The Fox 301

Chapter 301: The Art of Rumor-Mongering

Once the plan was set, the next step was its execution. The first move in the entire plan was to spread rumors. Creating rumors, in reality, was quite a skillful task. Who spreads the rumor and how it amplifies—each detail holds significance.

Generally, high-end, sophisticated newspapers like "The Scientific Truth Gazette" don't indulge in actively creating rumors. Rumors are usually seeded in smaller newspapers. This time, the rumor originated in a fiercely nationalistic small paper called "The Frontline of France."

According to "The Frontline of France," a Turkish envoy arrived in France on behalf of the Grand Sultan to negotiate the purchase of a major cannon factory to produce artillery.

"The Frontline of France" was notorious for its exaggerations. It was filled with outlandish claims of invincibility and nations kneeling at the sight of certain events, treated mostly as a form of entertainment rather than news.

So when this rumor appeared in "The Frontline of France," it didn't catch much attention. Neither the general citizens nor the Turkish and Russian ambassadors in France paid heed to this rumor—embassies had other affairs to attend to.

However, what followed caught some people's attention. The French Ministry of Public Safety suddenly acted, shutting down "The Frontline of France" and arresting its reporters and editors on grounds of spreading false information. In a country with freedom of speech like France, spreading rumors did carry legal responsibilities, but usually, they weren't seriously pursued. But now, the Ministry's actions drew the eye of the media.

Soon, other media outlets noticed something wasn't quite simple. Normally, these cases of spreading false information resulted in civil responsibility at most. Even if one lost in court, they wouldn't end up in jail but rather issue an apology in the paper and pay a fine. Hence, the detention of "The Frontline of France" editors and reporters was unusual, and even a journalist from "Traditional France," visiting the editorials of "The Frontline of France," got caught up and remained detained.

"Traditional France" claimed to preserve the nation's heritage and essence during times of major change, and many suspected it had royalist affiliations. Nonetheless, despite its leanings, it was a legal media outlet. Thus, the arrest of a journalist just for a visit was a clear affront to freedom of speech.

"Traditional France" boldly protested, printing a special edition with large words on the front page: "Release Them!" followed by a scathing article condemning the abuse of power by the Ministry, violating press freedoms, ending with: "Though we are small, we too have a backbone!"

Subsequently, several newspapers expressed support for "Traditional France." The newspapers became abuzz.

The public, now intrigued, eagerly gathered in cafes, ordering coffee and pastries, settling down comfortably, ready for the drama to unfold.

However, the developments exceeded everyone's expectations. Suddenly, almost all newspapers fell silent, with "Traditional France" even publishing an article stating that the media shouldn't interfere with judicial independence.

In the cafes, new rumors emerged. They spoke of the Ministry urgently summoning leaders of major media outlets and briefing them on something, leading to their silence. But what was discussed remained a state secret—unmentionable.

This incident drew the attention of diplomatic circles. Upon investigation, they discovered the issue of "The Frontline of France" was nowhere to be found. It seemed someone retrieved and destroyed all copies. Then, "The Scientific Truth Gazette" published an article: "Spreading rumors is not within the bounds of free speech."

This article strongly condemned the practice of reckless rumor-mongering and manipulation of public opinion. It stated that whether the rumor from "The Frontline of France" or the recent rumors about so-called 'state secrets' circulating in cafes, all were baseless and irresponsible uses of free speech, detrimental in the long run.

The reports from "The Frontline of France" were erased, but grasping their gist wasn't difficult. This startled the Russians and convinced the Turks that it was indeed a rumor.

However, the sudden debunking by "The Scientific Truth Gazette" worried both the Russians and the Turks. They knew the Gazette never lied but was also the master of deceit.

Initially relieved, the Russians, relying on the Gazette's denial, grew tense again. The Gazette never lies, but it also deceives expertly. What if the rumor wasn't entirely false? If it mentioned a cannon factory but meant a gun factory, wouldn't it be a rumor? Or if it cited one factory but meant two, or a factory producing both guns and cannons? The Gazette was cunning, so caution was paramount—not to be deceived.

Meanwhile, the Turks, acknowledging the Gazette's denial, also grew anxious. Aware of the Gazette's truthfulness and deceitful ways, they pondered what it aimed to conceal.

They knew no cooperation on factories existed between France and Turkey—no cannon or gun factories, or any other for that matter. But what if the only lie was the word "Turkey" in the message?

Though France and Turkey had a long-standing friendship, recently, France had grown closer to Russia. France welcomed many Russian students and exported weapons to Russia. France... well, in the past, when the French admired the moon with me, they called me 'Sweetie.' Now, with new people winning over the old, would they now label me a heathen?

In the end, both the Russians and the Turks couldn't contain their curiosity. They discreetly inquired with the French government if there was any truth to the factory sale.

The French government responded, emphasizing their friendship with any nation willing to maintain mutually beneficial trade relations. They had no trade embargo with Turkey or Russia and wouldn't intervene if legal trade transactions occurred.

This was a clear message: If you have money and find a seller, you can buy whatever you desire.

So the Russians ventured forth, "Um, could we purchase the Lorraine Steelworks' related technologies?"

The reply was straightforward: "You can discuss this with the Lorraine Steel Company."

Of course, engaging in such discussions now was akin to entering the lion's den.

The Russians inquired further, "What if we wish to acquire technology related to firearms? Can we approach 'Bonaparte Armaments' directly?"

This query received a positive response. Moreover, 'Bonaparte Armaments' seemed keen on this deal. Negotiations swiftly commenced, and Russian negotiators were promptly lodged in the hotel attached to 'Bonaparte Armaments.' Soon, they discovered a group of Turks residing next door...

This arrangement was deliberate, not coincidental. Such strategies were common in later times. During the Iran-Iraq war, both countries sought 152mm shell bricks. Iran and Iraq couldn't produce them and scoured the world for sources. Only the Big Hair camp and the Red Hare country manufactured these shells. Big Hair's quality was top-notch but pricey. As none could afford Big Hair's, they all flocked to the Red Hare country.

Then shameless little White Rabbit arranged their representatives in adjacent rooms, and both countries, fearing a shortage, purchased more shells, allowing the little White Rabbit to profit merrily.

This time, France's arrangements had a similar effect. Soon, both the Russians and the Turks reached agreements with 'Bonaparte Armaments' for purchasing the armament factory and related technologies.

Chapter 302: Unexpected Encounters

It began with the deployment of technical personnel, dispatched to both countries for fundamental assessments and selecting factories. Naturally, this wasn't a swift affair—whether in the East or the West, administrative efficiency wasn't exactly their strong suit. The bureaucratic pace, especially in the Western sphere, moved slower than a sloth in a hurry.

But these two contracts signaled something bigger—a European-wide arms upgrade. When news broke about the "Bonaparte Armaments" transferring technology to Russia and Turkey, assisting in establishing brand-new armament factories, the entire continent stirred.

Joseph and Napoleon initially assumed Austria would be the first to make moves. Considering the immense tensions among Gaul, East Gaul, and the Green Vines in the Balkans, Austria couldn't possibly stand by while these two disrupted the balance of power.

Surprisingly, the first visitor knocking on their door wasn't Austrian—it was the Americans.

Initially, the Americans weren't there to discuss factory matters; they were concerned about their "special interests" in "New Orleans."

The American envoy was Robert Livingston, their Secretary of State, also their first in history. His selection alone underscored the importance the Americans placed on this mission.

New Orleans sat at the mouth of the Mississippi River, the world's third-largest basin. Much of America's territory bordered this river or its tributaries.

The fertile lands along the Mississippi made it a prime agricultural region. At that time, America's industry hadn't fully blossomed; it was predominantly an agrarian economy. And the Mississippi River basin was critical for their agriculture.

Unlike the agrarian focus of a certain Eastern giant, American agriculture was profit-driven from the start. The expansive and fertile lands allowed America to produce more food than it needed. Exporting this surplus became a cornerstone of their economy.

In an era without trains, goods traversed inland through two main avenues: river transport or heavy-loaded carts. The latter was mostly suitable for smaller quantities of high-value items. Shipping grains primarily relied on river transportation.

The Mississippi River was exceptionally suited for navigation, with its main channel stretching from the mouth to Minneapolis, covering a span of 3400 kilometers. Including tributaries, over 50 navigable streams existed. With depths exceeding 2.7 meters, utilizing this river system meant convenient and cost-effective transport of agricultural produce to the coast, loading onto ships, and profitable sales in Europe.

