

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

Thanks for listening to the Rest is History.

For bonus episodes, early access, add free listening and access to our chat community, please sign up at restishistorypod.com.

Or, if you're listening on the Apple Podcasts app, you can subscribe within the app in just a few clicks.

Nigel tethered pommers to a thornbush and then turned his attention to the injured man. He was a mere stripping, with the delicate features of a woman and a pair of great violet blue eyes, which looked up presently with a puzzled stare into Nigel's face.

Who are you?

He asked.

Ah yes, I call you to mind.

You are the young Englishman who chased me on the great yellow horse, by our lady of Rockamador whose vernicul is round my neck.

I could not have believed that any horse could have kept to the heels of Charlemagne so long, but I will wager you a hundred crowns, Englishman, that I lead you over a five mile course.

Nay, said Nigel, it sounds like a horse.

Nay, said Nigel, we will wait until you can back a horse, there we took of racing it.

I am Nigel of Tilford, of the family of Loring, a squire by rank and the son of a knight.

How are you called young sir?

I am also a squire by rank and the son of a knight.

I am Raul de la Roche Pierre de Bra, whose father writes himself Lord of Grobois, a free Vavasor of the noble count of Toulouse, with the right of Fossa and of Ferca, the high justice, the middle and the low.

He sat up and rubbed his eyes.

Englishman, you have saved my life as I would have saved yours had I seen such yelping dogs set upon a man of blood and of coat armor, but now I am yours and what is your sweet will?

When you are fit to ride, you will come back with me to my people.

Alas, I had feared that you would say so, had I taken you Nigel, that is your name, is it not?

Had I taken you, I would not have acted thus.

So Tom Holland, that's Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel, beautifully written as usual.

Sir Nigel, both beautifully written and I think it's fair to say remarkably read, beautifully read.

Yeah.

Those readings from Sir Nigel with which we're introducing our epic sweep through the Hundred Years War.

Sir Conan Doyle always thought they were better than the Sherlock Holmes books and he was gutted, wasn't he, that people paid so much attention to Holmes and not enough to Nigel.

And actually, although we are, it's fair to say we're not reading them, well, I'm not reading them with an entirely straight face.

They do capture the sort of sense of the Hundred Years War as this great gallant Chevalric.

Yes.

Yes.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

As a bit of a game.

I mean, it probably didn't seem that way to the blind king of Bohemia when he was riding the wrong way.

Well, no, but it did.

It did because he died a Chevalric death.

Yes, that's fair.

And the codes of chivalry are still very important in this period.

And one of the things that's interesting about the Hundred Years War and makes it significant is the way that it starts to mutate those codes, both because they are used very, very powerfully by both French and English kings and knights.

But also because of the impact of the way that the English fight, which starts to diminish the rank and the status of the traditional knightly classes.

Well, we ended last time by talking about the Battle of Cressy, didn't we, and the Longbow and military technology, you know, their arguments that it's even the first, first modern battle because it's won by projectiles rather than by people fighting hand to hand.

But on the other thing about the Sennigil spirit of gallantry and chivalry.

So listeners who heard the first two episodes will recall that we went through the origins of the war.

Edward III, launching this sort of preemptive strike almost on France, the great superpower of Europe, and then winning these tremendous battles at Sluse, and then it's taking Calais and Cressy.

But all of that happens against the backdrop of this looming catastrophe with which we ended last time, which is the advent of the Black Death.

So we had this amazing moment.

Yeah, this is as a ship pulls into Messina, dead men at the oars, the description in Barbara Tuckman's book, A Distant Mirror.

So everything that we're going to talk about from now on happens against the backdrop that arguably one of the most devastating backdrops in Western history, which is the advent of the plague.

Well, actually, Sennigil, Conan Doyle's novel, opens with a brilliant account of the Black Death coming.

I mean, I don't remember much of what happens in Sennigil, but I do remember that opening.

But the strange thing is, you were saying in our last episode that the Black Death changes everything.

And obviously, on one level it does.

I mean, up to a third of Europe's population gets wiped out.

I mean, that is a catastrophe on an enormous, enormous scale.

But at the same time, actually, in the context of the war, it doesn't change very much.

That's the strange thing.

It brings a halt to the fighting.

So we said that the Black Death arrives in Europe a month or so after the capture of Calais.

It's reached France that winter.

It reaches England the following summer.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

