The Fox 281

Chapter 281: Negotiations (3)

Dussan Lucidur gathered his trusted subordinates to discuss the proposals brought by Victor on behalf of the First Consul, Napoleon Bonaparte, regarding the future of Saint-Domingue.

The room buzzed with discussion as they weighed the options. Meanwhile, the "Liberty Trade" ship remained anchored outside the harbor, exerting a considerable pressure. While the "Constitution" was docked in the Prince's Port, those captured or injured American crew members had been brought ashore. Through their interrogations, Dussan Lucidur and his team began to piece together what had transpired at sea.

While most of the black slaves were unaware of the events, Dussan Lucidur discovered the terror that "Liberty Trade" embodied, still lurking just outside Prince's Port. Aside from the potential military threat, the mere thought of the ship wreaking havoc on the harbor was unsettling.

In history, black rebel forces had employed a scorched-earth policy when facing French expeditions. For instance, when the French landed in Prince's Port, the black rebel forces set the entire port ablaze. However, unless it was absolutely necessary, it seemed unwise to engage in such actions without provocation. Even the uneducated among them realized that burning down their own city before the enemy arrived was foolish.

After heated debates, they came to a tentative conclusion: they would delay declaring independence and, as Victor suggested, investigate the "treason" of white slave owners. They would secure their trade routes and then consider their next steps while also dispatching individuals to assess the situation in Louisiana.

With this decision in hand, Victor proposed the construction of a dedicated French naval base in Saint-Domingue. He emphasized that one of the primary reasons for the First Consul's goodwill gestures was to ensure the safety of Louisiana. And to secure that safety, they needed a reliable naval base in Saint-Domingue.

More discussions ensued regarding the naval base. Dussan Lucidur didn't have a strong objection to the base itself but expressed concerns about the presence of French troops. At one point, he even requested that the French turn over the land defenses of the base to his own troops.

Victor promptly rejected this unreasonable demand, stating, "Governor, let's be frank. Your concern over the French garrison in the naval base is primarily rooted in your fear that these troops might pose a threat to you. In more straightforward terms, you don't entirely trust us and are worried that we might use these troops to jeopardize the security of Saint-Domingue. Likewise, we have our doubts about you. We fear that in certain circumstances, you might suddenly ally with our enemies, posing a severe threat to our naval base. Thus, the security of the base must remain under our control. Of course, to enhance our cooperation and mutual trust, we can discuss the size of the garrison and the types of weaponry."

After a week-long discussion, they finally reached a basic understanding: the French could construct a naval base at Cap Français, and the land defenses would be handled by the French. However, the number of French troops stationed there could not exceed three thousand. Additionally, the naval base's artillery, including cannons of 12 pounds or less, would not exceed twelve pieces.

Cap Français was where the French first set foot on the island of Saint-Domingue, and until 1790, it had served as the capital of the entire colony. However, it suffered extensive damage in subsequent earthquakes. In another timeline, after Haiti achieved independence, it was renamed Cape Haiti. From the perspective of port conditions, it was an excellent location. Dussan Lucidur did mention one issue, though:

"Some Americans have settled there, and we haven't had the chance to drive them out."

Of course, this was just an excuse, and Victor was well aware that these Americans were there with Dussan Lucidur's tacit approval, possibly even lured by him, as he needed their support for his independence cause.

"Well, for now, Saint-Domingue is still French territory. How can they stay there?" Victor replied.

"These are just some folks seeking shelter to repair their ships temporarily," Dussan Lucidur explained. "It's just that their progress has been a bit slow. However, according to our agreement, your naval base won't begin construction until the land issue is resolved. I can assure you that we can make these Americans leave before construction begins."

Victor looked at Dussan Lucidur and said, "Governor, I understand your reluctance to confront the Americans directly at this time. You're keeping them as a backup plan, and we understand that. However, in that case, these 'traitors' probably can't be held by you. They will be sent back to France for trial on charges of treason... just in case you decide to betray us; we also need a backup plan."

After completing the basic negotiations and signing a memorandum, Victor returned to the "Liberty Trade." According to the plan, the "Liberty Trade" would depart from Haiti and sail to New Orleans, the capital of Louisiana. After some repairs and preparations, it would return to Europe.

"Captain Leclerc," Victor said as soon as he stepped on board, "before heading to New Orleans, we need to make a stop at Cap Français."

"Is there an issue at Cap Français?" Captain Leclerc inquired.

"Not a significant one. It's just that there are some Americans reportedly repairing their ships there," Victor explained. "Given that they've gifted us such a significant patrol frigate, how can we not pay them a visit? Besides, Captain Leclerc, your ship can't stay here for an extended period. After the 'Liberty Trade' departs, our naval forces won't be sufficient to counter any American actions in this region. They're bound to make some moves. Why not take the opportunity while we're still here to show the American navy the stark difference between them and a real maritime power?"

Captain Leclerc naturally understood Victor's intent: to deal a heavy blow to the American navy while the "Liberty Trade" was in the vicinity. This was intended to change the unfavorable situation where French naval power was lacking in this region.

"Are you suggesting we engage the Americans directly? Does the First Consul know about this?" Captain Leclerc asked.

"The First Consul? How could he possibly be aware of these matters? However, when Minister Lucien Bonaparte spoke to me before our departure, he said something along these lines: 'Victor, you must understand that once we decide to take control of Louisiana, we will inevitably become

enemies of the Americans. Since they've struck first in this matter, I believe we have no need to hold back any longer.'"

The "Liberty Trader" and the recently repaired "Constitution" sailed away from Port-au-Prince together. They first circled around the Cape of France, but they didn't spot any American warships there. Evidently, they had received a warning from Dussan Lucidur and left in haste.

The "Liberty Trader" and "Constitution" made a turn at the Cape of France, then set their course westward.

Over a week ago, the Americans in Santo Domingo had learned about the capture of the "Constitution." However, transmitting this news from Santo Domingo back to the United States would take time. At that time, Florida was still in the hands of the Spanish, so getting the message to the United States was a time-consuming task. According to Victor and Laulau's calculations, the Americans probably just found out about it. During this era, the U.S. Navy was relatively weak in Europe, with only six major warships. Though these six frigates were considered "super-frigates," they couldn't stand up to European naval powers in Europe.

However, in the Americas, the strength of these countries' regional fleets was quite remarkable. The flagships of these fleets were often fifth-rate ships (frigates), with other vessels usually less than 1,000 tons in displacement, armed with just over twenty cannons and even smaller sixth-rate or unclassified sloops.

Due to the weakness of these national fleets in the region, piracy was rampant in the Caribbean. At one point, even the United States had to pay protection money to these pirates. Establishing a navy was, in fact, the United States' initial response to avoid paying protection money to these pirates.

In an alternate timeline, the U.S. Navy, which later collected protection money around the world, started with these six "super-frigates." Interestingly, by the time the United States was collecting protection money globally, they only had six decent surface vessels left.

Victor estimated that after learning this news, the Americans would not sit idly by. They would certainly try to concentrate their forces, intercept the "Constitution," and regain military advantage in the Caribbean before it reached New Orleans.

In reality, the American response was much faster than Victor and the others had anticipated. The news about the "Liberty Trader" and the "Constitution" was not sent by ship but relayed through carrier pigeons. Nevertheless, it took some time for the Americans to gather their warships.

Only when they received the news of the "Liberty Trader" and the "Constitution" leaving Santo Domingo did the Americans manage to assemble three warships: the "USS America" super-frigate, the "USS Congress" super-frigate, and the former French warship "Light Breeze," recently captured by the "Constitution." It was renamed the "Lafayette," but this little ship had only 16 cannons.

Considering that the "Constitution" was not yet fully repaired and the French had not been able to recruit many sailors in Santo Domingo, it was safe to assume that the "Constitution" had navigational capability but lacked combat power. Therefore, the American navy's formation should have given them the upper hand in their confrontation with the French.

"Engage the steamship with two ships, and the remaining one will catch up with the 'Constitution' to regain it," said the captain of the "USS America" and the commander of this operation, Colonel Matthews.

However, this was only a theoretical plan. In practice, they had a major problem to solve: how to quickly locate the two French warships.

Today, there was no wireless communication. Once naval vessels left the harbor, if they dispersed, it was almost impossible for them to contact each other. If they gathered together, the area they could control would be much smaller, and the possibility of the enemy bypassing them from another direction would increase.

Of course, they could easily deduce the destination of the French ships (besides New Orleans, where else could they go?). So they could simply wait outside the New Orleans harbor for an ambush.

But there was a French fleet stationed near New Orleans as well. Although this fleet wasn't strong, it only had an ordinary sixth-rate ship and three small sloops. However, if a battle broke out near New Orleans between the French steamship and the American navy, this fleet could join in, becoming a force strong enough to change the course of the battle.

