

The Fox 141

Chapter 141: Lucien's New Role

Within the contract signed with Stephen Girard, the most important aspect, as perceived by Joseph, was Girard's commitment to prepay the full cost of the first five large clipper ships. Considering that clipper ships were significantly more expensive to build than ordinary vessels, this was indeed a substantial sum of money.

With this financial infusion, Joseph could proceed with the expansion of the shipyard. Of course, this meant Joseph had more tasks on his hands and became busier than ever.

Lucien and Louis were pleased with this development because it meant Joseph wouldn't be monitoring their activities as closely. However, Lucien's satisfaction was short-lived as Joseph soon found new tasks for him.

"Lucien, you've been doing well lately," Joseph said. "Your assistance in the American deal was a great help to me. It seems like you've grown and improved."

Lucien immediately became proud and responded, "Of course... I believe I've made significant progress compared to how I was before."

"Well, you know, both Napoleon and I are quite busy these days, and we need someone to share our workload. We believe you have the reliability and capability. After all, you are our brother, and that naturally makes you the most reliable choice. As for your abilities, both Napoleon and I think you're quite competent. So, we hope you can help us shoulder the family's responsibilities. However, you must know that after the incident last time, we had some doubts about your reliability. But recently, you've shown improvement, and upon reflection, I realized we made a mistake by entrusting you with significant responsibilities without adequate training."

Lucien's initial happiness waned when he heard the words "without adequate training." He interrupted Joseph sincerely, saying, "Joseph, I don't think the last incident had anything to do with inadequate training. It was mainly due to my own complacency and lack of vigilance."

"It's commendable that you can self-critique so honestly and identify your shortcomings. However, no genius grows without training. Just like Napoleon, without his education at the military academy, he wouldn't possess the leadership skills he has today. Necessary training remains essential. Now, my business has grown, and the institute demands more of my time. I'm overwhelmed, and I can't manage everything alone. Lucien, I'd like you to work with me, at least for a while, as my confidential secretary. This will allow you to develop your abilities and gain an overall understanding of our family's operations."

Lucien initially thought that working as a confidential secretary for Joseph was a good arrangement. However, he quickly realized that the role of a confidential secretary meant...

"Lucien, come help me here... The crucial processes here are completed, and now it's about the calculations. Take over and provide me with the data."

"Lucien, come here... I think there's an issue with this data. Gather the relevant materials and verify it, find out where the problem lies."

"Lucien, this is the agenda for the latter part of the month. Organize them and create an optimal execution sequence."

"Lucien..."

While Joseph didn't deceive Lucien regarding his responsibilities, working as a confidential secretary expanded Lucien's understanding of the family's operations and notably improved his analytical skills. Still, he couldn't help but feel like he was continually solving mathematical problems.

Despite that, Lucien was generally satisfied with Joseph's arrangement because it allowed him to access information he never could have otherwise. This made him feel genuinely valued.

With a reliable confidential secretary like Lucien, Joseph had more free time to focus on honing his skills in French writing especially for the letters he wrote to Fanny.

Joseph shared most of his other correspondence, particularly those with people in Paris, with Lucien, who assisted him in analyzing the situation in Paris and devising strategies. Participating in these matters was intriguing, but there was a catch:

"All right, Lucien, we've analyzed our response. Now, draft a reply on my behalf..."

Then Joseph would go off to rest, and Lucien would get to work on writing the reply.

Typically, the issues discussed in these letters were within Joseph's expectations, making his responses less challenging. However, a recent letter from Fouch presented a dilemma for Joseph.

"Fouch mentioned that the government is preparing for new elections to form a new parliament. After all, the previous National Convention had significant vacancies."

"That's natural. The original parliamentarians either got executed by Robespierre or had some Jacobin affiliations. Of course, they have to replace them. But aren't they concerned that these elections might bring a flood of royalists into power at this time?"

Ever since the downfall of Robespierre, the Thermidorian Reaction, the Thermidorians, as they were known, had been trying to undermine the Jacobins. However, their hold on power was fragile, and without the support of the sans-culottes, they couldn't maintain their authority. The sans-culottes had even attempted two unsuccessful uprisings, backed by the remnants of the Jacobins, to overthrow them. In opposition to the sans-culottes, the petite bourgeoisie wasn't necessarily supportive either. The Thermidorians depended on big capital.

In the Jacobin period, the bourgeoisie had been subjected to various forms of price controls and requisitions, which were meant to curb their power. However, the French bourgeoisie, despite being called "big capital," didn't have substantial power. Their inability to suppress the feudal forces was why the Jacobins came to power in the first place. During the Jacobin regime, the bourgeoisie had their power greatly diminished, no less than the royalists.

As a result, the counterrevolutionary royalists, who had been repressed by the Jacobins, suddenly reemerged as soon as the Jacobins were toppled. In fact, they did so with a vengeance. They were even more intent on hanging the rebels, much like they had sung in the song "Everything Will Be Fine" during the height of the revolution. They just altered the lyrics slightly. ("Everything Will Be Fine" was a popular song during the French Revolution. The most revolutionary lyrics went, "Everything will be fine, oh yes, everything will be fine. The aristocrats will be hung from

lampposts." This rhythmic song was also appreciated by royalists, but when they sang it, they changed the words "aristocrats" to terms like "rebels," "Jacobins," or "the mob." Hugo also mentioned this in "Les Misérables," stating, "The song was like the guillotine; it didn't care whom it decapitated.")

Now, Joseph asked, "So, what's your plan if the royalists come to power?"

"Well, I believe elections must be held. It's essential to maintain the semblance of a legitimate government. But we can't allow the royalists to take power. The royalists, after all, also sing 'Everything Will Be Fine,' but they modify the lyrics slightly. (In this context, Lucien is referring to the song mentioned earlier.)"

The royalists had suffered greatly during the revolution, and their hearts were filled with hatred. If they returned to power, they might indeed start hanging the rebels, just as they sang in the song. The Thermidorians were no less unpopular in their eyes.

Joseph asked, "How can we prevent the royalists from taking control, then?"

Lucien thought for a moment and then replied, "We need to find a way to manipulate the elections. If we can ensure that the candidates we support are elected, we can indirectly influence the parliament's decisions."

Joseph smiled and said, "Lucien, you're absolutely right. If we can control the elections, we can dictate the parliament's composition. You're already well-versed in my strategies for managing elections in the United States. Use the same principles here. It will be your task to draft and dispatch the relevant instructions to our agents in France."

Lucien understood that the responsibility of managing the elections in France was a significant task. He realized that if he succeeded, it could strengthen the position of the big bourgeoisie in France and counter the royalist resurgence.

The prospect of having such a profound impact on French politics excited him. Despite the pressure and responsibility, Lucien felt like he was part of something crucial, and it added a new sense of purpose to his role as Joseph's confidential secretary.

Chapter 142: Lucien's Advice

Lucien carefully absorbed the ink from his plan document with blotting paper, then reread the entire plan thoroughly from start to finish. Satisfied with his work, he muttered to himself, "This should do. At the very least, there won't be any glaring absurdities to catch the eye. It may be a bit verbose with numerous adjectives and adverbs, making the text seem less concise, but the meaning is clear and precise. I believe it should pass muster with Joseph."

Sitting there, he closed his eyes and imagined Joseph, wide-eyed and searching for flaws throughout the paper but ultimately finding nothing, leaving him disappointed. Lucien found immense satisfaction in that mental image.

"Let's call it a day!" Lucien said. "If Joseph manages to find any issues, I'll... I'll do Louis's math homework for him!"

With that, Lucien opened his eyes, stood up, stretched with a long yawn, and extinguished the candles on his desk, preparing to share a night of rest with his beloved pillow. However, to his

surprise, he noticed the faint light of dawn seeping through the curtains. Soon after, he heard the wake-up call from the training ground across the street.

"Damn!" Lucien exclaimed. He knew that Joseph would soon come knocking on his door, summoning him for their morning run.

"Health is the capital of the revolution, and running is the most effective way to keep fit," Joseph always said, both to himself and to his brother. Back in Paris, they used to join their fellow students at the training grounds of the "Paris Military School" every morning for a run. The students in that school may have been somewhat lax in other respects, but they took their running exercises seriously. The school believed that good running ability was the most important quality for the French military. Even after coming here, Joseph would drag Lucien to the training grounds for their daily three-kilometer run.

Thanks to this regular exercise, Lucien had developed impressive long-distance running skills. If our army were to suffer a defeat on the battlefield, he could bolt and leave most pursuers in the dust. As for Joseph, well, if one day he was visiting Fanny in Paris, and news suddenly arrived that Robespierre had come back to life, Joseph could probably run all the way from Paris to the New World without breaking a sweat.

His chance for a peaceful night with his beloved pillow had vanished. Lucien started counting in his mind, "1, 2, 3..." He was certain that Joseph would appear at his door before he reached twenty.

As expected, when he reached fifteen, there came a knocking on his door. "Lucien, get up, it's time for our run!" Joseph's voice called.

Lucien opened the door, glanced at Joseph, and said, "Let's go."

However, Joseph stopped and asked, "What time did you go to sleep last night?"

"What's it to you?"

"Have you been up all night?" Joseph looked at Lucien. "Your eyes remind me of some animal."

"What animal?" Lucien rubbed his eyes.

"A raccoon, of course, the kind with dark circles around the eyes that Stephen Girard mentioned. We used to say that when we got a better ship, we could transport some animals never seen before by people for exhibition... Did you work on this plan all night?"

"How did you know?"

"I can see the satisfaction in your eyes. Well, you should eat something first, then come back and take a nap. As for the run, we can catch up later tonight... By the way, let me see your plan," Joseph said, furrowing his brow. After all, this was his brother, not one of those programmers who could be replaced if they messed up.

Lucien had slept through the morning, even missing lunch. It wasn't until his stomach grumbled in protest that he reluctantly rose from bed and left his room.

He decided to head to the cafeteria and order a light meal. After all, as the chief secretary, he still had some privileges.

After filling his stomach and enjoying a nice meal, Lucien thought about his plan and then made his way to Joseph's office.

