

THE SUN KING

Created by Noah Bender

"Ah, if I were not king, I should lose my temper." -Louis XIV

LOGLINE:

In the year 1648, soon-to-be king of France Louis XIV must balance the swells of teenage life with the pressures of running a sovereign nation.

PREMISE LINE:

Set in 17th century Paris, 17-year-old Louis XIV is an immature, spoiled rich kid who has always had everything done for him, ever since ascending to the throne at age 4. He wants to prove his worth and rule with the power ordained to him by God himself but doesn't yet know how, especially with his power-hungry chief minister always in his ear and up his ass. Plus, the snooty nobility, who believe they are owed more than they are given, use every tool at their disposal to curtail his royal authority. Aided by his beleaguered butler, paranoid mother, and unruly pre-selected bride/cousin, Louis must escape the chopping block by cleverly grappling for power while keeping his royal court happy, in hopes of gaining the confidence to formidably run a sovereign nation.

WHAT'S IT ABOUT?

From a young age, I've always fantasized about what it must be like to have *absolute power*, the authority to have all desires met immediately and to make anyone do as I wish. When I was a teenager, I felt powerless and wished I could live like a king. Louis XIV was a kid who really did get to rule the world, reigning over France from age 4 until his death 72 years later. When the king is a young man, however, he wields absolute power but lacks the life experience to exercise it properly. How can a kid who's never buckled his own diamond-encrusted shoes be trusted to run a major European nation?

For millennia, those at the top have grappled for power, whether they be royal, rogue, noble, or today's billionaire class. Privilege begets greed begets folly, and in this comedy of manners, the mega-rich get cut down to size (hopefully not by guillotine) and make fools of themselves in order to seize, strengthen, eschew, and cling tight to their own power, all while still having to shit into a hole in the ground like everyone else. Revenge! Betrayal! Absurdity! Croissants! The king's palace may be grand and expansive, but its inhabitants are like a big family, each serving their own purpose, except some have powers over the guillotine and some are on powdered wig-fluffing duty. Either way, most are illiterate.

“The Sun King” bases itself loosely on *The Fronde* (1648-1653), a series of civil wars and uprisings in France between the aristocracy and the royal court, a time when everyone had their own idea of who should hold the power of the throne, named for the slingshots peasants used to smash the windows of royal supporters. When surrounded by yes-men and backstabbers alike, the young king must learn to rule in his own unique way, battling the minute throws of the struggles for power, dancing the great dance, all while giving the appearance that he knows what he’s doing.

Before he became the mightiest ruler Europe has ever seen, Louis was just a teenager with way too much power. When you’re a teen, you make mistakes, you don’t have fully formed judgment, you don’t care what others think. This is a show about defining your own identity, your own legacy, and just like all of us growing up, Louis figures it out one day at a time.

THE WORLD:

Life at the royal palace in Paris can be quite ridiculous. Everyone at the king’s court has to grapple with the endless nuances of etiquette and flattery. There are rules for how to enter rooms (by *scratching* the door, *not* knocking) and strict guidelines that dictate who may sit in the presence of the king. In this time period, manners were by all means a *political* issue.

This show is set in the seventeenth century, an archaic time long before running water, electricity, and Taco Bell delivery. Even the most wealthy rarely bathe themselves, so due to the prevalence of body odor and human waste, the halls of the palace smell so putrid that the French literally had to *invent* perfume.

Stories mainly take place on the palace grounds, including its many gardens, menageries, hunting grounds, banquet halls, military strategy rooms, sleeping chambers, and servants’ quarters. The visuals are ornate and godly, with characters in full period attire, fit with powdered wigs, corsets, and whatever that frilly neck thing is.

tone:

This show presents royal behavior at its most absurd, inspired by classic historical comedies like BBC’s *Blackadder* and Mel Brooks’ “It’s Good to be the King,” and *The Favourite* (2018). “The Sun King” is a satire of privilege and power, so much of the comedy comes from balancing settings and situations of utmost decadence with reckless attitudes of palace debauchery. We laugh *at* the royals, but ultimately learn to understand their struggle.