From this perspective, the interception point had to be set at a distance from New Orleans, but not too far, to prevent the target from slipping away.

Just as the Americans were pondering this issue, an unexpected ally suddenly appeared—a British fleet came looking for them.

The British colonies of Jamaica and the Cayman Islands in the Caribbean weren't particularly prosperous, especially compared to Santo Domingo. However, Jamaica had a unique commodity to offer - enslaved people brought from Africa. So, it served as a relatively important trade point.

The British maintained a small fleet in the region, consisting of two frigates and three two-masted gunboats. They were rumored to have dealings with the Caribbean pirates.

The British fleet's commander, Colonel Wayne, sent an emissary directly to the Americans, offering their assistance in confronting the French. Of course, if they could sink or capture the French steamship, it would belong to the British.

Capturing the French steam frigate would be the most valuable prize. However, both the British and the Americans knew that the chances of capturing the ship in battle were slim. Moreover, the most enticing part of the ship was its advanced technology, but given the current scientific knowledge of the United States, they would likely not comprehend or utilize these innovations effectively.

This was akin to a scenario in the future where a market for unique bricks was set up by the Big Hare family. They allowed the White Elephant to inspect and touch the bricks freely, but the Big Hare was forbidden from looking and touching. Why? Because the White Elephant looking and touching wouldn't change a thing, but if the Big Hare did the same, it might end up pregnant.

Since the Americans had no use for the technology, Colonel Matthews readily agreed. Thus, a temporary alliance was formed.

Soon after, a joint fleet of four frigates and four gunboats appeared off the coast of New Orleans. The British and American fleets were not integrated as they had never fought together before, but the British ships flew the American flag from their masts.

According to their division of labor, the Americans were responsible for intercepting and attacking the incoming French steam frigate and reclaiming the "Constitution." The British, on the other hand, were tasked with diverting the French fleet in New Orleans Harbor.

"Could the British take the opportunity to bombard New Orleans while flying our flag?"" asked Lieutenant Thomas of the "USS America."

"The British might just do that," Colonel Matthews replied. "They want us to completely fall out with the French now, preferably declaring war. That way, whatever the outcome, it's beneficial for them."

"So what should we do?" Thomas inquired.

"We can't let the French establish a foothold on the American continent. Besides, do the French really have the resources to wage war with us while suppressing all of Europe? So, our differences aside, it shouldn't lead to an actual war. And, right now, we need their cooperation."

As they were conversing, a lookout's shout broke the silence. "Target spotted! At nine o'clock! Target spotted!"

Both men quickly raised their heads and looked in the nine o'clock direction, where a thick column of black smoke was rising slowly from below the horizon.

"French steam battleship!" they both immediately concluded.

Based on the information they had, French steam warships also had sails and primarily relied on them for movement, not their steam engines. However, the rising smoke indicated one thing - the French were prepared for battle.

Meanwhile, on board the "Liberty Trader," the atmosphere was far from tense. The steam engine was running, and they were not far from New Orleans. In fact, they were unaware that a fleet was waiting for them ahead.

Chapter 283: The Battle (1)

The thick plumes of smoke made the Americans and the British spot the "Liberty Trade" first. After all, as long as the steam engine was fired up, this feature was hard to conceal. Especially when warships still used coal as boiler fuel, it was even more noticeable.

In later years, as the steam engines on warships gradually transitioned to burning heavy oil, the smoke produced during full combustion was much less, and it dissipated easily in the air. A bit farther away, you could barely see anything. (Of course, when a turbine engine just started, no matter which country's ship it was, it would produce billowing black smoke for a while.)

But burning coal was a different story, especially when it was bituminous coal. It naturally produced thick smoke. As for why smokeless coal wasn't used, well, most of Europe's coal mines had relatively low coalification levels, and smokeless coal was quite rare. Furthermore, the boiler design of this era had many impractical aspects, and many times, it couldn't achieve complete fuel combustion. The result was that when the "Liberty Trade" set sail, it belched thick smoke into the air, making it as visible as an aircraft carrier from a later age. Even from the International Space Station, they might have been able to spot it through a telescope.

The dense smoke allowed the Americans and the British to achieve early detection, but in this era, early detection didn't necessarily bring an advantage in combat. At most, it allowed the Americans and the British to form up first.

After about half an hour, the "Liberty Trade" finally appeared in the sight of the American and British joint fleet. Of course, by this time, the "Liberty Trade" had also noticed the fleet that blocked its way, flying the American flag.

Just as the Americans had anticipated, the "Constitution" was at this time just a hollow shell with sailing capability but no combat power due to a lack of sailors. Although it still had dozens of cannons on board, there wasn't a single gunner to man them, so, for now, those cannons were essentially decorations.

Apart from lacking gunners, this ship also lacked soldiers. The entire ship only had enough sailors to handle the rigging, nothing more. So, if the enemy really approached, and a few soldiers boarded, the ship had only one path to take, immediate surrender.

Therefore, in this battle, the "Constitution" was not an asset but a burden.

So, upon spotting the intercepting fleet, the "Constitution" immediately changed course, attempting to exit the battlefield. Meanwhile, the "Liberty Trade" accelerated, charging toward the enemy fleet to cover the "Constitution's" escape.

In the authentic American fleet, there were two "super frigates" just like the "Constitution," and one double-masted gunboat.

All three of these ships had good speed, even though the smaller double-masted gunboat theoretically had a slightly slower speed than the "Constitution." However, when it came to executing interception missions, the Americans had taken measures to increase this ship's speed. For example, they removed most of the cannons from the ship to reduce its weight. Anyway, this ship's combat capabilities were not dependable, and now they could only hope that the intelligence they had received from the black sailors about the "Constitution" not having any gunners on board was accurate.

According to the pre-battle plan, the British were responsible for keeping the French fleet within New Orleans Harbor. Then the two American super frigates were to detain the French steamships while the smaller gunboat had a chance to catch up to the "Constitution" and reclaim it.

However, the Americans soon discovered that their plan might have some issues. The first problem was that the steamship was simply too fast.

The wind wasn't strong that day, so even the "United States" and the "Congress," the two super frigates, could only reach speeds of 8-9 knots. Although these two ships were rated with a maximum speed of 13 knots, reaching that top speed required favorable conditions. So, that maximum speed number was mainly for show, and most of the time, they couldn't achieve such speeds.

But the "Liberty Trade" was different; it could reach a maximum speed of 14 knots, and in most situations, it genuinely could reach that speed.

The "Liberty Trade" first headed straight toward the leading "United States." If both sides maintained their course, they could pass each other.

The "United States" began to veer to the left towards the "Liberty Trade," attempting to secure the "T position" (a tactical advantage). However, just as it seemed like it was about to successfully secure the "T position," the "Liberty Trade" suddenly veered right. The ship's design, along with its large rudder, should have made it less agile when turning. In fact, under sail, it was indeed the case. However, at this moment, it was under full steam power. Abundant power allowed it to disregard the speed loss caused by maneuvering, making its agility during the turn far superior to sailing warships.

The result of these two turns was that the two ships passed each other in parallel. They were only about 200 meters apart when they crossed paths. In naval combat, generally speaking, such a distance and a crossing angle meant that the window for firing was quite limited. Firing under these circumstances mostly meant not hitting anything. But during this crossing, the "Liberty Trade" managed to unleash a broadside volley.

Only one of the nine cannonballs hit its mark. However, this single projectile easily pierced through the "United States," a ship known for its formidable hull. This armor-piercing shell created a rain of blood in the "United States"' gun deck, as five or six gunners were struck by the shrapnel, meeting their maker instantly.

As there was no certainty of hitting the enemy under these conditions, the "United States" refrained from firing back.

The "Congress," which was originally following the "United States," naturally didn't get an opportunity to open fire either.

After passing the "United States" in a parallel course following the encounter with the "Liberty Trade," the "Liberty Trade" continued with a wide turn, leaving behind a trail on the sea like a pancake.

This kind of maneuver was almost unimaginable for sailboats with limited power and significant wind direction restrictions. So when Captain Will, commanding the "Congress," saw the Liberty Trade's big turn following the United States, he exclaimed in astonishment, "Good Lord, she can turn like that!"

After completing the turn, the "Liberty Trade" occupied the 7 o'clock position relative to the two American warships and then accelerated to close the gap.

Seeing the pancake-like turn made by the "Liberty Trade," both Colonel Matthews and Captain Will abandoned their hopes of vying for the "T position" through speed and maneuverability. Instead, they focused on not letting the "Liberty Trade" easily take their "T position."