Pushing the door open, he found Joseph sitting comfortably at his desk, sipping coffee with a smile on his face, and a book lying in front of him.

"What are you reading, Joseph?" Lucien approached.

"Oh, nothing much. I pulled out 'Don Quixote' and read it again," Joseph said with a smile.

"You have time for this?" Lucien was somewhat surprised.

"I normally wouldn't, but now that you're helping, I do." Joseph replied.

Lucien's face showed some concern, and Joseph added, "Well, Lucien, it means you're ready to take on more responsibilities with me and Napoleon. Now that you've had enough rest, right?"

"Yeah."

"First, don't work late into the night anymore. It shortens your shelf life makes you age faster. The three of us brothers have to carry on for decades. Even from a short-term perspective, it's uneconomical because the fatigue from staying up late requires even longer rest to recover. Of course, it's an exception if you have a brilliant idea. Well, from the look of you, you seem to have recovered nicely, right?"

"Completely recovered..." Lucien stretched his arms and legs. He was about to boast about his physical condition when he suddenly realized that if he did, Joseph might say something like, "Good, there's an important and challenging task for you," and he'd be trapped. So he stopped himself mid-sentence.

Joseph, however, didn't notice his brother's internal thoughts and continued, "Since you're taking over this matter, we'll need you well-rested. What time do you go to sleep? Is it late?"

Lucien replied, "I usually go to sleep late but not last night."

Joseph noted, "That's good. Now, I want to talk about your plan. It's clear you've got a lot of bright ideas..."

In Joseph's view, Lucien's plan had a shining aspect in the way it analyzed problems from the fundamental level. Lucien first pointed out that the underground order was fundamentally no different from the above-ground order. Both were based on violence, and this violence was the foundation of their rules. The reason the underground order existed was that the above-ground order's power was insufficient, and there were places it couldn't reach. This created opportunities for underground factions. Establishing an underground order meant having a violent organization.

However, the underground order had its unique characteristics. Its violence was distinct from the above-ground order's violence in terms of usage. It had to be covert, small-scale, and easy to use. This violence organization had to be different from the military, the primary violence organization on the surface. However, in some aspects, it had similarities with the police. Lucien believed that he didn't have enough knowledge to specify the differences, but he suggested Joseph consult experts in the field when dealing with this matter. He pointed out that technological advancements would affect both underground and surface violence, suggesting that the institute conduct targeted research, which he called "Civil Arms Research."

Of course, developing specialized weapons for their limited underground organization wasn't cost-effective. Lucien recommended selling these weapons outside of France. Both Poland and North

America were good markets for France. Poland was France's ally, while North America was a weak country located nearby. So selling weapons there could weaken it and affect France's rival, Great Britain. However, it had to be approached with care. The weapons had to be in compliance with international law, and they had to take care of the local French citizens. By creating a company, the FFL Corporation, this could be accomplished. The FFL Corporation would operate out of North America and Poland, while the FFL College would manage the education and training.

Moreover, Joseph's newly established secret service, the BRI, would be in charge of security affairs in France. As the central region would have the highest level of risk, Joseph had previously arranged for the largest and most powerful part of the BRI to be stationed there. He also made use of the British network. In the end, Lucien recommended that Joseph organize some sort of unified and specialized force.

In summary, Lucien's plan focused on creating a research institute for underground and surface violence. It aimed to use technological advancements to provide suitable violence organizations for the underground, with the sale of surplus weapons in France's favor. This entire network was a comprehensive scheme, and with the establishment of the Central Security Bureau, Joseph could integrate the enforcement of law, making it highly efficient. This was Lucien's idea.

Joseph couldn't help but nod in agreement, "Lucien, your ideas are quite inspiring. So you've been sleeping in peace for most of the night, which is a good thing, as you have enough rest. Napoleon asked me to talk to you about this because you're a secretary of the Central Committee now."

Lucien felt proud and pleased with his brother's trust. He said, "No problem. I'll work harder."

"Good. Your pay will also go up," Joseph said.

Lucien blinked. His salary was going up, and it made him rather pleased. In that case, he was willing to dedicate himself to the work.

"Your plan still has some flaws," Joseph pointed out.

"What flaws?"

"Your plan doesn't touch on the underground political landscape. We need to know more about it."

"I agree. I'm not qualified to talk about this," Lucien admitted.

Joseph explained, "For this reason, you'll have to study this for the next few months. You can't know too much about it."

Lucien nodded. "I will."

Joseph continued, "You also didn't think about the organizations that are currently in charge of security. What will they think when they learn of your idea? The police will become the Central Security Bureau, and that's a direct impact on them."

Lucien felt somewhat dumb, as he had indeed neglected this aspect.

Joseph patted Lucien on the shoulder, saying, "Don't worry, you can think about this for a while. In the future, the BRI and the Central Security Bureau will be our underground organizations. As a security agent, your first duty is to act with precision. When your command is properly executed and successful, your organization will have great prestige and grow even stronger."

"Precision, prestige, strength. I understand," Lucien replied.

Joseph then began discussing the details of the plan. They were almost done when Napoleon entered the room.

"Joseph, what's the matter?" Napoleon asked.

"Lucien wants to take on a little more responsibility," Joseph said.

Napoleon smiled and said, "That's great. He's the best choice for the Central Security Bureau and has the support of the Central Committee. He knows more about underground organizations and their operations than anyone else."

Lucien could only smile awkwardly in response.

Then, Napoleon asked, "Where's the plan?"

Joseph handed it to him, and Napoleon carefully read through it, asking for clarification on certain points.

After a while, Napoleon said, "The surface and underground orders are linked. If we create a large organization and recruit too many members from the underground, the surface order may attack us. At the same time, the underground may become stronger and make its move. It's a dangerous situation, as both sides might target us."

Joseph and Lucien nodded in agreement.

Napoleon continued, "The most dangerous part of this plan is the FFL Corporation and the FFL College. There might be powerful forces that intend to make a move here. After all, we are weakening the military monopoly. Of course, France has also gotten more powerful, so this kind of operation could be carried out."

He handed the plan back to Lucien and said, "You've got talent, and you're a secretary now. You'll have to learn quickly. As for the rest of the plan, don't rush it. To take that step, we'll need to gather more talent. Let's start by forming the Central Security Bureau."

After he left, Joseph patted Lucien's shoulder and said, "I hope you'll be able to meet Napoleon's expectations and do a good job."

"Don't worry, I'll do my best," Lucien replied.

Joseph looked at the plans on the table and said, "This will be quite a headache for you."

As Joseph spoke, Lucien noticed the volume on the table. He wondered if he should pick it up and read it, but since Joseph didn't suggest it, he decided against it.

Lucien left Joseph's office. While walking down the corridor, he considered the responsibilities that lay ahead. Lucien had grown and matured in the underground order, and now he was becoming an integral part of its new structure. He was excited about the future, eager to face the challenges that lay ahead, and determined to contribute to his brothers' cause.

The Central Security Bureau, the FFL Corporation, and the FFL College were set to become essential components of this ambitious plan to reshape the underground and the surface order. The future was uncertain, but Lucien was ready to face it with dedication, precision, and a clear vision.

Chapter 143: Special Tactical Training Camp (1)

Joseph handed Lucien a set of documents outlining weapon development plans. These weapons were not just abstract ideas; they came complete with detailed blueprints. Lucien couldn't believe that Joseph had come up with all of this in just a little over a morning, right after seeing Lucien's plans. He knew that it was impossible for Joseph to create so much in such a short time, even if he were to resurrect da Vinci from the depths of the earth.

So, the appearance of this document folder meant only one thing: his brother had been preparing for this for quite some time.

However, Lucien overestimated Joseph in some ways. These designs were mostly adaptations of future concepts, and the relevant blueprints had already been drawn. They were merely waiting to be put into practical use. Lucien's suggestions prompted Joseph to dig them out to impress Lucien.

Among these designs, the first to align with Lucien's vision was the revolver.

In this era, handguns were flintlock pistols, which shared the same loading difficulties as muskets. Loading a flintlock pistol was a time-consuming process, and after firing a shot, it might take over a minute to reload. Handguns had limited range, and in a real combat situation, there was no time to reload.

Compared to rifles, handguns were less accurate due to their grip style. Since they could only fire one bullet at a time, many people believed that a swift sword was more useful in combat. Even those who intended to use handguns typically carried two of them, just like Carnot's two friends.

Therefore, a firearm capable of firing multiple shots was a game-changer. Imagine holding a revolver and firing a shot at someone, missing the target. The enemy would assume you were out of bullets, exposing themselves with a malicious grin, and that's when you'd fire again. In an urban setting, a few individuals carrying two revolvers each could easily cause mayhem.

Furthermore, revolvers had a relatively simple design and could be manufactured even with the technology of the time. Unfortunately, metallic cartridges were still under development and couldn't be used yet. Joseph had no intention of immediately introducing them, as he planned to release an older version first, let people buy it, and then unveil a new model for more profit.

So, the first version of Joseph's revolver still required the traditional loading process with priming, pouring gunpowder, and loading the bullets, which was painstakingly slow after firing six rounds.

Besides the revolver, there were other special melee weapons. Small, dismantlable crossbows were popular for assassination when suppressors weren't available yet. However, these didn't sell well in the end; a more successful melee weapon was the folding knife.

Joseph designed two types of folding knives: a side-opening spring-assisted knife and a butterfly knife, which would become popular in the future. In a way, both were just variations of daggers. Surprisingly, these two knives were highly appreciated by criminal organizations worldwide. Although they were more expensive than regular daggers, they quickly replaced them as standard equipment among criminal circles.

These knives had two distinct advantages over regular daggers:

First, they were easy to carry. You could fit spring-assisted and butterfly knives into a small pocket without the risk of injuring yourself. Regular daggers were almost twice as long and, with a sheath,

weren't as convenient. Even if you removed the sheath to make them shorter, pocketing them could lead to accidents.

