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La Soiree Finale

An Interactive Drama
set in 1940 during the Fall of Paris

Written by:

Gordon & Stephanie Olmstead-Dean

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The Fall of France

In Spring of 1940, Paris was the major metropolitan center of a great, modern, world power. Today, we get used to seeing lines of fleeing refugees in the third world, and are perhaps a little hardened to it. After all, those people, of different skin color or race, are not like us. We tell ourselves that they could never be in the situation they are in. We live in a world of peace, sophistication, and tolerance.

Paris was the most civilized city in the world. It had more automobiles than any other city - the average middle class family owned one. All of the modern conveniences we think of today - telephone, radio, even television, were available to Parisians of 1940. France was a world leader in science, and had already produced heavy water, one of the keys to the atom bomb.

Electric appliances lined the kitchens, and the middle class Parisian worked a 9 to 5 office job, and took his family out on Sunday. The French lived behind the security of the Maginot Line, the most formidable defensive structure ever constructed by a major military power - a fortification that even by today's standards would be virtually unassailable.

In June of 1940 these fashionable middle class people choked the roads of France in one of the greatest traffic jams in history as they fled the City of Lights, they slept in ditches or on the road. Most eventually returned to live under Nazi occupation for half a decade. Others ardently participated in the travesty of the Vichy Government.

This is not a story of the remote past. In all probability, your mother or

father was alive in 1940, though fairly young. This happened less than one full generation ago. You may well live in a house that was standing then, and you almost certainly own furniture made before that time. In historical terms, the fall of Paris was yesterday, and only the enormity of the Second World War separates it from our concept of "modern times."

In April of 1940, the modern Parisian felt secure in his government's ability to defeat Hitler. It would take the cooperation of the rest of the world, and five years of the most fierce mortal combat in history to win the Second World War, and France would never fully recover her stature as a world power.

Paris was liberated in 1944 by Allied Troops and French Partisans. The Allies withheld support from Parisian Partisans until nearly the end, because of fear that they would mount a Communist rebellion.

This is a story about some people and their adventures in a difficult time. It has no moral, and no message. But it exists against a backdrop that conveys a message basic to all human history. *We always live in uncertain times.*



A French man weeps as the Nazis march into Paris, June 14, 1940 - U.S. National Archives

LARP Writing.ORG

Gordon Olmstead-Dean's
site for, by, and about
Producing Live Roleplay

www.larpwriting.org



Looking for more details and resources for producing your own LARP?

A free site focused on GMs and others involved in the production side of Live Roleplaying. LARPWRITING.ORG currently hosts a detailed "how-to" manual on producing Theatre Style LARP, and is adding new material at a glacial pace!

For links, and useful information for novices and veterans, please visit www.larpwriting.org.

We are a spam-free site, and support LARPA, the Live Action Roleplayers Association as a primary source for LARP in the U.S. and abroad.

LA MARSEILLAISE

Allons enfants de la Patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé !
Contre nous de la tyrannie !
L'étendard sanglant est levé
L'étendard sanglant est levé
Entendez-vous dans nos campagnes
Mugir ces féroces soldats ?
Ils viennent jusque dans vos bras.
Egorger vos fils, vos compagnes !

Refrain

Aux armes citoyens,
Formez vos bataillons
Marchons, marchons
Qu'un sang impur
Abreuve nos sillons

(Translation)

*Come on, children of the motherland,
The day of glory has arrived !
Against us, full of tyranny !
The bloody sword is raised
The bloody sword is raised
Do you hear in our countryside
Those ferocious soldiers barking ?
They come up to your arms
Slaughter your sons, your countryside !*

Chorus

*To arms, citizens,
Form your battalions
March on, march on
Let an impure blood
Soak our paths*

THE RULES

I. **The Obvious:** The gaming space is the area designated by the GM. Other areas are not gaming space. Do not game there. Do not conduct combat there. **DO NOT MAKE LOUD NOISES THERE, UNLESS A GM HAS EXPLICITLY TOLD YOU THAT YOU MAY.**

Do not physically strike anyone in the course of the game. Touch only in a socially accepted manner. (*Consensual Tango is an exception to this rule.*)

Use of prop weapons will be regulated by your individual Game GM, and may change from site to site. It is important you obey any rules the GMs set about prop weapons.

II. **Hurting People:** Soiree Finale uses the “Rules to Live By” (RTL) Combat System, published by Interactivities Ink, and some optional rules for weapons damage. Your GM should have a copy of RTL. If you don’t know much about it, the GM should be able to run the combat for you.

The only rule you really need to know is that you start a fight by declaring in an audible, but not necessarily loud tone “Combat.” At that point, everything will progress in rounds.

In each round you may:

Take two steps
Take one step and shoot
Take one step and draw a gun or knife.