The Americans then adjusted their formation, changing from a line ahead to a line abreast, almost parallel formation.

Line abreast was inconvenient, as it caused mutual interference in terms of maneuvering and observation among the friendly ships. However, it had an advantage: when an enemy ship attempted to cross the bow of the first friendly ship and take the "T position," it would inadvertently put itself in the T position of the second friendly ship.

But the "Liberty Trade" had no intention of playing a game of maneuvering with the Americans. Considering that the American artillery was incapable of posing a real threat to it, sailing parallel to them to sustain continuous fire was the most efficient combat approach.

So the "Liberty Trade" approached the trailing "Congress" from the starboard side and fired a broadside volley at a range of one hundred meters.

As the two ships were heading almost parallel, this volley was highly effective. Out of the nine projectiles fired, seven struck their targets. All seven shells penetrated the "Congress's" side plates, and in the face of the new rear-loading steel cannons, the once proud sturdy hull of the American super frigate proved as fragile as an eggshell.

The "Congress" immediately returned fire. Although its cannons were less accurate than those on the "Liberty Trade," they had more guns, so in terms of the number of projectiles hitting the target, they had the upper hand.

However, regardless of whether the shots were fired from the 24-pounders or the 18-pounders, every single one of them was deflected by the steel-plated "Liberty Trade." Not a single shot managed to penetrate the ship's hull.

"Quick, load the cannons! Let's get closer, and this time, we must give them a spectacle!" Colonel Will shouted. Since their large-caliber cannons couldn't penetrate the enemy's hull at a range of one hundred meters, they decided to close the distance further and try again.

"I can't believe their hull is still made of steel," he muttered. But closing in wasn't easy because when you moved, so did the other side. The "Congress" began to turn to the starboard side, and the "Liberty Trade" also began to turn to the right, actively maintaining distance from the "Congress." Simultaneously, it unleashed another broadside volley.

Leveraging the advantage of their rear-loading cannons in terms of firing rate, the "Liberty Trade" fired three consecutive broadsides, while the "Congress" could barely launch a single ineffective counterattack. Furthermore, their firepower density had visibly decreased in this counterattack. The previous volleys from the "Liberty Trade" had inflicted significant casualties among the "Congress's" gunners, leaving many of the cannons unmanned.

At this point, the "United States," realizing something was amiss, began to approach the "Liberty Trade" from the left. If the "Liberty Trade" didn't abandon its attack on the "Congress," it would find itself caught in a crossfire between the "United States" and the "Congress."

In the distance, British Commander Colonel Vein observed the battle through his spyglass. After watching several rounds of exchange between the two sides, he shifted the direction of his spyglass and issued the order, "Full sail, increase speed, let's head back."

Chapter 284: The Battle (2)

All three warships engaged in the fierce battle had taken note of the British actions. However, because the British were still flying the American flag as they retreated, those on the "Liberty Trade" still considered them to be Americans.

"When did Americans become so good at betraying their allies?" Lafayette had some previous dealings with Americans and in his impression, they might be a bit rough around the edges, but they were generally good-hearted and didn't seem like the type to excel at this sort of treachery.

Nonetheless, the British didn't care what the French thought and made a hasty retreat. Their departure immediately altered the entire course of the battle. The French fleet in the harbor began to

sortie, adding a patrol frigate and three small gunboats. Even just considering the number of ships, the French now held the upper hand.

Approaching the "American," which was heading towards the "Liberty Trade," naturally, noticed this change. Colonel Matthews, in charge of command, immediately realized that they had lost this battle. Given the current situation, even without considering the French reinforcements, their two ships would find it challenging to stand up against the French steamship. Adding the French reinforcements, escaping or victory seemed almost impossible.

However, even so, the "American" had to get closer and fire at the enemy ships to rescue the "Congress," which was being pummeled with no means to return fire.

The distance between the two sides continued to shrink, and the "American" was now less than two hundred meters from the "Liberty Trade."

The nine large guns on the left side of the "Liberty Trade" hadn't had a chance to fire until now. With the enemy ship closing in, they began firing at the "American."

At a distance of just over two hundred meters, rifled cannons were still quite effective. Out of nine shots, two hit their mark, and one of them was a precise hit on the "American's" foremast shroud.

This single cannonball had nearly devastating consequences. The foremast shroud was the part that held the triangular sails. It provided most of the windward sailing power and was essential for controlling a sailboat. After taking a hit, the robust foremast shroud snapped into two pieces with a resounding crack.

The broken foremast shroud fell directly into the sea, entangled with numerous ropes that held sails and connected to other masts. As it dropped into the sea during the ship's high-speed voyage, the ropes immediately pulled taut and caused the ship to list to the right.

"Quick, cut the ropes!" Matthews ordered urgently.

The Americans did a commendable job; several sailors rushed in with axes and quickly severed the ropes, preventing a more significant crisis, like the main mast being pulled down. However, after losing the foremast shroud, the "American's" speed had clearly decreased, and control became more challenging.

"Send a signal to the 'Congress' to retreat." Faced with the current situation, Matthews issued a new order with a heavy heart, "Now, let's fight with all our might, delay the enemy, and cover the 'Congress' in its retreat."

Matthews' command was conveyed using signal flags. However, the "Congress" had already taken a beating from the "Liberty Trade." And since it was significantly slower than the French, the question remained whether the "Congress" could escape.

Yet, the "Liberty Trade" also faced an issue – its limited supply of cannonballs.

The "Liberty Trade" used breech-loading rifled steel cannons, which fired a different type of ammunition compared to conventional cannonballs and were much more technologically advanced. While the round iron balls used in other cannons were widely available, the ammunition for breech-loading cannons was not produced anywhere in the Americas. They had to rely on the cannonballs they brought with them. Every shot was a loss. The "Liberty Trade" still needed to preserve enough ammunition for its return journey.

During this voyage, the navy's main task for the "Liberty Trade" was to test its long-range capabilities, and they hadn't anticipated this much combat. They believed that with high enough speed, the "Liberty Trade" wouldn't be in significant danger, so they even intentionally carried fewer ammunition to make room for more things they deemed more helpful for their long-range experiment.

So, at this point, while the Americans were undoubtedly in distress, the French were also getting anxious about their ammunition levels. The "Liberty Trade" was running dangerously low on ammunition.

On the other hand, without high-explosive shells, sinking a large ship like the "American" or the "Congress" with solid shot alone was nearly impossible. Even if they lowered their expectations to just disabling the enemy ships, it would require a significant amount of ammunition. The "Liberty Trade" didn't even have enough ammunition to achieve that second goal. Therefore, the "Liberty Trade" was faced with a choice: which American cruiser to pursue.

Captain Lafayette quickly made a decision. He abandoned the "Congress" and focused on attacking the "American," trying to keep it behind. Not only was the "American" already damaged, making it easier to handle, but capturing a ship named "America" sounded more enticing than capturing a ship named "Congress."

In a sense, it was somewhat foolish to name warships after countries or nationalities. These vessels, often lost or damaged in warfare, could have a significant impact on the morale of an entire nation.

For instance, during World War II, the Germans initially made the mistake of naming a vessel used for daring raids "Deutschland." However, as soon as the war started, they realized that this ship might not last very long, and headlines like "Deutschland Sunk" or "Royal Navy Sinks Deutschland" were inauspicious. To avoid this, they had to change the ship's name, eventually turning "Deutschland Sunk" into "Lutzow Sunk."

Even the Germans' ally, the footbath chicken (Japan), named a battleship after their nation, "Bathing Hut." However, when it came time to use it, they were concerned that losing a ship with such an ominous name would bring bad luck. So, for most of the time, it ended up staying in port.

As "Congress" attempted to put some distance between itself and the battle, the "Liberty Trade" didn't pursue but instead turned toward the "American." With confidence in their defense, the "Liberty Trade" even spared the T-position. Instead, it aligned its broadside with that of the "American." This meant that "American" had more opportunities to fire, but as a target, the projection area of the "American's" broadside was significantly larger than its bow. Given the shared direction of movement, the hit rate on this kind of target would be much higher. Considering the "Liberty Trade" was running low on ammunition, attacking from this angle would efficiently utilize each cannonball.

When the "Liberty Trade" shifted its primary target to the "American," the "American" quickly found itself in a predicament. Utilizing its superior maneuverability, the "Liberty Trade" maintained a distance of about fifty meters from the "American." At this distance, the cannons on the "Liberty Trade" could guarantee a high hit rate, while the large guns on the "American" couldn't penetrate the "Liberty Trade's" hanging steel armor.