However, the Americans didn't entirely control the Mississippi. Significant stretches of the river, especially the crucial entry point, were in Louisiana. The entry point? New Orleans.

During the Spanish rule in Louisiana, the Americans, taking advantage of Spain's decline, signed the Pinckney Treaty, securing navigation rights on the entire Mississippi and access to New Orleans' port facilities.

Frankly, the Pinckney Treaty was hardly fair to Spain; the passage fee the Americans paid was symbolic, almost obtaining these rights for free.

Now, with the Pinckney Treaty nearing expiration and Louisiana falling into French hands, the situation changed. The French were far more assertive than the Spanish. With control over the Mississippi and New Orleans, the French had something crucial in their hands—a piece America relied on.

Initially, the Americans hoped to unsettle and support the independence of Saint-Domingue, making it a weak point for the French in the Americas, then address the issue later.

In historical accounts, Robert Livingston proposed the purchase of New Orleans from France after Napoleon's expedition to Saint-Domingue suffered a decisive defeat. Facing the loss of Saint-Domingue and looming European tensions, Napoleon had to accept the American proposal, ultimately selling all of Louisiana to the Americans at a low price (actually, without New Orleans, maintaining control over the entry point was impossible).

However, things were different now. The French had negotiated with Dussan Lucidur, essentially resolving the issue. Besides, during the battles involving the "Freedom Trader," their ship had showcased astonishing prowess, eliminating a third of the American navy in two encounters. So, the suggestion of buying New Orleans wasn't even on the table. The Americans were there to discuss continued use of the Mississippi for navigation and access to New Orleans' port.

This negotiation wasn't too tricky. Although France had initiated migration activities to North America and sent Europeans there, it wasn't time for a fallout yet. North America was a crucial market for European industrial goods, particularly French products. They couldn't afford to fall out with their major source of income.

Conversely, the Americans also wished to maintain relations with France. It was partly due to British pressure and partly because offending France could hinder American agricultural products' access to European markets.

So, despite historical tensions where American and French navies nearly tore each other apart in the Caribbean, they never declared war. Their merchant ships still peacefully traversed each other's ports, even while observing naval battles from the sidelines.

In this timeline, even after the "Freedom Trader" obliterated the "America" super cruiser near New Orleans, inhabitants, be they French, Spanish, or American, witnessed it all. Yet, life went on as usual—American merchant vessels continued to dock at New Orleans.

Thus, while the Americans aimed to maintain access to waterways and ports, it wasn't a difficult feat. However, achieving the unrestricted access they had during the Spanish rule would likely prove challenging. With the Saint-Domingue plan at least temporarily failing and the maritime results unfavorable for America, even after the "Freedom Trader" departed from the Americas, the shadow it cast on the fledgling American navy lingered. So, it boiled down to straightforward negotiations.

Apart from navigation rights on the Mississippi and access to New Orleans' port, Robert Livingston had another task: purchasing steel cannons from France.

Initially, when the French showcased steel muzzle-loading cannons at the Baja Expo, the Americans did consider them. However, due to the high cost and having their own artillery industry, mass acquisition of these cannons would've harmed their domestic manufacturers' interests. Thus, they bought a few, similar to the British, for testing and trial in their own armament factories, attempting to replicate them.

However, reverse engineering, usually problematic in terms of craftsmanship and materials, posed major hurdles. While the British mainly encountered the second issue while replicating French steel cannons, the Americans faced both. And as of now, they hadn't found solutions.

Fortunately, until then, there weren't many steel cannons in North America. No one had much of an upper hand, so the pressure on Americans to swiftly replace their bronze cannons with steel wasn't high. Even though various tests proved steel cannons far superior in terms of accuracy and firepower.

However, this situation changed swiftly. First, the "Freedom Trader" using steel cannons thrashed both the "America" and the "Congress" at a safe distance. One of the conclusions drawn from this battle by the Americans was: without steel cannons, they were essentially powerless in naval battles from then on.

Following that, the French forces in Louisiana started equipping themselves with steel cannons. And that wasn't the worst part. Even the Canadians began arming themselves with steel cannons. In fact, not long ago, during a skirmish with the Dakota Indians, the Americans confiscated a 1.5-inch caliber lightweight steel cannon—possibly developed by the British (since the French avoided making such caliber weapons after adopting the metric system). This cannon could be carried by two people and towed by two horses, yet its firing range and power far surpassed American 6-pound and 8-pound cannons.

So, Robert Livingston

's visit to France also included the purpose of ordering more steel cannons—despite the discontent brewing among the domestic armament factories, the situation left no choice.

Upon arriving in America, Robert Livingston discovered that the French were willing to sell enterprises capable of manufacturing these cannons. This was... Robert calculated for a moment—while the material issue remained unsolved, at least the craftsmanship problem wasn't an issue anymore!

Of course, that wasn't the most crucial aspect. Importing this technology would keep the domestic armament factories afloat, garnering him more support.

Chapter 303: Buy Instead of Make

Selling a factory to the Americans wasn't a huge deal for the French. Hence, negotiations between the two parties went smoothly. But consider this: ordering steel from France, shipping it to America, manufacturing cannons there with additional facilities, scale, and wage differences for workers—clearly, American-made cannons would cost much more than those made in Europe by the French.

Moreover, those American factory owners, did their "patriotism" mean they didn't love money? If so, why didn't they stick with the "United Kingdom" as their motherland? How did the UK oppress or curtail their freedom? Just because they paid a bit more in taxes, they'd choose "death over loss of liberty" and yet not seek profits? Unthinkable!

Hence, it's almost certain that the cannons made by Americans and sold to their army would fetch a much higher price than those shipped to North America by the French. Possibly even more than what the British charged for cannons sold to Native Americans.

However, this wasn't something the French needed to consider, nor did Robert Livingston need to worry about it—after all, it wasn't his money.

Maybe it was due to the distance between the U.S. and the New World, the limited danger to France, and the historically friendly relations between the nations that the French didn't ask for exorbitant prices. Consequently, the deal swiftly concluded: the American government ordered a steel factory capable of producing 200 cannons annually and a hydroelectric plant from France.

This marked France's first complete export of a hydroelectric plant overseas. Considering the relevant science was already public, exporting such factories wasn't a major issue.

As for the pricing, Joseph explained it this way:

"The American factories need raw materials from us and rely on our technical expertise. The same goes for the power station. So, in the future, we can recoup the money through services. Asking for a high price outright might scare them off, which isn't favorable."

This was a tactic later exploited by some businesses. Selling machines at a loss but profiting from consumables; making no profit from a machine but gaining from maintenance—it's a strategy. In fact, there's a story from another time:

"At the start of the 20th century, Ford Motors was rapidly expanding. Orders overflowed their sales offices. Each freshly assembled Ford car had eager buyers waiting. Suddenly, a motor malfunction halted the entire assembly line and production ceased.

Ford brought in scores of mechanics and experts, but they couldn't find or fix the issue.

Frustrated, the management sought help from the renowned physicist and motor expert, Stantonz. After three days of intense scrutiny, Stantonz took a ladder, worked for hours, and finally, with a chalk, marked a coil, noting 'Here, the coils are wound 16 turns extra.'

To everyone's surprise, the problem vanished! Production resumed immediately!

The Ford manager asked Stantonz his fee. Stantonz replied, 'Not much, just $10,000.'

$10,000? For simply marking a line! At that time, Ford's famous pay slogan was '$5 per month,' a high wage. Many experienced technicians and engineers rushed in for this $5 monthly wage from all over the country.

A line, $1; knowing where to put it, $9,999."

The story itself has flaws and doesn't hold up under scrutiny. Nevertheless, it suggests a money-making model: once you've used our product, even for minor maintenance tasks like marking a line, we can extract a hefty fee. It's not about knowledge being wealth, but about making money through after-sales and technical support.

What's worse, once Americans use French production equipment and systems, maintenance has to adhere to French standards. Considering the U.S.'s technological capability at the time, they wouldn't use French components for maintenance. Disassembled parts would be more valuable than the entire factory. Also, using non-genuine parts, like a self-made screw cap on a drilling machine, would void warranties for the entire system. In essence, buying these things back to the U.S. would be boarding a pirate ship, ripe for plundering in the future.

Surprisingly, most Americans at this time were naive, failing to see Joseph's nefarious intentions. They happily believed they'd made a good deal.

Finally, when the Austrians, long-awaited by the three brothers, arrived, they surprised them yet again. Unlike the East and Green Isles, who established armament factories to spark an arms race, the Austrians merely sought to understand the production capacities of the Russian and Turkish factories. This was to plan accordingly, whether to purchase from France or lease weaponry.