CHARACTERS:

(All based on real historical figures. Semi-accurate, mostly fictional)

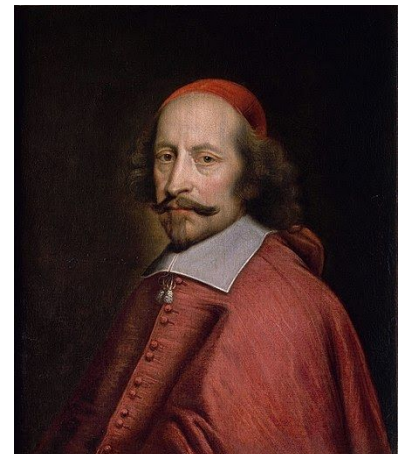
Louis XIV (17) - Soon-to-be king of France

All his life, he's been a big deal. The guy was nicknamed "The God-Given One" at birth, so he's always had rockstar status. To add to the already-historic level of pressure, Louis (like the sun) is constantly orbited by a group of 10 to 100 royal court members and servants, trying to bask in his aura and win his fancy. That can seriously mess with a kid's head. Louis strives to portray the veneer of power, so he thinks he needs to bully those around him to be seen as strong, but in reality, he's a little softie. He assumes people snicker behind his back, but they really just don't know him. Because of this, he has very few real friends and has become emotionally guarded, especially after the recent death of his father Louis XIII. He knows how to perform the charm of royalty, but overall his social skills are faulty, so he feels most comfortable with his butler and his horses. Louis *wants* to be a progressive, equitable leader and address the real concerns of his constituents, but he is tremendously out of touch. He thinks he should be fighting for larger *foie gras* rations and fair rates for portrait painters, when the peasants in his country really just want to be able to afford a scrap of moldy bread to eat. Over time, he learns that being a leader is more than just *presenting* like one, and that serving his country lies beyond serving himself.



Cardinal Jules Mazarin (50) - Chief Minister to Kings Louis XIII and XIV

Mazarin is the regent to France while Louis is too young to govern. He's like Jafar meets Mike Pence, a bloodhungry snake with the demeanor of a public servant. He's jealous of a teenage ruler, for he believes *himself* much better suited to be king of France, even though he is Italian and lacks royal blood. Mazarin is *obsessed* with decorum. He reprimands those who do not bow to the correct angle and keeps a list of those who dare to begin eating before the king. As much as Louis resists, Mazarin tries to assume the role of the



king's surrogate father because he thinks he knows what's best for the king and the country. When something goes right, he takes credit, but as soon as something goes wrong, it's the boy king's fault. Selfish and corrupt as hell, he's constantly trying to undermine and usurp the king. Even though Mazarin is fairly strong-willed, his kryptonite is *money*. He is no stranger to a bribe and can be bent to a wealthy nobleman's will at the drop of a three-cornered hat.

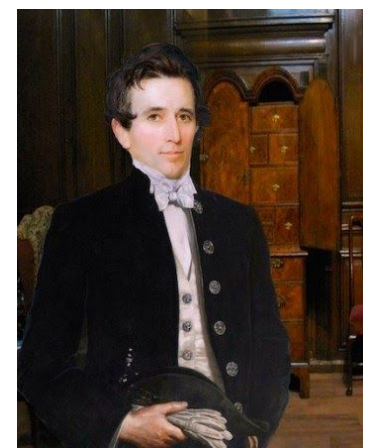
Maria Theresa, Princess of Spain (16) - Louis's betrothed/cousin

Feeling like every aspect of her life has already been decided for her, Maria resents her royal blood. She thinks her life would be so much easier as a peasant, and even has her own makeshift peasant cottage on the palace grounds (Marie Antoinette really had this!). Sometimes she even tries to sneak away into town and blend in with the common folk. She's crafty, charitable, and impulsive, and could totally survive as a lowly hayseed, but only for so long until she yet again hungers for the sweet taste of bottomless caviar (which she eats with her gloves on! Sacrilege!). Maria and Louis keep up a ruse of marriage, but in reality they are both disgusted at the idea of marrying their cousin, so Louis gets to have his mistress-of-the-week, and Maria gets a close friend who truly understands her regal woes.



