

1. Free Stuff

I've moved the freebies link to the bottom of my newsletters so that you can click without worrying about missing the rest of the information. Wasn't that nice of me?

Today's freebie is the audio book version of *Interviews with the Rogues*, which Paul Christy just finished narrating. Hear the villains share their jaded perspectives – some of them talking from beyond the grave!

Sidebar 1 – you can use your free audio book code for any book on Audible. I do hope you use it on a Rogue Submarine book, but enjoy whatever book you buy!

Sidebar 2 – if you can't get to your code or if it doesn't work, please let me know at john@subthriller.com. Audible changed its promo code policy since I last used one.

2. My Vacation in Lourdes, France

I'm vacationing with my wife in Lourdes, France, where the Virgin Mary appeared 18 times to (now Saint) Bernadette Soubirou, a 14-year old peasant girl. It's a fantastic religious vacation spot with three basilicas within a stone's throw of each other, including an underground concrete edifice built on the 100th anniversary of Bernadette's visions. Anyone who's interested in more about this, drop me a note. It's wonderful.

I hear as much Spanish in the streets as I do French, which makes since given Lourdes' location in the French foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains that separate the countries. It's an ironic confirmation of the logic behind France and Spain uniting to produce the beloved (well, I love them and hope you do) *Scorpène*-class (i.e. *Specter* and *Wraith*) submarines. So, in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes, I'll review the local navies.

3. French Navy and SSBNs

France has reached impressive heights in its naval history. For example, they've built their own nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBN), which places them in elite company. As I was verifying my notes, I discovered that every nation who's built an SSBN is a permanent member of the UN Council (Russia, USA, UK, China, France) except for India, which commissioned its first SSBN in 2016.

Whereas SSBNs give a second-strike deterrence, they are falling from favor. I assume they're being considered less vital than they were during the Cold War, and we'll continue to see less of them. For example, the USA has dropped from 18 to 14 (the first 4 are now SSGNs/special ops boats). Russia has only 7 left. China has 6, France 4, UK 4, and India 1. China and India are the only ones looking to increase SSBN numbers, which makes sense as they are playing catch up while the other nations are right-sizing their complete deterrence arsenals.

If you're getting super-excited about nuclear deterrence, I invite your attention to the untiring research machine, [Joe Buff](#). Check out his site to see what he's learned (I have not yet due to time constraints, but certainly not for lack of interest).

4. French Navy – Carriers

France also has a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier (CVN), the *Charles de Gaulle*. This French flagship is the only CVN outside of the United States. From Wikipedia: As of May 2019, *Charles de Gaulle* is the only non-American carrier-vessel that has a catapult launch system, which has allowed for operation of F/A-18E/F Super Hornets and C-2 Greyhounds of the US Navy.

To my trained eye, a CVN is a huge target I aim torpedoes at through my periscope. Or I consider it a juicy target for the rich sonar data it would provide. However, despite my warranted elitism as a submariner, I must give props to the aviators and their CVN for doing important and visible work. If you're a rogue nation and know that a peacekeeping combat airwing can station itself within reach of your shores, you think twice about your every move. That's a good thing.

5. French Navy – other

The *Goliath* borrows bow sections from the *LaFayette*-class (FREMM - Frégate européenne multi-mission) frigate. I was going to research it a bit, but then Wikipedia said it succinctly: The French Navy operates three amphibious assault ships, one amphibious transport dock, two air defence frigates, seven anti-submarine frigates, five general purpose frigates and six fleet submarines (SSNs). This constitutes the French Navy's main oceangoing war-fighting forces.

The SSNs are still of the old *Rubis* (Ruby) class. It's cool that they named their subs after gems, but they're approaching 40 years of age. The *Barracuda*-class will replace them, but I'm sure there will be gaps in mission coverage based upon how old the *Rubis*-class is getting. For crying out loud, Pierre Renard commanded one ages ago!

6. Spanish Navy

Since the Mercenary Fleet is led by a Frenchman named Pierre Renard (Peter Fox) and not a Spaniard named Pedro Zorro, I had little familiarity with the Spanish Navy. Here's what I learned.

As I expected, there's no aircraft carrier other than amphibious assault vessels, which lack catapults and require vertical/short takeoff-landing craft. Still, the Spaniards have maritime assault capability (as do the French) which gives them a certain gravitas harkening back to the glory days of the armada.

There's also no SSBN or SSB for that matter, since Spain operates zero nuclear-powered vessels. Why should they? The nukes are only worth the investment for the rapid, hidden journeys of an SSN in transit, an SSBN on patrol or any submarine needing to remain hidden for multiple days, or for the carriers that need to sustain top speeds over distances.

For submarines, the Spanish have three of the *Agosta*-class, which you may recognize from *Rogue Betrayal* as the historical vessels in Pakistan. In other words, old.

I was a bit surprised to learn that Spain won't use *Scorpènes* to replace its own fleet. That's not unheard of, as other nations have built submarines for export that they don't use themselves (i.e. Germany, due to naval vessel weight restrictions from WWII treaties). The Spaniards will use the *S-80 Plus-class* (or Isaac Peral class) of four submarines in production by the Spanish company Navantia (who builds *Scorpènes* with DCN of France) in its Cartagena shipyard for the Spanish Navy. Sadly, "weight imbalance problems" delayed the program 7 years.

Maybe they should buy some of their own export *Scorpènes*!

7. Freebies

As promised, get your freebies [here](#).