"Even if Austria could produce these themselves, they couldn't match France in quantity or quality. So, why bother establishing factories when, unlike weapons, there's genuine profit in your power stations and related electrical technologies?" Metternich, the Austrian ambassador in France, mentioned at a ball to Napoleon.

"Napoleon, you misunderstand us. In other European markets, we couldn't possibly compete with your factories. But in some places, like within Austria and certain areas of the Balkans, for various reasons, your business isn't exceptionally strong. Developing those markets requires time. It'd be better if we cooperated and jointly developed them, wouldn't it?" he continued.

Napoleon pondered and didn't outright refuse Metternich. Business dealings weren't his forte, so he felt it best to discuss with Joseph before deciding. Thus, he replied, "Ambassador, this matter requires more thought. I can't give you an immediate answer. But regarding temporary purchases or leases of cannons, as a professional military man, I need to remind you that while cannons can be quickly obtained, trained artillerymen aren't as readily available."

"Ah, that's a concern," Metternich acknowledged. "We hope your country could assist in training a batch of gunners. Of course, if your country could provide artillerymen for hire, that would be even better..."

Chapter 304: Preferred Shares

Allowing the Austrians to establish their own power plants didn't bother Joseph much. After all, the scientific principles behind it had been widely revealed, and everyone understood the workings of these stations. It was only a matter of time before the English could set up their own. During this window, expanding France's power plants across the entire European continent seemed promising. It would tether the continent's electricity standards to France, a definite advantage.

However, producing electric bulbs in Austria posed a different challenge. The scientific principles behind light bulbs were relatively simple, understandable by anyone with a bit of knowledge about electricity. Yet, technically, they were formidable. They fit the bill for being hard to replicate: high craftsmanship and specialized materials.

In bulb manufacturing, one crucial technical requirement was vacuuming the air, directly affecting bulb quality and lifespan. In this aspect, the French had unparalleled technical expertise. Before unveiling light bulbs to the public, "Bonaparte Electric" had already registered numerous patents concerning vacuuming technology. Although these technologies weren't impossible for others to replicate, having these patents meant Napoleon's France could prevent the legal sale of any products infringing upon France's patent rights in most European countries, acting as a formidable barrier for others to enter this domain.

Certainly, there were various methods to create a vacuum, but the commonly used, cheaper, and easier implementations had all been patented by "Bonaparte Electric." Any foreign manufacturer attempting to bypass these patents would face substantial costs.

The second issue was the specialized materials. Anyone could buy a bulb, shatter it on the ground, and extract the filament to see it was made of carbon. But the question remained: what specific carbonized material was it? People could only surmise it was from some plant. Identifying the suitable plant among many required significant effort.

Collaborating with Austrians in light bulb production, even if they restricted sales to specific regions, risked leaking certain related technological secrets. Hence, after meticulous consideration, Napoleon instructed Metternich that France had "no particular opinion" regarding economic cooperation with Austria.

This notion of "no particular opinion" meant they could negotiate, and whatever resulted, France wouldn't intervene. It somewhat echoed a future nation's "we don't know what happens next." Essentially: succeed, and I claim a share; fail, and it's not my responsibility.

Metternich understood immediately. This was negotiable, but France would likely have additional demands. Yet, negotiations implied a potential outcome, and with it, a share of credit and reward.

In recent years, both French diplomats stationed abroad and foreign diplomats in France had become wealthier. While positions like ambassadors and consuls to France still considered factors like loyalty and capability, other roles within embassies and consulates were predominantly awarded to the highest bidder. These positions easily facilitated business relationships with the French, leading to incidental profits.

With such lucrative opportunities for subordinates, the heads of embassies and consulates weren't idle. Moreover, fostering economic and trade ties between nations was a key responsibility for ambassadors and consuls.

Thus, a man named François, armed with a letter bearing Metternich's signature, approached "Bonaparte Electric" to discuss purchasing a factory.

While "François" might have been an alias, the letter signed by Metternich wasn't forged. More importantly, the certificate issued by Bon Bank certifying a million francs was unquestionably genuine, clearly outlined on that document.

Subsequently, both sides engaged in candid discussions about collaborating for profit. They quickly reached basic agreements on most issues, leaving only one major point unresolved: the filament factory to complement the light bulb factory.

The French insisted that given Austria's technological and managerial capabilities, managing a filament factory was implausible. Moreover, an Austrian filament factory could potentially expose critical commercial technological secrets, a risk too significant. Hence, France proposed manufacturing filaments in France, shipping them to Austria for assembly, and then letting Austrians sell them in designated areas.

However, François argued that this would only escalate costs unnecessarily. Besides, France's technological secrets were safeguarded by patents, rendering concerns about technological leakage baseless.

Representing "Bonaparte Electric," Louis Bonaparte contended that transportation costs for filaments were minimal. Moreover, although patent protections were relatively robust across most of continental Europe, they were considerably deficient in some remote regions, notably in Russia, where the enforcement of patent laws remained dubious. As for Turkey, the situation was even less certain.

However, these weren't the most critical points; the paramount concern was the British.

"The British were the first in Europe to have patent laws, so nobody knows how to exploit these laws better than they do. Apart from that, in their colonies, they can easily sidestep patent laws. For instance, in India, most regions are under the control of the East India Company. Even though these areas nominally belong to Indian rulers, the British can clandestinely establish illegal factories under their names, producing illicit goods not only for sale in India but also smuggling them into Europe. And since it's the Indians doing it, not the British, theoretically, our retaliation could only be against goods from a particular Indian principality. But let's face it, we don't have much trade with India; what kind of retaliation could we even pursue? Therefore, worrying about the risks of technological leakage isn't baseless. Hence, for the time being, filament production can't happen in Austria."

In reality, even in France, despite having several bulb factories, they only had one filament factory. Building a dedicated filament factory for a limited bulb production, economically, didn't make sense.

This latter argument had more persuasiveness. After all, Austrians were involved in this affair primarily for profit. Moreover, Louis presented a novel counterproposal.

"Additionally, Mr. François," Louis stated, "given the high demand and profitability of light bulbs, we naturally want to increase production. This means establishing more bulb factories and more filament factories. We welcome anyone willing to be our business partner in making profits. Mr. Fritz, if you're interested in the filament factory, we suggest you invest in our filament and bulb factories. Would that interest you?"

"Ah, the prospect of merely erecting an electric plant in the Balkans to earn some profit might yield a sum, but oh, the limits it possesses. However, an investment in 'Bonaparte General Electric'? That's akin to picking up coins off the ground! When François heard this suggestion, his eyes lit up as if catching a glimpse of a treasure trove.

Much like Napoleon and Joseph anticipated, this François was, in fact, a representative of the upper echelons of Austria. Accompanying him were a group of Austrian nobles.

Initially, when France had just settled peace with Austria and other nations, Austria harbored desires for 'a decade of gathering strength, a decade of learning lessons, aiming for retaliation.' Yet, after these two years, they observed France's burgeoning development. Presently, there were no signs of imminent downfall. The disparity in power between Austria and France was evidently widening. Formerly, Austria could not defeat France, but with determination, could make France bleed. Now, even if they engaged in war again, even Archduke Karl found it challenging to confront France. It seemed that, at most, they could only splatter the French with some blood.

Faced with this perilous scenario, Austria's upper echelons found themselves divided into two factions. One, led by Archduke Karl, aspired to follow France's footsteps—industrialize and strengthen the nation. On the other side stood Emperor Friedrich II. The Emperor was cautious about any change. On one hand, he feared that industrial and commercial growth might excessively empower the commoners, disrupting the fragile internal balance of the empire, leading to undesirable consequences. On the other hand, he realized the necessity for change. Continuing in old footsteps would inevitably result in the empire's collapse.

The Emperor understood the need for change but was wary of hastening it. Moving too slow might spell disaster, yet hastening it might yield similar results. It's said that fearing a fate akin to his aunt and uncle's, the Emperor was troubled, losing sleep and weight.

It's rumored that it was Metternich who suggested to the Emperor to align their interests with France's, making social reforms easier with France's support. Even if France didn't actively incite revolution within Austria, as long as they didn't interfere, Austria's situation would be far more stable.

Now, the French agreed to assist Austria in constructing power plants and electric factories, aligning with Archduke Karl's 'strengthen the nation' doctrine, or at least adhering to the 'enrich the nation' principle. Additionally, Louis Bonaparte's proposal to invite Austrians to join 'Bonaparte General Electric' resonated with Emperor Friedrich's desire to bind Austria's upper echelons, particularly the Austrian royal family, with France.

