



## Plot Synopsis

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### Act 1

King John receives an ambassador from France who demands, with the threat of war, that he renounce his throne in favor of his nephew, young Arthur, whom the French King Philip believes to be the rightful king of England. John refuses the demands and vows war against the French. John then intervenes in a dispute between Robert and Philip Faulconbridge over their inheritance. It emerges that Philip is the bastard son of John's older brother, King Richard Coer-de-lion (the Lion-heart). Philip the Bastard gives up his share of inheritance in return for formal acknowledgment that he is the illegitimate son of a king. John knights him and invites the Bastard to join him and his mother, Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, in their war against the French. The English prepare for battle and set sail.

In France, King Philip, his son Lewis the Dauphin, and his ally the Duke of Austria are meeting to besiege the city of Angiers in the name of young Arthur, who is also there with his mother Constance. John and his forces arrive and the two sides argue who has the greater right to the city, and the throne of England. Hubert, a citizen of Angiers, speaks to them from the battlements and refuses to open the gates to either side until one proves victorious in battle. The English and French fight, but cannot determine a victor and the gates remain closed. The Bastard suggests that the two sides unite to attack Angiers, but Hubert forestalls this by proposing a marriage between John's niece, Blanche, and Lewis the Dauphin. The parties agree and prepare for the wedding as the gates open. The Bastard, bewildered at how quickly events have turned, reflects on the insidious self interest of political dealmaking.

Arthur's mother, Constance, angrily rejects the new alliance and interrupts Lewis and Blanche's wedding to curse the two kings. In the midst of this chaos, Cardinal Pandolph arrives and excommunicates John because of his opposition to the Catholic Church. Pandolph then threatens the same to King Philip, who breaks his alliance with John and the battle recommences. The French are defeated; the Bastard kills the Duke of Austria; and Arthur is taken prisoner, to Constance's great distress. Pandolph persuades Lewis the Dauphin to continue the fight in England

and claim the throne by right of his marriage to Blanche. John orders Hubert to kill Arthur, but Hubert is dissuaded by Arthur's heartfelt pleas. He plans to lie to John, saying Arthur is dead, and secretly frees him from prison.

## Act 2

John has returned to England and celebrates at home with a lavish second coronation. He tries to keep the support of the lords Pembroke and Salisbury, but they revolt when Hubert brings his (false) report of Arthur's death. When John despairs of their desertion, Hubert reveals that Arthur is still alive, and John urges him to make peace with the discontented lords. However, while trying to escape from the prison, Arthur jumps off a wall and dies. Pembroke, Salisbury, Hubert and the Bastard discover Arthur's body and the lords defect from England and join Lewis's invading French army leaving the Bastard and Hubert to continue in service to John.

Anticipating the French invasion, John accepts Pandulph's demands for reconciliation with Rome, in return for an assurance that he will dissuade Lewis from attacking England. But Lewis, whose confidence has been boosted by the support of Pembroke and Salisbury, refuses and the battle begins again.

In the midst of the battle Pembroke and Salisbury learn that Lewis plans to kill them after his victory, so they defect back to John, weakening the French invasion. A shaky truce is negotiated between France and England, but the news arrives too late for John, who has been poisoned and dies. The lords prepare to crown John's young son Prince Henry as king, and The Bastard reflects on the country's uncertain future.

