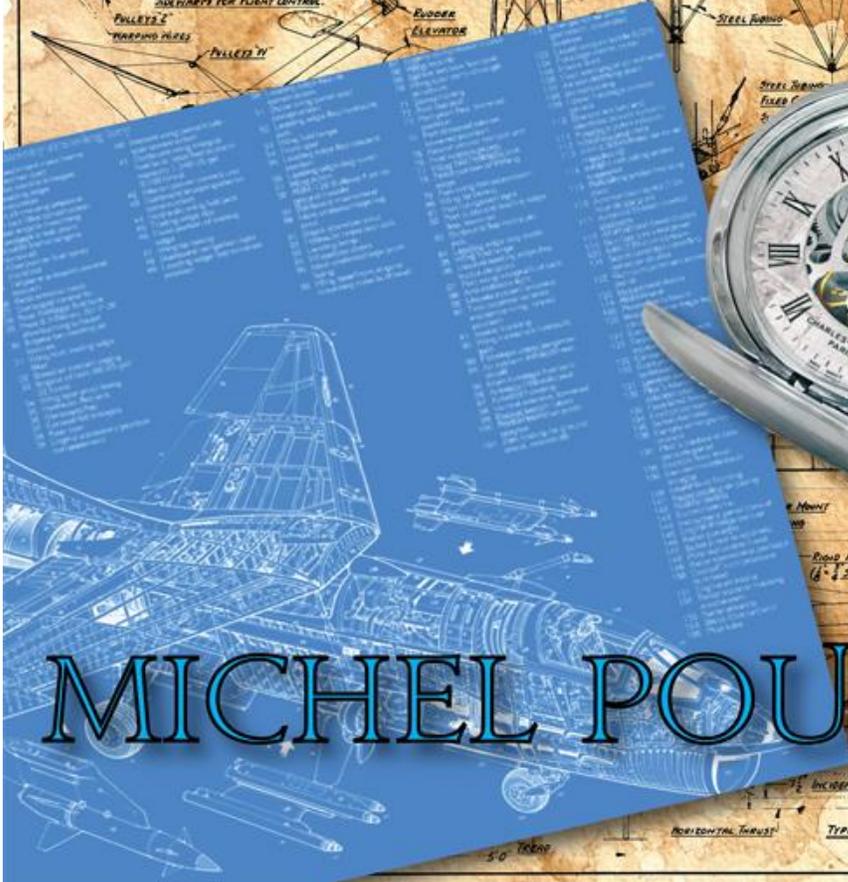
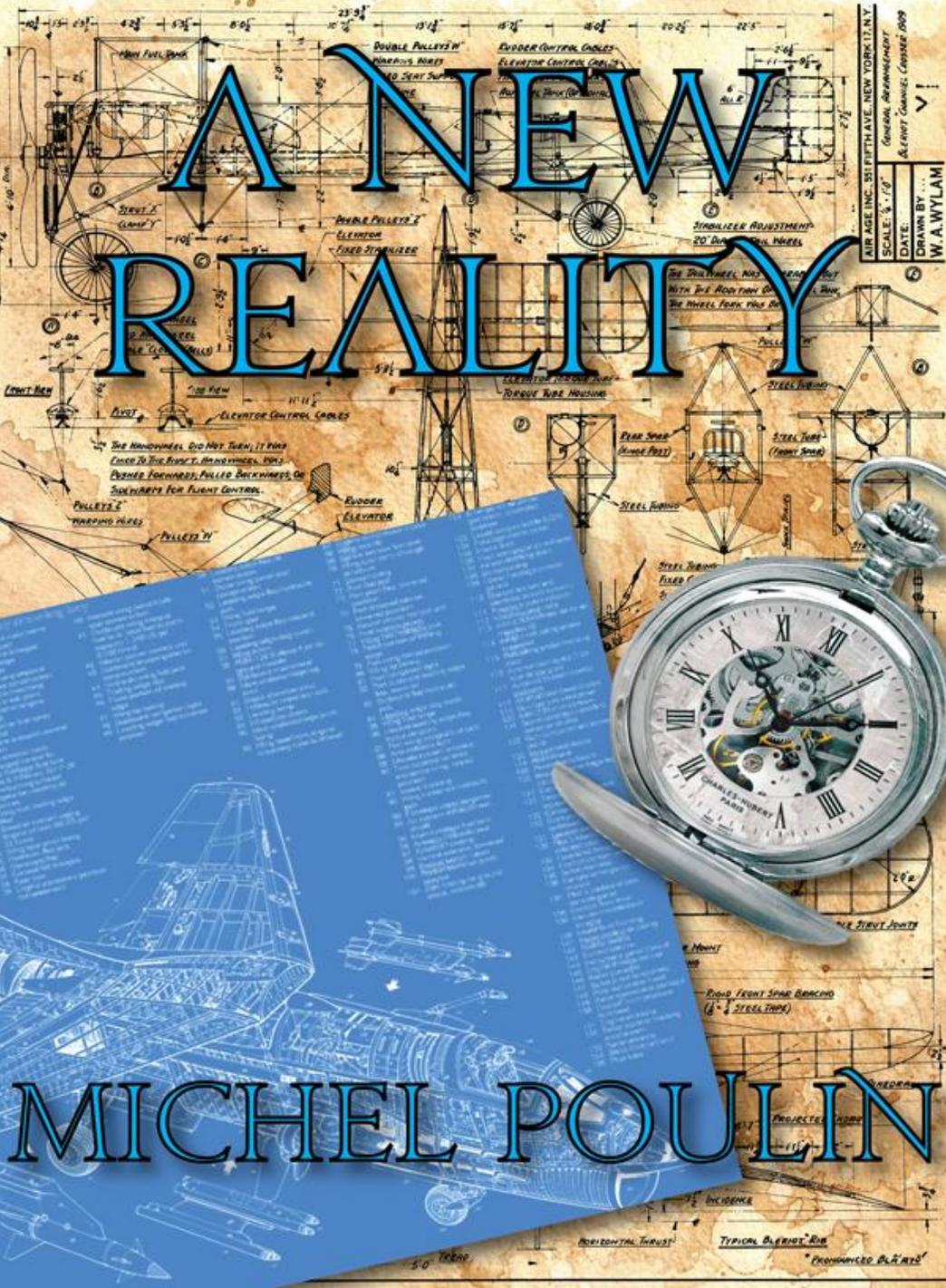


