between England and France.
And they are Scotland.
The Scots would be delighted to hear you describe them as a massive sore, Tom.
And Gascony.
OK, they tell the Gascons.
So Scotland remains what it has been since the signing of the treaty back in 1296, a way for the French kings to apply pressure to England.
And Edward knows this.
He's resentful of the treaty that Mortimer had signed.
And so his priority, basically, is to repudiate that.
And he does this by, you remember John Balliol, who was originally the king of Scotland, appointed by Edward I. His son wants to go and reclaim the throne.
And so Edward turns a blind eye when John Balliol's son invades Scotland from Northumbria, take it with a band of adventurers, and he does tremendously well.
And his aim, basically, is to topple the five-year-old son of Robert Bruce, David II.
That goes very well to begin with, and then it goes very badly.
And by 1333, a large Scottish army have arrived on the banks of the Tweed and are besieging Berwick.
So Edward III goes rushing up to the rescue because he's able to cast this as an invasion of England.
And he meets with the Scottish army at a place called Halladon Hill, which is a few miles from where Sadie was inherited from her father, a bonny cottage on the banks of the Tweed.
From the Holland Country Estate, Tom, as I like to think of it.
It's in our country estate.
And I'm ashamed to say I've never actually visited the site of the Battle of Halladon Hill, and I'll be doing it the next time we go up there.
Anyway, it's an absolutely singing victory.
Edward absolutely crushes it.
David II has to escape to France, and this absolutely poisons Anglais-French relations because by the terms of the Scottish-French agreement, Philip VI has to back David II

and get him back on the throne.

Of course.

So this is very provocative to the French.

Yeah.

The English ambassadors, in fact, the Archbishop of Canterbury are in Paris at the time when David II arrives in France asking for French support.

Well, he's obviously five, but the guys have gone with him.

And so Philip VI informs the English ambassadors that there will be no treaty between England and France unless Scotland is included and Scottish rights are upheld.

So it's actually very Brexit.

It's very Brexit, Tom.

The equivalent of the Northern Ireland protocol is getting in the way of an Anglais-French treaty.

So essentially, Edward III is faced with the choice of abandoning his Scottish claim or risking the security of Gascany because obviously if no treaty is signed with the French king, then the French will feel that they have the right to go and appropriate Gascany.

So it's a very difficult decision that he has to make, but because he's an absolute lad, he refuses to compromise.

And so essentially, he says, well, I'm going to uphold my claims on Scotland.

If you attack Gascany, I'm going to go to war over it, and relations between England and France go into a kind of downward spiral.

So by 1336, so that's two years after the Scottish king has fled to France.

The whole of England is having a massive invasion scare.

They're kind of building beacons.

They're trying to kind of rustle up ships to defend the channel, all this kind of thing.

And the French kings, meanwhile, is drawing up this incredibly complicated and in the long run abortive plan to invade England through Scotland, I mean, which is kind of mad.

Yeah.

It's a very complicated way of doing it.

So that's looking very, very bad for Edward, the threat of direct invasion.

And then in May, 1337, Philip declares that he is confiscating the Duchy of Aquitaine, and this effectively is a declaration of war.

Right.

Because Edward has to respond to that.

Well, so Edward goes to parliament, gets the backing of parliament, gets all the peers of England on side.

So he's absolutely making sure that, you know, he's not just treating this as a personal dynastic war.

He's making sure that he's getting the peers and the parliament of England on side as well.

And on the 28th of August, 1337, he issues a public manifesto in which he accuses Philip of provoking war by supporting the Scots in defiance of his rights in Scotland, of supporting French ships in their kind of paratrical raids on the English coast, and of behaving unlawfully in stripping him of his ancestral rights in Aquitaine.

So it's pretty interesting that he feels the need to issue a public manifesto that this is an agent.

Because the stereotype of the Hundred Years' War is this is just, you know, knights and barons among themselves.

But he feels he needs to get the commons, the...

He absolutely does.

Yeah.

So why is that, do you think?

It's in part because Edward can recognise that English identity is something more coherent, say, than French identity, and that if he can rally the mass of the English to a sense that his cause is England's cause, then obviously that'll be great.

And the reason that he is aware of the need to do that is that Edward knows he has a secret weapon in the form of an incredible new military technology, which he had actually unleashed at the Battle of Halladon Hill against the Scots, and so he knows his devastating, which is the Longbow.

And we should probably save that for a discussion in the next episode.

But just to reiterate, Edward's declaration of war, his readiness to uphold his rights against the French monarchy, is very, very punchy.

I mean, it's equivalent, say, of in the buildup to the Ukraine war.

If Ukraine had basically gone to war with Russia and invaded Russia, it's that level of punchiness.

So it's the smaller that the underdog just saying, right, let's go for it.

Let's get stuck in.

I'm not waiting to be attacked by the bigger dog, as it were.

And Edward's strategy is absolutely to take the war to France.

So in other words, he knows that if the French get a toehold in England, then their capacity to devastate England will be overwhelming.

But that if he can clear French control of the channel and establish permanent footholds in France and take the war to France, then that will keep England secure from the war.

So that is basically its strategy.

But it's still very, very punchy.

And the question that people are asking as the war begins, isn't can he win?

It isn't can he make himself king of France?

It's how can he avoid a French evasion?

How can he avoid the conquest of Gaskinia, maybe even England?

And basically pretty much everyone in Europe is expecting him to lose.

Crikey.

What a drastic moment on which to end, Tom.

Because this is just the first of four podcasts, isn't it?

It is.

The rest is history club members who are interested in long bows, underdog victories, stories of tremendous heroism against overwhelming evil.

Black princes.

Red ferrets.

Exactly.

They can listen to the rest of the episodes now.

Ordinary listeners.

I mean, there's nothing bad about being ordinary if that's what you want to be.

A long bowman rather than a knight.

They can.

Well, they'll have to wait till Thursday, basically.

But you can listen now by signing up at restishistorypod.com.

And let me tell you one more thing that you will be getting if you do that.

You will get with each episode a lovely reading from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sir Nigel.

Because that's how we'll be introducing future episodes to this series.

So you'll get a taste, not just of great history, courtesy of Tom Holland, but a fantastic high-level literary craftsmanship courtesy of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and me.

So on that bombshell, Tom, we return next time with the long bow.

What battle have we got coming up?

We've got the Battle of Sleuths, which is a great naval victory.

We've got the Battle of Cressy, which is an absolutely priceless – it's basically – it's the medieval battle of Trafalgar.

And we've got the Capture of Calais by the English.

And loads of gallantry, knights, maidens, red ferrets.

You name it.

I mean, basically, if you're French, you won't want to listen to it.

But if you're English, you definitely will.

Yeah.

Since we don't have any French listeners, who cares?

And on that bombshell, we'll see you next time.

Goodbye.

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