Although France now existed as a republic, under the leadership of Napoleon, his authority surpassed that of most monarchs of sovereign nations. One could argue it matched or even exceeded the authority of the Sun King, the 'I am the state' monarch of yesteryears. Simultaneously, the Bonaparte family's influence in France was staggering, rivalling the Bourbon family's sway. If only Napoleon were not merely the first consul but a hereditary king, the Emperor might have considered

proposing a union with Napoleon's family. After all, marital alliances were a hallmark of Austrian tradition, were they not?

For François, this approach appeared to gratify the desires of both factions within the nation, a picture of perfection. He hurriedly inquired about the news regarding investing in 'Bonaparte General Electric.'

'Ah, Monsieur François, perhaps you are unaware that 'Bonaparte General Electric' is an enterprise with numerous investors. The Bonaparte family's stake in the entire enterprise is less than fifty percent. Ergo, we do not possess complete controlling rights. This signifies that any extensive expansion must obtain approval from the shareholders' assembly. Nevertheless, as you know, we cannot allow significant alterations in the distribution of the company's shares. Therefore, even if we convene a shareholders' assembly, considering the present circumstances, the share we can offer will not be substantial.'

This statement left François somewhat disappointed. However, even a small share would be welcome. He hastily inquired, 'So, how much stake could we acquire at most?'

Louis replied, 'Monsieur François, you're aware that 'Bonaparte General Electric' is sure to generate considerable profits. This is common knowledge. This renders our company's financing exceptionally easy. We can effortlessly borrow funds from any bank at an interest rate significantly below the market rate. In this situation, I believe the shareholders' assembly won't consent to yield a significant portion of ordinary shares. Personally, I estimate it won't exceed five percent.'

The estimation of 'not exceeding five percent' disappointed François. He understood that investing in 'Bonaparte General Electric' would not only hold political significance but would assuredly yield substantial economic gains. However, a share not surpassing five percent felt insufficient.

'Why restrict the funds for expanding the business, Mr. Bonaparte? More capital could facilitate quicker business expansion, earning more profits,' François queried, furrowing his brow slightly.

'Because changes in shareholding would alter the internal power dynamics of the company, thereby affecting the company's future. The company's present development is remarkably smooth. Hence, the majority of shareholders are naturally averse to significant changes in the company's power structure. Hence, shareholders prefer acquiring expansion funds through loans rather than introducing more partners. I believe this is quite natural and easily understandable, wouldn't you agree?' Louis explained. 'However, perhaps we could collaborate in a different manner.'

'What do you mean by a different way?' François hastily asked.

'Ah, Monsieur François, have you heard of preferred stock?' Louis inquired.

François shook his head in confusion.

Preferred stock refers to shares with 'preferred rights.' Shareholders of preferred stock enjoy priority in company assets and profit distribution, with lower risks. However, preferred stockholders usually lack voting rights on affairs not concerning their interests. They also lack voting and being voted rights, usually without involvement in the company's operations. Preferred stockholders cannot withdraw shares but can only be redeemed by the company through the preferred stock's redemption clause.

This type of 'preferred stock' was invented by the English in the 16th century. However, due to market irregularities and inadequate business development at the time, the advantages of preferred stock weren't fully realized. Instead, it caused several management issues, leading to its limited use and near-oblivion. In history, it wasn't until the 1920s when a British company, facing financial difficulties in developing canals, unable to secure funds from banks due to high interest rates, and failing to attract new investors with common stock, reintroduced 'preferred stock' from centuries ago, and achieved remarkable success. Hence, this ancient 'financial innovation' began to find widespread use.

However, when Louis mentioned 'preferred stock' to François, centuries had passed since the initial unsuccessful attempt at 'preferred stock.' Unless someone specifically studied this area, it would be improbable to understand the meaning of the term. Therefore, François' lack of knowledge about this term was perfectly normal.

Louis proceeded to explain the concept of 'preferred stock' in general terms to François. Then he remarked, 'I believe your primary objective in investing

in our company is to earn profits. In terms of profit-making, there isn't much difference between 'preferred stock' and ordinary shares. In fact, in dividend distribution, there are certain advantages. I assume you're rather content with our company's current operations and future prospects. You probably don't intend to alter our company's business model and development strategies. Therefore, this form of 'preferred stock' should be a suitable solution for both of our needs.'

School's keeping me occupied today, so this is all for now."

Chapter 305: Rothschild

This was a decision beyond François's capacity. He had to inform Louis of the situation and reach out to the investors behind him. Louis nodded understandingly, setting a time for their next discussion before François took his leave.

Exiting "Bonaparte Armaments," François boarded a carriage waiting outside and headed straight for the Austrian embassy. Inside, he briefed Metternich on his talk with Louis, asking, "Your Excellency, what do you make of the French's proposal?"

Metternich pondered before responding, "François, overall, the Bonaparte family has shown goodwill. As they've mentioned, they aren't lacking in avenues for funds. If they require capital, I believe banks across Europe, including those in England, would be eager to collaborate. Offering us a portion of their shares in this scenario is already remarkable. As for the preferred shares, it's an uncommon provision. However, these terms aren't unfavourable. Our goal shouldn't involve vying for control over 'Bonaparte Armaments,' correct?"

"At least not in the short term," François shook his head. "The Bonaparte family's dominion in France has been steadily solidifying. Initially, it was challenging, but they've succeeded. Napoleon's rule was established as a war hero turned ruler. This position is precarious. While initially praised for his conquests, his great deeds will fade in time."

"Their previous support stemmed from the spoils he brought, depleting the nobles' wealth, plundering us, the Italians, the Prussians. Sharing a fraction of these spoils with the populace made them grateful. However, stolen riches eventually run out. The people, accustomed to easy gains through theft, find it hard to live modestly. If General Bonaparte desires continued support and love,

he must ensure their relative comfort. Sustaining this is challenging; initially, we thought it impossible. We believed his only capability was constant military raids. But that's a temporary fix; it would only make France an enemy to all of Europe, inevitably leading to his downfall."

"Yet, we underestimated General Napoleon and the Bonaparte family behind him. Not only do they possess a military genius, but they've paved a new path for the French – a path unforeseen by us. Through commerce and science, they now acquire more wealth than through wars. So, for the foreseeable future, General Napoleon's rule in France is secure. Unfortunately, he lacks royal lineage; otherwise, France could easily become a kingdom."

"Given their stability for the immediate future, we can't vie for their core interests. The rise of France is unstoppable, it seems God stands by the Bonapartes. We must temporarily shelve other thoughts and obey the will of God. Ambassador, I understand your concerns. My hesitation lies in the fact that preferred shares can't be easily transferred. Joining the French venture may tie us in knots, making it hard to disentangle."

"François, if you've approached me for this issue, you've sought the wrong person. You know, I'm not adept in these matters. But I have a friend, a Jew, well-versed in economics. Perhaps seeking his counsel would be beneficial."

"Thank you for your assistance," François replied. "May I ask the name of your friend?"

"Meyer Rothschild — a banker in Frankfurt. He's quite astute in trade, and he's groomed his sons well in the same. He has five sons, all adept in business. Presently, his son Nathan Mayer Rothschild operates a successful bank in Paris. Perhaps seeking his advice could aid you."

Nathan Mayer Rothschild was a pivotal figure during the inception of the renowned Rothschild family in history. He was the third son of the senior Rothschild and the most capable among his five sons. In the original historical timeline, by late 1798, he'd arrived in London with startup capital, already an esteemed figure in the British capital's financial market.

However, in this timeline, for unknown reasons, in 1798, Nathan didn't venture to London as he did historically but found himself in Paris instead. During the Battle of Valmy, while Joseph's false injury report nearly deceived everyone, Nathan, relying on various prior information, deduced that even if the report were true, the Allied forces couldn't breach Valmy's defenses and were doomed to fail. Consequently, when French government bonds plummeted to a mere twentieth of their value due to rampant rumors, Nathan decisively invested a significant portion of his wealth ahead of the Baring Bank, purchasing substantial amounts of French government bonds. This bold move reaped enormous profits and earned him both Baring's ire and admiration.

It's said that when educating his son, Baring often used Nathan Mayer Rothschild as an exemplary figure. This practice greatly motivated young Baring to study diligently. However, it also instilled in him a strong aversion toward the Rothschilds and even Jews.

Since then, Nathan Mayer Rothschild sought to infiltrate France's military-industrial complex. However, both Baring's strong opposition and Joseph's apparent distrust of the surname "Rothschild" hindered his efforts.