# A NEW REALITY



# MICHEL POULIN

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# **A NEW REALITY**

**An alternate history fiction novel**

**By**

**Michel Poulin**

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Cover art by

**Jason Terlecki**

## **WARNING TO POTENTIAL READERS**

**THIS NOVEL CONTAINS SOME GRAPHIC DESCRIPTIONS AND PICTURES OF WAR AND VIOLENCE, AS WELL AS COARSE LANGUAGE AND CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECTS THAT ARE UNSUITABLE FOR CHILDREN. THIS IS A WORK OF FICTION: WHILE SOME PERSONS DEPICTED IN THIS NOVEL EXISTED, THEIR ACTIONS AND WORDS IN THIS NOVEL DO NOT REPRESENT HISTORICAL REALITY.**

## **ABOUT THIS NOVEL**

This novel is a sequel to my novel A MINOR GLITCH and can be best described as being part of the 'Alternate History' genre as much as being a science-fiction novel. It continues the adventures of four women who were accidentally displaced in time and found themselves marooned in the early parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, where they did their best to adapt and prosper.

## **OTHER NOVELS BY THIS AUTHOR**

(Can be obtained for free online at [Free-Ebooks.net](http://Free-Ebooks.net) and [Goodreads.com](http://Goodreads.com), or can be requested directly for free to the author by sending an email at [natai@videotron.ca](mailto:natai@videotron.ca))

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Bastille Day military parade down the Champs Élysées in Paris.

## **CHAPTER 1 – LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, FRATERNITÉ**

**18:03 (Paris Time)**

**Friday, July 11, 1930**

**Château du Haut-Buc (Castle of High-Buc)**

**Buc, southwest of Paris**

**France**

“...This afternoon, the Senate finally passed and approved the new law and constitutional amendment on the equality of women. I, as President of the Republic, in turn signed that new law and constitutional amendment less than one hour ago. I, Pierre-Paul-Henri-Gaston Doumergue, am thus most happy to announce to the women of France that they are now fully equal to men in the eyes of the law and will be able to vote at every level of government. This means in practice that married women will be able to keep control of their possessions and financial assets, which can no longer be

taken away from them by their husbands or relatives, be they male or female. French women will be able to own and operate businesses and financial enterprises and sign legal contracts as freely as men do, while they will have equal rights regarding divorce and separation procedures. Finally, to balance those new rights with corresponding responsibilities, unmarried women aged eighteen and over will be obligated from now on to serve the nation for one year or more, depending on the occupation, by doing either national service work like humanitarian or medical work, or by serving in non-combat support positions in the Army, Air Force and Navy, for which positions they will be trained for by military instructors and specialists. Women of France, you can be proud of yourselves today, as you richly deserved your new rights.”