Second, they offered enhanced concealment during attacks. Regular daggers were conspicuous because the blade was visible, even when held normally. Spring-assisted and butterfly knives concealed the blade until the moment of attack. This made it difficult for the target to react properly. Changing defensive postures was hard, and this increased the chances of a successful surprise attack. Therefore, these knives were more sinister and dangerous than regular daggers, to the point where many places banned them even in the future, where firearms weren't restricted.

Lucien didn't initially consider these factors; he simply thought that these knives were unique. However, he understood why Joseph had to keep their designs highly confidential they were deceptively simple and easily copied.

Lucien spent the entire night in Joseph's office working on the basic budget for these new designs. Surprisingly, Joseph was satisfied with it, without any nitpicking.

"Well, about establishing the related organization, I think the first thing to do is to gather talent. You'd better handle this yourself. I'll write a letter to Carnot for you to take with you. While Carnot's status is not as high as before, he should be able to obtain a list of recently discharged personnel from the Paris police. You can also contact Fouch, but try not to get too involved with him. In the long run, you'll be competitors. Frankly, I think he's more capable than you, especially in this field. Our family doesn't have anyone better. Be careful when dealing with him; he might sell you out and count the money."

Lucien's heart was lightened by the thought of going to Paris. It felt like a vacation. He burst into laughter. Joseph noticed but didn't think much of it, considering it a typical daydream of a young teenager. Joseph went on to discuss various details and matters to be cautious about when he arrived in Paris.

Joseph, although rather unscrupulous, was highly efficient. He wrote the letter that evening, and the next morning, Lucien took the letter and, accompanied by two assistants, boarded a carriage headed to Paris.

When Lucien arrived in Paris, it was already evening. He didn't go to Joseph's residence in Paris since the original owner of the house had met the guillotine during the Reign of Terror. Joseph had acquired the property at a relatively low price from the government. Instead, Lucien went directly to Carnot's house, a place he knew well.

Upon arriving at Carnot's house, it was nearly dinnertime, which was an opportune moment to enjoy a free meal. Lucien got out of the carriage and knocked on the door.

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A day later, Carnot handed a list to Lucien, saying, "Lucien, this is a list of police personnel who were expelled from the Paris police force after the events of Thermidor. I suggest you pay particular attention to a few of them. First, there's Javert, the former police chief. He's highly capable and has thwarted numerous royalist conspiracies, earning the enmity of royalists. After the Thermidorian Reaction, some of his colleagues accused him of being a Jacobin, leading to his dismissal. He has a son and a daughter and used to live at 25 Peacock Street.

Next is Maniere, similar to Javert, he's an excellent detective. However, he was wounded in one operation against speculators, leaving him crippled. You know that being injured in an operation against businessmen is no longer an honor. He's in a worse position than Javert, as he's disabled. He's currently living in an unknown place. But the name on the list, Henry Durand, is his friend. You can contact Maniere through him. Henry Durand resides at 45 Bernard Street."

Carnot continued, introducing a few more individuals from the list, and he also expressed his concerns about the current state of Paris. Lucien learned that Paris was teetering on the edge of chaos, with the republicans and royalists constantly butting heads.

After dinner, Lucien left Carnot's house, determined to find Javert and Maniere. They seemed to be suitable candidates for Joseph's plans, but finding Maniere, who was without a fixed residence, might prove challenging.

As Lucien walked through the dimly lit streets of Paris, he couldn't help but feel a sense of foreboding. The city was a powder keg, and any spark could set it off. Lucien had a nagging feeling that his visit to Paris was not just for recruiting new talent; it might lead him into a situation much more dangerous than he anticipated.

Chapter 144: Special Tactical Training Camp (2)

Javert's residence on Peacock Street had an interesting feature. From the second-floor window of the building, you could clearly see anyone knocking at the door below. The house also had a back door leading to the adjacent street, providing an escape route for Javert's family. Javert had chosen this residence initially because of its affordable rent and its suitability for his family's safety. Now, he remained there to elude his creditors. Since losing his job, Javert had struggled to find alternative means of income. He had spent most of his life as a police officer, and aside from policing techniques, he lacked other survival skills. Given his age, switching careers was not easy. Consequently, he accumulated debts, and his financial situation worsened.

However, Javert had not run out of options entirely. He had spent the first half of his life catching various criminals and had witnessed various criminal methods. If he chose, he could have resorted to crime to make money, utilizing his extensive knowledge of criminal techniques. It was perhaps this potential that led moneylenders to continue lending him money. The lenders weren't in a hurry because they believed that the pressures of life would eventually make him make rational choices.

When Lucien and his team arrived at Javert's residence and began knocking on the door, Javert was contemplating whether he should descend into the criminal world he had always despised.

Lucien ascended the steps and gently rang the doorbell.

The doorbell's chime made Javert jump from his chair as if he were a spring. He signaled for his wife, who had been incessantly complaining, to be quiet, and cautiously approached the window. He opened the curtain slightly and peered below.

Three young men stood outside, and the one in the middle was ringing the doorbell. He appeared well-dressed, likely from an affluent family. The two next to him seemed to be trained guards, their eyes constantly scanning their surroundings. They were not debt collectors, but their presence puzzled Javert.

"They're not debt collectors," Javert informed his wife.

"Not debt collectors?" His wife, upon hearing that they weren't there for debt collection, reverted to her previous topic. "I must have been blind to marry a useless man like you. Now, our children are hungry and scared because of you!"

Though they had both sworn before God at their wedding to love, comfort, honor, and remain faithful to each other in poverty or prosperity, in sickness or health, the God they had sworn to seemed to have taken a backseat in their lives in the current state of France.

"Let's not talk about that right now," Javert said. "Let's open the door and see why they've come."

"Do you want to run away at this opportunity? You always try to avoid problems. Look at how our family is suffering because of you," his wife continued to berate him.

"Alright, enough! Maybe it's an opportunity," Javert retorted. "As long as they're willing to pay me for something, I'll do it."

With that, Javert strode out of the room and pounded up the wooden stairs outside.

Lucien waited for a moment, and the door slowly opened before him. A middle-aged man with a troubled expression stood in front of him.

"Sir, who are you looking for?" the man asked.

"I'm looking for Mr. Javert. I'm here to see Mr. Javert," Lucien replied politely, taking off his hat.

"That would be me," the man said. "But I don't know you, sir. What brings you here?"

"I'm Lucien Bonaparte, and General Napoleon Bonaparte is my brother," Lucien replied.

"But... sir, I don't know General Napoleon Bonaparte either," Javert responded, his surprise evident. Napoleon's name was well-known, and he knew of him from newspaper reports, but the general was a high-ranking figure, far removed from Javert's world. He couldn't fathom why the general's brother had suddenly come to find him.

"I heard about you from General Carnot. Would you mind inviting me inside so we can talk?" Lucien asked politely.

"Of course," Javert said, opening the door for Lucien. "I don't recognize you, sir, but if General Carnot mentioned me to you, I'm at your service."

Lucien followed Javert into the house, climbing the steep, dark wooden stairs to the second floor, where they entered a room that was roughly seventeen square meters.

"Mathilde, we have a visitor. Can you fetch some water?" Javert said as he approached his wife. Then, he lowered his voice and said, "This is a high-ranking person, a friend of General Carnot."

Mathilde knew who General Carnot was and was startled by the news. She quickly went to get water.

"Mr. Javert, we've come to find you because of your extensive experience over the years. We'd like to employ you," Lucien said as he observed his surroundings. From Javert's appearance and their earlier conversation, he knew that Javert's life was not in a good state.

Lucien knew that individuals like Javert, known as crime-fighters, were well-versed in various criminal techniques. If they were willing to abandon their principles, they could easily become formidable criminals. Yet, many of them found themselves in difficult circumstances. This,

however, indicated that they were principled and steadfast individuals. The pressure of life seemed to be pushing Javert into this predicament. Moneylenders had confidence that life's pressures would lead him to make rational choices eventually.

When Lucien explained the purpose of their visit, Javert's eyes welled with tears. He was deeply touched and hastily wiped his face. He asked, "Mr. Bonaparte, can you tell me what you need me to do?"

Lucien explained that they were looking for people to protect the secrets of the French army, which were crucial in restoring France's military superiority. Additionally, they needed to train individuals in other countries who were fighting against the invading forces. The success of these people's struggles was France's success.

After explaining this, Lucien said, "Mr. Javert, you are welcome to join us in the fight for France."

"I am willing," Javert replied immediately, standing up.

"From today, you are one of us," Lucien said, shaking Javert's hand. "Your salary will be based on your previous earnings as a police chief."

Lucien also suggested that they could provide an advance on several months of his salary.

After discussing the matter, Lucien informed Javert that he needed to find Henry Durand to locate Maniere and others.

Javert, now standing, put on his hat and coat and took a large cane from the rack. He smiled at Lucien and said, "Mr. Bonaparte, let me be your guide."

With Javert's assistance, their efficiency improved significantly. In just one day, they located more than half of the people on their list. Most of these individuals were also in difficult circumstances, and some had even turned to a life of crime. However, Lucien still welcomed them into their group. He told Javert, "People who are suffering are the most valuable to us. We are all of one heart, and we will surely defeat the invading forces."

After a few days, they were able to locate almost all the individuals on their list, with the exception of one, Marius, a former lawyer who had gone into hiding.

Lucien said to Javert, "I hear Marius is a formidable individual. Could you help us find him?"

Javert pondered for a moment and then replied, "I have some connections that I can rely on."

Lucien took a step forward and said, "Javert, I believe you can find him. The goal of the French army is at stake, and we need every person we can find."

Javert smiled and said, "I will find him."

Now, the team had almost all the members they needed. They began the second phase of their operation by instructing these individuals to prepare for a meeting where they would be informed of their mission. Their training began in earnest as they prepared to take on the challenges that lay ahead.

Chapter 145: Special Tactics Training Camp (3)

The next day, Lucien and Javert spent the whole day running around Paris. However, it wasn't as smooth as the first day, and many people were still missing.

"Napoleon, don't worry. The remaining individuals on this list are the hard ones to find. But in another two days, we should have them all," Javert reassured Lucien after another fruitless search.