Additionally, the remarkable firing rate of the cannons on the "Liberty Trade" for this era allowed them to fire at least three to four rounds in the time it took the "American" to fire one shot. After several volleys, the gun deck of the "American" was in chaos, with blood flowing like a river.

"They should be surrendering by now," Captain Lafayette said, looking at the "American" not far away. "They've given it their all, and surrendering at this point wouldn't damage their honor."

At this moment, a long triangular red flag was raised on the mast of the "American."

"They've raised the St. George's flag," Lafayette sighed. "Well, it's the 'American,' and no matter what, it has to fight to the end. God help us, we don't have a warship named 'France.'"

"St. George's flag?" Victor, who wasn't very familiar with naval matters, asked, "I remember St. George's flag is the white background with a red cross, right, England's flag?"

"That's England's national flag," Lafayette explained, "But in the navy, there's another St. George's flag representing the courage and desperation of a warship. Yes, that one over there. The flag means: Fight to the death, never surrender."

Chapter 285: The Leak

Despite paying their respects to the relentless "USS America," Captain Lefebvre had no intentions of going easy on her. However, at this moment, a French squadron had arrived from the port of New Orleans, with the frigate "D'Adaniou" leading the way.

The "D'Adaniou" was a standard frigate armed with 40 guns and would typically overpower the "USS America." But the current circumstances were quite different. On the port side of the "USS America," there were only two guns left due to the damage caused by the angled masts at her bow. This significantly reduced her speed as well. So, even when facing the "D'Adaniou," the "USS America" couldn't fight or escape effectively.

On the other side, the "Constitution" was working diligently to evade the pursuit of the American gunboat. If they could recruit enough sailors in the port of Santo Domingo, the "Constitution" would easily crush the "Rafaelite" gunboat like squashing an ant.

However, given the complex situation in Santo Domingo, Captain Lefebvre and Victor were concerned about the possibility of recruiting American sailors who might collaborate with their imprisoned compatriots. This could lead to unforeseen complications. Therefore, the "Constitution" hadn't recruited a single sailor in Santo Domingo. They had just transferred some of the sailors from the "Free Trade" to handle the ship.

The consequence of this decision was that the "Constitution" had numerous large guns but not a single gunner. Yet, even so, it wasn't easy for the "Rafaelite" to deal with the "Constitution." Firstly, the "Constitution" was incredibly fast. Despite removing some heavy guns to reduce weight and increase speed, the "Rafaelite" still struggled to catch up. Especially when the "Constitution" was determined to flee.

The chase between two sailboats with similar speeds could last for a long time, even extending from low latitudes to near the polar regions, much like a certain movie. The chase between the "Rafaelite" and the "Constitution" had a similar feeling. So, at this moment, the two ships were still sailing in circles at sea.

During this process, the "Rafaelite" constantly launched attacks using the ship's cannons. The "Rafaelite" had 12-pound cannons that couldn't penetrate the hull of the "Constitution, an American ship that they knew well. However, 12-pound cannons could still damage the "Constitution's" sails, reducing its speed.

Compared to the ship's hull, sails were much larger targets and easier to hit. But because of their size, they were challenging to damage significantly. Even chain shot could only tear a small hole in the massive sails, causing limited damage. To significantly reduce a sailboat's speed, multiple hits were required, which took time.

So, the "Constitution" had not slowed down significantly until now. Meanwhile, on the other side, the battle was approaching its conclusion. The "Congress" had turned, the "USS America" raised the Saint George flag, and the formidable steam warship was heading their way.

The captain of the "Rafaelite," Lieutenant Murich, immediately made a decision, "This operation has already failed. The biggest issue now is how to escape."

He gave the order, "Full speed retreat!"

However, escaping from the pursuit of the "Free Trade" wasn't easy. The "Free Trade" was much faster. Still, they couldn't give up on running. Captain Murich knew that the "Rafaelite" had one advantage - it had a shallower draft, allowing it to navigate in areas inaccessible to the American "Free Trade." There was such a region nearby, but whether they could reach it before the "Free Trade" caught up was uncertain.

In truth, the "Free Trade" had no intention of catching the "Rafaelite." Their ammunition was running low, and they were close to depleting their reserves. It wasn't worth consuming more resources for such a small ship. The "Free Trade" had chased to ensure the "Constitution" returned safely.

As the "Free Trade" escorted the "Constitution" back, the battle on the sea was reaching its final moments. By this time, all the guns on the "USS America" had been destroyed, and the "D'Adaniou" had started using chain shots to attack the "USS America's" sails. They wanted to further reduce its sailing capabilities and board the ship for capture.

In this situation, Captain Thomas ordered the abandonment of the ship. The damaged sailors clung to barrels and other floating objects, jumping into the sea, while Captain Thomas himself held a torch and entered the ship's cabin. Before long, the ship was engulfed in flames.

Initially, the French had considered trying to put out the fire, but the flames spread rapidly. Evidently, while the "D'Adaniou" was busy destroying the ship's sails, the sailors on board had scattered gunpowder and other incendiaries everywhere.

This ship was truly ablaze, and even in modern times, it might not be salvageable. At this point, there was nothing to do but watch it burn.

Watching the "USS America" being consumed by flames, Captain Lefebvre said to Victor, "Monsieur Treville, we couldn't capture the enemy ship this time... It's a pity, it was a fine vessel."

"A real shame, it was a fine ship indeed," Victor sighed in agreement. But he quickly added, "However, this ship was already outdated from the moment it was commissioned. Nowadays, the high seas belong to steam warships."

"At least, we're the only ones in the world with functional steam warships," Captain Lefebvre remarked.

Just as Captain Lefebvre spoke these words, on the Faslane Bay, west of Glasgow in Scotland, a new ship was undergoing secret tests. It was a steamship, but unlike most steamships, it had no visible paddlewheel.

The ship wasn't large, and it was evident that it had been modified from the steam frigates that had been outperformed by the French near the coast of Ireland. It lacked paddlewheels, masts, and sails, but it was an experimental vessel. There was a sail frigate accompanying it, so even if there was a machinery malfunction, they had a backup.

Now, in the evening breeze, the ship began to accelerate, leaving its escort, the "Wonder," a frigate, trailing behind, unable to match its speed.

"General, the experimental ship is now going at least 15 knots. It appears that this is the secret of the French steamship's remarkable speed," Second Officer Jack Aubrey reported to the man standing beside him in a full general's uniform, holding a telescope, observing the experimental vessel closely.

"You're right, Jack. The screw propeller is indeed an excellent design, eliminating the greatest weakness of steamships. With this technology, steamships can truly become warships," the general commented, but he let out a sigh.

"General, why the sigh? We've succeeded, haven't we?" Jack asked.

"Yes, we've succeeded. But Jack, the era of sails has already passed," the general extended his hand, patting the shoulder of the young Jack Aubrey, "The things we've been studying our whole lives might have dissipated into the black smoke rising from this ship. Fortunately, you're still young, and you have time to learn new things."

"General, you're not old either, you're not even fifty yet. And if you learned all the techniques for sail ships and fleet warfare in the past, you can surely figure out the best tactics for these new warships. Don't you think this task is challenging?" Jack said.

"Ah, Jack, you're right. I shouldn't have entertained thoughts of slacking off. Well, you must study hard, and when my 'Victory' is eventually converted into a steam warship, and if you continue to excel, I'll invite you on board..."

At this moment, the steamship in front made a turn and began to return. This area was relatively remote, with very few ships passing through. However, now that it was getting dark, it was time to head back.

Yet, neither Jack nor the "General" noticed that someone on the coastal side was hiding behind a large rock, using a telescope to watch from afar.

A few days later, within the Bonaparte family, the three brothers found themselves in another argument.

"All the current signs indicate that, Joseph, your security measures were lacking, and there's a leak on your end. They stole the secret of the screw propeller," Lucien stated.

"Lucien, it's not necessarily my fault. The screw propeller design is so simple that anyone who looks at it can uncover the secret. I think it's more likely that the secret leaked during the production process. But you're focusing on my department, and now you want to investigate my people, which could seriously disrupt our work," Joseph countered.

"Joseph, of course, we'll investigate the production process, but you don't think your department could be the source of the problem? A little investigation won't hurt," Lucien said.

"Yes, Joseph, we can certainly investigate. It won't harm anyone as long as we don't wrongly accuse people," Napoleon added.

"Fine, we can investigate, but it can't disrupt the normal operations of the research department, and the investigators can't let the existence of the investigation be known," Joseph made a slight concession. "Also, I'll reiterate, the screw propeller is extremely simple, so simple that anyone can grasp it with a single glance. We mustn't make the same mistake the British did with torpedoes."