The eight women assembled in front of the large, flat screen color television sitting in one corner of the big lounge screamed as one with joy as President Doumergue concluded his televised appearance. Tasha Lenoir, the owner of the Château du Haut-Buc, first hugged her three longtime friends, Terry Clarkson, Pham Ti Hien and Johanna Kruger, before hugging in turn the four women employees of her household.

“Girls, I am so happy, for all of us! This is a moment that I had been hoping for years.”

“I actually had despaired of seeing this day ever come, madam.” replied Sylvie Brochu, the cook of the residence, while returning Tasha’s hug.

“Me too!” added Marthe Lecomte, the senior maid. “I do wish that it could have come much earlier: that would have prevented my no-good ex-husband from grabbing all my hard-earned savings when he left me.”

Tasha Lenoir, a tall and still beautiful Eurasian woman at the age of 52, smiled down with sympathy at Marthe.

“And I made sure that he later paid for his acts, Marthe. Here, you will always be respected and treated as an equal.”

Marthe nodded her head at that, knowing that Tasha meant what she had said. Tasha was a most caring employer, on top of being the richest woman in France and possibly in the World, being a savvy businesswoman and a scientific genius. In fact, all four permanent residents of the manor were rich, to varying degrees. Pham Ti Hien, the 43 year-old ex-executive secretary of Tasha Lenoir, owned and controlled the hugely popular and ever expanding ‘Radio France’ network, to which ‘Radio France Télévision’ had been added eleven years ago. Johanna Kruger, a blond, 57 year-old aerospace engineer, owned the ‘Automobiles Kruger’ company, which had gobbled up the

'Automobiles Renault' company some thirteen years ago, and was also co-owner and chief designer of the 'Aéronautique Blériot-Kruger' company. Finally, there was the incredibly tall and strong Terry Clarkson, a 49 year-old black woman who was still Tasha Lenoir's personal bodyguard, on top of being a top test pilot at Blériot-Kruger and the owner of 'Armements Clarkson', a producer of advanced weapons and military equipment which was the favorite supplier of the French Army.

"Jeanne, this calls for Champagne!" said Tasha to one of the maids. "Bring eight cups and two of the bottles that were chilling in the refrigerator for Bastille Day." The maid walked out at once, heading towards the kitchen and leaving the seven other women to listen to the commentaries from the Radio France TV news announcer about President Doumergue's declaration. Those comments made evident the fact that the resistance to that new law had been both long and intense, something the women knew too well indeed. They had hoped for such a law for a long time but had until now to angrily listen to the collection of misogynistic and hypocritical arguments dished out by the opponents to the women's right to vote. Most prominent in those opponents were the members of the French Senate, who had blocked for years all the attempts by either the President of the Republic or the Prime Minister, also known as the 'President of the Council of Ministers', to have such a law pass. However, Tasha Lenoir, who held discreet but considerable political power thanks to her fortune and to her friendly links with high officials, including the President, had worked hard to discredit those opponents to women's rights and to counter their arguments. Now, those efforts were finally paying off, opening new horizons for Tasha, her three friends and partners and for all the women of France.

Jeanne soon came back to the lounge with a service trolley on which sat eight crystal flutes and an ice bucket with two Champagne bottles in it. Tasha personally filled and distributed the cups, then raised her flute high while speaking up.

"TO EQUALITY!"

"TO EQUALITY!" repeated out loud the other women before each taking a sip of Champagne. Sitting back like the others on a sofa, Tasha sighed audibly, her glass still in her hand.

"I wish that Henri would still be here to see this moment."

Mournful expressions appeared on the faces of Hien, Terry and Johanna at those words: Henri Deutsch de la Meurthe, a rich oil industrialist who had helped all four of them after

they had arrived accidentally from the future in 1912, had died over ten years ago and was missed by many, as his generosity as a philanthropist and his support for the development of aviation and automobile had been widely recognized. The group of women stayed mostly silent for minutes while sipping their Champagne and listening to the commentaries on the television. The four female employees were finally dismissed for the weekend by Tasha, leaving her alone in the lounge with her three friends from the year 2624. When she spoke again, it was while keeping the volume of her voice low, so that the departing employees could not hear her.