"I know that. When I first received this list, I had planned to take about a month to gather these people. Yesterday, with your help, it all went so smoothly that it raised my expectations. Today's progress, in fact, exceeded my original expectations," Lucien said. "A few years ago, my brother brought me out from Corsica to study in Paris. I've been in Paris for several years, and while I can't compare myself to the true Parisians, I always thought I knew Paris. These past couple of days walking through the alleys with you in Paris, I've realized I don't know Paris at all."

"Even people who've lived in Paris their whole lives can't claim to know it completely," Javert sighed.

"Mr. Javert," Lucien continued, "in two days, we need to prepare to leave Paris."

"So soon?" Javert was surprised.

"Yes, the sooner we return, the sooner we can begin our work," Lucien replied. "As for the rest of the people, we can leave one or two individuals in Paris. They can continue recruiting and get to know the situation in the city."

"Mr. Lucien, our people in Paris can't gather high-level information," Javert said.

This was normal; Javert's associates were mostly low-level police officers, and the upper echelons were far removed from them.

"You don't need to worry about high-level matters; we have other channels for that. What we lack is knowledge of the streets," Lucien explained. "So, are you a little reluctant to leave Paris?"

Javert sighed, "Yes, I am. After all, I've been here for half a lifetime. Nearly every street and alley in Paris bears my footsteps."

"My friend, we are only temporarily leaving," Lucien said. "We will definitely return to Paris!"

Two days later, after another visit to Fouch, Lucien left Paris with about twenty people, and they would become the first group of instructors for the Special Tactics Training Camp.

Fouch had already noticed Lucien's actions a while ago. To be honest, Lucien's actions had a hint of something else, so Fouch's reception of Lucien was quite cold. However, he also knew that diversifying and not putting all the eggs in one basket was the right choice for any mature organization. Although Lucien was a pure-blood Bonapartist, Fouch had the confidence to surpass him with his own abilities.

During these days, Napoleon had found an estate near Toulon to serve as the training base for the "Special Tactics Training Camp."

The estate mainly consisted of hills and forests, originally used by a local noble for hunting. After the Toulon rebellion, the noble and his son had fled with the British, leaving behind what they couldn't take, which was then confiscated. The farmlands suitable for cultivation were put to use by the local farmers. However, this hunting estate, being remote and unproductive aside from wildlife, had fallen into disuse. It was now being repurposed for the "Special Tactics Training Camp."

While they had the location, they didn't have students yet. At the moment, the Polish insurgents were fiercely fighting the Russian army near Warsaw. Their situation was far from optimistic. Their

military commander, Kosciuszko, had been seriously injured in previous battles. Despite some initial victories due to sudden uprisings and various smuggled supplies, their situation had worsened significantly.

Now, the Russians, Austrians, and Prussians had essentially agreed on how to divide the spoils. The good times for the Poles were over. With the three parties reaching an agreement, the smuggling routes within Prussia were almost immediately cut off. Subsequently, the Poles faced attacks from three directions. Though they were still resisting, their defeat was only a matter of time.

Vebitzki had begun contacting Lucien to inquire about training underground resistance fighters.

So, even though they had no students at the moment, the people in the training camp remained busy. They needed to prepare the various courses before the Polish insurgents arrived.

According to Lucien's plan, these courses would primarily include the following:

Firstly, reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance. Without training in this area, underground work would be extremely challenging. Even Joseph himself took time out of his busy schedule to provide suggestions on setting up these courses. Many of his ideas were rejected for being impractical, but some of his suggestions received admiration from the instructors. Some of them even said, "I didn't know such operations were possible," or "It actually seems feasible," prompting Javert to say, "If Mr. Joseph Bonaparte had become a policeman, he would have been a legend in the police force." Of course, others joked that what Javert really meant was, "If Mr. Joseph Bonaparte had become a criminal, we wouldn't have been able to live in peace."

Joseph, however, didn't think there was anything extraordinary about it; after all, he had watched hundreds of episodes of children's detective series.

Secondly, various weapons usage and related combat techniques. Underground combat techniques were entirely different from conventional warfare, with unique demands like stealth and speed. This required many distinctive skills. Some individuals even proposed using death row inmates to verify the effectiveness of certain rumored techniques, but Joseph promptly rejected such a cruel suggestion. After all, the organization was established to promote European revolution and the liberation of European people. Therefore, such a proposal was against its principles.

Nonetheless, Joseph, who had studied "Bring'em Back Alive," understood the importance of "keeping the opium but not publicly smashing it, to ensure complete revolution, and delivering it to the pharmacy for medicinal use."

Chapter 146: Liberation of Italy (1)

After discussing these matters, Napoleon continued to inspire his troops. He told them, "In Italy, you'll find greedy and ruthless nobles and clergy everywhere. The former have accumulated immense wealth through centuries, if not millennia, of exploiting their people unjustly. The latter have gathered staggering riches by selling indulgences and amassing guilt on an unprecedented scale across all of Europe.

Now, they use this ill-gotten wealth to oppose us because they fear the revolutionary France. They fear that revolutionary France will become a beacon of democracy and freedom for all of Europe. They are afraid that those people they've oppressed for hundreds, even thousands of years, those they've trampled on like mud, will rise just as our fellow citizens in France did and overthrow these oppressors.

My brothers, this wealth originally belonged to the people, especially that of the clergy, and it belongs to all of Europe, including the French people. It was meant to be used for the liberation of the European people, but now it's being used to suppress their freedom. Can this continue?

So, we should march into Italy, seize this wealth, and use it where it rightfully belongs. We'll confiscate the assets of the reactionary nobles and clergy, distribute a portion to the local commoners to gain their support, and use the rest, including gold, silver, and various artworks, to fund our military operations and reward our heroes."

These words certainly boosted the morale of the officers, as it essentially meant they'd share in the wealth by going to Italy, enjoying food, and claiming gold, just like Robin Hood. As for the soldiers' morale, the officers present reassured them, explaining that once they understood the significance of this mission, they would be on board. After all, going to Italy meant good food.

The next phase was pre-battle training. New, allegedly diverted firearms quickly reached the hands of the soldiers.

"Are these all rifled barrels? Are we going to hunt wild boars in the Alps?" Many soldiers had this question when they received the new weapons initially. However, after the "Bonaparte Research Institute" technicians demonstrated how to use these new firearms with custom ammunition, the soldiers' skepticism turned to enthusiasm.

"This is excellent, anything with the 'Bonaparte' brand is top-notch! Look at 'Bonaparte Little Melon,' and this 'Bonaparte Rifle' compared to these, the government-issued ones are just fire sticks! Why didn't they give us these rifles earlier instead of selling them to the Americans?"

"Is it because these rifles are more expensive?" another soldier speculated.

The "technicians," anticipating this question, responded, "Yes, they are somewhat more expensive. After all, the barrels have to be rifled, and the ammunition is custom-made. If we calculate based on the price we export them to the Americans with over a 100% profit, they become significantly pricier. But I've heard that the purchase price for your old rifles wasn't much lower than our offer to the government. You know, we always keep our prices low for weapons sold to our country's army. As for why the government refused to buy our rifles, we don't know. Maybe they didn't trust these innovative gadgets."

The "technicians" were instructed not to directly blame the government but to subtly guide the conversation. As for the soldiers, they weren't naive and could easily pick up the implied message.

"Oh, if only they'd grease some palms, we would have had these rifles long ago! I'm sure there's some dirty business going on," one soldier immediately said.

"Even if they are pricier, these weapons could save many lives. For a few coins, they left us with these lousy sticks. I say some heads in the government should roll," another soldier said.

"Bouvier, you can't spread such talk in the camp; you need to amend your words," Captain Stanislas Joubert interjected. But his tone wasn't too stern, because deep down, Private Auguste Bouvier's words reflected his own sentiments.

"Alright, Captain," Bouvier scratched his head and said, "You're right. I'll correct my previous statement about the government. Some people in the government don't deserve the guillotine."

The soldiers burst into laughter, and even Captain Stanislas Joubert couldn't help but join in.

"Alright, alright. Without that mouth of yours, you'd have been promoted to sergeant long ago..."

After receiving the new weapons, Napoleon organized his army for more targeted training, such as collective shooting at targets 400 yards away and precise marksmanship at 300 yards. Napoleon had consistently increased the ratio of light infantry in his army, making it easier to adapt to these new firearms.

After nearly a month of preparation, Napoleon led his forces westward toward Italy. One month later, in November 1795, Joseph received the first war report from Napoleon. His army had crossed the Alps in winter, entered Piedmont, and engaged Austrian and Sardinian forces.

To navigate the mountainous terrain, they left behind most cannons weighing over six pounds. However, the winter campaign was unexpected, and the lack of response from the Austrian and Sardinian forces caught them off guard.

Historically, by April 1796, when Napoleon crossed the Alps, Austria and Sardinia had prepared an army of 80,000 soldiers to face Napoleon's 40,000. Yet, the lack of coordination between the two allies almost led to a different outcome.

The unexpected winter campaign took both the Austrian and Sardinian forces by surprise. In this scenario, the lack of manpower proved beneficial for Napoleon. Austrians had around 20,000 troops in Italy and were scattered throughout the region, making centralization difficult.

Sardinia, with a better response, could quickly mobilize around 50,000 troops, although their distribution was dispersed across the nation. Napoleon's army, equipped with Mini rifles, improved firepower significantly. It enabled them to conduct small, specialized operations, given that their size and firepower allowed for better security. In contrast, the Austrians and Sardinians couldn't pose a significant threat with dispersed forces.

Marshal Jean-Baptiste Jourdan wrote to Victor Amadeus III, King of Sardinia, requesting immediate action and concentrating their troops. However, their efforts took time, and Jourdan's subsequent letter advised patience and avoiding a hasty battle with the French.

However, the French didn't attack the Sardinian positions, bypassing them and infiltrating the plains of Piedmont. French troops began to sweep the estates of nobles across the countryside, confiscating whatever portable riches they could find. Some nobles who couldn't escape were captured and held trials in their own estates, establishing "revolutionary courts." Nearby peasants were gathered to witness the hanging of these nobles. French soldiers then publicly burned the nobles' land deeds and declared that these lands would be distributed for free to the peasants cultivating them.