Usually, all combats must be referred to a GM, though in some games, the GM may let individual players run Combats if they are very familiar with RTL.

You can purchase your own RTL rules from Interactivities Ink at:

<http://www.interactivitiesink.com>.

Here are some things you may want to know about your stats:

- A stat of 5 is healthy adult average. A stat of 6 is good, and a 7 is very good
- A combat skill of 2-3 is good. A skill of 4 is very good, and a 5 or higher is amazingly good.
- Some characters have other RTL Special Abilities. If you don’t know how these work, the GM should have a copy of RTL available for you to look them up.

Note: one bullet *can* kill you. Don’t go around assuming you can “take a couple of shots” just because you are tough.

III. **Paris GM - Leaving the Hotel:** If you feel the need to leave the Hotel Hampton for any reason, go to the Paris GM, and tell them what you are doing. You can inform the Live GM where you are going, but the Live GM *cannot* referee out-of-hotel events.

IV. **Sensibilities:** You will hear talk you may find socially reprehensible concerning race, religion, sex, or any other topic. Please be aware that your fellows are playing characters, who may not be at all like themselves. Every attempt has been made to utilize period references when developing the characters of *La Soiree Finale*

In particular we hope that players who have characters with moderate pro-Fascist sentiments will portray those sentiments accurately. Many French - and even many Americans - thought that the Socialist-leaning French Governments were weak, and that Hitler had a pretty good idea. Many middle class conservatives admired Hitler, and thought that the Germans would at least bring order. Many who hated the Germans still felt a Fascist French Regime was the best answer to them.

The Last Evening Party - Scenario

The Hotel Hampton is a small Hotel, which lies a block off the Boulevard St. Germain, just below the Ministry of War, and caters primarily to English and American visitors, often housing diplomats. The Manager is M. Constant. The Hotel is convenient to the Gare D'Orsay (train station), and only a few blocks from the Seine. One reason for its current popularity is that it is the closest hotel to the train station that is still open and serving food, probably because many of its guests are American or British Journalists.

Until the 3rd, the Hotel Hampton was across the street from the Danse Vitesse, a trendy upscale burlesque club. Unfortunately, a stray bomb destroyed the Danse Vitesse. Since the Hampton has remained undamaged, though operating with a minimal staff. The Danse Vitesse, has been continuing business a few hours a night out of the Hotel Hampton's Casino.

The space is somewhat limited, but most other clubs have closed. Today, Paris is a ghost town, but the Hotel Hampton is enjoying a brief renaissance. Only a handful of other hotels are in operation - The Ritz, which has always preferred "promotion from within the ranks" is said to have an elevator boy acting as Maitre D'Hotel.

Spies and the Fall of France

As the Third Republic has collapsed, there has been a rising tide of sentiment that spies must be to blame for the rapid crumbling of France's armies. After all, the French army was one of the most powerful in the world. Over the past two weeks, the authorities have been rounding up spies in unusual numbers. Many have been arrested, and more than a few may have been summarily executed by the military authorities.

The Smoke and Martial Law

Since this morning, Paris has been choked with a thick cloud of black smoke. No one knows exactly what its origins are, but the general theory is that the retreating army set fire to the petroleum farms on the southeastern side of the city, in order to keep them out of the hands of the Nazis.

Paris is under martial law. Since yesterday, Paris has been declared an open city. The military commander is General Georges. There is a curfew in effect, which prohibits anyone from being on the streets after dark without a pass. In general, this has been ignored on a local level, though automobiles are being stopped and turned back. The garrison troops have orders to shoot looters.



Statue of the Republic (Wood River Media)

Background - A Chronology of recent events:

1939

August

23 Russia and Germany signed a non-aggression pact.

September

1 Bombs began falling on Warsaw

3 Britain, France declared war.

19 Poland surrenders

November

30 Russia invades Poland

1940

March

12 Finland surrenders

19 Edouard Daladier ousted as Prime Minister of France. Paul Reynaud becomes Prime Minister

April

9 Germans invade Denmark and Norway, Denmark falls

14 Allies landed in Norway

May

3 Allies withdraw from Norway

7-8 Neville Chamberlain ousted as Prime Minister Winston Churchill, former

Secretary of the Navy, formed a coalition government.

10 Holland, Netherlands, Belgium invaded

14 Nazi ultimatum to the Netherlands. Rotterdam betrayed. Holland surrenders. Germans cross the Meuse

15 Breakthrough at Sedan, Netherlands capitulate

18 Marshall Petain recalled from Spain

19 Gamelin fired as General. Weygand assumes command of French armies.

20 Germans reach the sea

28 Belgium surrenders

29 Evacuation from Dunkirk begun.

June

1 Rhone valley bombed

2 Lyon bombed

3 Bombing of Paris 1:20pm

4 Completion of Evacuation from Dunkirk

5 Battle of the Somme. Many spies being executed in France

9 German troops 35 miles from Paris

10 French Government withdraws from Paris Italy declares war on France

11 German guns heard in Paris, Nazis cross Marne. Germans at Parsan, Beaumont, 12.5 miles from the St. Denis suburb of Paris.