People in Scotland are laughing, haha, the English are all dying of it.
And then it reaches Scotland and they will start dying of it as well.
So it does definitely put a pause on the conflict, but it certainly doesn't bring it to an end.
And it certainly doesn't stop Edward's war aims because, essentially, the Black Death serves to pause the conflict.
And Edward is in pole position because he has the upper hand militarily.
But crucially, he also has the upper hand in terms of prestige.
So this is a world, you know, I mean, beautifully rendered by Conan Doyle and Articulate in your reading, in which these codes do matter.
And the person who can kind of lay claim to them and to present himself as the model of those codes is actually, you know, that's a strong position to be in.
So listeners who have the first episodes will know that Edward did not go to war because he wanted to be king of France.
That ends up being a kind of justification or tactic during his war.
But he goes to war to protect his own realm from what he sees as inevitable French attack.
That's right, isn't it?
That's right.
And his claim to the French throne is basically a kind of bargain encounter.
Right.
So here's the thing.
Post-Cressy, does he still see it that way or does he now think, OK, I can actually do this?
I could become king of France.
I don't think so.
I mean, he's a strategic genius.
He understands the way that power works and armies work.
And he, I think, appreciates the fact that he has no real prospect of conquering the whole of France.
Right.
His aim is to use his claim to the French crown to leverage as many possessions as he can get out of the French king and also, crucially, to get the French king to acknowledge that these possessions are sovereign.
In other words, Edward will no longer have to kind of pay homage to the French crown for these possessions.
But obviously, he can't admit that because if he says that, then the whole scam fails.
So he has to project himself as a potential king of France.
And to do that, he has to present himself basically as the greatest king in Christendom because that is his ambition.
And he can do that because he is palpably a greater warrior and a kind of more glamorous, a more burnished figure than Philip VI, who's left very diminished by his defeat at Cressy.
And Edward's aim, which he triumphantly fulfills oddly in the aftermath of Calais when the Black Death is raging, is to establish himself as a new King Arthur, ruling over a new Camelot.
And as his strategy, its long run effect will be to demolish the kind of the nightly ideals that he's articulated.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

So that's the kind of the paradox of his reign.

But I think there's absolutely a sense in the wake of Cressy and Calais that England and France, even while hostilities have been paused by the onset of the Black Death, they are kind of competing for the upper ground of chivalric glory.

And so one of the things about this is that knights are the closest equivalent of sports stars that the Middle Ages have.

These are figures with kind of international renown.

And so their relative status does matter.

So the emblematic figure for the French is a man called Geoffrey de Charny, who likes so many of the great knights right the way through the Middle Ages, is he's a third son of a relatively minor nobleman from Burgundy.

But he rises to become the absolute sinister of French chivalry.

And he does that because he's basically, you know, he's in bapay of tournaments.

He is superb.

Well, not as good as Messi, that's your claim.

That prince is Messi.

Yeah, I guess.

We'll come to who might be the Messi.

So he does everything that a chivalier should.

He goes on a crusade.

He writes tomes on points of chivalry.

He articulates a sense that being a knight is the finest service that anyone can do to God outside of actually becoming a priest.

And brilliantly, he's the first known owner of the Turin shroud, which is kind of distinctive quality.

That's nice.

But the question then is what practical use is this to France?

It's great that you have this kind of model of chivalry, but does it actually help France militarily?

Yeah.

And Shani is aware of this.

He's anxious about this.

And so he wants to do his bit for France.

And so late in 1349, after the kind of the worst of the Black Death has passed, he decides that he's going to retake Calais because he appreciates that Calais is the great strategic fruit of Edward's Cressy campaign.

Yeah.

And he also appreciates that this is a massive ask because Calais is now, it's exclusively inhabited by English, it has this massive, massive concentration of troops, the largest concentration of troops anywhere in Europe.

And so the idea that you can write up to it like Salant Salot and take it out is fantastical and Shani recognizes that.

But he's not obliged by the codes of chivalry simply to launch a full-on charge.

He can deploy tricks and schemes and reasons as well.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

That's perfectly legitimate.

So what he does is he approaches an Italian mercenary who's in Calais, a guy called Almeric of Pavia, and offers him a big bribe.

And Almeric pockets it and says, yeah, brilliant, I'll let you and your band of French troops in.

Almeric then takes ship, crosses the channel, comes to Edward's court on Christmas Eve and tells him what's doing for Edward, this is a massive Christmas present.

What fun.

So him, the Black Prince, all the lads, they all abandon their Christmas festivities, take ship to Calais.

Poor old Shani has no idea that they've arrived there.

He's very naive, I think is what you say, Tom.

Well, he's a model of chivalry.

Almeric lets a kind of advance guard of the French in, they raise the banner over the gateway and then they get wiped out and Edward sounds the trumpets and they all get captured and Shani gets taken prisoner and goes to England.

So it's all very embarrassing and Edward has triumphed.

Meanwhile, back in France, Philip VI, he's on his way out and he dies in August 1350 and he succeeded by his son, John, who becomes John II.

Your listeners may remember that John I was the five-year-old baby.

Oh, gosh, yeah, who ruled for five days or something.

Yeah, and to be honest, John II is pretty much as useless as John I was.

He's a terrible...

So he looks like a king.

He's got a beard, I mean, you know, central casting, but he's terrible.

He's kind of very insecure.

He's very obstinate and he's incredibly thick.

And if he's given two options, he will invariably choose the worst option and then kind of cling to it absolutely, obdurately.

Barbara Tuckman says of him that he could have served Machiavelli as the model for the anti-prince.

So he's a terrible king, but because he looks like a king, he feels that he should have an order of chivalry that adequately reflects his desire to be the most Christian king.

And fortunately for him, a year after he succeeded to the throne, so July 1351, Geoffrey de Shani comes back from England, he's been ransomed and he is the guy, obviously, to advise the French king on setting up an order of chivalry.

He's the perfect guy.

So Geoffrey de Shani kind of draws up a rulebook and this new order is to be called the Order of the Star and it is enshrined in honor of God, of our Lady, and for the heightening of chivalry and augmenting of honor, Geoffrey de Shani writes a complete guidebook for it.