Napoleon was aware that the mere redistribution of land wasn't sufficient to gain the support of the baffled Italian peasants. Still, for now, these actions would prevent them from opposing him. The raids on these estates also temporarily solved the issue of supplies.

Sardinia was not naive; they began preparing for scorched earth tactics when Napoleon's forces entered the Piedmont plain. Still, their preparations were slow compared to the fast advance of the French troops. Napoleon's scorched earth tactics were more brutal and creative.

French soldiers destroyed the dikes and water supply networks, turning fertile plains into wetlands. Trenches were dug on roads, and trees were felled. The entire region turned into an impassable swamp.

As Sardinian and Austrian troops arrived, they realized it was impossible to intercept the French army, as the French had already moved away, leaving behind nothing useful.

Sardinia lost most of its army, around 30,000 troops, during this campaign of winter 1795, but they still had troops ready and were gathering them around Turin, preparing for a siege. Yet, the French army entered the city with unexpected ease, catching Sardinians off guard.

The siege of Turin was quick, as the defenses were weak due to a shortage of defenders and supplies. In April 1796, Turin fell into French hands.

Victor Amadeus III of Sardinia fled with his family. His nephew, the Duke of Aosta, surrendered and was taken captive, along with his sister-in-law, Maria Teresa, to France, while the rest of the royal family and loyal nobles escaped to Spain. To ensure a more comfortable journey, the Duke and Duchess of Aosta offered to cover their expenses. After reaching the border, Napoleon, who had been polite throughout the journey, handed the Aosta couple some French coins and said, "Keep the change."

As the rulers fled, Piedmontese cities were instructed to cooperate with the French army. Napoleon managed the region well; he issued decrees to relax oppressive taxation and promoted industries. These steps aimed to gain the support of locals, but the true objective was to strip wealth from the clergy and the nobles.

Yet, despite their initial reluctance, many wealthy and influential families in the area found it more convenient to cooperate. They had, after all, benefited from Sardinian oppression and believed that siding with France was a less risky option.

The strategic actions taken by the French army in this winter campaign essentially isolated Sardinia and Austria. They ended up dividing the combined armies, making them easier to deal with, while capturing the economically vital regions of the Plain of Piedmont, the heart of Sardinia. Napoleon, utilizing the Mini rifle's superior range and accuracy, could engage in skirmishes without requiring a large, continuous line of supply.

In a letter to Joseph, Napoleon claimed his advances, although successful, were costly due to the long supply line. He expected that he would need Joseph to apply diplomatic pressure to persuade Austria to back down or, if possible, force them to negotiate.

Meanwhile, Napoleon, aware of the circumstances in the Austrian Netherlands, desired to recruit Joseph's diplomatic skills to initiate peace talks. However, he was cautious about involving his brother directly in the military operations.

Joseph replied to his brother, acknowledging the gravity of the situation and assuring him that he would use his diplomatic skills to the utmost.

While Napoleon was campaigning in Italy, Joseph Bonaparte began his role as the French ambassador in Madrid. The threat of a French invasion loomed large, and many in Spain were aware that war with France was inevitable. Therefore, Joseph's diplomatic mission was to delay that eventuality while securing Spain's support.

To gain Spanish support, he initially offered a deal. In exchange for Spain's neutrality, France would promise not to interfere with Spain's expansion in Portugal, Brazil, and the Rio de la Plata region, a gesture welcomed by many in the Spanish court.

However, King Charles IV and his son Ferdinand VII remained skeptical of the French, even as their country struggled with an economic crisis. Spanish ambassadors in Vienna and London began negotiations for a possible alliance with Austria or Britain, prompting Joseph Bonaparte to take a more aggressive stance.

Determined to bring Spain under French influence and aware of Napoleon's plan to remove King Charles IV in the future, Joseph initiated a campaign of propaganda, using contacts in the Spanish court. His efforts painted a picture of an alliance between Spain and France as a great opportunity to revitalize Spain's declining power and economy.

In the following months, Joseph Bonaparte actively sought to control the influence of other foreign powers in Spain, limiting their ability to undermine the alliance with France. British and Austrian diplomats found their efforts less effective as Joseph increasingly controlled the levers of power.

While facing opposition from various Spanish factions, Joseph skillfully managed to steer the country toward a pro-French alliance. In the latter half of 1795, Spain formally declared its neutrality in the ongoing conflicts in Europe, a significant victory for France.

Joseph, during his time in Madrid, took several steps to strengthen the French-Spanish relationship. He worked with Spain's government to modernize its army and implemented reforms to improve the country's finances. His work on a bilateral treaty, the Treaty of Pardo, solidified the alliance between France and Spain, even though he had to make substantial concessions to secure Spain's support.

By the end of 1795, Napoleon Bonaparte's campaign in Italy was progressing well, as he successfully captured key territories in Piedmont and defeated or isolated the Austrian and Sardinian armies. Joseph Bonaparte, in Madrid, secured Spain's neutrality and eventual alliance with France, marking significant developments in Napoleon's European strategy. These successes paved the way for further expansion of the French Empire in the years to come.

The French Revolution and its impact on Europe were ongoing. As Napoleon expanded the French sphere of influence, he faced challenges and opportunities on multiple fronts. In Italy, the campaign had just begun, and in Spain, the alliance was taking shape. Meanwhile, tensions with other European powers, especially Austria and Britain, remained unresolved, foreshadowing further conflicts and diplomatic maneuvers. Napoleon's strategic vision, along with his family members' support and diplomatic skills, played a crucial role in shaping the course of history.

Chapter 147: Liberation of Italy (2)

Speaking of it, the Kingdom of Sardinia was also a member of the anti-French coalition. However, once the war began, they hadn't really engaged with the French army seriously. For the most part, their responsibilities included a bit of naval blockade alongside the British and Spanish, but their main activities were talking big and minding their own business. When their navy discovered they couldn't handle the lightning-fast French ships, they discreetly joined the lucrative business of smuggling goods to France.

Because they had never truly clashed with the French on the battlefield, the Sardinian Kingdom's military had little insight into how strong or weak they really were. They weren't completely ignorant of the significant changes in warfare tactics these days. They were equipped with the new "musket," understanding the benefits it brought in terms of "skirmisher advantage." They even

validated these advantages in their own military exercises. However, these things hadn't been tested in real combat.

The Sardinian Kingdom's skirmishers performed reasonably well during these exercises. While they did exhibit some sluggishness and laziness, it wasn't significantly worse than regular infantry. In fact, they were on par with Austrian skirmishers.

Generally, the Austrians, out of jealousy, liked to baselessly belittle the Sardinian Kingdom's army. Nevertheless, they would say, "Sardinian skirmishers seem decent."

The Sardinian generals, however, filtered out the "seem decent" part and were quite satisfied with their mastery of the new tactics. They modestly made the judgment, "Our skirmishers might have a slight gap compared to the acknowledged best, the French skirmishers, but they should still be top-notch in Europe."

The Sardinian Kingdom's 50,000-strong army gradually assembled, with General Colli as its commander. Colli believed they should wait for the Austrian allies to arrive before launching a full assault on the French, but the Austrians were taking their time. (Field Marshal Beaulieu believed the entire Italian army was not elite enough Austria's elite forces were in Belgium and Poland, and as for the Sardinian Kingdom's army, Beaulieu thought they were less elite than Austria's non-elite forces. So, for now, it was best to take a defensive stance and wait for reinforcements.) Plus, the pressure from the king and nobility was too great, so General Colli decided to initiate a small skirmish to buy some time.

So, he dispatched a cavalry unit to attack a French garrison in Count Coney's estate. The cavalry safely returned to the camp and reported that they had retaken the territory, killing five or six Frenchmen and several Italian turncoats who had joined the French. To prove they weren't lying, they brought back the heads of these Italian traitors.

General Colli had some doubts about this victory's significance, but at this point, he needed a victory to ease the pressure. However, the victory seemed too small, as it only resulted in the deaths of five or six Frenchmen.

Colli summoned the cavalry unit's captain and inquired about the battle's details. After their conversation, the entire situation became clearer.

The cavalry unit, numbering less than a hundred, encountered over a thousand French troops and more than two thousand Italian rebels who had shamelessly joined the French near Count Coney's estate. The Sardinian cavalry immediately unsheathed their sabers, shouting "For God and the King," and fearlessly launched a brave charge against these invaders and traitors.

The French instantly fell into chaos, fleeing in all directions, while the Sardinian cavalry pursued and killed countless invaders and traitors. This victory was as glorious as the Battle of Montgisard, where King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem, known as the "Leper King," had triumphed with only a few hundred horsemen against Saladin's army of twenty thousand.

General Colli reported this news to the king and informed the nobles who had been forced to abandon their estates and take refuge in the city. The entire city of Turin erupted in celebration.

Almost simultaneously, Napoleon received a similar report:

"Our troops encountered a group of about a hundred Sardinian cavalry near the Count Coney's estate and opened fire upon them. When our troops fired, those cavalry quickly retreated."

This report piqued Napoleon's interest because it marked their first encounter with a fully organized Sardinian cavalry.

"It seems the Sardinians are getting impatient, don't you think?" Napoleon thought. He decided it was time to shrink his forces in preparation for a possible major battle.

The next day, however, Napoleon received another report from that very location, along with several Italians.

Count Coney, upon learning that his estate had been retaken, was anxious to assess the extent of his losses. He sent his nephew and a group of servants to return to the estate overnight for inspection. Sadly, they all became prisoners of the French, including his nephew, Viscount Toldo.

Napoleon handed the viscount over to the Revolutionary Tribunal but released his entourage.

General Colli had to defend himself. He claimed that his cavalry had indeed achieved victory and retaken the estate, but once his cavalry returned, the French returned as well. So, he couldn't be blamed for it; it was just that the count was too impatient.

While General Colli could force such an explanation, it left him with no room for further delay.

At the same time, General Colli believed that his side had the upper hand and could fight. The enemy had no more than thirty to forty thousand troops, while he had a full fifty thousand. Furthermore, thanks to the Alps' barrier, the French lacked significant artillery, but his side had over a hundred cannons. The enemy was also lacking in cavalry, while his side's cavalry outnumbered theirs by several times. In this light, the advantages seemed significant, enough to warrant a battle.