Chapter 286: Science Knows No Borders

"Some things are just bound to spread," Joseph said with a thoughtful tone. "Take, for example, the recent incident with underwater mines. We use electrical fuses for our mines, but what do the British use?"

"I haven't acquired that intelligence yet," Lucien replied. He added, "I don't think it's that important. Knowing that won't help us much. Joseph, do we really need this information?"

"We don't," Joseph replied, a sly smile on his face. "I'm not inquiring about the specifics; I'm testing your knowledge of physics."

"What?" Lucien was taken aback and hurriedly said, "Joseph, I'm extremely busy with work right now, and such matters should be left to the experts."

"Nonsense! Are you implying that you're busier than me? I could—" Napoleon interjected.

"Napoleon, don't pretend. Do you think I don't know who the real primary author of that recent paper was? You shamelessly put your name ahead of Laplace's," Lucien retorted.

"Me? You couldn't even understand that paper! While Laplace contributed somewhat, the majority of it was my work," Napoleon began defending his position as the first author.

"That's because I'm naturally gifted, and I'm only a tad behind Joseph, Laplace, and Lagrange in mathematics," Napoleon proudly declared. "If it were you, Laplace would have died and not because of helping you solve problems but from frustration while trying to make you understand the solution! Let's not even talk about it, Lucien. Joseph's question was straightforward, and yet you managed to complicate it. It's embarrassing!"

"So, what's the fuse used in British mines?" Lucien asked.

"The same electrical fuse as ours," Napoleon answered without hesitation. "You can deduce that from the shape of the contact points."

"That was Joseph's deduction."

"Alright, you two, stop bickering over such trivial matters," Joseph scolded.

The two brothers fell into silence.

"Some technologies are impossible to keep secret for long, even without espionage. Take the example of the screw propeller. Developing such technology is as simple as scratching your head," Joseph continued. "But Lucien, you're the exception. So, Napoleon, if you want to pat someone on the back for their work, pat yourself. Don't reach out to pat Lucien."

Napoleon withdrew his outstretched hand.

"Joseph is right; patting you is a waste of time."

"Besides a few truly core technologies, the kind so complex that you can't even understand them, excessive secrecy doesn't seem to serve much purpose anymore," Joseph went on. "Apart from technology, I want to talk to you about the issue of scientific secrecy.

You know, we've hidden numerous scientific discoveries, particularly in electricity, such as knowledge about generators and electric motors. It has served a purpose, but it's brought its own set of problems."

"What problems?" Napoleon inquired.

"The issue of training engineers," Joseph explained. "Because the most fundamental scientific knowledge is kept highly confidential during their education, even top graduates from the University of Paris need substantial training when they come here, whether in laboratories or factories. It's a costly process. Even worse, these individuals, having learned these secrets, essentially have a guaranteed job. No, it's not just a job; it's a golden ticket. Every one of them knows how valuable this knowledge is. They know they can sell it and make enough money to feed their grandchildren truffles and caviar every day. So, at this point, not only do we pay them salaries, but we also have to pay them hush money to keep their secrets. We pass on knowledge to them and end up paying them for it. Can you imagine how absurd that is?

What's more, even with these measures, their loyalty is still not guaranteed. We need to control their families, employ tracking and monitoring methods – all of which are costly. So, while secrecy has given us a lead for some time, the cost of maintaining it is increasing, and it's becoming harder to sustain."

"Besides, we shouldn't underestimate the research capabilities of other countries," Joseph continued. "Some of our products will inevitably be sold abroad. Just look at the British and their electric detonators. Where did they get that technology? Most likely, they obtained samples during their conflicts with the Irish and then reverse-engineered it."

"Not long ago, the British even attempted to steal information about electric motors. Though the operation was thwarted by the Ministry of Public Security—Fouché did an exceptional job, I must say—when it comes to these matters, I don't think there's anyone in all of Europe stronger than him. Lucien, you should learn a thing or two from him," Joseph pointed out.

Lucien nodded immediately. "Fouché is undoubtedly strong in this area, but it's due to a combination of talent and hard work. I find it difficult to immerse myself completely in a single event. But he is genuinely dedicated to learning."

"Fouché can succeed once, but not indefinitely. Electric motors are everywhere, and obtaining one and reverse-engineering it is only a matter of time," Joseph continued. "With a sample, even the British, given their scientific prowess, could easily deduce something from it. So, the cost of

maintaining scientific secrecy is increasing. I believe there are certain scientific areas where we should no longer keep things under wraps."

Napoleon and Lucien remained silent. After a moment, Napoleon spoke up, "That's a valid point. But will openly sharing this information boost their research significantly? Can we still maintain our lead?"

"It will undoubtedly accelerate scientific progress in Europe, including the likes of Britain. However, you should remember that this includes our own country. First, we can save a considerable amount of unnecessary costs, and these savings can be redirected toward scientific research.

Furthermore, even if we disclose these scientific findings, only our universities, for a certain period, will be equipped to teach and practically apply this knowledge. Any advancement in knowledge is tied to practice; theory must go hand in hand with real-world application to remain relevant. Other countries, given their less favorable conditions, won't be able to compete with us. So, even if we don't disclose these findings, sooner or later, they will catch up," Joseph explained.

"That makes sense," Napoleon conceded. "However, we shouldn't release everything all at once. We should proceed step by step, with plans and justifications in place. We can't simply decide on a whim; we need a well-thought-out approach."

With that, he glanced at Joseph and continued, "Joseph, your time is precious, and you have many responsibilities. You can't afford to waste your time on administrative matters like this. Lucien, why don't you take care of this, and Joseph can review it when he gets a chance?"

"Is my time really that free?" Lucien was slightly indignant.

"Among the few of us, you're relatively less busy," Napoleon said. "Do you think I don't know that for the past two weeks, you've been partying at the Moulin Rouge every night till dawn?"

"Nonsense! Is that what Fouché said? He's just envious; it's slander! The Moulin Rouge is a renowned entertainment establishment in Paris, and the entertainment industry is an essential part of the Ministry of Truth's jurisdiction. Under my leadership, the entertainment industry in France has flourished. In these past few months, a significant number of wealthy individuals from other countries have been attracted to Paris to spend their money. And, as you know, the entertainment industry is heavily taxed. Just one business, the Moulin Rouge, pays over a hundred thousand francs in taxes to your government every month. The entire Montmartre entertainment district contributes over a million in tax revenue each month.

Moreover, the Montmartre entertainment district sets the tone for the entire European fashion industry. Any luxury brand that doesn't make an appearance in Montmartre won't make it big. How much revenue has this brought to our various industries? Napoleon, I'm not bragging, but the current prosperity of France, the smiles on the faces of the people of Paris, and the people of France —it's all thanks to my hard work.

Why have I done so well? Because I know that without thorough on-site investigations, I can't come up with effective measures. Without hands-on experience, there's no correct understanding, and without the right understanding, there's no proper decision-making. You think I'm out for pleasure? I'm working, working tirelessly! Just now, I mentioned how hard-working Minister Fouché is. But

among all the ministers in France, who works the hardest? That would be me! Don't say I'm not working hard, and don't slander me like this; it truly saddens me..."

Napoleon widened his eyes, looking at Lucien, then said after a pause, "Lucien, I never expected you to work so hard."

"Well, among us, you're all..."

"How about this, Lucien? I'll establish a department to handle entertainment affairs, allowing you to take a break," Napoleon suggested. "But they should take over your work gradually, which will require time and... in any case, it's hard work. Though it may be challenging, I'm willing to endure it for the sake of France and our family."

Chapter 287: International Students

In the end, the responsibility for formulating this plan was handed over to Joseph, primarily overseen by Montesquiou. It wasn't because Lucien was the busiest among the brothers, needing to work around the clock for twenty-four hours. It was more due to Joseph's lack of trust in Lucien's scientific expertise.

After approximately a month of research and deliberation, various scientific papers related to electricity began to appear in the pages of the French Academy of Sciences' journal, "Nature."

With the publication of these papers, two significant developments swiftly unfolded.

The first was the application and approval of patents. While certain technologies had remained confidential when the relevant knowledge was shrouded in secrecy, now that the scientific knowledge had been disclosed, patent applications were submitted for various technologies, such as the screw propeller.

Although the British had already been testing screw propellers, and they appeared quite straightforward, there was a substantial difference between screw propellers and screw propellers. Their structural forms and operational speeds were different, resulting in a significant efficiency gap. Furthermore, screw propellers demanded a high level of manufacturing precision. As a result, the British screw propellers, despite being tested, had no competitive edge in commercial use, at least for the time being. Without competitiveness, they couldn't secure orders, and without orders, they had no funds to invest in research. This widened the performance gap. At most, their navy could employ them.