This was reasonable. After all, even in his previous life, Joseph had read "The Currency Wars." Though he knew it was a novel, he was aware that the Rothschild family wasn't as formidable as

portrayed. He knew that since missing out on the United States, the Rothschilds suffered significant losses during both World Wars, no longer the most powerful financial conglomerate.

Yet, this didn't mean Joseph could let his guard down, especially against someone named "Nathan Mayer Rothschild." In the original timeline, this individual almost controlled Britain's entire monetary policy.

Monetary policy was crucial sovereignty. This couldn't fall into any conglomerate's hands apart from the Bonaparte consortium; otherwise, the interests of the French populace would be jeopardized, turning them into slaves.

Similar to the beacon nation of the future, where monetary sovereignty landed in a private institution's hands, having several months' warning during a pandemic, possessing the world's most abundant medical resources and expertise, and a president touted as all-knowing, yet opting to protect the economy over lives, turning a global superpower into what seemed like a third-world country. Such an occurrence couldn't be allowed in magnificent France. How could monetary sovereignty fall into the hands of the Jews?

The people of France wouldn't consent to such a scenario. Apart from the "Bonaparte consortium," they recognized no other authority!

Due to this vigilance, Nathan Mayer Rothschild, though profitable in France, faced difficulty infiltrating the "military-industrial complex."

Armed with Metternich's letter of introduction, François met the banker in Nathan Mayer Rothschild's opulent home. François explained his purpose to Nathan.

Nathan intertwined his fingers, contemplated on the sofa, and spoke, "I understand your apprehension. You see this deal as highly lucrative — so do I. You intend to invest as much cash as possible — something I'd also consider. But you worry that once this money becomes preferred shares, it won't be as liquid as standard stocks in the market. If you invest too much cash, you might encounter trouble when urgently needing it; if not all cash is invested, it might feel like passing up a lucrative opportunity. Am I correct?"

François nodded. "Mr. Rothschild, you're spot on. That's precisely

my concern."

"François," Nathan Mayer Rothschild placed his palms on the table, "I have a solution that ensures both your peace of mind investing and maintains adequate liquidity. We can establish an investment company first, inject funds into this entity, and then use it to acquire 'Bonaparte Armaments' preferred shares. While these preferred shares can't be traded on the open market, the company's ownership can freely circulate. How does this plan sound to you?"

"Mr. Rothschild, I'm immensely grateful. How can I express my gratitude?" François inquired.

"Ah, François, if you genuinely wish to show gratitude, I'd be honored if you'd allow me to invest in your new company," Nathan Mayer Rothschild smiled.

François didn't outright refuse Rothschild's request. Still, he expressed, "Mr. Rothschild, personally, I think this shouldn't be an issue. We need your expertise and talent. However, as mentioned earlier, we might only offer up to five percent of common stock. It's not a substantial amount, but it's liquid. So, this portion of shares, I believe, doesn't need to be under the company's name."

Rothschild nodded, understandingly replying, "That's entirely understandable. There's no necessity for that."

Understanding that even five percent of common stock in a promising enterprise like "Bonaparte General Electric," no matter how small, was quite valuable, representing not just wealth but also a certain degree of power. If François and his team ever urgently needed cash and had to sell a portion of their shares, they'd prefer to part with preferred stocks rather than common ones. Owning the entire common stock under the new company's name while selling off the company's shares would mean indirectly selling these common stocks as well. Rothschild had suggested a solution, yet allowing him a stake in preferred stocks was already quite fair.

After a casual chat, François took his leave. Back at his residence, he penned a letter swiftly dispatched back home, awaiting news and authorization.

Meanwhile, the French side remained unperturbed. For the French, particularly for Napoleon, these matters weren't their priority.

Napoleon's primary concern lay in the advancement of the "City That Never Sleeps" project. Secondarily, it was the experiment with the world's first steam locomotive.

Over half a year ago, Joseph personally reached an agreement with Watt for the joint development of the steam locomotive. Since then, the project had progressed smoothly. It was natural for Joseph not to invest significant effort this time due to other commitments, but his role had been pivotal—efficiently and intuitively eliminating over ten design proposals, leaving just two.

This wasn't particularly surprising; Joseph, in his past life, although born a bit late to witness steam locomotives spewing smoke on railway lines (actually, the retirement of steam locomotives in the Crimson Hare country was notably late, some even in use until around 2016. Rumor had it that Hollywood often sought props involving steam trains from the Crimson Hare country as it possessed the most steam locomotives that could be refurbished and operated globally. However, Joseph scarcely saw running steam locomotives in most places), had seen countless of them in movies, TV shows, and various parks. So, based on appearances alone, Joseph could easily eliminate many designs that didn't meet future requirements.

Essentially, these two proposals were quite similar. The only difference lay in the transmission mechanism.

Proposal one, dubbed the British model, entirely relied on Watt's planetary gear system to transmit power. Proposal two, known as the Continental model, used a simpler crankshaft transmission in many areas—primarily because the patent for crankshaft technology had expired.

Hence, fundamentally, these two proposals weren't vastly different, almost like one. The reason for having two such proposals was entirely due to Watt's insistence. Despite the expiration of the crankshaft patent, Watt adamantly refused to use this technology.

However, in certain aspects, using the straightforward crankshaft could notably cut costs. So, although Watt abhorred the crankshaft, the French insisted on utilizing the cost-effective option. The result was the emergence of two types of steam locomotive proposals.

Apart from this, Watt particularly emphasized that the British model must undergo testing first and become the world's inaugural steam locomotive. Napoleon wasn't entirely inclined towards this, but

Joseph felt it wasn't a problem. Despite the initial experiment being with the British model, the testing ground remained in France.

Comparing the first steam locomotive currently parked on the test track to those Joseph had seen in future TV programs, it was notably smaller. This was a result of Joseph discarding numerous proposals aiming for steam-powered carriages equipped with a mere five to ten horsepower engines—initially, some folks simply wanted a steam-powered carriage. Their level was worse than Stephenson's Traveler.

Naturally, these proposals couldn't pass Joseph's scrutiny. In a meeting at the design department, Joseph unexpectedly appeared, quoting a phrase from Dandong, exclaiming to the engineers, "Boldness, always boldness! Your designs can pass muster with me!"

Encouraged, the engineers prepared a locomotive equipped with a steam engine fit for use on a ship, designing a colossal contraption around it. They initially thought Joseph would reject this proposal outright. To their surprise, Joseph felt it was somewhat small.

Yet, Joseph understood the importance of not overstepping boundaries, so while he felt it was a tad small, he refrained from going too far. Though it didn't match the grandeur of the "Advance" model or the slightly smaller "Upstream" model of steam locomotives he'd seen in Japanese dramas, at least it wasn't as humble as the "Traveler."

Following Joseph's adjustments, the proposal was approved.

The radical nature of this proposal astonished Watt. However, after thorough calculations, he discovered the plan seemed feasible. He remarked to his assistant William Murdoch, "William, have you noticed? We're still not accustomed to using the best steel as pig iron..."

Indeed, before this, several individuals in Britain had experimented with steam locomotives. Their repeated failures were largely due to their inability to use steel in this manner. Even historically, Stephenson's creation of the first practical steam locomotive, "Traveler," was significantly restricted by material performance. Leaving aside other factors, his train only ran on wooden tracks coated with wrought iron, unlike the affluent French, planning to directly manufacture steel rails. A mere meter of track required 20 kilograms of steel; it was simply...

After the proposal was approved, it took half a year for the newly established "Bonaparte-Watt Company" to construct a six-kilometer test track in Lorraine, along with completing two experimental locomotives. Since Watt was also personally participating in the initial experiment, Joseph delegated all his tasks to his students and joined Napoleon to rush to Lorraine.

During the carriage ride to Lorraine, Joseph asked, "Napoleon, why are you so interested in this?"

"Oh, nothing much. It's just that day when I came to your office, and you weren't there," Napoleon said. "I was bored, looked around your desk, and found that drawing of yours, the 'Armored Train Imaginary Drawing.' Well, even though your drawing skills are leagues behind Lucien's, I have to admit, it was interesting. It's like a battleship on land. If it really comes to life, let's call it a Land Battleship."

"Hah!" Joseph chuckled. "What a name, Land Battleship, not appealing. Also, a few days ago, didn't you mention Lucien's lackluster painting skills?"