On January 14, 1796, the main forces of the Kingdom of Sardinia and Napoleon's Fifth Army Corps took up their positions in Cuneo, preparing for a decisive battle.

General Colli knew that their greatest advantage was artillery, and he intended to use it to the fullest. Therefore, the Sardinian army lined up more than a hundred cannons in a single row in front of their position. Then, General Colli sent out his skirmishers.

This tactic was a routine strategy that General Colli had practiced in multiple exercises. He believed that his army had become quite adept at using this tactic. They would use artillery's grapeshot to suppress the enemy skirmishers, support their own skirmishers' advance, and then rely on the skirmishers' "musket" and the artillery's solid shot to break through the enemy's formation. After that, they'd deploy their cavalry to finish the fight.

During exercises, this strategy had proven to be quite effective, earning General Colli a fair amount of praise. He hoped that this meticulously researched tactic could also win him more glory on the real battlefield.

The Sardinian Kingdom's skirmishers began to advance, and through his telescope, General Colli saw the French skirmishers moving forward as well.

"Artillery, get ready! Use grapeshot to suppress the enemy skirmishers," General Colli ordered methodically.

However, the cannons hadn't fired yet, as the enemy was still out of range.

The Kingdom of Sardinia, albeit a member of the anti-French alliance, hadn't truly engaged the French forces in battle since the war began. Their contribution had mainly been naval support, following the British and Spanish in blockading the French. Their primary activities had involved trading with the French secretly after realizing their naval forces were no match for the nimble French privateers.

Due to this lack of direct confrontation with the French, the Sardinian military had little knowledge of its own combat capabilities. While they were not entirely ignorant of the changes in warfare, having adopted new "musket" rifles and understanding the advantages of dispersed infantry tactics, they lacked battlefield experience.

During military exercises in Sardinia, their infantry had shown satisfactory performance, despite occasional indiscipline and sluggishness. They didn't fare any worse than the Austrian infantry, and some even thought they looked better than the Austrians. General opinion was, "Sardinian infantry seems decent compared to the French."

The Sardinian army of fifty thousand gradually assembled under the command of General Colli. He initially intended to wait for the arrival of the Austrian allies before launching a full-scale attack on the French. However, the Austrians were slow to mobilize, mainly due to their belief that the Italian army was not as well-trained as the Austrian troops in Belgium and Poland. Colli, feeling pressure from the king and nobility, decided to stage a minor skirmish to relieve this pressure.

He dispatched a cavalry unit to assault a French-held position in the estate of Count Corni, which was followed by their return to camp with a report of successful land recapture, claiming they had killed five to six French and several Italian turncoats. To prove this, they brought back the heads of the Italian turncoats.

Colli had reservations about this small victory, but with the pressure mounting, he felt the need to show some success. Nevertheless, this victory felt insignificant since they had only killed a few French soldiers. Colli's dissatisfaction made him summon the cavalry captain to inquire about the battle's details, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the situation.

This cavalry unit of fewer than one hundred men had encountered over a thousand French troops and more than two thousand Italian rebels who had joined the French. The Sardinian cavalry immediately drew their sabers, shouting, "For God and the King," and launched a courageous frontal charge against these invaders and traitors. The French scattered in disarray, fleeing, while the Sardinian cavalry pursued them, killing numerous intruders and rebels. This victory was hailed as a brilliant success, akin to the Battle of Monsieur, where Baldwin IV, the "Leper King," defeated Saladin's twenty thousand troops with only a few hundred cavalry.

Colli reported this victory to the king and informed the nobles who had abandoned their estates and sought refuge in the city, raising spirits throughout Turin.

Almost simultaneously, Napoleon received a similar report:

"Our troops encountered a Sardinian cavalry unit at the Corni estate and engaged in a firefight. Following our volley, the enemy quickly retreated."

This report caught Napoleon's attention. It was the first time they had encountered well-trained Sardinian cavalry.

"It seems the Sardinians are losing patience," Napoleon mused. He decided to redeploy his forces in preparation for the upcoming major battle.

The next day, Napoleon received another report from the same estate. This time it included several Italians who had been captured. It turned out that Count Corni, upon hearing of his estate's recapture, sent his nephew with servants to investigate the situation. Unfortunately, they all fell into French hands.

Napoleon handed the nephew over to the Revolutionary Tribunal but released the servants.

Colli found himself in a difficult situation due to the sudden change in circumstances. He believed the best course of action was to proceed with the battle. The French faced a smaller force of thirty to forty thousand, with superior Sardinian artillery (over one hundred cannons) and significant cavalry numbers. Colli assumed they could engage and exploit their advantageous position, given that the French were lacking proper artillery because of the Alps' terrain.

Colli was optimistic about his army's chances and believed that, while the French might have noticed their tactics, they still had the upper hand. He intended to maximize the use of their superior artillery, a strategy that had been practiced during their military exercises. The plan was to use cannon fire to suppress the French infantry and then deploy their own infantry to advance, aided by artillery. The Sardinians would rely on their "musket" rifles and artillery to open breaches in the enemy lines before committing their cavalry to the fight.

Their strategy had been well-rehearsed during exercises, and Colli was confident in its effectiveness. His confidence grew as the Sardinian infantry started advancing towards the French positions.

"Prepare the artillery! Suppress the enemy infantry with grapeshot," ordered General Colli, sticking to his well-practiced plan. However, the cannons remained silent as the enemy troops were still outside of their range.

The Sardinian infantry continued advancing but slowed down. They couldn't push forward too quickly to avoid entering the effective range of the French infantry without their own artillery support. Their role was to keep the French infantry, which was proud of their "line infantry" tactics, at a safe distance while allowing their artillery to eliminate them.

Unexpectedly, the French infantry stopped about three hundred yards away from the Sardinians.

"The French seem to have noticed our setup," General Colli explained to Count Corni, who was watching the battle alongside him. "They know that advancing will expose them to our artillery fire. However, if they keep advancing, I believe the brave French soldiers can endure the bombardment. Our infantry is stopping them, preventing them from closing in, and allowing our artillery to eliminate them."

Corni had come to push Colli's forces to rescue his nephew, the legitimate heir to his brother's legacy. He frowned as he observed the halted French infantry and asked, "What if they stay put and don't advance?"

"Simple. If the mountain won't come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain. We can move some of the artillery forward like this..."

As General Colli explained, he noticed that the French infantry had started generating puffs of blue smoke at their positions.

"How can they open fire at such a range? What are they hoping to achieve?" Colli exclaimed, surprised.

Even more surprising was the result: with the French infantry's first volleys, a considerable number of Sardinian soldiers fell.

"General, what's happening?" Count Corni asked, stunned. He also realized that, at this distance, achieving such accuracy was impossible.

"Maybe... perhaps they're using rifled guns," General Colli suggested.

In that era, only rifled guns could engage targets at such long distances. However, rifled guns were challenging to load, taking four to five minutes for each shot. If the entire French infantry was armed with these weapons, it meant they'd be defenseless for a significant period. Colli believed that as long as the Sardinian infantry quickly advanced, they could engage the enemy at closer ranges and gain the upper hand.

Thinking along those lines, General Colli issued the order for his infantry to advance. However, before his orders could be carried out, the messenger hadn't even reached his horse yet when the French infantry fired another volley. This time, even more Sardinian soldiers fell.

"How is this possible?" General Colli was shocked and then turned angry. Evidently, the French couldn't be firing rifled guns at such rapid rates. The only explanation was that these cowardly men were playing dead to escape the battle.

The following volley from the French infantry further confirmed these suspicions, and General Colli watched with a growing mix of astonishment and anger. One of the French soldiers had stood motionless, gazing around, while the Sardinian soldiers fell around him. After several seconds, he dramatically dropped his rifle, clutched his chest, and slowly crouched before lying on the ground.

"These damn cowards! After this battle, I swear I'll hang them from the gallows to dry!" General Colli had erupted in anger, feeling the bitterness and darkness of the world around him.

What followed was not only infuriating but heartbreaking. After the French infantry's continued firing, more Sardinian soldiers fell one after another. In an instant, over one thousand carefully trained Sardinian infantrymen disappeared from the battlefield.

This change left General Colli shocked and disheartened. Meanwhile, Napoleon watched with a sly smile. He was aware that his infantry had indeed struck their targets, but they couldn't possibly have killed that many Sardinian infantrymen. It was clear that the Sardinian soldiers were feigning death and fleeing the battle.

With their infantry routed, the French infantry advanced swiftly.

"Don't be afraid. This is just a minor technical setback; don't be afraid," General Colli consoled himself, "at least we have the advantage of artillery. If they dare come any closer, we'll blast them to smithereens!"

The French infantry continued to move forward, drawing near to the Sardinian artillery positions.

"Don't be afraid, just don't be afraid," he reassured himself, as the enemy infantry approached the range of their cannons.

However, as the French infantry halted, they raised their rifles...

"This... how is this possible? How can they have such range and firing speed?" General Colli was dumbfounded, now that the enemy was well within their effective range.

In the first volley from the French infantry, the Sardinian artillery was utterly silenced. The Sardinian gunners, who had survived the first volleys, had lost the courage to stand their ground and fled. Some even dropped to the ground, pretending to be dead.

"Cavalry! Charge and drive the enemy infantry back!" General Colli shouted.

Sardinia had a significant cavalry advantage, and during the Austrians' accounts of their battles against the French, they had stressed the importance of employing light cavalry to counter the French infantrymen. Light cavalry was relatively inexpensive and could move quickly. After all, no armor could withstand musket bullets.

Sardinian cavalry, the last hope, was now called into action.

Chapter 148: Liberation of Italy (3)

Over a thousand Sardinian cavalymen rapidly prepared to charge the French skirmishers.

However, there were always signs when cavalry prepared to charge. If it were a dry, sunny day, they'd kick up dust, but with the recent rain, the ground remained moist. Nevertheless, coordinating such a large cavalry unit required clearing a path through the other troops, and this sign couldn't be concealed. Napoleon, ever watchful, noticed this signal before the Sardinian cavalry even advanced.

