

WAIT, WAIT, DON'T GUILLOTINE ME!

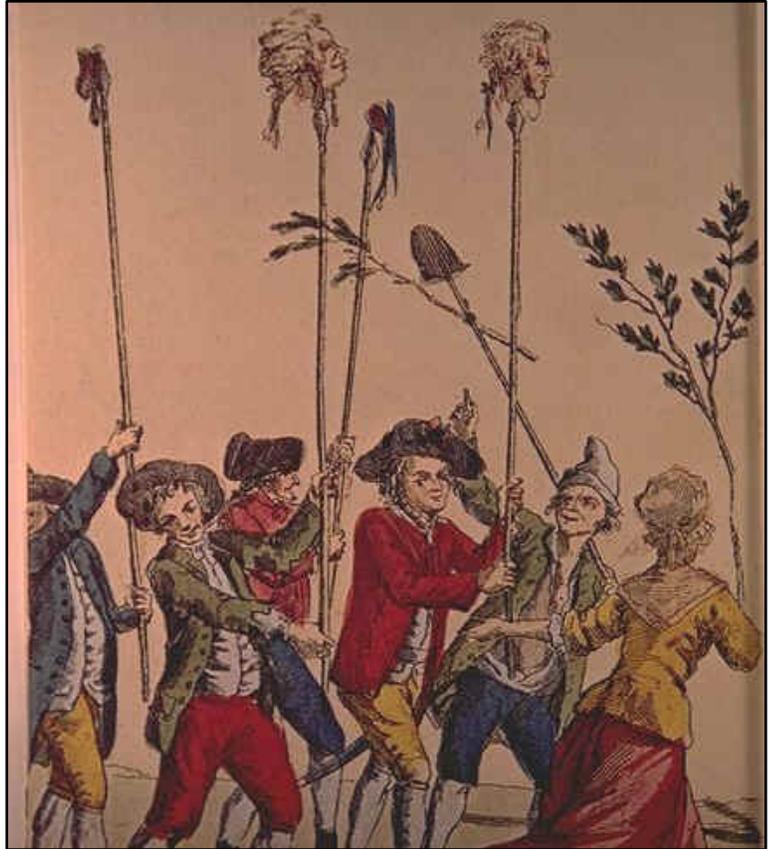
Test – and refresh – your knowledge of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror with this simple multiple-choice quiz!

7. Who were the principle architects of The Reign of Terror?

- A. Georges Danton
- B. Maximilien Robespierre
- C. Jabba the Hutt

Answer: B and, to a lesser degree, A.

The Reign of Terror, also called The Terror, was the period of the French Revolution from September 5, 1793, to July 27, 1794. With civil war spreading and hostile armies surrounding France on all sides, the Revolutionary government decided to make "Terror" the order of the day and to take harsh measures against those suspected of being enemies of the Revolution (nobles, priests, hoarders). In Paris, a wave of executions followed. In the provinces, representatives on mission and surveillance committees instituted local terrors. The Terror had an economic side embodied in the Maximum, a price-control measure demanded by the lower classes of Paris, and a religious side that was embodied in a program of de-Christianization.



Maximilien Robespierre (right) was a radical Jacobin leader who came to dominate the Committee of Public Safety (CPS), the principal organ of the Revolutionary government during the Reign of Terror. Robespierre sat at the head of this committee and watched approvingly as the guillotine fell several times a day. He decided who lived and who died, reasoning, "Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue."



Georges Danton (left) was a lawyer and a brilliant orator. Although one of the early members of the National Convention (the first government of the French Revolution) and a supporter of the CPS, over time his views moderated and he came to oppose the excessive violence of the Terror and become Robespierre's rival for power.

In terms of personality, the Convention's two great leaders were direct opposites: Danton was a man who relished wine, women, and high living, while Robespierre was dull, single-minded, and austere. Though never friends, in the first years of the revolution they were political allies who commanded each other's respect. The rift between Danton and

Robespierre began to open in the spring of 1793 after the formation of the CPS. Danton dominated the CPS in its early months but by mid-1793 his political views were at odds with radicals in the Convention. Danton wanted to slow the revolution, negotiate peace with Europe, restore the rule of law and rebuild the nation. Disgusted by the increase in indiscriminate killings, Danton retired to the country, declaring that he was "sick of men." He said of the Reign of Terror:

We must pursue traitors everywhere, whatever their disguise, but we must be careful to distinguish between error and crime. Perhaps the Terror once served a useful purpose but it should not hurt innocent people. No-one wants to see a person treated as a criminal just because he happens not to have enough revolutionary enthusiasm.

Danton spent several weeks away from politics, returning in late November 1793 to stand against the escalating Terror. However, many believed that Danton was attempting to halt revolutionary change in order to install himself as a political leader, if not a king.

The backroom conspiracies gathered pace in early 1794. Danton and several of his associates were arrested on March 29th and charged with corruption and attempting to restore the monarchy. He was thrust before Paris' Revolutionary Tribunal four days later but it was no one-sided affair: Danton was a creator of the tribunals, one of the revolution's best lawyers, and probably its best orator. He drew on his legal cunning and powerful turns of phrase to condemn Robespierre, the deputies of the Convention, the men of the CPS and the Tribunal itself. He discredited the evidence raised against him and denounced the proceedings as a political show trial. When it seemed that Danton might win the day and gain an acquittal, the Convention began exerting pressure on the Tribunal's judges. Danton was eventually silenced and found guilty. On April 5th he was sent to the guillotine. "My only regret is that I am going before that rat Robespierre" were among his final words, along with "Above all, don't forget to show my head to the people - it's well worth having a look at." Modesty was never one of his virtues.

When Robespierre called for a new purge in 1794, he seemed to threaten the other members of the CPS. The Jacobins had had enough. Joseph Cambon rose in the National Convention and said "It is time to tell the whole truth. One man alone is paralyzing the will of the Convention. And that man is Robespierre." Others quickly rallied to his support. Robespierre was arrested and sent to the guillotine the next day, the last victim of the Reign of Terror.

Jabba the Hutt was a slug-like alien gangster who carried out his own reign of terror in a galaxy far, far away. He was strangled to death by Princess Leia in *The Return of the Jedi*.

Sources: Historywiz.com; Wikipedia; AlphaHistory.com; Howstuffworks.com; Starwars.com