“Hien, what are the chances that our actions in this century, by changing history, could prevent Louis’s death in 1936?”

Hien, who had like her three friends a micro-computer and radio implanted at the base of her brain, reviewed mentally the historical files contained in her computer databanks before answering Tasha while shaking her head sadly.

“I am sorry, Tasha, but Louis is due to die from a heart attack, something our actions can hardly prevent. At best, the actual circumstances and date of his eventual death may change a bit, but Louis has only a few years left to live right now, whether we like it or not.”

“And what then?” asked Johanna Kruger. “I may be the co-owner of the Aéronautique Blériot-Kruger, but who will succeed him? Our company is now hugely important to both the economy and power of France and none of his children are truly ready or even willing to take his place.”

“We will continue Louis’ work while channeling Louis’ part of the profits to his family.” declared Tasha in a quiet voice. “Our biggest problem is actually about ourselves: what will happen to all that we have accomplished when we will eventually die? The anti-aging genetic treatment that we got as a standard medical procedure in the 27<sup>th</sup> Century may make us live longer than the typical people from this century, but we will still die eventually, either from old age, accident, disease or assassination. What then? Our combined industrial and economic empires are now central to France’s future and to a better World overall. Even though we could now marry without fear of losing our fortunes to greedy husbands, I am loathe to have children only to push them into having to assume our succession. If I ever have children, I would want them to be free to choose the kind of life and occupation they would like best. To force-feed a child into becoming an industrial baron is not my idea of being a good parent.”

“Neither is it for me, Tasha.” replied Johanna Kruger. “Losing my husband and son from the 27<sup>th</sup> Century when that matter transporter accident projected us in the past was very painful to me at first, but I would never have a child just to fulfill some long term plan for him or her to succeed me. Adopting children and then forming them to succeed us equally strikes me as pure cynical manipulation and I won’t do that. I think that our best option is still to carefully select our most meritorious and talented employees we have in our respective industries and name them as chief designers and managers in our last wills, while naming people we know to be caring and generous persons as beneficiaries of our wills and actual owners of our companies, in order to ensure that our industrial empires profit all of France, rather than only just a few very rich people. I already have a very talented and imaginative engineer name Marcel Bloch in mind, who could succeed me as chief designer at Blériot-Kruger. As for a future owner of Blériot-Kruger, I can’t think of anyone better than Éliane Archdeacon: she loves aviation, like her father, is generous and kind and lives rather simply, despite her father’s fortune. She also happens to be married to an aristocrat who is a painter and a true artist at heart.”

“I agree with you, Johanna.” said Terry Clarkson, Tasha’s personal bodyguard and owner and chief executive of the ‘Armements Clarkson’ industrial group. “Choosing successors based on their talents and ideals sounds like the best solution for us.” All four women nodded their heads at that and fell silent while sipping on their flutes, absorbed in their individual thoughts. In truth, as the mere existence of the large flat screen color television set in the lounge proved, their eighteen years in France had already transformed the country in an immeasurable way, putting it largely ahead of other countries both technologically and, more importantly for Tasha and her three friends, sociologically.

**09:18 (New York Time)**

**Sunday, July 13, 1930**

**Queens International Airport**

**District of Queens, New York City**

**New York State, U.S.A.**

U.S. Secretary of Commerce Robert P. Lamont was happy to get up from his rather uncomfortable seat in the narrow cabin of his Boeing 224 passenger plane, which

had just landed in New York, coming from Washington. Recuperating his leather briefcase and hat from the overhead luggage rack, he then walked towards the forward exit of the plane, mixing with the nineteen other passengers, which included his two aides and one female secretary. The Boeing 224 was by American standards a good plane, with two radial piston engines, an all-metal construction and a true cantilever mono wing, and was the mainstay of many American domestic airlines. However, by the standards of Air France it was a hopeless dinosaur. Lamont had more than once wished that American airline companies could buy some of the advanced aircraft designs used by Air France, but that had hit a wall raised by the owner of Air France, Tasha Lenoir, who refused to sell Blériot-Kruger aircraft to American customers as long as segregationist laws, regulations and policies would be forced upon Air France installations in the United States. New York City, along with Los Angeles and Honolulu, had been and still were the three sole American cities which had accepted to forgo segregationist policies at their local airports. That had in turn brought a huge economic stimulus to those three cities, which were now important international hubs in the worldwide Air France network of airports, routes and radio navigation beacon stations. If you wanted to go from the United States to Europe and back these days, you basically had two options: to either be ready to spend over a week at sea and travel aboard a passenger liner ship, or to take one of the jet-powered airliners operated by Air France, which made the New York – Paris trip in less than seven hours, and this at less cost than the cheapest maritime fare available. Understandably, most people opted for Air France, making its New York – Paris route a heavily frequented and also very profitable one. It also made the maritime companies scream like skinned cats as they were gradually pushed towards bankruptcy.