"Where's the shepherd? Where's the shepherd?" Napoleon shouted. "Take your cavalry and support the skirmishers!"

"The Shepherd" was Napoleon's nickname for Joseph. Joseph was proud of this nickname since not everyone had the chance to capture over three hundred Peppino Giorgio with a whip.

"Understood!" Joseph replied enthusiastically. He checked his four revolvers hanging from his belt and his trusty sword. He mounted his horse and headed toward the cavalry.

Napoleon stood there, one foot on a rock, raising his spyglass to scan the opposite side.

By this point, the Sardinian cavalry was ready. Since they weren't aware of the French skirmishers' rifle range, they had stayed behind their main formation. Their orders were to charge the French skirmishers, but no one had informed them that the French rifles had a range of three to four hundred yards. As the Sardinian cavalry advanced, they maintained a relatively tight formation, as was common practice. A close formation was better for maintaining discipline. Besides, they weren't too close to the enemy yet, so there was time to spread out.

As for moving at a slow pace, it was because their horses couldn't maintain their top speed continuously. To avoid entering the enemy's rifle range too quickly, they advanced at a walk and then gradually increased their speed, reaching their top speed when approaching the enemy's rifle range. This minimized the impact of the skirmishers' "Little Melons."

As Daniel, the skirmisher, finished loading his bullets, Captain Amy's voice rang out, "Prepare, aim at the enemy cavalry..."

Everyone raised their rifles. Captain Amy seemed to be showcasing his incredible lung capacity, dragging out his words deliberately. He had become a captain because Colonel Lanna appreciated his booming voice, even on noisy battlefields. A big voice was necessary but not enough to reach every skirmisher. At this point, his enormous lung capacity came into play. He stretched out his words to give other captains time to follow his lead and maintain consistency when giving the final command.

Amy finally finished his melodramatic "cavalry" command, took a deep breath, mentally counted, and then shouted, "Fire!"

The other captains gave their fire commands within a similar timeframe. Over two thousand skirmishers fired a synchronized volley at the still-distant Sardinian cavalry.

Despite the long distance, almost reaching the limit of Mini rifles, this volley was surprisingly effective. The Sardinian cavalry fell from their horses, like leaves falling in the autumn breeze.

"What the hell! How far can their guns reach?" General Colli started contemplating how to explain this defeat to the king and shift the blame to incompetent arms manufacturers.

This unexpected blow left the Italians disoriented. Many of them were not aware of the French skirmishers' superior rifle range. They charged forward, keeping their formation tight, which was the typical practice. Maintaining a tight formation helped preserve discipline, and they believed that they could spread out closer to the enemy. After the widespread use of the "Little Melons," there were no cavalry units in any nation that still used the old, tight formation charge.

As they approached the skirmishers, they faced another volley. However, since they were moving faster, the casualties were lower than in the previous volleys.

Count Vivaldi, the cavalry division's commander, struggled to maintain order. He yelled orders, trying to keep the formation intact and commanding a full-speed charge. But at this moment, the second synchronized volley resounded.

This second volley caused even more chaos among the Italians. They realized the skirmishers were too far to be so effective, yet they couldn't grasp the full extent of the French rifles' range. Some tried to rein in their horses and stop, while others spurred their horses to run faster. Some remained oblivious and continued with their previous formation.

People wanting to stop collided with those who wanted to charge ahead, leading to chaos. Those who wanted to charge took a few steps before abruptly pulling back, while others tried to turn their horses to the side. The entire cavalry force was in disarray.

The skirmisher captain, Jean Lanna, watched the cavalry chase with anticipation. When he saw that the Italians didn't break through their formation as he had hoped, he shouted in delight, "Brothers, I told you, don't be deceived by appearances! To win battles, you have to rely on our skirmishers! Now, forward, let's crush their infantry!"

Skirmishers equipped with Mini rifles against Italian infantry was a lopsided contest. With their greater range, they systematically picked off the Italian infantry like peeling layers of an onion. The Italians were taking a beating, and they couldn't effectively retaliate.

Furthermore, the cannons abandoned by the Italians were now under French control. When the Italians had abandoned the cannons, they had neglected to destroy them. The French quickly turned

them around, ready to fire. However, the Italians broke into complete disarray before the French could shoot. Soldiers ignored their officers' commands, scattered, and the officers soon joined the rout. They ran faster than the soldiers.

Over fifty thousand Italians scattered, and catching them proved difficult. The Italians were more familiar with the terrain and could disappear into the countryside, so Napoleon didn't capture many prisoners. On the other hand, General Colli, retreating to Turin, also failed to gather many stragglers. About half of the soldiers didn't die or get captured but simply went their separate ways.

After gaining over a hundred cannons, the French army advanced toward Turin. In Turin, the city experienced three shocking events in one night. The people of the city spread various rumors, saying that the French would behead all the nobles if they entered Turin. Others narrated tales of the French "robbing the rich to help the poor." Some were terrified of the French and shook with fear, while others hoped the French would enter the city so they could share in the spoils.

At the nobles' unanimous request, the king declared his withdrawal from the war and sent envoys to negotiate with the French. Facing the Sardinian envoys, Napoleon initially displayed indifference, followed by various threats. Finally, under the threat of the French army, Sardinia had to accept the following terms:

Sardinia would withdraw from the anti-French alliance and promise not to allow anyone to use its territory for actions against France. The Sardinian army had to hand over the forts of Coni, Ceva, and Tortona. They temporarily surrendered Alessandria before giving it to the French. The people in the French-controlled area would have complete autonomy and the right to establish a self-governing body to implement revolutionary policies. Sardinia couldn't interfere. The French army could move freely within Piedmont and had the right to cross the Po River at Valenza. All local police in Piedmont were to be disbanded. France would help administer the region. French agents would have the right to travel freely within Piedmont. The French army had the right to confiscate all Sardinian army property. Sardinia had to pay one hundred million gold francs in indemnities to the French army.

In the Italian War of 1796-97, the French won yet another victory without shedding much blood. They captured Turin and acquired another one hundred million gold francs. They also held several Sardinian generals and officers. As for the citizens of Turin, they rejoiced at the French arrival, as they no longer had to worry about the war's destruction.

The Sardinian King Charles Emmanuel IV led his family and fled Turin, moving south. The Holy Roman Empire declared war on France, Britain continued to wage war, but on the European continent, things became calmer.

Chapter 149: The Bane of Royalists (1)

While Napoleon was waging his battles in Italy, significant changes were unfolding in Paris. The first-ever parliamentary elections under the rule of the Thermidorians had concluded. Despite a historically low voter turnout, the royalists had managed to secure more than half the seats in Paris.

The Thermidorian government promptly declared the elections invalid, citing various irregularities that had compromised their fairness. They scheduled a new round of elections to take place in ten days.

During those ten days, the Thermidorians went all out in their efforts to persuade the common people, warning them of the consequences they would face if the royalists came to power. They hoped that these threats would motivate the citizens to vote for them.

However, when the second round of elections took place, the people of Paris remained apathetic. Voter turnout was even lower than before, yet the royalists once again emerged victorious, claiming the majority of seats in Paris. The situation in the provinces couldn't be tallied in time, but it was widely assumed that it didn't favor the Thermidorians either.

Acknowledging these results would only be a matter of time before the Thermidorians faced retribution. Therefore, they promptly declared the second election invalid as well.

But what constituted a valid election? The Thermidorians, who still controlled the National Convention, passed a law stipulating that, in the next parliament, they must hold a two-thirds majority.

This decision stirred up a commotion in Paris. The royalists, who had gathered strength, were now openly declaring, "If we can't ascend through legal means, we'll resort to revolution!" They began preparing for a semi-public uprising, and the Thermidorians found themselves with few options.

To eliminate the influence of the Jacobins, the Thermidorians reorganized the Parisian National Guard. Those who leaned towards the lower classes were purged from the National Guard and replaced with more "respectable" individuals. The overall number of the National Guard was significantly reduced, and the guard in the poorer districts was disbanded entirely. Additionally, the National Guard's funding was no longer a government responsibility, meaning only property owners could join.

While this measure helped eliminate the risk of a Jacobin-led uprising, it also meant that the main armed force in Paris, the National Guard, fell into the hands of those less loyal to the revolutionary cause. With most of the National Guard now leaning towards the royalists, the situation was dire for the Thermidorians. It seemed that if the royalists initiated a rebellion, the Thermidorians would be in grave danger.

Some Thermidorians had already started preparing for exile. Crucial positions, such as the command of the Paris garrison, were left unoccupied because no one was willing to take them.

In this environment, one night, a visitor quietly made their way to the residence of Paul Barras, a prominent Thermidorian figure.

Barras was already in bed, but due to the visitor's urgent insistence, he reluctantly got up to meet them.

"Mr. Fouch, why have you come to me at this hour?" Barras asked, furrowing his brows upon seeing the visitor. It wasn't that he disliked Fouch, but recently, Fouch had been a bearer of only bad news.

"Your Excellency," Fouch said with a smile, "I'm amazed you can sleep at such a time."

"What's the matter?"

"One of your servants took money from someone else and betrayed you," Fouch stated. "He has sold information about your daily activities and other arrangements to Viscount Thierry. You are, of course, well aware of who Viscount Thierry is."

Barras' expression darkened immediately. He had arranged various plans for exile, and did this mean...

"Who is it? What did he tell them?" Barras demanded to know.

Fouch slowly reached into his pocket, retrieved an envelope, and handed it to Barras.

Taking the envelope, Barras removed the letter inside. He put on his glasses and, by the candlelight, started reading the letter with hands that trembled ever so slightly.

"So, it was him... this ungrateful serpent... I must have been blind..."

"Barras, now is not the time to curse," Fouch said. "The revolt is imminent, and we don't have much time. Moreover, devising a new escape plan isn't a viable solution. Forgive my bluntness, but in the current situation, those around you aren't very reliable. Don't think that just because I've found one traitor, there's only one around you. The situation is clear, and for the sake of your life and wealth, some will be willing to switch sides."