"Lucien isn't that great, but it depends on who you compare him with. At least, Lucien doesn't mess up proportions when drawing women, making their eyes one-third the size of their faces... Oh, and that train cannon you drew, can that thing really be made?" Napoleon's eyes gleamed. "It's grander than the Urbain Cannon, filled with sinister beauty. It's good; can that thing be built? Also

, why did you name it Gustav? Although His Majesty Gustav was proficient in using cannons, he excelled mainly with 3-pounders. I think it needs a name change, maybe call it the Augustus Cannon..."

"Napoleon, don't worry. Your Land Battleship will soon come to fruition. As for the 'Gustav' cannon, well, that was just me doodling. The theory might not be entirely implausible, but bringing that thing to life might just take a lifetime... Besides, even if we manage to build it, it doesn't seem very useful."

"It's useless." Napoleon nodded. "There's nothing to fire it at. But it's a spectacle..."

Chapter 307: Inspection

"That truly is a sight," Joseph shook his head. "But this sight, it doesn't make money, does it? Nowadays, spectacles that don't bring in profits are just misguided wonders. Also, you think my depiction of women is inadequate? None of you have any taste. Pauline actually adores it. Just two days ago, she specifically asked me to paint her a portrait with big eyes."

Napoleon couldn't help but shake his head. "Joseph, what nonsense are you spouting? You boast about your prowess in mathematics. You utter a phrase like 'I have a viewpoint on this issue,' and all of Europe obediently listens, even if you claim the sum of angles in a triangle is less than 180 degrees. They'll ponder for days before daring to argue. You boast about your prowess in science; say Newton's laws are all wrong, and they'd hesitate to challenge you without evidence. Even if you bluster about military matters, besides me, few would dare contradict you. But when it comes to your painting? Do you think it's all about rules and compasses? Pauline praises your work? She says so because you're the elder brother, she just wants to please you!"

At this point, Napoleon paused, then suddenly looked puzzled. "Wait, wait, this doesn't add up!"

"What's wrong?" Joseph asked.

"How could Pauline praise your painting? She's not a flatterer like Lucien. No, this doesn't make sense. That troublemaker Pauline must have stirred something up again, hence the flattery towards you. Hmm, you're not vigilant enough with her. Maybe this idea came from Lucien; they always conspire together... Joseph, what mischief has this troublemaker caused this time?"

"The way you speak, does praising me mean they're definitely flattering or have ulterior motives? I think you're the one with ulterior motives!" Joseph first expressed his dissatisfaction, but then added, "But specifically regarding Pauline, that's uncertain. Napoleon, quickly have someone investigate to see what trouble she's caused now. Don't let Lucien do it..."

"I'm not a fool, why would I let Lucien investigate?" Napoleon said. "Anyway, Pauline isn't a child anymore, causing a ruckus every day—hmph, that's all because of your indulgence—listen, as the elder brother, shouldn't you also consider helping her find a husband?"

"How am I the one indulging her? Don't throw all the blame at me. I think, in this matter, your responsibility is just as significant!" Joseph first harshly criticized Napoleon's attempt to evade

responsibility and shift the blame. Then he scratched his head, sighed, and said, "Napoleon, what you said does make sense. But among my students, there really isn't anyone suitable. Hmm, I wonder among your old subordinates, is there anyone appropriate?"

Napoleon understood this well; most of Joseph's students were scientists, unlike troublemakers like Pauline. Napoleon himself thought it wouldn't be wise to involve them.

"My old subordinates? Hmm, who among my old subordinates doesn't know about 'The Saint of Toulon,'" Napoleon said. "But, perhaps among my old subordinates, there might be someone who can appreciate her. After all, Pauline's quite attractive, just a bit temperamental, but she's very cheerful... Ah, Joseph, why are these troublemakers so worrisome?"

Joseph gazed at Napoleon, momentarily speechless.

After three days, the two arrived at the "Bonaparte-Watt Company's" test site, where Watt and his team had been awaiting their arrival.

Despite several days of carriage travel, Napoleon's enthusiasm remained high, unaffected by fatigue. Immediately upon arrival, he insisted on visiting the site. Joseph, though a bit tired, didn't want to dampen Napoleon's spirits, so he accompanied him along with a retinue and Watt's team to the test site.

The test site was on a large flat expanse, with a six-kilometer stretch of steel rails laid out. The way these rails were laid closely resembled practices from future times. Hmm, saying this felt a bit peculiar, akin to a future country imitating 5G technology from a country yet to have it, like the Red Hare Country copying the Lighthouse Country. Perhaps the Red Hare Country also had time travelers?

There were differences from the railways of the future. In later times, the sleepers beneath the rails were usually made of reinforced concrete. However, wood was still inexpensive at this time, so the sleepers beneath this railway were indeed high-quality solid wood.

Beneath the solid wood sleepers were layers of thick gravel, and beneath the gravel were larger stones forming the base.

Napoleon walked to the edge of the track, bent down, and tapped the steel rail with his knuckle, asking, "How much steel was used for this experimental track?"

"20 kilograms per meter. You do the math," Joseph replied. "But if the experiment succeeds, we'll be constructing a railway from the Saar coal mine to the steel factory. This test track can directly become a part of that route. So, though the test track seems a bit long, it's not actually wasteful."

"It seems you have confidence in the experiment's success," Napoleon said. "Where's the locomotive?"

"It's over there, Your Excellency," William Murdoch said. "The locomotive is in the workshop over there, but the original plan was to conduct the test tomorrow, so..."

Not far away stood a large workshop, from which the railway extended.

Napoleon glanced in that direction and smiled. "Ah, I understand. I just wanted to take a look at it and feel it. As for the experiment, it should follow the scheduled plan. Changing plans isn't a good habit."

So, they all followed Napoleon into the workshop.

Once inside, they saw two colossal machines parked on the tracks, the two steam locomotives. A group of workers was giving the final checks before the experiment. The guards approached and said a few words; the workers stopped and waited.

"Let them continue; we shouldn't disturb them," Napoleon said. The guards conveyed the message. However, the workers didn't immediately resume work. Instead, someone called out, "Is that First Consul Bonaparte?"

"What's this? Do you recognize me?" Napoleon was pleased to hear the workers' shouts.

"It's really First Consul Bonaparte!"

"Long live First Consul Bonaparte!" Someone else followed.

Napoleon was thrilled. He walked up and shook hands with the workers one by one.

"You work hard here. How does it feel working here?"

"Your Excellency, you're right; it's indeed hard here, but nowadays, apart from land-owning farmers, who isn't toiling? Thankfully, Bonaparte Company pays us decently. In a little while, I'll have saved enough money, and then I can become a farmer in Louisiana."

"Your Excellency, they're saying, as long as one can speak French and pledge allegiance to France, even foreigners can get land to be farmers in Louisiana?" another person asked in hesitant French.

"Of course. As long as one can speak the simplest French and is willing to pledge allegiance to France, anyone can," Napoleon replied.

Cheers resounded around them.

Given the good

conditions in French rural areas, there were now many foreign workers in French factories, especially from the Germanic states. Honestly, Joseph didn't pay them very high wages, but compared to their hometowns, the pay was decent. Moreover, once they saved enough, they could go to Louisiana and acquire a substantial piece of land.

Of course, this practice would inevitably lead to a result: among those migrating to Louisiana, the number of German immigrants would significantly surpass the French. However, Joseph thought it wouldn't become a major problem. In future times, after acquiring Louisiana, the Lighthouse Country also massively imported immigrants from Europe, and among them, the largest group were also Germans. Until Joseph's time travel, the Germanic people remained the largest ethnic group in the Lighthouse Country, but this hadn't altered the Lighthouse Country's cultural characteristics. If the Lighthouse Country could do it, there was no reason France couldn't. It was just a matter of indoctrination plus education. In fact, considering the fervor of converts, making a Germanic person love French culture, in a way, might be easier than making a French person love French culture. For instance, in later times, the ones most devoted to the Lighthouse Country were often not its own people.

After shaking hands with Napoleon and expressing their admiration and gratitude, the workers gradually returned to their posts. Napoleon's technical team then began introducing the two locomotives to him.

"Your Excellency," as the chief designer of the locomotives, Watt introduced, "the closer one to us is the 'Progress Type 1,' and the one behind is the 'Progress Type 2.'"

Napoleon nodded; he knew that the difference between the so-called "Progress Type 1" and "Progress Type 2" was essentially the result of the elder gentleman in front of him being at odds with someone else. The "Progress Type 2" was the model Joseph truly aspired to.

"It's quite a massive thing. If some foolish Native Americans were to see this running, they might even worship it as a deity," Napoleon laughed. He walked to the side of the "Progress Type 1," grabbed the steel handrail of the ladder, and turned back to ask, "Can I climb up and take a look?"