Alexandre (23) - Louis's butler (Official title "First Valet of the King's Bedchamber")

Alexandre was born to buttle. His father and father's father were royal servants with sworn allegiance to the crown, so he, too, feels immense pressure to uphold his family's legacy. He grew up in the palace alongside Louis, so they've been best friends for years, only one of them is always the king and the other fluffs his sheets, summons his meals, and (very publicly) dresses him in the morning. His honesty is honorable but can be insulting: "Master, if you'd like, I could personally burn that hideous wig before it offends the royal court." Alexandre oversees a staff of thirty-two servants who all fear him. He's ascended to a level where he can punt the less desirable jobs to his subordinates, but when the king needs someone to wipe his ass, he only rings the bell for you-know-who. Although he would be hesitant to admit it, Alex is secretly in love with Victor (25),



a groundskeeper at Louis's palace. They sneak away to hidden hallways and secluded gardens to munch on discarded cheese and spill dirt on what *really* goes on inside the palace and Louis's head. Victor serves as Alexandre's outlet to let loose and take a break from the decorum he works so hard to constantly maintain: "Geez, Al, loosen up. You don't have to call *me* 'sire...' unless you're into that kind of thing."

Anne of Austria (43) - Louis's mother, regent to France

Even though she is the highest-ranking woman in all of France, she resents her son for being (by virtue of his birth) what she believes she deserves to be: A true #1 monarch. She firmly and selfishly believes royal power starts and ends with the ruler in charge, so she took it upon herself to educate and indoctrinate Louis. She is his role model for perseverance and forthrightness, teaching him to stand his ground and fight for what *he* believes is right, however ruthless their goals may be. Anne is *extremely* cultured (and proud of it). She loves riding horses, attending opera, playing with her collection of expensive puppies, and *gasp* bathing regularly. At a time when there was very little to go around, she is one of the chief advocates for personal hygiene. Like a helicopter parent, she constantly micromanages and coddles her boy, resisting his process of growing up. Harshly protective of her son and the throne, Anne is perpetually paranoid about the possibility of a coup. She makes hasty and premature precautions, and much of her comedy comes from a relatively small threat spiking her degree of suspicion. Being born into such wealth and privilege can royally mess with how one sees her place in the world, and Anne is always worried about losing it. She is hopelessly in love with Mazarin, but alas, he is celibate.



OTHER RECURRING CHARACTERS:

God (ageless, infinite): God is real and exists as a voice in Louis's head, his conscience, advising him on how to act. God can be a tricky one, though, like that time he convinced Louis that drinking vinegar before a speech would make him sound more manly.

Leonard of Nice (45): A wealthy, sinister nobleman who will stop at nothing to pay fewer taxes. The only thing he loves more than money is when other people don't have his.

Father Gerard Giroux (60): An elder clergyman whose vast wisdom of the (Catholic) universe and (flat) Earth make him suited to act as a royal mouthpiece for the deception and control of hapless peasants who *only* care about making it to heaven.

Henriette (12): The filthy dungeon girl who frequently teaches Maria and Louis all about the mysterious world of "regular people."

Philippe the Town Crier (20): He serves as a conduit between the palace and the city, since there is no other way for news to travel. He is illiterate, hard of hearing, and has a gimp leg.

WEEK-TO-WEEK:

Stories generally revolve around some great royal responsibility like overseeing invasions, taxation, or *escargot* production, Louis *thinking* he can knock it out of the park, then dealing with the consequences of his actions. This upstairs-downstairs comedy is all about the struggle towards and away from Absolute Power. Characters volley for status, in measures large and small, with hopes of harnessing the influence of the crown atop a seventeen-year-old boy's head.

PILOT:

The historic ending of the Thirty Years War signifies peace between France and Spain, which calls for a symbolic marriage (what better way to begin a series than with a good old-fashioned cousin-wedding!). The young Louis is paired with his second cousin, Princess Maria Theresa of Spain, whom he's never met. The awkward teens in the royal spotlight share a rapid salutation at the welcoming ceremony and feel immense pressure with all the eyes of the kingdom watching them.