At this point, Barras had regained his composure. He nodded and said, "Thank you, Joseph. Since you've come to me at this time, I assume you're not here to tell me my fate is sealed. What do you suggest?"

"To deal with a rebellion, there's only one effective method: crushing it with force," Fouch said.

"The current Paris garrison commander has no one willing to take the position except the royalists. If you take this position, you can legally mobilize the troops to suppress the rebellion."

"But most of the National Guard now leans towards them."

"You're mistaken. Most of the National Guard merely leans toward what they perceive as the stronger side. Moreover, near Paris, the National Guard is not the only military force."

"You mean the army... but there aren't many troops near Paris, and mobilizing them will only trigger the royalists prematurely."

"No additional mobilization is required; there is already a military force in Paris the Red Army," Fouch reminded.

"The Red Army? Are there enough of them?"

Barras, not well-versed in military matters, took a moment to recall that there was a force known as the "Red Army," officially named the "Educational Troops." However...

"But, aren't there only a few of them?"

During the Jacobin era, the Red Army had at one point expanded to over a thousand soldiers, but as the Thermidorians came to power, the military budget was significantly reduced, and the Red Army's numbers were cut back to around five hundred. This was an achievement of Carnot's.

"But the Red Army has five hundred seasoned warriors," Fouch said.

"But their side has thousands!"

"They are a disorganized mob," Fouch scoffed. "In recent years, warfare has evolved significantly, and old tactics are no longer effective. Faced with the most advanced Red Army in the world, those mobs, no matter how numerous, won't stand a chance. Furthermore, most of the National Guard currently leaning towards the royalists are doing so because they believe the royalists are already

victorious. A resounding blow will make most of those who leaned towards the royalists hesitate, and the neutrals will shift to our side."

Fouch's words gave Barras much encouragement, and he said, "If that's possible, it would be great. But can the Red Army be controlled by us?"

"You are the Paris garrison commander; if you make the request, as long as the Ministry of War doesn't object... Besides, truth be told, the army doesn't have a good impression of you. You'd better find someone they trust to serve as your liaison. They might trust them, but make no mistake, they won't follow orders if it doesn't suit them."

Barras nodded in agreement. "And you've already arranged for someone, haven't you?"

"I came here straight from their camp, and their representatives will arrive soon."

That night, Barras assumed the role of Paris garrison commander and got to work, preparing for the imminent showdown with the royalists.

Chapter 150: The Bane of Royalists (2)

The grand halls of the National Assembly stood in solemn silence, appearing devoid of any human presence from the outside.

"Hahaha" A royalist sympathizer burst into laughter. "I knew these rebels would flee early! Cowards! Hahaha"

He waved a massive white flag in his hand (well, the Bourbon dynasty's flag was white, after all) and shouted back to the others, "Brothers, follow me! Hoist this white flag atop the National Assembly building!"

The crowd rushed toward the National Assembly building, many of them firing haphazardly at the walls, their bullets sparking as they hit the stonework, shattering windows in a cacophonous symphony.

The crowd drew closer to the building, within a mere forty meters. Just then, explosions erupted from all directions.

Countless fireballs emerged from underground tunnels beneath the square in front of the National Assembly, along with a barrage of fireballs in mid-air.

"What is this?" Barras, hiding behind a window on the second floor of the building, peered outside with a trembling voice. Despite the winter chill, his brow was already damp with sweat.

Barras knew that if he had chosen to hide elsewhere at this moment, he would likely be safer. However, when it came to sharing the spoils later on, his share would be significantly smaller. So, after a sleepless night of contemplation, he decided to close his eyes and take the risk. After all, Fouch and Lucien were here. If they weren't certain, they wouldn't

But just a moment ago, when the mob swarmed toward them, Barras was genuinely frightened. He recalled the various imaginative and gruesome ways the nobility met their end during the September Massacres. His legs went weak, and he almost forgot that he had a small vial of poison prepared.

However, this series of massive explosions changed everything. After the explosions, the entire area surrounding the National Assembly, including several streets leading to it, had been swept by

shockwaves and shrapnel. Most of the rioters had become lifeless, sprawled every which way, while the few survivors moaned in agony. There was no one left standing in the vacant square and streets.

"These are electrically detonated landmines," Lucien explained. "They are our enterprise's latest creation."

In the original history, in 1799, Volta developed the first practical battery, known as the Voltaic pile. In that same year, E.C. Howard created an essential explosive, fulminate of mercury. But in this alternate timeline, Lavasie had inadvertently discovered fulminate of mercury while producing nitrocellulose for military purposes. Recently, to develop various explosives, especially timed explosives, Joseph had successfully replicated a battery. He began with more advanced starting points than Volta, immediately producing consumer-friendly carbon-zinc batteries and rechargeable zinc-copper batteries with dilute sulfuric acid as the electrolyte.

Combined with Lavasie's invention of electric blasting caps, and with the addition of a timer, a widely-appreciated and highly efficient household, travel, and assassination essential, the timed bomb, was created. If these devices were given to the European revolutionary zealots, especially Napoleon and Russian enthusiasts for clandestine killings, they would wreak havoc on the European nobility.

Of course, these technologies had applications far beyond assassinations, playing critical roles in various fields. In this context, they merely slightly modified the technology used for safe mining explosions (as fuses were unreliable and comparatively dangerous). They had transformed it into a massive weapon.

The so-called "electrically detonated landmine" consisted, conscientiously, of a packet of nitrocellulose wrapped in oil paper and cloth, covered with glass shards and iron nails. Then, they attached an electric blasting cap with wires. Those less scrupulous affixed a long nail to the ground and placed the explosive parcel on top. They inserted an electric blasting cap with wires, securing a small melon on top, rigged to pull a cord attached to a nail below. Upon detonation, the melon would launch into the air, its fuse also pulled. As long as the explosive quantity was correct, the melon would explode in the air, leaving the target with no escape.

In a single night, the Red Army buried over three hundred of these mines on the square and main roads leading to the National Assembly, turning the entire area into a massive deathtrap.

"Counterattack! Crush them while we have the chance!" the current commanding officer of the Red Army and Carnot's chosen successor, Colonel Berti, yelled.

Suddenly, hundreds of soldiers, donned in their red uniforms and armed with bayoneted rifles, surged from windows and doors, charging from the entrances, jumping out of windows, and sprinting toward the bewildered rioters who hadn't yet grasped the gravity of the situation.

The rioters had been utterly paralyzed by the recent explosions. Their scattered, directionless escape wasn't due to their courage but rather their shock. Now, seeing a squad of soldiers brandishing gleaming bayonets charging toward them, they snapped out of their stupor, turned tail, and fled while shouting, "We're defeated! Run, quick, run! Damn it, don't block my way!"

The mob descended into chaos, their panicked escape slowed by the fact that there was no place to run. The Red Army quickly closed in, first with a volley, followed by the melon bombs, and then... well, there was nothing left after that.

The rioters hadn't even considered fighting back; they were merely desperate to flee. The smarter ones abandoned their weapons, deserted the main streets, and scurried into alleys. Since the Red Army had no intention of pursuing them here, they converged where the mob was densest.

"Mr. Barras, you can now issue orders to the National Guard in the name of the city's defense commander. I'm confident they'll obediently follow your commands now," Lucien looked outside for a moment, then turned to Barras.

In truth, Barras didn't need to issue orders. After news of the failed royalist siege of the National Assembly, the National Guards from previously "neutral" districts had voluntarily joined in the counter-revolutionary efforts. Even those who had initially leaned toward the royalists and were a bit late to the scene promptly declared, "We're here to suppress the rebellion and defend the Republic!"

Indeed, the "redrawing" had already begun, and the most significant matter was rewarding those who had earned it. Failure to recognize the valiant would be unacceptable, and the Red Army wouldn't stand for it.

In the past, no matter how chaotic Paris became, the military had never truly intervened in the city's political struggles. But this time, the military made an abrupt entrance, demonstrating to all that, "Don't misunderstand our intentions. We're not targeting any of you. We're here to tell you that if you're planning to flip the table, you're all amateurs!"

The Red Army of five hundred soldiers effortlessly defeated over forty thousand rioters with minimal casualties. The only soldier who gained an honorable injury during the fight had sprained his ankle while pursuing the rioters. As for the number of rioters who perished, that was anyone's guess. It was said that wagons hauling the corpses had been busy all day.

Since the uprising had been quelled, the most crucial matter was rewarding the deserving. Barras, with newfound enthusiasm, addressed the government assembly to discuss the country's new leadership and policies.

First, those who had accomplished significant feats in this event needed to be acknowledged; otherwise, it wouldn't sit right. And... the Red Army wouldn't accept it.

In the past, Barras had been a broker between the factions, but now, he shifted his allegiance swiftly. He represented the interests of the military on the political stage.

"Over the past period, our arms procurement management has been a complete mess, delivering far too much junk to our military! I'm telling you, our soldiers are dissatisfied! They suspect there may be royalist plots in these terrible arms we've been feeding them. They're suspicious that someone among us is selling them out for money, betraying France. They believe this situation cannot continue!"

"So, we must pass a resolution to restore the military representative system and reintroduce quality control and accountability measures for arms procurement. Anyone attempting to deliver these shoddy products to our military is committing high treason and should face severe punishment!"

"Arms procurement for the military, with the exception of classified projects, should be conducted transparently. The military should establish open technical standards, and only products meeting these standards from qualified companies should be accepted into our military..."

"Barras has turned to the military side quite quickly," a member of the assembly commented quietly as Barras delivered his speech.

"Indeed, he has, Mr. Rn," another member whispered back. "But what concerns me more is the standards for military procurement. It's likely that certain scientists have already developed something and are dictating the standard to the military, tailored to their product."

"Ah, Barras, this fellow, is quite the visionary. He was the one who managed to sell the navy and the Institute of Technology to that family at a low price. And I've heard Barras just sold his two gunpowder factories, which are now said to be part of the 'Military-Industrial Consortium.' He's a shareholder now."

"That's quite enviable... he's getting rich like this, and he didn't even tell us beforehand..."