"Of course, Your Excellency," Watt said. "The cabin is up there, you can go take a look."

Chapter 308: Testing

Napoleon, hearing this, grasped the handrail and ascended the steps. Halfway up, he glanced down to find Joseph standing nearby. "Joseph, why don't you come up and take a look as well?"

Joseph instinctively wanted to decline.

"Come on up, don't worry, this is a steam locomotive; it won't derail," Napoleon added.

"Trust you? Not likely!" Joseph thought to himself. Realizing the engine hadn't even been fired up, let alone ignited, he turned to Watt. "Mr. Watt, I recall there's considerable space up there. Shall we go and take a look together? Hmm, the ladder's a bit steep, why don't you lead the way?"

"Haha, Chancellor Bonaparte, worried about me falling and wanting to catch me? I might be a tad older, but climbing this ladder poses no problem," Watt chuckled.

With that, Watt ascended first, followed by Joseph. They climbed up and entered the cockpit.

The cockpit was indeed spacious, around eight to nine square meters. On the right side, there was a control panel with several levers and a rope hanging nearby.

"Is this the cord for the electric lights?" Napoleon inquired.

"No, it's for the steam whistle," Watt replied. "The light cord is over there, near the entrance."

Napoleon nodded, then turned to see a closed door on the left side of the cockpit. Beside it sat a small cart and a few shovels.

"What's this?" Napoleon asked.

"It's the boiler's feed port," Watt explained. "During operation, workers feed coal into it for combustion. This small cart facilitates bringing coal from the coal and water car behind. There..."

Watt gestured toward a nearby pipeline and valves above. "Your Excellency, this is the water pipe for adding water to the steam engine. Of course, it can only be done when the steam engine is shut down, with no pressure in the cylinder..."

Napoleon nodded and thanked Watt again. They inspected every corner of the locomotive before departing.

Early the next morning, after breakfast, Napoleon and Joseph, accompanied by guards, arrived at the testing ground. The locomotive had left the factory and was now on the outdoor tracks. The

morning sun illuminated the steel behemoth and the tracks, glinting off the glass and brass adornments on both.

On a hill about 300 meters from the tracks stood a grandstand. Joseph explained why it was positioned so far away:

"From here, you can oversee the entire test track, witnessing the locomotive's performance throughout. If placed elsewhere, our view would be limited. Concerning any distance issues, a telescope can compensate."

Everyone agreed Joseph's reasoning was sound, except Napoleon, who privately expressed doubts to his brother. Joseph admitted his reluctance to a close inspection was indeed due to a dislike for the coal smoke.

"Hehe," Napoleon chuckled.

However, they didn't delve deeper into the discussion as the locomotive, named "Progress No. 1," began emitting smoke.

Napoleon, ignoring the chance to tease his elder brother, lifted his spyglass and asked, "Joseph, Joseph, is it about to move?"

"It's just starting the steam, no carriages attached yet. What's the rush?" Joseph looked at his brother with a countryman's gaze. "Moreover, unless we give the signal here, how can it move? Napoleon, didn't you review the procedure I showed you last night?"

"I did, I remember. They'll hoist a blue flag when they're ready for us, and then, via phone, they'll confirm readiness, and we'll signal the departure with a red flag. How could I forget? I'm just excited..."

Time passed, no call, no blue flag.

"So slow," Napoleon remarked.

"I told you, they should finish firing up and pressurizing first. But it looks like it's about time," Joseph said.

"It's... ah, it's moving! It's moving," Napoleon exclaimed.

"It's just attaching the carriages," Joseph replied.

The locomotive slowly moved backward, not forward, to where the carriages were stationed.

"Your Excellency, 'Progress No. 1' will be pulling nine carriages, each loaded with over fifty tons of coal. Along with the carriage weight, it'll haul over five hundred tons," Watt explained.

"Ah, it's like a large seafaring vessel on land. Can it pull that weight?" Napoleon inquired.

"According to calculations, it shouldn't be an issue," Joseph replied.

"Ah," Napoleon nodded.

The coupling took a while. By the time the blue flag rose and the guard stationed by the phone received confirmation, it was late morning.

"Alright, let's start!" Napoleon shouted.

The signal was sent, and soon, a long whistle sounded from the distance, audible even from their elevated position.

"Now you see how perfectly situated our stand is? If we were below, this sound would've been..." Joseph explained. "I'm telling you, Napoleon, no one understands the selection of a stand's ideal position better than I do."

"Shush, don't disturb," Napoleon said, holding the spyglass. "The train's moving!"

Indeed, after the whistle, the train began gradually moving forward.

"Why so slow? Slower than a carriage," Napoleon commented. "But pulling this much, it's still more efficient than a horse-drawn carriage."

In the historical context, early steam locomotives lacked proper suspension, and their rigid wheels would cause severe jolting at slightly higher speeds, risking derailment.

However, the 'Progress No. 1' had addressed these issues with spring suspension, ensuring the wheels firmly adhered to the steel tracks, avoiding jumps and potential derailments. Its track, made of heavy steel, far surpassed the older iron ones in strength. Thus, if the 'Progress No. 1' couldn't surpass a horse-drawn carriage, it would indeed be a joke. Napoleon felt it was slower due to its poor acceleration and deceleration abilities. But with more distance covered, its speed would undoubtedly surpass a carriage.

The train whistled again, enveloped in swirling steam, gradually accelerating. "Good, good, quite a speed, rivaling a carriage! Hauling this much weight at such a pace! Marvelous! Joseph, can it go faster?" Napoleon asked.

At this moment, the train began slowing down. The six-kilometer test track was too short to allow the train to reach its maximum speed. The highest speed achieved during this test was thirty kilometers per hour, remarkable for the era.

"Can it accommodate passengers?" Napoleon inquired. "This is incredibly useful. Joseph, when can we have that land battleship?"

"That thing?" Joseph smirked. "Let's focus on establishing a nationwide railway network, making profits first. About the battleship, well, some railroads are strategically significant. We could term them 'Defense Railways' and..."

"And then allocate funds from the War Department to build them, and then you'll use them, right?" Napoleon interjected. "Even if I agree, are you sure General Carnot would approve?"

"General Carnot?" Joseph replied. "Just tell him it's crucial for military use and explain that during peacetime, leasing to private enterprises can generate income. I believe he'll agree."

Chapter 309: Misappropriation

Back in Paris, Joseph immediately sought out Carnot. Being a regular visitor to Carnot's house, he didn't need to announce himself—the servants recognized the esteemed Bonaparte and ushered him in without a word.

Upon entering the living room, Joseph was greeted by Carnot's exasperated voice, "You fool! Didn't I explain this problem to you yesterday? Just swapped X and Y, and yet... It's maddening! By God, I'd rather face a coalition of European armies than deal with your incompetence! You..."

In this prolonged peace, Carnot had more time at home, delving into scholarly pursuits and educating his six-year-old son.

Following the sound, Joseph strode into the adjacent study. There, Carnot stood, ruffled and flustered by a desk cluttered with crumpled drafts, discarded pencils strewn on the floor. His six-year-old son, Nicolas, stood beside, pale and bewildered.

"Lazare, what's going on? You can't vent your frustration on a child," Joseph promptly scolded Carnot.

"Ah... Joseph, when did you arrive?" Carnot's tone softened.

"Nicolas, come here to Uncle Joseph," Joseph turned to the boy.

Nicolas hurried to Joseph's side.

"Lazare, did you give Nicolas this problem and he couldn't solve it?" Joseph inquired.

"Yeah, a simple question... I just explained a nearly identical one to him yesterday... This child, driving me mad..." Carnot sighed.

"Let me see the problem," Joseph knew Carnot's son was remarkably bright.

Carnot handed over a crumpled paper to Joseph.

Glancing at it, Joseph exclaimed, "Lazare, how could you? Presenting a six-year-old with a quadratic equation! Good Lord, it's even a second-degree equation! Are you out of your mind? Using this on a child, and then getting mad at Nicolas? I must say, I'm certain that even at twelve, or maybe even fourteen, you couldn't solve this! Nicolas, don't cry, Uncle will sort this out. Your father's being unreasonable! Lazare, truth be told, do you honestly believe you could solve this at twelve?"

"Yesterday, I already explained it to him once..." Carnot's voice trailed off, showing some guilt. Often, parents set unrealistically high expectations for their children, expecting feats they themselves couldn't achieve. In this aspect, Lazare Carnot was no different.