Leaving the Air America's Boeing 224 by its forward left door, Lamont waited for his three assistants to come out as well before walking to the nearest ground level access door to the air terminal building. The building, a big, round affair, had eight arrival/departure aircraft gates, each of which had both a ground level access door and what was called 'jetways', elevated corridors that could move around on wheels and extend themselves to connect with the access doors of aircraft which would otherwise require the use of mobile staircases. Lamont knew about them from the past newspaper articles written about Air France, its planes and its installations, but the airports in the U.S.A. that didn't belong to Air France still didn't have such 'jetways'. Once inside the

terminal, Lamont was confronted with more visual evidence that this was no standard American installation. The architecture was decidedly 'avant-garde', with lots of stained glass and stainless steel used, while electronic display boards and large color television screens dispersed around the terminal showed various messages and flights information to the public using the building. Lamont's secretary, Louise Perkins, sighed with content on feeling the fresh breeze from the building's air conditioning system.

"Aaaah, that feels good! I wish that our offices in Washington could also be air-conditioned."

"Don't count too much on that, Louise." replied with a smile Adam Salinger, Lamont's translator for this trip. "They are talking of further cutting our department's budget, thanks to the recession."

"Uh, I would use the word 'depression' instead of 'recession', Adam." said John Cartwright, who was Lamont's personal aide and who tended to tell things as they were. "But I must say that this place does honor its reputation, from what I can see of it."

"Well, you guys can debate semantics later." cut in the Secretary of Commerce. "Let's recuperate our luggage, so that we can go to the Air France counter and board our plane to Paris."

For that, the group had to wait for the ground personnel of Air America to finish transferring the luggage inside the Boeing 224 to the terminal building, putting the various bags and suitcases on an oval conveyor belt system near the gate's door. Using two of the luggage carts available around the terminal, Lamont and his aides loaded their suitcases on them, then rolled them towards the Air France service counters. One large publicity poster made Lamont stop for a moment on the way, time to examine it with curiosity.

"The Ireland weekend express? What is that?"

Reading the poster, which showed the picture of a happy Irish family coming out of an Air France plane, Lamont understood quickly what it was all about.

"Special weekend return trips to Dublin at half fares for Irish-American families? That is mighty generous on the part of Air France...and not very good business practice: those special fares must eat a lot in their profit margins."

"Maybe, sir, but it certainly must create a lot of goodwill and good publicity for Air France." said Adam Salinger. "There is a big Irish immigrant community in New York and such cheap flights, providing a chance to go visit relatives in Ireland, must be

extremely popular. That would also jive with the reputation of the owner and creator of Air France as a social activist.”

“Aah, yes: the powerful and mysterious Miss Tasha Lenoir. I can’t count how many times someone mentioned her while discussing trade with France with me. If I believed them, this Tasha Lenoir pretty well owns much of France.”

“Well, sir, they do say that she is the richest woman in the World right now.” added Louise Perkins, making Lamont nod his head.

“She does have that reputation, Louise. She is also said to be a formidable businesswoman, on top of being a scientific genius. I would be truly curious to meet her one day. But enough of this! Let’s go to the Air France counter!”

The line of passengers waiting to get booked aboard the next flight to Paris was quite long, snaking around moveable poles linked by red tape. Lamont was tempted for a moment to use his social status and jump the line but decided that it would have been squarely impolite and patiently waited his turn. John Cartwright, on his part, eyed with some misgivings the few dark-skinned people mixed in with white people in the lineup.

“Hum, no segregated line for negroes: I wouldn’t try that in Alabama or Georgia.”