But the measure of how much Geoffrey de Shani has been thinking about this and the reasons for English success is that although he is the great star of tournaments, what you have to do to win entry into the Order of the Star isn't success in tournaments, as had traditionally been the case with the chivalric orders, but success in battle.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

So members have to come and report their deeds in battle to the king.
And when they're enrolled in the order, they have to swear a solemn oath that they will never retreat from battle.
They will stand their ground at all times.
So this is the real thing.
This is the hardcore.
This isn't flumming around with like garters for ladders and stuff.
This is pretty gritty.
That is absolutely right.
And it's clearly an attempt to adapt to Geoffrey de Shani's understanding that there is a new age and that if the French are to hold their own against the English, they need to basically not run away, which loads are done at Cressy.
So this is this new order is proclaimed with kind of lots of trumpets and harrass and things like that.
But the problem is, I mean, it's a bit rubbish really.
Oh no.
How disappointing for the French.
Of course, you know, the French court is the traditionally the model of the chivalry, but they have the first meeting in on the 6th of January, 1352 and basically not many people turn up.
So very embarrassing.
And even more embarrassing is the fact that one of the knights who does turn up is a guy who is commanding one of the key castles next to Calais, so one of the French held castles next to Calais.
So he comes to this meeting and while he's away, the English move in and grab his castle.
So it's all, you know, mortifying.
That's very funny.
Thanks for being proud to be English that does.
Absolutely.
But Dominic, what should also completely make you proud to be English is the fact that one of the reasons why the order of the star seems a bit pallid is that it's nothing compared to the blaze of another order of chivalry that's just been set up and that has been set up by Edward III in England and it's an order of chivalry that is still going strong to this day.
The order of the garter.
And you see, I feel bad now because I made a disablaging remark about messing around with garters.
Well, because the order of the garter is the top order of chivalry.
Tom, if we play our cards right with this podcast, I mean, I don't think historian has ever got the garter.
It'd be great, wouldn't it?
I mean, Churchill got the garter, or I think John Major has it.
If John Major has the garter, you could reasonably aspire to that.
Surely we can do that, can't we?

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

So the order of the garter has been founded by Edward III at the absolute height of the Black Beth, so St. George's Day 1349.

And Edward has been advised by his physicians to socially distance.

So Edward, however, is very much not the kind of guy I think who would have worn a mask. Yeah.

He's a partying in Downing Street kind of fellow, isn't he?

He very much is.

And his response to this advice from his physicians to socially distance is an absolutely massive tournament.

Right.

And invite everybody to it.

That's actually Novak Djokovic's type behavior.

Yes.

So this is what's going on with, on St. George's Day, massive tournament, loads of ladies, loads of knights.

And this is when he introduces the order of the garter.

Right.

And what this does absolutely brilliantly and much more effectively than the order of the star is to fuse the Arthurian with a massive celebration of military victory.

So on the Arthurian level, the fact that it's held at Windsor is really significant because Windsor is thought to have been founded by Arthur.

Okay.

And I think I said in a previous episode that when Edward first starts ruling in his own name, one of the first things he does is go to Glastonbury and he then comes back and he starts building Windsor.

So the heart of Windsor Castle now, where the royal family still live, is the portion of the castle built by Edward III basically to look like Camelot.

So it's a kind of Arthurian fantasy.

The tournament that he holds when he's meant to be socially distancing.

It's absolutely modeled on the tournaments that Arthur holds.

People praise and celebrate, say Queen Philippa as a new Guinevere.

And the whole scene is, it's all about spectacle, dazzle, illusion, suspense.

It's brilliantly done.

But it's also about proclaiming military glory.

You mentioned the garter.

So the motto, on his Swahki Malipons, evil beta he who thinks it.

And the joke in 1066 and all that is, honey, your garter's fallen off.

So the story that comes to be told is that there is a lady, some say the Countess of Salisbury and her garter drops off and Edward nobly hands it back to her, and this is what he says.

But this is a late story.

And it's much likelier that that motto is the motto that Edward was using on the Cressy campaign.

So everything that he was doing on the Cressy campaign was for the cause of legitimacy in

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

God is basically the spin.

And the garter in the 14th century, much more than in the 15th century, is actually associated with military figures rather than with women.

And it's particularly associated with Edward's most formidable lieutenant, the Earl of Lancaster, who shortly after becomes the Duke of Lancaster, who is very much the leading English commander. He's led Fort Wars in Scotland, in Gaskony.

He was at Sleuth.

He was at Calais.

And he is enrolled as the second knight of the order.

And he is a guy who is particularly associated with a military garter.

So that's the likeliest explanation for it.

So he is enrolled in it.

Edward is obviously, you know, he's presiding over it.

The Black Prince is enrolled in it.

26 in all, most of whom participated in the Cressy campaign.

Among them, I'm proud to say Sir Thomas Holland.

Sir Tom Holland.

Yeah.

So that's great.

So I wouldn't be the first Tom Holland to be enrolled in it.

So.

No, you wouldn't.

That's something.

Yeah.

And also the guy who, again, from childhood was always my chivalric hero, who is, I think, the English equivalent to Geoffrey Deschanis, is a man called Sir John Shandos.

Okay.

Now, tell us about Sir John.

I know you love him.

Well, you should know about him.

You've been reading Sir Nigel.

Sir Nigel becomes the squire to Sir John Shandos.

And John Shandos is, again, like Geoffrey Deschanis, he's a younger son who rises to become one of the great chivalric and military figures in England and indeed in Europe.