"Damn it! Understanding this concept at six is already close to genius level, let alone the complexity involved! How can we expect skill at this age? Mozart composing at five is art, not mathematics! Besides Mozart, who else in this world could do that? Are we fools for not achieving Mozart's level? I dare say, in terms of scientific aptitude, Nicolas is likely superior to you. He'll probably enter the Academy earlier than you did. Remember, at twelve, you might not have solved this question!" Joseph argued.

"But..." Carnot became more sheepish, "Joseph, your assistant seems capable of..."

"My assistant?" Joseph paused, then burst into laughter, "Hahaha! Lazare, now I understand! You're feeling a little inadequate! Let me tell you, some folks are inexplicable wonders. The first time I met that guy, I was nearly scared to death!

This scoundrel, at twelve, was already questioning the fundamental proofs in geometric elements. At sixteen, he derived the general form of binomial theorem. At seventeen, discovered prime distribution theorem and least squares method. By nineteen, he was using compass and straightedge, drawing regular heptadecagon... Oh, and recently, he's onto another stroke of genius. I completely

agree; it'll soon shock the entirety of European mathematicians... Hahaha! Honestly, we can't compare ourselves to those geniuses. Otherwise, how could we even eat?"

Carnot glared at Joseph, "Joseph, you're also one of those geniuses! Why did you come to my house?"

"Ah, Nicolas, go play outside for a bit. Uncle needs to talk to your father," Joseph ruffled Nicolas's hair.

"Okay," Nicolas agreed before leaving and responsibly closing the door behind him.

Joseph approached Carnot's desk, retrieving a document from his briefcase to show Carnot.

Carnot bent over the document, Joseph settled into a nearby chair, crossing his legs.

After a while, Carnot set down the document, "Joseph, this is another invention that can change the world! It also means we can further reduce military expenses. Did you come to discuss this?"

The military advantages of railways were evident—they facilitated swift movement of troops and supplies, offering a strategic edge. A well-connected rail network in France and its allies implied superior mobility compared to hypothetical adversaries. Prussia's success in the Franco-Prussian War rested significantly on its superior railway network, quickly amassing troops to defeat France.

High strategic mobility also reduced the need for a standing army. Previously, lengthy deployment meant maintaining substantial forces everywhere. But with railways, fewer troops sufficed, allowing saved funds to bolster training, equipment, and personnel benefits.

"Lazare, you're right. With this, we can reduce the standing army, channeling more funds into training, new weapons, and the navy. A national railway network would aid overall economic growth by drastically cutting transportation costs. Our military expenses have seen a decreasing share in the national budget despite accommodating numerous post-war soldiers. The average annual funding per soldier has increased. Hence, overall national economic growth will benefit the military," Joseph explained.

"But before the railways are complete, reducing troop numbers is risky. You should discuss these matters with your brother," Carnot advised.

"Of course, but I have military-related thoughts I wish to discuss with you. The entire world's willingness for free trade with us is primarily because they can't defeat us. We must never compromise our military strength. However, railway construction takes time. If solely relying on corporate investment, we'd fund routes with the quickest returns. I believe, Lazare, you'd understand," Joseph remarked.

Carnot nodded in comprehension.

"Often, the most economically vital routes coincide with the most strategically important ones. However, not all areas may yield immediate economic returns but hold great military significance. If only focusing on economics, these lines would be delayed. This would slow down our troop reductions and, subsequently, our savings. Thus, I propose this—let the War Department allocate some funds for these railways. Economically, they might not yield as much as others, but they're still profitable. The War Department would benefit economically from these routes. What do you think?" Joseph suggested.

"The military shouldn't have its finances, as you've said before," Carnot countered.

"Indeed, but this money doesn't directly go to the military. It passes through the government, which then allocates it. Essentially, the government slightly reduces military spending for a few years, in return for larger future allocations," Joseph clarified.

Chapter 310: Military Exercise Plan

Carnot, upon hearing the proposal, neither opposed nor immediately endorsed it. He understood that the military was the cornerstone of the Bonaparte family; they were unlikely to deceive the army. However, precisely because the military was their bedrock, Joseph and his kin would certainly not compromise the soldiers' treatment. Thus, reducing military expenses would likely impact either equipment or training.

After pondering, Carnot spoke, "I don't have many objections, but two points to consider."

He paused briefly, then continued, "Firstly, when you sell weapons abroad, Joseph, you must... hmm, are you implying that most of the weapons you sell to foreigners are substandard?"

"How would they know?" Joseph replied. "Otherwise, they won't sell."

"What if they realize they have more than us or if they perceive their weapons to be on par? Would they consider taking risks? Are the weapons you sell better than what they already possess? Could they falsely believe they've significantly enhanced their capabilities?" Carnot inquired.

"That's possible," Joseph nodded.

"So, we must make them aware that the weapons they buy from us are inferior. Compared to ours, their weapons are like monkeys compared to humans," Carnot explained.

"That might affect our revenue," Joseph argued.

"No, Joseph," Carnot countered, "they already recognize the vast disparity between their past and current capabilities. We just need to emphasize the gap between them and us. If they don't buy our substandard weapons, not only can't they match us, but they also can't match their neighbors. The more they realize they're not our match, the more they'll feel the necessity to purchase our weapons, even the substandard ones."

"Darn, isn't this akin to paying protection money?" Joseph nearly slapped himself for needing a local to remind him of this tactic so widely played in the future. It was utterly embarrassing!

In the future, when speaking of substandard weapons, people often thought of a certain nation, but another superpower, Lighthouse Nation, also excelled in this. For instance, when selling tanks, they'd remove critical depleted uranium armor and replace it with outdated composite armor. (Due to investing in depleted uranium armor tech, they neglected advancements in composite armor.)

Arms trade always involved expert procurement. Did the countries purchasing Lighthouse tanks not realize what they were getting after removing the depleted uranium armor? Yet, Lighthouse's substandard versions sold well. Why?

Firstly, while Lighthouse's substandard versions couldn't match their originals, they were still superior to what other countries produced, or those countries couldn't produce them at all. Secondly, buying Lighthouse's substandard weapons was akin to paying them protection money. Apart from

Lighthouse, no one else could easily intimidate those buyers. Hence, the actual quality of the weapons didn't always correlate with their marketability.

However, to achieve this effect, it would be best to have France confront an opponent they could easily defeat, much like Lighthouse once did. But presently, in continental Europe, there seemed to be no immediate candidate for such a scenario. Austria was no longer a hostile nation, and there was no benefit in attacking them. Russia was an option, but the distance posed an issue. Moreover, Russia wasn't the type to forget after being beaten, unlike the aforementioned.

Given the absence of a direct target, they could follow Great Mao's strategy: stage a "Western-81 Military Exercise" to intimidate others.

Of course, replicating the scale of Mao's "Western-81" exercise, involving ten army groups, over three hundred thousand troops, thousands of tanks and armored vehicles, and numerous aircraft, was inconceivable for Joseph's or even France's lifetime.

Furthermore, organizing such an exercise aimed at saving money and selling weapons would be excessively costly.

However, there was one aspect of "Western-81" worth emulating—inviting the hypothetical enemies to witness the exercise and scare them. Joseph believed France could invite those still harboring illusions, allowing them to witness a "high-tech war" and effectively advertise French weaponry.

"Joseph, you've got that gleam in your eyes again. Have you thought of something?" Carnot, having worked alongside Joseph for years, knew him well enough. Just by observing his expression, he could tell Joseph had struck upon an idea.

"Shouldn't we organize a joint military exercise and invite our 'friends' from other countries to witness?" Joseph suggested.

"Are you saying we should flaunt our capabilities to our 'friends' during this exercise?" Carnot caught onto the enthusiasm. "Alright, let's discuss. Firstly, what abilities do we need to showcase?"

"Rapid mobility, especially with heavy firepower units, artillery's swift mobility; immense and swift firepower, like rear-mounted cannons and shrapnel shells; formidable breaching capabilities under cover of firepower, advancing trenches and using grenade tubes and trench guns..." Joseph listed off.

"You missed one thing that we can certainly exhibit to others," Carnot interjected.

"What?" Joseph asked.

"The navy!" Carnot exclaimed. "What truly stimulates and compels others to swiftly buy weapons is the navy. Let the 'Free Trade' demonstrate in the naval exercise how to disrupt free trade. And I'm aware you've been working on those updated models..."

"I promised Napoleon not to sell rear-mounted cannons until the next generation appears," Joseph stated. "But the substandard 'Free Trade' can be easily sold. Let's have it demonstrate during the exercise, then sell it off to the Ottomans or even the British..."