“And that is why they don’t have Air France service there and still have to use piston-powered planes.” replied Salinger, his tone a bit caustic. While on the whole a fairly decent man, Cartwright had a racist streak that tended to sour his personality. At that point, Lamont put up one hand, cutting off a reply from Cartwright.

“Enough on that subject! John, I will remind you that the racial atmosphere in France is quite different from that here in the United States.”

“Understood, sir!” said the chastised aide, who then clamed up. Twelve minutes later, Lamont’s turn came at the service counter. The Air France stewardess who greeted him with a big smile was young, very pretty and most appetizing, making Lamont wish that he was some thirty years younger. Her English proved to be fluent, with only a trace of French accent in it.

“May I have your passport, sir? Did you have a reservation made in advance in your name, sir?”

“Me and my three assistants behind me had first class seats reserved for this morning’s flight to Paris, with return tickets for next Friday. Here are my passport and those of my assistants.”

“Thank you, sir!”

The young woman opened first Lamont's passport and looked at the picture and name inside, then looked at a sort of glass screen in front of her while typing quickly on a keyboard somewhat similar to that of a typewriter. She then did the same with the passports of his assistants before looking back up at Lamont and smile to him.

"Your reservations are confirmed and you are now booked aboard our Flight AF002, Mister Secretary. I just need now to weigh your suitcases and tag them and you will then be able to pay for your fare before going to your gate's waiting lounge."

"Uh, may I ask what you just used to type our names and check our reservations, miss? And how do you know that I am a federal cabinet member?"

The young French woman had a cute smile, her eyes glinting, as she answered him.

"What I used is called a computer, sir. It was developed by the 'Électroniques Lenoir' company and is a proprietary system used only by the various branches of the 'Lenoir Industries Consortium', which includes Air France, and by the French government and military. That computer system allows us to book or check for a reservation, verify seat availability and allot specific seats for each passengers. As for your title, sir, our personnel keeps abreast of lists of important officials with V.I.P. status."

What the stewardess didn't say, in order not to alarm Lamont, was that the Air France computer reservation system did a lot more than that and had actually flagged Lamont as a high-level government official once his name had been entered in the system. She also didn't tell him that she had scanned his passport, thus recording his picture in the system. Her explanation however seemed to satisfy Lamont, who was still quite overwhelmed by that demonstration of superior technology. He thus promised himself to tell someone about this 'computer system' once back in Washington and took back his passport, along with his ticket and embarkation card. He then paid for his fare and that of his assistants, using cash, before passing one by one their suitcases to the stewardess, so that she could weigh and tag them. At the end of the process, the stewardess gave a last warm smile to Lamont while pointing at a nearby hallway.

"Your bags are now going to be loaded aboard your flight, Mister Secretary. If you may now proceed to the departure area, where you will be able to wait for your flight's departure, which is due in eighty minutes. There, you will be within the airport's duty free zone, where you will find various boutiques that sell numerous luxury items free of import taxes."

“Thank you very much, miss.” said Lamont before leading his three assistants towards the departure area. He couldn’t help however say something to them in a low voice while walking.

“Wow! This Air France bunch is starting to seriously impress me. That computer system of theirs looks incredible. I will have to mention it to the President and to the rest of the cabinet on our return.”

Only seconds after saying that, they crossed path with a group of Air France pilots and stewardesses dragging behind them wheeled suitcases. Louise Perkins couldn’t help open her mouth and eyes wide at the sight of those suitcases, held by their owners via telescopic handles integrated into the hard-cased suitcases.

“Oh my God! Look at those suitcases! I should get some like these.”

One of the French stewardesses heard her and turned her head to speak to Louise in a good English.

“If you wish to buy similar suitcases, miss, you can find them in most boutiques in Paris and also in one of the duty free boutiques of this airport.”

“Damn, I must get myself a couple of those: I am getting tired of stretching out my arms with heavy suitcases that I have to lift and carry.”

“They sure look practical.” said Lamont, thoughtful, while watching the Air France crew walk away. “Maybe we could reserve half a day for shopping, once in Paris.”

“Thank you, sir.” said Louise gleefully, promising herself to use that coming half-day to the fullest.

To their surprise, they had to empty their pockets of all metallic objects and pass through a metal detector frame in order to enter the departure area, which was situated on the upper floor, while a large, multi-lingual sign at the entrance said ‘No firearms, knives or other weapons allowed’. However, Lamont accepted that without fuss.

“Well, that policy makes sense. I certainly wouldn’t want to have an armed madman aboard our plane.”