And it's that fusion of the chivalric and the military that is the key to his success.

And he's the warrior who had, at Sleuth's, he'd landed and kind of reconnoitred the French fleet and reports back to Edward what it is, so kind of very brave.

He stood beside the black prince, Cressy.

So Frasai describes him as a man who was wise and full of wiles.

And he's also a man of great sophistication, charisma, he's very fond of music, very fond of dancing.

I mean, he's absolutely a class act.

And he comes to serve the black prince as his right hand man.

He's both friend and military advisor.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

And the black prince, he's not oversold.

Is he, Tom?

Is he is dashing and as gallant as I remember from the, from my childhood textbooks?

So there's debate about how the black prince, Edward of Woodstock, comes to get the subricade, the black prince.

At some say it's because of his armor, which might be possible.

Others say that it's because of his reputation in France, which is a dark one.

He is a hard, hard man.

But that kind of hardness isn't necessarily to his disrepute.

Yeah.

We haven't come here to slag off the black prince, Tom.

And that's, if you told me that would happen in this podcast, I would never agree to do it.

Dominic, wait, wait, wait.

Because again, chivalry in the 14th century, just as you, it perfectly entitles you to employ kind of Odyssean schemes and wheezes, it doesn't prohibit you from essentially committing what today we would describe as war crimes.

Okay, that's good.

So the black prince, you know, he's still very young at this point.

He's kind of, you know, not yet in his twenties.

He is celebrated across Europe already as the flower of chivalry, that the young 16-year-old at Cressy who had won his spurs, but he also has a reputation for being a hard man.

So by the time that the order of the garter is in it, he's already the most famous knight in Christendom.

And this has a polarizing effect in the way that spectators to the Hundred Years War understand the relative status of England and France.

So England, this minnow has really started to kind of bulk up, you know, as I keep saying, that matters.

And it matters as well, of course, that compared to Edward, John the Second rapidly comes to seem a complete loser.

Edward's genius is for keeping his nobility close to him, making them his allies, making them his friends, band of brothers.

That's what the order of the garter is all about.

John has a genius for alienating his nobility.

So the constable of France had been taken prisoner during the Cressy campaign.

He gets ransomed, comes back, John immediately executes him.

Okay.

And the reason that he does this is because he's become very Edward the Second and wants to appoint one of his favourites as constable, a near relative of his called Charles.

So Charles, Charles de Spagne, Charles of Spain.

And you know, this justice, the nobility in the reign of Edward the Second had resented these displays of favouritism.

So now in France, they resent John's displays of favouritism.

And what makes this all the more dangerous is that Edward the Third is not John's only

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

rival for the French throne.

Yeah.

I felt the story was getting insufficiently complicated, Tom, and we needed more contenders.

There is a third rival.

Now, again, Dominic, you may remember that I flagged up.

Oh, God, you did.

Do you remember?

I flagged up the fact that there were these three contenders for the French throne.

There was Edward the Third, there was Philip of Valois, and there was a Third Philip, Philip of Evraux.

Yeah.

And he gets married off to John, who was the four-year-old girl.

So direct descendant of the Capetians.

And John and Philip of Evraux had married, and I said, the problem for the Valois will be if John then has a son.

Don't tell me she did.

And John does have a son.

And this guy is also called Charles.

Right.

Charles de Navarre.

Yeah.

Charles of Navarre.

He's very kind of...

Well, you've never seen The Simpsons, have you?

Well, I can see your notes.

You've just written the words Mr. Burns.

Right.

So you probably know what Mr. Burns looks like.

He's like the caretaker or something?

Is he?

Is there something of that ilk?

No.

He's the evil guy.

He's the evil capitalist who owns the nuclear power station.

Okay.

Well, I've never seen The Simpsons.

If you look at the kind of portraits of Charles de Navarre, he looks slight.

He looks vulpine.

He has kind of big, glistening eyes.

He's a schemer.

He's a back snabber.

He's utterly unscrupulous.

And the measure of how bad he is, he's actually called Charles the Bad.

I'm not sure if that was your name.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

Yeah.

It's not my name.

It's his nickname.

Yeah.

And basically, he's so bad that all he does is go around plotting and scheming.

And it's unclear whether he wanted to become King of France or whether he just, you know, he's just doing it for the, for the bands, whether he's doing it for the fun.

He's kind of a yargo figure.

Right.

But basically, if there's a possibility to stir up trouble, he will take it.

And so he has a younger brother who he commissions to murder the Constable.

Oh, yeah.

Charles de Spanier, who behaves very, very badly, lets himself down, you know, grovels, begs for mercy.

But no, he's, he's exterminated.

And so by doing this, Charles the Bad wins the support of all the nobility who had resented the Constable.

John the Second promptly confiscates all Charles the Bad's lands in Normandy.

Charles enters into negotiations with the English.

John the Second backs down.

There's going to be a test, by the way, for listeners at the end of this.

Okay.

Basically, it's very, very easy to keep track of because essentially, if you think that you know who Charles the Bad is backing in the Hundred Years' War, you've got it wrong because he will have changed sides.

He's constantly changing sides.

Right.

And so this is kind of creating further chaos in France that the stability of the monarchy is now becoming severely rocked.

And John, thick though he is, understands this.