Once in private, Maria expresses how much she detests being royal and wishes to be rid of it all, a sentiment to which Louis cannot relate. As he shows her around the most majestic wings of the palace, trying to convince her of the (superficial) joys of her new French royal life, she attempts to break as many rules as possible, infuriating Louis's butler Alexandre, their chaperone. Louis feels great stress and pressure as a young ruler to live up to the expectations of and be *just like* his father, Louis XIII, who died tragically from gout one year ago. Louis's mother Anne obsessively checks up on the two "lovebirds" to make sure they're falling head over heels, since her arranged

marriage with Louis XIII (secretly gay) was a loveless one. Maria is put off by Louis's pompous energy, but Louis gets a taste of being his own person, discovering that being king can be... fun?

Maria begs Louis to cancel, but he's too concerned with decorum, legacies, *doing it right*. Suddenly, feeling powerless and trapped in tradition, he realizes he's the king, dammit, that he's not bound by the rules, because he *makes* the rules! With his mother and the kingdom waiting on the happy couple's entrance, Louis calls off the wedding and decides that a king does not have to be what everybody tells him to be. He's seventeen, not ready to settle down, and is tired of feeling burdened by the expectations of others. He doesn't need to be exactly like his father. He can be his own king, rule in his own way, define his own legacy. Louis and Maria pledge to get to know each other first as friends/cousins, while keeping up a public ruse to appease their subjects.

At the last moment, Mazarin sends out a message to the town crier to alert the peasants that the king is indecisive, unstable, and cannot be trusted to head the nation...

OTHER EPISODES:

TOUGHEN UP OR HEADS WILL ROLL: God convinces Louis that he needs to be a more ruthless and imposing leader. In turn, Louis attempts to oversee a public execution but doesn't want to kill just *anybody*, so he sets out to find the roughest, toughest person in Paris most deserving of a beheading. When Louis and the ruffian become unexpected friends, he struggles to embody the cold-hearted gusto (he thinks) his kingdom expects of him.

WHERE'S LOUIS?: When Louis grows frustrated with his overall lack of privacy, he elects to eat his dinner privately in an isolated, locked, and secluded wing of the palace. With over 100 members of the royal court in the dining hall eagerly awaiting the king's arrival for the *grand couvert* ceremony, Alexandre suspects foul play and dispatches his men to search the palace, as Mazarin sees the king's absence as an opportunity to ram through some unpopular legislation regarding the taxation of peasants. When Alexandre finds the king's hiding place and witnesses Louis's anxiety, he plays dumb to the search party and lets slide a brief moment of peace.

THE BATHWATER: Anne falls ill from bathing in contaminated water. When Louis unleashes the royal doctors on her, the mother who is so used to taking care of everybody else must learn to accept help and move past her archaic and superstitious

ways of healing, in favor of new modern methods. Move over incantations and prayer, here come leeches and bloodletting!

A DRINK, MONSIEUR?: Mazarin teams up with a wealthy nobleman, who pays him to induce food poisoning Louis. His loyalty gets tested as he must balance his allegiance to the crown with his perverse lust for power. When Mazarin accidentally feeds himself the poison, he must protect his reputation by playing the victim of an elaborate coup against him.

THE DIAMOND OF WESTPHALIA: Feeling guilty for her privileged status, in an effort to be more charitable, Maria brazenly gives away a royal jewel, not knowing that it is a thousand-year-old relic that symbolizes peace between nations. At her aunt Anne's order, she must venture into town to carefully track it down, for the peasant she gifted it to has already sold it.

SEASON ARC:

REVOLUTION!: The first season builds to a *revolution* in Paris, orchestrated by the wealthy noblemen and fought by foolish peasants. Everybody's got *some* beef with the royal leadership, it's only a matter of time before they all organize.

CONCLUSION:

With all the pressures of running a country on his plate, Louis the Fourteenth must learn to rise to the occasion, not only to become a legendary leader, but to become a functioning human being.

All this and more on... "THE SUN KING!"