Moreover, considering that France, the Netherlands, the Rhine Confederation, and Prussia had all signed agreements recognizing each other's patent rights in continental Europe, if a patent for the screw propeller was successfully obtained in France, it meant that every ship using screw propellers built by the British, aiming to enter the harbors of these countries, had to pay a patent fee to the French. The ultimate result would be that the money invested by the British in screw propellers wouldn't be recovered, and they would have to rely on their national budget.

The second rapidly advancing matter was that France started introducing a range of products, including electric motors, into the market. New power stations began construction in various regions of Europe.

These power stations were, of course, part of the military-industrial complex's business. They not only increased the profits of the military-industrial complex but also displaced most other power

sources in those regions. Consequently, virtually all industries in these regions would depend on these power plants in the future, and the military-industrial complex controlling these power plants would wield tremendous economic influence over these areas.

Furthermore, a few months ago, a new open-pit copper mine in the Sudeten region of Prussia began producing a large quantity of copper. This was the best copper mine in all of Europe, with shallow deposits and high-grade ore. Its large-scale extraction, combined with the newly constructed copper smelter nearby, increased Europe's copper production by nearly a quarter. Moreover, there was room for further expansion.

The development of this copper mine caused the previously skyrocketing copper prices in Europe to begin declining. This made electric power even more competitive.

On the other hand, the development of this copper mine gave Prussia a big sigh of relief. Originally, Prussia was financially suffocated due to war reparations. Now, the operation of this major copper mine rapidly brought in substantial revenue for Prussia. However, it also brought Prussia another problem - its economy was becoming increasingly reliant on mining.

Another effect of France's actions was the substantial increase in foreign students studying in France. Although the French government didn't offer many spots for studying the electrical technologies they most desired to learn, the series of public scientific research achievements in electricity further solidified the impression that "France's scientific level was the best in Europe." Consequently, there was a noticeable increase in students coming to learn other technical disciplines.

Joseph welcomed this situation. Some had previously raised objections, believing that too many students learning these scientific technologies would diminish France's relative advantage in scientific knowledge compared to other countries. However, this pessimistic view was quickly refuted by Joseph.

Joseph pointed out, "For every foreign student who comes to study in France, their tuition fees are enough to provide free education to over twenty children or allow two to three young French individuals to receive higher education through scholarships. Thus, in terms of overall benefit, it's undoubtedly favorable for France. Moreover, many outstanding foreign students who excel in their studies will stay in France. In this way, they become part of France's strength."

"The more students come from underdeveloped areas, the more this holds true. Because much of what they learn in their own countries won't find much application there. Unless they're extremely patriotic and willing to endure all sorts of hardships as heroes, the majority of them will stay in France."

"As for those studying law, arts, literature, and the like, it's even more so. When they return to their countries, they'll discover that their countries are at odds with France in various ways. Moreover, through our education, we can make them ideologically align with us and our European Union ideology," Joseph stated.

Joseph said this because in a previous lifetime, in another dimension, he had witnessed firsthand how, through similar means, a certain country had effectively turned the entire Third World into a talent pool, recruiting their most exceptional students. This strategy had enabled them to build a significant technological advantage. During those years, nearly half of the best students from the two top schools in a certain Eastern nation ended up working in various universities and research

institutes overseen by the same country. Additionally, students from "the largest democracy" flooded Silicon Valley.

Furthermore, on another front, Joseph continued with these efforts, molding his standards and his moral compass into a global norm and establishing the so-called "universal values." This garnered him a large following of passionate supporters.

Without the high-quality young talents harvested from these "fishponds," Joseph would find it very challenging to maintain his lead in science and technology, especially after he had veered onto the treacherous path of finance and industrialization.

Andrei Obolensky was one such student, hailing from Russia. In France, there were quite a few Russian students, and French universities actually welcomed them. However, this wasn't because the French and Russians were particularly friendly; it was because Russian students tended to be quite wealthy. The majority of Russian students came from aristocratic backgrounds.

This also meant that Russian students possessed another characteristic: most of them studied various forms of art. Art was more suitable for aristocratic students compared to the complexities of science and the intricacies of law. Typically, art students had plenty of free time, and on weekends, places like the Moulin Rouge were often filled with Russian-accented French speakers.

However, Andrei was different from the rest. He had specifically come to study electricity.

In January, in St. Petersburg, Andrei was perusing the latest issue of "Nature" under the guidance of his teacher, Mr. Shelpukhovsky. At that time, he had been wholeheartedly committed to going to England to study steam engine technology. However, electricity, this novel fascination, captured his imagination, and he resolved to come to France to study it.

Andrei hailed from a noble family, descendants of the Romanovs, and some even considered the entire city of St. Petersburg to be distant relatives. However, these connections were of little use when it came to studying electricity in France. This field didn't have many full-time professors, as most of the instructors were engineers working for the military-industrial complex. Moreover, a significant number of slots for foreign students were already occupied by the French. As a result, it was exceptionally challenging for foreigners to qualify for studying this subject, as they had to outperform more than ninety percent of their competitors in the entrance exams.

However, Andrei prevailed with his true capabilities, earning a spot as a student in the "Electrical Engineering" program at the University of Paris.

His instructor was reputedly a student of a great scientific figure, always in a hurry. After each class, he hurriedly collected his lecture notes and departed, leaving the students with a pile of assignments that often kept them busy until midnight. According to senior students, this was his way of giving back to society, as it was said that the great figure, too, enjoyed assigning challenging assignments to students.

Nevertheless, this enriching daily life made Andrei's academic progress especially pronounced. Of course, it also made him the subject of ridicule among many of his fellow students, particularly those who came from Russia.

"Andrei, you've been in Paris for quite a while now, and tomorrow is Sunday. Won't you be swamped with assignments again, unable to even step out the door?" Andrei's friend Anatole teased him.

"This time, there aren't any assignments. In fact, the teacher didn't assign any work this time. It's because Assistant Professor Denard fell ill. You know, our assignments are usually reviewed by Assistant Professor Denard. But since there's no one to review them, the teacher didn't want our assignments to pile up, so he decided not to assign any this time."

"Ah, he's quite foolish. He could have just provided you all with a standard answer and called it a day," Anatole said. "By the way, does that mean you'll have some free time tomorrow? I think you've been in Paris for quite a while, and you probably haven't even been to the Moulin Rouge, have you?"

Chapter 288: The National Assembly

To be honest, Andrei had never been to the Moulin Rouge, even though he had heard of it many times. The weight of his studies bore down on him, and even though it was a Sunday, with no homework assigned by his professors, he didn't dare relax. Midterm exams were looming on the horizon.

Exams in electrical engineering were a whole different beast compared to the arts. In the arts, there was a curious tradition where, during the last class before the exam, professors would say, "Ah, my dear students, following the school's requirements, we have to conduct a dreadful exam. Devil take it... Ah, according to the school, we have to use a percentage scale for the entire paper, and it should have at least two questions. So, tell me, what two questions shall we include?"

The students would then start shouting out their preferences for exam topics, and a classmate would record the suggestions on the blackboard. Afterward, a democratic vote decided the final questions, and the exam would be prepared accordingly.

After the exam, the papers were collected, rolled into a tube, sealed with another piece of paper that read "Maximum Score: 100," and sent to the administration. Then, the exam was done.

But "Electrical Engineering" was a whole different story. Several days before the exam, the professors warned their students, "For this exam, we have two major questions, each worth fifty points. If you fail one, you fail the whole exam. Consider changing your major if you can't handle it; we don't need fools here!"

There was no room for democratic voting or open discussion here. The professors in the engineering department were tough. Some of them managed to fail half or more of their students every year. Electrical engineering was a new subject, so its fate was uncertain, but rumors circulated about popular majors from the past, where many students were expelled each year. Andrei figured electrical engineering would be no exception. If you weren't careful during the exam and scored a zero (which was very easy with just two questions - get one wrong, and you got no points; get both right, and they could still take off for the process), you were in serious trouble.

"Anatole, we're about to have our exam... You know, it's quite different from your major," Andrei said.

"Come on, forget about the exam! Andrei, tell me, in the last exam, what number were you when you entered the classroom?"

At some point, Paris University developed two peculiar habits in some of its science and engineering departments. First, students were assigned fixed seat numbers, and regardless of the

classroom, they had to sit in their designated seats. This was supposedly to monitor who attended class, avoiding potential cheating.

The other habit was even more interesting - every time there was an exam, the seating arrangement was changed. Here's how it worked: students gathered outside the classroom, and the teaching assistant called out names in order of their exam scores, starting with the highest. The student with the highest score could choose a seat first and update their assigned number. Then, the second-highest scorer went next, and so on. For students with lower scores, this process was almost like a public punishment. Anyone who skipped the seating process was sure to be expelled and lose their tuition.