He appreciates that things are really bad for him.

He really needs a treaty to try and sort Charles the Bad out, to try and put his rule on firmer foundations.

So because the Pope in Avignon is very much under the thumb of the French king, he's able to kind of basically push the papacy to try and really work towards creating a peace treaty between England and France.

And Edward is very tempted by it, but in the end, he turns it down partly because he doesn't trust the Pope.

Right.

Because he thinks the Pope is, you know, he's basically French.

But also because Charles the Bad inevitably switches sides again, stabs John in the back and promises to join the English with an army in Normandy.

And so this is in 1355.

Right.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

So Edward thinks, oh, this is too good an opportunity to miss.

So he draws up plans for a triple invasion.

He is going to cross to Calais.

Yeah.

The Duke of Lancaster is going to cross to Normandy and meet Charles the Bad.

The Black Prince is going to head to Gascony.

So they draw up all these plans.

Yeah.

They're ready to go when inevitably Charles the Bad switches sides again.

Oh, my word.

And moves back, starts back at, you know, gets reconciled to John.

Yeah.

And he goes to the Louvre and he swears before John the Second that he had done nothing against the king that a loyal vassal might not properly do.

I think Charles the Bad is coming out of this pretty badly or well, depending on your view.

Well, he's bad.

Yeah.

I mean, you know, he's bad through and through.

And so this is a problem because obviously now it's no good for Normandy because the Duke of Lancaster won't have a kind of open port that Charles the Bad would have provided.

Edward decides that he's not going to go to Calais, but the Black Prince, you know, he wants to have a crack at the French.

He wants to have another go.

So he goes anyway.

So the 9th of September, 1355, he set sail from Plymouth and he's got a large expeditionary force and he heads off for Gascony and a series of campaigns that will make him perhaps the most famous knight in English history.

Oh, splendid.

Well, let's find out what happens after the break.

See you in a minute.

Welcome back to the rest of history.

We ended, as we always like to, on a cliff anger, which was the Black Prince sailing from Plymouth for Gascony on the 9th of September, 1355, bound, as Tom told us, for a series of campaigns that would enshrine him.

I think Tom not merely is the greatest knight in English history, but is the greatest knight of all time in European history.

Absolutely.

So Tom, he arrives in Bordeaux, 20th of September, 1355, he's got 2,220 men and he's also got your friend, Sir John Chandos, guest star of Sir Nigel.

He's there.

So what happens next?

Well, the moment the Black Prince arrives, he's not hanging around.

He decides that he's going to go looting and pillaging across the south of France.

This is the Chevauché, the kind of English knights on tour and they're like kind of,

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

you know, football hooligans leaving trail of chaos and because John and his lieutenants are worried about the English landing in northern France, they haven't come south to confront the Black Prince.

So basically the south is relatively undefended.

Black Prince is able to recruit maybe 4,000 or 5,000 Gascon troops, so he's got quite a large force and the Black Prince moves at a terrifying speed, takes the French completely by surprise, he's able to ford rivers that have never been forded before and strikes deep into lands that haven't seen the English for decades, for many, many generations. And as a result of that, these are lands that are incredibly rich.

They fully recovered from the Alborgencian wars, you know, that we talked about in a previous episode.

Yeah.

So for us, the great chronicler describes them as being one of the fattest lands in the world.

And you know, this is a place of great cities, enormously prosperous, the English arrive outside Carcassonne and in true English style, one of them describes it as being even better than York.

Even better.

Even better than York.

The highest praise that you can think to give it.

And the Black Prince advances almost to the Mediterranean and then by the end of November, he's back in Aquitaine and everyone who's gone with him comes back enormously rich.

It's said that 1,000 wagons piled high with loot.

There's loads of prisoners who can be ransomed.

It's been great fun.

They've destroyed 500 villages, they've burned down a dozen towns.

So Tom, I know we're a patriotic podcast, but I should interject at this point and say, so this is all being fought on French soil and for ordinary people, the Hundred Years War is just a terrible, terrible business.

Am I right?

It's awful.

It's awful.

And most of the chroniclers don't really dwell on that.

But some of them do.

And in due course, Frasar will, for instance, you know, he will say these people were innocent and they're completely innocent.

And it's part of the brutality of the Chivalric Code that they don't really count.

Peasant lives don't matter.

Not really.

I mean, you'll maybe say this is a silly comparison, but the combination of plague and extreme violence being visited on sort of unwitting peasant communities.

Is there a hint of the Thirty Years War about this, would you say?

Perhaps in the long run, but at the moment, the Black Prince is very clearly playing a role both as the Prince of Wales, so the heir to the English throne and as the Duke of Aquitaine.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

So the sense of a war between England and France at this point is still pretty clear. So the kind of the confusion and chaos that you get in the Thirty Years War, it hasn't yet manifested itself.

So the Prince of Wales is in command of this campaign.

It's not kind of slipping his control.

It's not anarchic.

It's sort of very focused.

No.

On the scale of this chevauché, he's penetrated hundreds of miles deep into French territory.

No one has opposed him.

And so it's a shattering blow to French self-confidence.

So in that sense, this is an English success, one therefore that redounds to the glory not just of the Black Prince, but of the English crown as well.

And conversely, it's absolutely terrible for the image of John.

And there are French lords who are starting to think, you know, he's awful.