13 Paris declared an open city, Wall Posters announce surrender

14 Paris occupied shortly after dawn by the Nazis



Traffic near the Place de La Concorde in the 1930s (Wood River Media)

French Governments from 1932

Paul Boncour	Jan 1932	Socialist
Edouard Herriot	Jan 1932	Moderate
Edouard Daldier	Dec 1932	Moderate
Albert Sarrut	Oct 1933	Moderate
Camille Chautemps	Nov 1933	Socialist
Edouard Daldier	Feb 1934	Moderate
Gaston Doumergue	Feb 1934	Moderate Conserv.
Pierre-Etienne Flandin	Nov 1935	Conservative
Pierre Laval	Jun 1935	Conservative
Sarrut	Jan 1936	Moderate
Leon Blum	Jun 1936	Popular Front
Camille Chautemps	Jun 1937	Popular Front
Leon Blum	Mar 1938	Popular Front
Edouard Daldier	Apr 1938	Moderate Conserv.
Paul Reynaud	Mar 1940	Moderate Conserv.

THE CITY OF PARIS HAS BEEN DECLARED AN OPEN CITY

“By order of General Weygand, Commander in Chief of the French Army, the City of Paris has been declared an open city, and will not be defended by troops of the French Army, in order to preserve the health and safety of the populace. The City of Paris will be surrendered to the German Army.”



Adolf Hitler visits Paris with architect Albert Speer (left) June 23, 1940. - U.S. National Archives



A Paris neighborhood between the wars

Background - The Government of the Third Republic

ORIGINS

The French didn't want a Republic. The Third Republic of 1870 was only a temporary measure, and emerged out of an irresolvable factioning between the two majority parties over who should be King of France. A Constitutional Monarchy, like that of England, was the preferred form of government.

France had just lost a costly war with Prussia. In Paris, the *Commune* had seized control of the city shortly after the siege began and imposed a communist state. The new President, Thiers, secured terms from the Prussians, and viciously crushed the *Communards*, with nearly 20,000 killed in fighting, and 4000 condemned to death afterwards, with thousands more deported. This was one of the first experiments at a Communist revolt, and aroused a great deal of popular sympathy. A republic was seen as a need to bring France back into line under a more conservative regime.

FALTERING STEPS

France wavered toward dictators several times. In 1888, after winning various elections by landslide proportions, General Boulanger could have marched up the Elysees, and seized power. His subordinates urged him, but instead he went home to sleep with his mistress. By morning, the enthusiasm was dampened, and he never again had an opportunity. He fled the country and committed suicide after his mistress' death.

The Dreyfus Affair rocked the French government, and nearly brought down the Republic. Dreyfus was a French Army Officer, convicted of Treason. A Jew, his enemies were violent Anti-Semites, and had framed him. Tempers raged to the breaking

point over several years. Writer Emile Zola with his condemnation of the government in an editorial entitled *J'Accuse* forced him into exile in Britain.

STRUCTURE

Eventually the French settled on a standard Republican structure. Two houses, the Chamber of Deputies, and the Senate, had the power to overthrow governments by a vote of no-confidence. Upon overthrow, an elected President asked for someone to constitute a new government, which must be voted powers by the Chamber. Meeting together the two houses constituted the National Assembly.

THE CONTINUING CRISIS

From 1870 to 1940, the Third Republic had more than forty different governments. Not all were total upheavals, and many individuals served as cabinet ministers under several successive governments. But many Frenchmen felt that this Republican manoeuvring, while Phalangist Spain, Fascist Italy, and National Socialist Germany, grew strong in the grip of solid government, was a terrible mistake.

During the twenties, France was brought back to stability by a series of competent Prime ministers, mostly “wartime moderates” whose political agendas had been shaped out of necessity during the first World War, rather than ideology. Strongest among them were Clemenceau and Poincare. It was Poincare whose seizure of the Ruhr from Germany in the twenties prompted the now famous hyperinflation, and led to Hitler's first, abortive, coup attempt and prison sentence.

Following the Great Depression, the French government fell into chaos, especially after 1932. In eight years, there were eighteen Prime Ministers and governments. The Deputies resisted an attempt at constitutional modification by Gaston Doumergue, which would have allowed the Senate to dissolve the Chamber if it overthrew the government, which might have checked the

endless succession of governments, as they collapsed in disgrace or scandal at a rate of better than two a year.