"Fifth," Andrei replied.

"You see, you're still far from danger!" Anatole retorted. "Take a look, it won't take long. You can't bury yourself in the library, classrooms, and labs all the time. Once in a while, it's good to see new things. Otherwise, one day, when you return to St. Petersburg, and your sister asks, 'Brother, what is Paris like?' are you going to tell her, 'Paris? It has many classrooms, lots of books, too few seats in the library, and various labs'?"

"However I describe Paris to my sister, I won't be telling her about places like the Moulin Rouge," Andrei replied.

Despite his words, Andrei was genuinely curious about the Moulin Rouge. As a young man, losing interest in such places would indicate a severe problem. Therefore, he decided to accompany Anatole and explore the Moulin Rouge, even if only for a brief visit. After all, he planned to return the next afternoon and hit the library.

The best time to visit the Moulin Rouge was in the evening, and since they had decided to go, Andrei and Anatole promptly hopped onto a carriage heading to Montmartre, even though it was getting dark by the time they arrived. Montmartre was now thriving, and the large number of carriages heading there was a testament to that. At this time, the Moulin Rouge was at its liveliest, but the road leading there was also the most congested. The streets were packed with vehicles, and traffic jams were a common sight, leading many to grumble about the narrowness of the road.

After several field trips and observations by Minister Lucien, a clear pattern emerged regarding the traffic leading to Montmartre. During the afternoons, there was a massive influx of vehicles from all directions, but very few headed away from Montmartre. Conversely, in the mornings and early afternoons, most vehicles were leaving Montmartre for other areas.

This prompted Minister Lucien to introduce an innovative solution - "Limited One-Way Streets." Most of the roads leading to Montmartre were now "Limited One-Way Streets." This meant that during the afternoon and evening, all vehicles were allowed to move only toward Montmartre. In the morning and early afternoon, they could only go in the opposite direction.

Despite the restrictions, Andrei and Anatole found themselves arriving at Montmartre nearly in the dark.

The two friends disembarked at Montmartre station, and from there, they could already see the iconic red windmill of the Moulin Rouge. The evening sun was casting its last rosy glow on the red windmill, making it even more captivating.

The streets were growing dark, and municipal workers were busy lighting the gas lamps along the roads. Although it was nighttime, the streets were coming alive with people. Each shop had various dazzling lights, creating a mesmerizing spectacle.

Anatole wore a broad smile as he pulled Andrei along and said, "My friend, have you ever seen a night like this? Such scenes, you'll never find them in St. Petersburg."

Andrei chuckled, "Yes, St. Petersburg is not this bustling, and at this time, our streets would be freezing."

"Tonight, we have several friends meeting here," Anatole added.

As they weaved through the bustling crowd, Andrei noticed the numerous police officers on horseback patrolling the area.

"Why are there so many police officers here?" Andrei furrowed his brow.

"Well, who do you think mostly comes here to have fun every night? It's the wealthy people! And when is it the liveliest? At night, of course. If there aren't enough police officers here, the place would be crawling with pickpockets," Anatole explained.

Upon arriving at the entrance of the Moulin Rouge, a luxurious carriage drove past them and entered the venue's parking lot.

To ensure smooth traffic, regular public carriages could only stop at the station, and only the wealthy who were willing to pay a special fee could have their carriages driven directly to the Moulin Rouge's entrance. There was a designated parking lot for private carriages, which was expensive and required reservations. Ordinary people couldn't secure a parking space, and rumors even claimed that the number one parking space at the Moulin Rouge belonged to a high-profile figure.

However, these matters had little to do with Andrei and his fellow students. After all, most Russian students abroad, particularly those in their circles, would eventually return to Russia, as they came from noble backgrounds.

Anatole was a regular at the Moulin Rouge, and he smoothly led Andrei inside. The performance hadn't started yet, but the Moulin Rouge's hall was already packed with people.

Anatole took Andrei to a private booth where several young men and women were already sitting on a large sofa.

Since the show had not yet begun, Anatole took the opportunity to introduce Andrei to his friends. They were lively, and each of them was more extroverted than Andrei. Most were young people, and with the combination of wine and the presence of beautiful companions to set the mood, they quickly became friends.

After a few sips of wine, the conversation transitioned from praising the greatness of Paris to complaining about Russia's backwardness and dullness. It then shifted to discussing how they could change Russia to become as great as France.

"It's a tough task," Andrei shook his head. "What you see here is just the surface grandeur. But underneath lies a formidable power—the power of industry. France's policies are driving industrialization and eliminating all obstacles, but in Russia, those obstacles are numerous."

"Andrei, you're right!" Marklov, a tall fellow, agreed. "Well, we're all Russian children, and we have a responsibility to change everything. We have a group called the 'National Assembly.' Would you be willing to join?"

The next day, Andrei woke up from the embrace of a green-eyed girl. It took him a whole ten minutes to recall her name – Anna or Lina? So Andrei spent another five minutes contemplating this question before hesitantly saying, "Anna..."

"Anna is sleeping in the next room!" the girl replied with a hint of annoyance.

"Oh... I'm sorry... I..." Andrei stammered, suddenly feeling flustered. He was well aware of this girl's identity, and there were no foolish misconceptions involved. But after spending the night with someone, calling them by the wrong name the next morning was a tad embarrassing.

Seeing Andrei's reaction, the girl couldn't help but chuckle. As she did, the blanket draped over her shoulder slipped, revealing her smooth shoulder bathed in the soft morning light. Andrei, however, didn't notice.

"Andrei, I was just teasing you," the girl said, her tone softened. "I am Anna, and the girl in the next room is Lina."

"Oh," Andrei lightly tapped his head, "I must've had a bit too much to drink last night... My companion..."

"You mean Mr. Petrovich? He probably won't wake up for a while," Anna replied. "So, are you planning to leave?"

"Yeah, what time is it now?"

Anna pointed to the clock on the wall, and Andrei turned to look. He had no recollection of how he had even entered this room last night, being too preoccupied with other activities.

"Ah!" Andrei jumped out of bed as if shocked. "Damn, it's already nine o'clock! I won't find a seat in the library now."

"Andrei, what's the rush? Do you have an urgent matter?" Anna asked, her eyebrows slightly furrowed, appearing to chide Andrei for his lack of finesse.

"I mean, the library seats after lunch. I'm sure they'll all be taken now!" Andrei frantically scrambled to get dressed, picking up his clothes from where they were strewn on the floor.

Anna offered to help him get dressed. As she assisted him, she remarked, "You must be studying mechanics or something, right?"

"How did you know?" Andrei inquired.

"Only those who study such subjects would be concerned about grabbing a seat in the library after a night out," Anna explained. "Those like Mr. Petrovich, who are into the arts, don't even consider these things."

"Do you know students who study mechanics?" Andrei asked.

"I know a few. They're just like you, waking up and immediately asking for the time," Anna laughed.

Once Andrei was dressed, he hesitated for a moment before saying, "I have to go. Is Anatole in the next room?"

"He should be. Unless he switched rooms last night," Anna replied.

Andrei nodded and proceeded to the adjoining room. He was about to knock on the door when he heard faint laughter from inside. He decided against disturbing them.

After a while, the laughter showed no signs of stopping. Andrei stood at the door, feeling a bit awkward. Eventually, he turned around and said to Anna, "Anna, when my friend comes out, please tell him I've already left."

"Sure, but I can guarantee he won't come out until it's time for lunch," Anna assured him.

Andrei nodded and prepared to leave. As he looked around, he realized he wasn't sure where to go.

"Shall I walk you out, Andrei?" Anna offered, taking his hand.

Andrei left the Moulin Rouge and walked onto the main street. By now, it was nearly 10 o'clock in the morning, but the streets in this area were eerily quiet, as if it were midnight. Apart from a few policemen patrolling on horseback, there was hardly a soul in sight—this place was known for its around-the-clock activities.

Andrei made his way to the train station, where only a few empty carriages were parked, and the horses were nowhere to be seen. He spotted a light two-wheeled carriage still hitched to a horse, with the driver standing nearby, smoking his pipe.

Andrei quickly approached the carriage driver, explaining his need to return to the University of Paris. The driver quoted a price that Andrei found exorbitant and refused to negotiate.

"Before noon, you won't find a public carriage anywhere," the driver insisted.

Reluctantly, Andrei accepted the driver's offer, knowing he had no other way to reach the university in time to secure a seat in the library after lunch.

Meanwhile, within the Moulin Rouge, Lucien had also awakened from the embrace of several soft and smooth arms. He sat up in his oversized bed, surrounded by several beautiful girls, including the lead singer and dancer from last night's performance.