So there's a guy in Normandy, the Count of Arco, very significant Norman Lord, who cries out by the blood of Christ, this king is a worthless man and a bad ruler.

He's not wrong.

And of course, you know, it doesn't help that you've got Charles the bad being bad on the scene.

So this is eminently exploitable by him.

Just on Charles the bad, his base is Navarre.

Is that right?

No, his base is actually Normandy.

Oh, right.

I mean, he doesn't have Navarre, but he has lands all over France, and he's particularly strong in Normandy.

And apart from his sort of pantomime badness, I mean, there must be some rationale behind his.

Is his thinking just protecting his own domain in kind of Normandy and yeah, he wants to expand his domain.

He wants to make himself the leading man in the France.

And perhaps at some point encompass the crown.

I mean, we don't know.

Right.

I mean, he seems basically to have engaged in kind of schemes and plots in huge part just for the fun of it.

I mean, there is a kind of Iago s quality to him.

Okay.

Charles is very, very good at it.

So he, not only does he start recruiting people like the kind of our co to his cause.

So leading Norman Knights, Charles the bad also manages to suborn the dofan who infuriatingly and typically is also called Charles, Charles, who's very debt written, very resentful of his father as dofans tend to be.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

And basically Charles the bad gets the dofan on his side, meanwhile, he is scheming with the kind of our co and various other noblemen to seize and murder the king.

It's not entirely clear whether the dofan is privy to this.

He probably isn't, but he does seem to have been complicit in a scheme to deprive John at the very least of his power, if not his life.

So this is a crisis at the absolute heart of the French royal state.

And it duly gets uncovered by John, and in April, 1356, he arrives in Rouen, the capital of Normandy, where the dofan is hosting Charles the bad, the count of our co, all the other conspirators.

John marches in, accuses everybody there of treachery, has Charles the bad arrested, taken away to Paris where he's put under lock and key.

The other conspirators are executed, including the count of our co, their heads are chopped off, their bodies are dragged to gibbets, hung up in chains, their head stuck on lances.

This again, does nothing to improve John's image with the aristocracy in France.

And Charles the bad is one of these victims?

No, Charles the bad has been arrested and taken to Paris.

So John is ready to kill the kind of the lower order and ability who've been conspiring about against him, but he's still not ready to get rid of Charles the bad because that would be a step too far.

So that's very game of thrones, I mean, turning the sun against the father, the plot, the conspirators.

And presumably the consequence of that is a complete rift between Charles the bad's people, the house of Navarre and the, what's the house of the France?

The Valois.

The Valois, sorry, the Valois.

Well, exactly.

So the house of Navarre then repudiates its loyalty to the French crown.

And because they are the big players in Normandy, that plunges Normandy into chaos.

And of course, it means that the house of Navarre is now in alliance with England, which opens the gates to an English expeditionary force, which in July 1356, Julie lands at Sherbourg, led by the Duke of Lancaster.

And the brothers and the heirs of all the noblemen in Normandy, who had been executed by John a few months before, do homage to Edward III, pledge loyalty to him.

And the Duke of Lancaster, as English war leaders tend to do, goes on in an enormous chevrolet across Normandy, obviously not targeting the properties of his new allies, but very much targeting royal properties, and then into Brittany.

And then towards later August, he heads southwards towards Gascany, because meanwhile, while the Duke of Lancaster is spreading chaos in the North, the Black Prince is up to his tricks in the South.

And he is heading northwards from Gascany towards the Loire.

The Loire is the great river that Marx divides the two halves of France.

And so the aim is for these two great English armies led, respectively, by the Duke of Lancaster and by the Black Prince to meet at the Loire, gang up, and then just have all kinds of fun.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

So that's the plan.

Now, obviously, for John, this is the crisis to end all crises.

He knows that he cannot allow this to happen.

And so he sends out summons, he raises, it said, all the flower of France.

That's an exaggeration, because there are lots of noblemen who don't come to his cause, because they're actively hostile to him.

Nevertheless, he raises a large force, probably the largest force that is seen in France in the 14th century.

And it's personally led by the King, who as a token of his confidence takes with him all his crown jewels.

I mean, whenever anyone does that before a battle, you just think, well, if you learn nothing from history, or maybe people who win battles also take their crown jewels, but their chroniclers just don't record it.

OK, from Dominic's comment, listeners who don't know the result may have some kind of presentiment of what's going to happen.

I should have said, people, if you don't want to know the result, look away now.

He also takes with him all four of his sons, including the Dauphin, Charles, and his younger son, who inevitably is called Philip, so just to make things even more confusing.

The lords, the knights, the princes who accompany him, I mean, there are more than enough to make a dazzling display.

They're all carrying their penance, fluttering proudly in the air.

So it's a tremendous spectacle, this army, as it moves.

And of course, the greatest of all the flags, the war banners, is the oriflame that we mentioned in the context of Cressy, the sacred banner born into battle by the French king.

And the man who carries it into battle by the side of the king is France's most famous knight, Geoffrey de Charny.

Oh, and presumably the order of the star is out in force for this, is it?

I mean, the order of the star is absolutely out in force.

And of course, they're pledged never to run away.

No, they can't go backwards.

Yeah, exactly.

So hopes are very, very high in this great gathering that at last, a French king will be able to corner an English army and wipe it out.