“Me neither, Mister Secretary.” added Louise. Once inside the departure area, they saw that a number of waiting lounges lined the outer side of their level, while numerous boutiques, shops and service counters lined the inner side. Since they still had over one hour to wait before boarding their flight, Lamont led his assistants in a tour of the boutiques, curious to see what they sold and at what prices. What they saw was a

wide variety of luxury items like perfumes, jewelry, watches and articles of clothing, but there was no alcohol on sale, as the Prohibition Act of 1920 made illegal the importation, sale or exportation of alcohol products in the United States. The boutiques themselves, sporting an abundance of mirrors, brass fittings, glass and stainless steel, were nearly as much of an eye-catcher as the products they sold, making a stunned Louise exclaim in wonderment at one point.

“My God! It is as if we stepped into a different world.”

“Well, a different world just came to us.” said Adam Salinger, his head turned towards one of the outer panoramic windows. “Look at the plane that just lined up at our gate.”

All four Americans then stared at the big, sleek jet aircraft that had come forward to their flight’s assigned gate. Painted mostly sky blue, it wore on its sides a wide tricolor, red-white-and blue band running from nose to tail, with the words ‘AIR FRANCE’ painted in bold red letters within the white band. All ideas of shopping temporarily forgotten, the Americans, like the other non-French passengers due to embark on Flight AF002, walked quickly to the panoramic windows to admire the aircraft.

“Look at the size of that beast!” exclaimed John Cartwright. “It is easily three times the length of the Boeing 224 we came in from Washington.”

Lamont looked at his boarding pass and read the aircraft type they were to fly in.

“This is a Blériot-Kruger ATLANTIQUE Model 200, according to our boarding passes. It is certainly an impressive beast. Hopefully, its performances and comfort will be on par with its looks.”

“Well, it appears to be an amphibian aircraft as well, sir.” remarked Adam Salinger. “Look at the shape of the bottom half of its fuselage.”

“Oh? Damn, you’re right, Adam! But why make such a big aircraft an amphibian one?”

“Probably because true airports with long, paved runways are still uncommon around the World, sir. Also, the French have many overseas territories, especially around the Pacific, where paved runways must be rare but where most places are near the sea. Such an amphibian airliner could thus in theory land about anywhere in the World, something that would be a definite advantage in commercial terms.”

“It is certainly a beautiful aircraft, with those smooth, curved lines.” Said Louise, making Lamont nod his head.

“That it is!”

His eyes then caught on a Ford three-engine plane rolling past behind the Blériot-Kruger ATLANTIQUE. Lamont couldn't help cringe at the sharp contrast between the American-made aircraft and the French one.

"Damn! And we are claiming to be the most advanced nation on Earth."

Some forty minutes later, an Air France employee standing behind a service counter near the gate's access announced via a loud speaker system that the passengers for Flight AF002 could start boarding, with the first class passengers to proceed inside first, along with pregnant women and handicapped persons. Walking down the 'jetway', Lamont was greeted just inside the aircraft by two smiling and very pretty Air France stewardesses who were pointing each passenger towards his or her seat. The stewardess who greeted Lamont took a brief look at his boarding pass before pointing at a nearby spiral staircase behind her, all the while smiling to him.

"The first class cabin is on the lower deck, sir. This staircase will lead you to it."

"Thank you, miss!"

Going down the carpeted stairs, Lamont ended inside a compartment that was approximately six meters long and five meters wide, which contained a total of sixteen wide, well padded seats. Another stewardess looked at his boarding pass and showed him a set of four seats arranged in pairs facing each other, beside two large windows on the left side of the aircraft.

"You have Seat 01-A, sir, the one nearest the first window."

"Thank you, miss." replied the politician before going to his seat and putting his hat and briefcase in the overhead luggage bin. Sitting down in the brown leather padded seat assigned to him, he found it to be very comfortable, making him sigh in contentment.

"Aaah, that seat is as comfortable as my favorite sofa at home. This flight is decidedly starting on a good foot."

"I wonder how the seats in the other classes look like." Said Salinger as he sat down in his own seat, prompting a reply from Cartwright.

"Probably a lot cheaper and narrower than our seats."

"Actually, Adam, I would like you later on to go look at the accommodations in the rest of this aircraft." said Lamont. "I would like to have an assessment of this plane ride, for the benefit of the employees of the department that may need to travel on Air France in the future."

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