The girls assisted Lucien in getting dressed and freshening up. Someone pulled a cord connected to a brass bell.

Soon after, someone arrived with breakfast. Lucien sat at the table while the girls sat beside him, taking turns feeding him.

Once breakfast was over, Lucien's female secretary, Emma, entered the room with a briefcase in hand. The girls, in a very disciplined manner, withdrew from the room. Once they were gone, Emma retrieved a report from the briefcase and handed it to Lucien.

The Moulin Rouge, aside from being a lucrative establishment, also served as a vital information hub for the Ministry of Truth. Most of the girls working here were also part of the ministry's investigative department. In each room of the establishment, whether it was a bed, a couch, or other furniture, hidden brass tubes were used for eavesdropping. Behind these tubes, there were always listening ears.

Lucien skimmed through the report, which mainly concerned various groups of foreign students. It seemed to be a collection of their thoughts and conversations. These students often discussed their countries, occasionally venting their frustrations about their homeland. They shared desires to bring a piece of France back to their countries, promoting a complete 'Frenchification.' Besides these conversations, the students also exchanged tidbits of reliable and unreliable information, including palace intrigues. Some of this information had value when corroborated with the actions of various governments.

"Furthermore, instruct our agents to attempt contact with these organizations, albeit under different civilian identities," Lucien continued to brief Emma.

By "different civilian identities," he referred to a network of "non-government organizations" under the control of the Ministry of Truth. Over the past year, various "non-profit organizations" had sprung up, seemingly dedicated to making the world a better place. These organizations initially started with academic interests, such as "Doctors Without Borders." Later, they expanded into a myriad of high-profile political and economic organizations, including the "World Anti-Torture Alliance," "Free Trade Promotion Association," "Fitch Credit Rating," "World Anti-Hunger League," and "Human Rights Promotion Association." This list continued to grow, encompassing cultural organizations like the "Free Writers Association."

These organizations claimed to be apolitical and unaffiliated with any particular government. They operated under the banner of "non-profit," with their primary funding coming from philanthropic donors. In reality, these "non-profit" organizations were largely backed by some lesser-known subsidiaries of the Ministry of Truth.

Soon, representatives of the "Promotion of Democracy and Freedom Alliance" found the newly established Russian "Society for National Salvation."

Chapter 290: Intimidation

In May 1801, after a series of battles, the "Free Trade" finally returned to the shores of France. Along with the ship came Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the representative of Saint-Domingue's governor, Dussan Lucidur. His mission was to journey to Paris, where he first sought an audience with the Minister of Truth, Lucien, followed by a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Talleyrand, and, when the time was right, an audience with First Consul Napoleon.

Jean-Jacques Dessalines, originally a plantation slave with little formal education, possessed remarkable intelligence. He had distinguished himself during the slave uprising in Saint-Domingue, gradually becoming one of Dussan Lucidur's most trusted commanders. In the original course of history, when French expeditionary forces used negotiations as a pretext to capture Dussan Lucidur, it was Dessalines who continued to lead the rebel forces, persistently battling against the French expeditionary forces. He eventually expelled the French from Saint-Domingue and established the world's first independent black republic. Dessalines became the first president of this black republic and later declared himself Emperor of Haiti.

However, the fate of this Haitian Emperor took a turn for the worse. Following Haiti's independence, he resorted to the most direct and brutal means to resolve land issues – the massacre of white colonists and the distribution of their land to his supporters.

After Haiti's independence, trade with the country nearly ceased, and even the British, who had supported Dessalines, effectively withdrew from Haiti's trade network. The newly-formed Haiti

could only grow cash crops and couldn't sustain itself with food production. They had to resort to smuggling, trading coffee and sugar for food at prices well below the international market rates.

Famine began to spread across Haiti, and many "free blacks" were forced to flee from the world's only "free black nation." In order to protect the interests of his supporters, boost agricultural output, and maintain the nation, Dessalines reestablished a plantation system with strict measures to bind laborers to their contracted areas, punishing those who attempted to escape or harbored escapees. In essence, he turned the majority of free black population back into agricultural serfs, with some of the blacks who had followed him replacing the former white slave masters.

Naturally, these reactionary measures triggered widespread opposition, and in a rebellion, Dessalines was assassinated. Haiti subsequently descended into division and civil war.

Accompanying the "Free Trade" to France were not only representatives of the black population but also a group of white individuals. However, they were not there as representatives but as prisoners.

These individuals were the plantation owners of Saint-Domingue, or in other words, the slave masters. Governor Dussan Lucidur had concocted various pretexts, accusing them of conspiring with exiled nobility to overthrow the republic.

These accusations were purely a fabrication, but in an era where close ties with the nobility were reason enough to be suspicious, evidence was not a problem. Both the Ministry of Truth and the Department of Public Safety had their ways of producing what appeared to be unquestionable evidence.

In recent years, the iron grip of authoritarianism had temporarily relaxed, and many had started to forget its existence. However, it had not vanished as completely as people believed. As the era of peace arrived, it had quietly retreated to a shadowy corner, much like a dagger sheathed in a splendid scabbard. People often only saw the intricate patterns on the scabbard's surface but forgot about the sharp blade concealed within.

During these years, the power of authoritarianism had not weakened but had, in fact, become more refined than in the days of Robespierre. During Robespierre's time, the Committee of Public Safety was a blunt instrument, potent but requiring substantial force to wield, and incapable of performing delicate tasks. In the present, authoritarianism had evolved into a precise surgical tool, capable of more accurate operations with minimal collateral damage.

For instance, manufacturing "ironclad evidence" was a task that Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety could not have performed at this level of technological sophistication.

However, in most cases, France did not immediately pass judgment on the "suspects" who had been brought in. Instead, they were detained, awaiting a thorough investigation. This allowed them to maintain a reason to confront Dussan Lucidur in the future.

Dessalines came ashore, but the French government didn't immediately arrange for him to go to Paris. Instead, officials from the French Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry of Trade accompanied him to inspect France's agricultural and industrial production.

Dessalines understood that the French were showcasing their power. To them, Saint-Domingue, no matter how independent, could not achieve self-sufficiency in food production, and thus it needed to align with some force. The French were displaying their might to make Dessalines realize that if he had to acknowledge a "father," he should acknowledge the most powerful and benevolent one.

For instance, they took him to visit the wheat production area along the Seine River. In May, the winter wheat was entering the grain-filling stage, a time when it needed water. Fortunately, this region had advanced irrigation systems in place, so the wheat production hadn't been significantly affected.

Dessalines had worked the land before, but he'd never grown wheat, so he wasn't entirely familiar with how it should look. Nonetheless, the French used a machine to effortlessly pump river water to higher elevations, which seemed almost miraculous and left Dessalines deeply impressed.

While the French countryside was astonishing to Dessalines, what came next, the inspection of French industry, was nothing short of terrifying for him. The French guided him to a cannon factory, where he saw massive red-hot steel ingots being deformed under thunderous forging machines, much like kneading dough. He witnessed cannon blanks being drilled, sparks flying, and cannons being produced one after another. The formidable might of France left this black man from the distant Central American region awestruck.

Even though Dessalines knew that the French were trying to intimidate him with these displays, he couldn't help but be overwhelmed by what he saw. He began to calculate just how many cannons one factory like this could produce in a year. If he could bring this technology back to Saint-Domingue...

The idea of first showing Dessalines around France and then negotiating with him was inspired by Joseph.

In the previous timeline, you, my dear reader, often employed this tactic to deal with people from less advanced nations. Many times, when representatives of these backward countries visited you, they aimed to learn from your advanced technology and ideas. However, after spending a lot of foreign exchange and going through the learning process, these individuals typically returned with results that sounded like this:

"Look at you, you're so advanced..."

"People like you are so advanced; our country will be trailing behind for a hundred years..."

Some of them even became proponents of your thoughts and interests, going as far as lamenting their own inadequacies:

"This yellow land can no longer nurture a new culture."

"This yellow earth can't teach us what real scientific spirit is."

And they eventually reached conclusions like "We must embrace the blue civilization," advocating complete surrender.

Of course, your approach had its risks. Consider the example of Zhu Long's southern journey to Wu and Yue, an attempt to use his strength to intimidate those who wouldn't submit. His actions did have an effect. However, what distinguishes heroes from the ordinary is their response when facing substantial disparities. Heroes are motivated by the belief, "We can attain that too," and "A great man should be like this."

What makes our family of gardeners most proud is that we never lack heroes. "Among the nobility, there must be a gardener!"

However, Dessalines was not a hero. So, what the French showed him deeply impressed him, and this formed a solid foundation for their subsequent negotiations.