And the news is brought that the black princes approaching Loire, and of course, they have to cross the Loire if they're going to go northwards and meet with the Duke of Lancaster.

So the black prince sends his most trusted lieutenant, Sir John Shandos, to lead an advanced party to try and find a ford.

They reach what they think is going to be a ford, and they find it guarded by French troops.

Sir John Shandos, because he's tremendously cool, beats them off easily, but he finds that the river is too swollen to cross.

There's been a lot of rain, the Loire is very, very swollen.

So the black prince and his army start to move along the south bank of the Loire, trying to find a crossing.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

But as had happened on the Kressi campaign, all the British have been cut, and they can't find a way to get over the Loire.

News then reaches him that the French king is approaching him with a massive army. And the black prince does not have enough men with him really to meet this huge army in battle.

He really, really needs to join up with Duke of Lancaster.

And so he is kind of sending scouts out frantically trying to find the Duke of Lancaster's expedition. Meanwhile, on the 10th of September, the French have reached Loire on the Loire where a bridge has been held for them, and they cross it.

11th of September, they're closing in on the black prince.

And the black prince is informed that this vast French army is now 10 miles from him, and he still can't find the Duke of Lancaster.

And he learns on the same day that the reason for this is that just as he can't get to the northern bank of the Loire, so the Duke of Lancaster can't get to the southern bank, so essentially they're separated.

So the black prince retreats towards the town of Poitiers, which is just south, southwards of where he'd been.

And he stops there to wait to see if Lancaster will be able to get across.

And as he halts there, the French army passes him about 10 miles to the east and then pivots westwards.

So essentially the road from Poitiers back to Gascony is cut off.

Bad news for the black prince, Tom.

So what's the black prince going to do?

He decides he has no choice really but to offer battle.

And so rather than alert the French to this, he orders his troops to advance through a forest so that the French won't know that he's approaching.

And on the 17th of September, a company of Gascons emerged from this forest, emerged from the wood, and they stumble into the French rearguard and they rout it.

But of course, it's now the king and all the French command know that the English are basically within striking distance.

And there's no point in hiding in the wood anymore.

So the 18th of September, the English emerge from the wood.

And there's a hill.

It's about five miles south of Poitiers, overlooking a village called Ney.

And the black prince and Sir John Shandos occupy this, raise their banners, take possession of it.

But their situation is very bad because they don't have any food and they don't have any water.

Plus, they're pretty shattered.

I wouldn't say they've been marching for hundreds of miles.

And also through the effort of pulling their wagons through the woods has not been stressful.

So at this point, the English and the French are staring at each other.

Ambassadors from the Pope step in and they're led by a cardinal, the cardinal of Perigord.

And he senses that the English situation is very, very weak.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

And so perhaps this is an opportunity to lean on the black prince and get him to accept terms that would then also be acceptable to the French king.

And the black prince situation is so grim that basically he says he is willing to negotiate. But John isn't because he feels that he has the English absolutely captured. This is his chance to finish the last once and for good.

So the cardinal's mediation efforts fail and loads of his entourage then go off and join the French, which only confirms the English suspicions of what kind of papal ambassadors are up to.

And so basically becomes pretty certain that the following day, which is the 19th of September, there is going to be a battle unless, of course, by some miracle, the Prince of Wales, the black prince can pull off a kind of retreat, somehow get away from this position where he's been cornered.

But obviously the intention of the French is to stop that.

So they draw up their battle lines.

And as they invariably do, as they've done at Cressy, they do it in three lines, three battalions.

So the first line is commanded by the Dauphin.

But he has, you know, he's still very young, John doesn't entirely trust him.

So he has at his right hand, a Scotsman, a lord of Douglas, who in obedience to the old alliance has come to France with a contingent of Scots knights and warriors.

So they're in the front line and because they are used to fighting the English, they suggest to the French that they dismount from their horses.

In other words, they don't launch a kind of full-on cavalry charge because this would not be, you know, otherwise they risk a repeat of the Battle of Cressy.

And this is advice that John is prepared to accept.

The second line is commanded by the Duke of Orleans, brother of the King.

And two of the Dauphin's younger brothers are there.

And the third line, it's the King with Geoffrey de Charny and the Oriflame and his youngest son, Philip.

So that's their battle line.

And then having drawn it up, there's actually a delay because suddenly they start to think, well, perhaps we shouldn't fight a battle, perhaps we should just stay here and starve the English out.

That would be the obvious thing to do.

Meanwhile, the Black Prince has decided that he is going to try and retreat.

And this, of course, is an incredibly difficult manoeuvre because it requires moving slowly backwards through the wood and not alerting the French.

But it's impossible not to alert the French.

And so not all the French are on foot.

Some are still on horseback.

And they notice the retreat and they're so excited by this that they immediately launch a charge.

So they go, careering up the hill, wiped out by the English archers.

When the first French line sees this, they think, oh, we better march to the rescue.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

And so they start marching up the hill and so the battle is joined.

And the fight goes on for two hours, but the French can't break through the English lines.

And after two hours fighting, the French line breaks.

The Dauphin has to be hurried away because, obviously, they don't want to risk him being captured.

As the first line starts moving away, the second line commanded by the Duke of Orleans thinks that the battle is lost.

And so he starts withdrawing.

And as he goes, he's taking two of the Dauphin's younger brothers with him.

So it's a kind of chaos of confusion and misunderstanding.

