

US author journeys from Twitter to print

July 14 2010, by Chris Lefkow



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"It's a lot easier to read this way," Matt Stewart said of the traditional paper format of his debut novel, "The French Revolution," published by Soft Skull Press.

"I don't blame anybody for holding out for the book," he said.

Stewart said it took about four months to "tweet" the entire 300-page book -- a project he began on Bastille Day a year ago -- and "around

5,000 tweets."

"It was an ordeal," Stewart said, adding that the 140-character Twitter format turned out not to be particularly "user-friendly" for a full-length novel.

Stewart, 31, describes his book as a "San Francisco family saga, loosely structured on the radical events of the historical French Revolution" that combines "vivid language, elements of fantasy and farce and raunchy humor."

The San Francisco Chronicle favorably compared it to John Kennedy Toole's 1980 classic "A Confederacy of Dunces."

"Stewart's book shares many of its best qualities with Toole's picaresque comedy: Both are deeply satirical and affectionate portraits of a city in all its messy, multiethnic splendor, seen through queasy glimpses over the fleshy shoulders of its obese, big-mouthed protagonist," the Chronicle said.

Stewart said the [Twitter](#) exercise was about "finding new ways to reach an audience" and he is continuing his literary and digital experimentation with the launch of the print version of "The French Revolution."

He teamed up with Ricoh Innovations to produce a free companion [iPhone](#) application to the book.

"One thing I've always been intrigued by is adding kind of bonus features to books, much like a movie DVD has deleted scenes or interviews," Stewart said.

"Right now, books on iPad do a lot of this," he said. "They can have embedded content and do some pretty cool things.

"But the reality is most people aren't reading [books](#) on iPads," he said. "I'm attempting to kind of bridge that gap between paper and digital content.

"I love the concept of clickable paper," he added. "You can combine your smartphone with standard text and bring it to life."

The iPhone application gives readers access to bonus content such as videos and extra chapters by zapping any page in the book with their iPhone camera.

"I went around San Francisco to a lot of locations that were featured in the book," Stewart said. "I show actual locations. I talk about my inspiration for those scenes.

"There are a lot of recipes featured in the book so I also have recipes," he said.

Stewart said the bonus content in the iPhone application is "there to enhance the story if you feel like it.

"The story holds up just fine without it," he said. "But it's there if you want it."

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