LIBERAL VOTERS FRUSTRATED:

During the thirties, the people of France consistently voted a progressively liberal ticket, sending Socialist, Communist, and other radicals to the Assembly. In each case, the resulting governments tended to be moderate. The *Radical Socialist* party was in fact the moderate centrist party, less liberal than either the Socialists, or the Communists. Because French laborers were deprived of protection by unions, big business had a vested interest in “buying” moderate governments, and succeeded in doing so. Despite the electorate’s preference for Socialism, France remained economically and legally conservative up until the war.

THE POPULAR FRONT

Eventually the Popular Front, made up of Socialists and Communists was united under Leon Blum, and the weak Chautemps, but presented with a comprehensive plan for building a strong economy the businessmen instigated a “strike” pulling capital out of the country and bringing down the Blum government, in favor of the moderate government of Edouard Daladier.

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Tensions over the Spanish Civil War had already brought France near to a Civil War of its own. In Spain, a Popular Front similar to Blum’s won power, but immediately suffered a military coup. France was afraid to support the popular front to any great degree, and the United States and Britain tacitly supported Franco, afraid of the Communists. Only Soviet Russia sent a few obsolete tanks and planes to defend the Loyalists, though a colorful brigade of international freedom fighters fought independently, including

literary luminary George Orwell.

The insurgents, under the Phalangist General Franco, took the nation by force with German and Italian arms, weapons, and even troops, by 1939. A million or more were slaughtered in a shattering civil war that saw the bombing of Barcelona, the annihilation of Guernica (portrayed by Pablo Picasso in his famous painting) and mass atrocities. Executions by firing squad, and the strangling chair, torture of civilians, and strategic bombing of Loyalist cities were all part of the ruthless campaign waged by General Franco to control the nation. French radicals were duly alarmed by the horrors in Spain, and already sobered by “Black Tuesday” acted cautiously to avoid a similar occurrence in France.

THE NEW RIGHT

As France crumbled under the advance of the German armies, the Conservatives climbed ascendant, and it became clear that Marshal Petain, a hero of the First World War, and ancient conservative, would form a new government to negotiate an end to the war, and bring France a new government on Fascist lines. Conservatives like Laval lined up to take an active part in the Petain government.

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French Government Scandals

The Stavisky Affair

This popular scandal is a nightmarish bit of French Politics which can best be understood in three minutes by comparing it to more recent scandals in our own nation. Imagine it as Watergate, only with G. Gordon Liddy having been shot by the FBI to keep him quiet. Imagine it as the Iran-Contra Affair, only with Oliver North having been an Eastern European Criminal with a record as long as your arm.

Stavisky was a failed swindler, whose apparent brilliance was his ability to convince men of power that he could make money for them. And he did, primarily by writing a fantastic sum in phoney bonds on a municipally-owned pawnshop in Bayonne, which he convinced the Minister of Colonies and Minister of Commerce to hawk to insurance companies. The scandal broke because the police, who were involved with Stavisky and had issued him immunity cards, panicked at his ever more grandiose schemes for fraud, and shot him to death, then called it a suicide.

Beyond that, every conspiracy theory in the world emerged, and about half of them were true. Stavisky had entangled half of France’s Radical-Socialist government in a web of deceit and treachery so thick that the Paris daily *Le Soir* hired a famous mystery writer to have a go at sorting them out.

“Bloody Tuesday”

For **Bloody Tuesday** there is no comparison. The Third Republic came within a hairsbreadth of falling. It was the galvanizing event of the decade. For our purposes, comparing it to the 1969 shootings at Kent State might give some distant idea of the power that this event exerted on the French throughout the decade of the 30’s.

The ripples from the Stavisky affair spread rapidly. The Government of Premier Chautemps held on for dear life, though there were ugly riots along the Boulevard St. Germain. Chautemps toppled, and Daladier was called. Daladier managed to do a thoroughly skillful job of retaining the wrong people, and firing the wrong people. His best screw up was to fire Paris’ Prefect of Police, and replace him with a bumpkin from the provinces who knew nothing of Paris and Parisians. Attempting to defend the Chamber of Deputies from mobs set on storming it, the French Police fired more than five hundred shots on the Place de la Concorde, killing about fourteen and wounding and injuring nearly a thousand.

The rioters were comprised of nearly every faction in France, but the incendiaries were the Fascists and Anti-Semites like Laval, many of whom would eventually become involved in the repressive Vichy government of Marshall Petain, after the Fall of France.

Paris was clean by noon the next day, and well mended, but the resultant governmental mess split the nation forever into left and right. Daladier’s government fell the next day, and over the next two years was replaced by a series of confused coalition governments before settling on the Socialists under Leon Blum, who led France up until Daladier returned to power just before the war.