And John, the king, in the third line, sees this and is humiliated and ashamed and mortified and is absolutely determined to save French honour.

And of course, as the head of the Order of the Star, there's no prospect that he can possibly retreat.

Oh, cracky, no.

And so instead, he advances.

And by this point, you know, he's absolutely in with a shout because the English archers have run out of arrows, they're tired, and basically all the greatest knights in France are with the king, all the members of the Order of the Star.

And so the fighting is incredibly desperate.

But with the result of the battle still absolutely hanging in the balance, one of the English captains notices that there's an opportunity for a flanking manoeuvre.

So he takes his men, he breaks from the line, and he moves around and starts to attack the French in their rear.

And this generates a kind of sense of chaos and panic in the French army.

And at this point, the Black Prince and Shandos appreciate that this is the moment, this is their opportunity.

And so they order all their knights to get on their horses, the horses have been kept back in reserve, to get on their horses and again to launch another kind of flanking manoeuvre on the other wing.

And this, the French end up surrounded and essentially those who don't flee are annihilated.

And Frassa describes the culmination of the battle.

So he says the pursuit of the routed French went on as far as the walls of Poitiers where there was a fearful slaughter of men and horses.

The inhabitants of Poitiers shut the gates and refused to let anyone in.

Consequently, a horrible scene of killing and maiming took place in the road and before the main gate.

The French surrendered at the mere sight of an Englishman and some of these archers and others had four, five or six prisoners each.

Never before had there been so disastrous a rout.

But members of the Order of the Star, to give them credit, they refused to retreat.

Geoffrey de Charny is killed holding the aura flame so his body is found with his fingers tight around the staff of the flag.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

And climatically, triumphantly for the English, disastrously for the French, John the Second is taken prisoner.

And this is actually the climax of Sir Nigel.

So in the novel, it's a Nigel who captures the French King.

So kind of stirring moment.

And it's an amazing victory, won by the Black Prince and Sir John Shandos completely against the odds, a French chronicler describing the performance of both men in this battle, describe them as being courageous and cruel as lions.

As well as the King, his son Philip is taken prisoner, 2,000 other noblemen, and as you as you hinted, Dominic, the crown jewels fall into the hands of the Black Prince.

And so this is an amazing victory.

The news is sent back to Edward III, who very, very piously declares, we take no pleasure in the slaughter of men, but we rejoice in God's bounty.

We look forward to a just and early peace.

So that's very nice.

That's nice.

Very nice.

Yeah.

And John is kept with the Black Prince in Bordeaux over winter, you know, he's looked after very well.

And then the following spring, the Black Prince takes John back to London.

And on the 24th of May, they enter the capital, the Black Prince riding on a horse that is deliberately shorter than the horse that the French King is riding on.

So that at least the French King, you know, is given the dignity that is his status as the greatest king in Europe, all the principal prisoners as well.

And such are the crowds that come to witness this spectacle, that it takes the Black Prince and his royal prisoners three hours to cross the city.

Imagine being in the crowd for that song.

That would be, oh, that would be brilliant.

Wouldn't it be great?

I mean, it would be like, you know, winning the World Cup and going on an open tour bus. It's basically.

I'll capture President Macron, yeah, and all the, yeah, all the assembly, you know, yeah, I'm sure that I'm sure that the crowds in London would really behave themselves.

Anyway, but actually, I mean, Edward does behave himself quite well and they give him the Great Palace of the Savoy, where the Savoy Hotel stands now and which had been built by the Duke of Lancaster with all the loot he'd got from all his various French prisoners.

So that's where the French King is allowed to stay and to set up his household.

It's where the ransom negotiations begin.

And meanwhile, out in London, across the nation, there is rejoicing and the herald of Sir John Shandos sums it up.

He writes, there was dancing, there was hunting, there was hawking, there were great jousts and banquets, and it was all as at the court of King Arthur.

What a note on which to end.

[Transcript] The Rest Is History / 320. Hundred Years' War: The Black Prince

Well, Tom, I have a nasty feeling, because there's another episode to come.

I'm afraid there is.

I have a nasty feeling that it's all going to go horribly wrong in the next episode, or horribly right if you're our producer, Theo, who's been listening to this in a state of agony, moaning and groaning about French bashing.

Well, when you say Theo, Theo.

Well, yeah.

I mean, if I tell you that his name is Theo Young Smith, you can gauge from that just how French he is.

He really is.

Yeah, exactly.

But he makes great play with being both French and Scottish.

I'm afraid that the result of the Battle of Poitiers.

He's the embodiment of the old alliance, Tom.

Yeah, he is.

He is.

I'm amazed we have him around.

All right.

On that bombshell, we will be back on Thursday.

You will, of course, be able to listen to it now if you're a member of the Restless History Club.

Some people say the Restless History Club is actually better than being in the Order of the Garter.

It's certainly a lot better than being in the Order of the Star, because we do allow you to go backwards.

Yes, we do.

If you're a member of the Restless History Club, crack on, listen to the fourth episode.

If you're not, sign up at restlesshistorypod.com, and either way, we'll see you for the next episode.

Goodbye.

Au revoir.

Thanks for listening to the Rest is History.

For bonus episodes, early access, ad-free listening, and access to our chat community, please sign up at restishistorypod.com.

That's restishistorypod.com.