

A novel about a libertarian revolution on the moon - that does full justice to the pressing, seldom-broached minarchist-anarchist debate! This may be just what the market for libertarian SF is crying out for.

-- Ken MacLeod, author of *The Cassinni Division*, *Cosmonaut Keep*, *Newton's Wake*

---

# The Powers of the Earth

## Chapter 7

### 2064: MaisonNeuve Construction office, Aristillus, Lunar Nearside

Leroy took a sip of gin, held the glass out in front of him and pondered it for a moment, and then threw the whole drink back. It was a shame to treat good liquor that way, but he was feeling on edge and in business you can't afford to let others see uncertainty or lack of control.

He steeled himself and placed the call. As the phone rang, he noted the empty glass on his desk and pushed it back, out of the view of the camera. Leroy put on a light-hearted grin; he had to get his game face on early, given the lag. After the fifth ring the phone picked up and the image appeared on his screen.

"Mr. Fournier - calling for your father?"

"Hi, Janelle. Yes."

A few moments later the image was replaced.

"Father! So good to see you." The usual long pause.

"Leroy...how are you?" The old man didn't smile, but did raise one eyebrow - about the most expressive he ever got with family.

"I'm doing well - how are mother, Addison, Celine, and Martial?"

"I would have thought that you'd have asked them yourself."

Leroy kept the smile on his face as he fought the urge to roll his eyes. The old man made mere pleasantries difficult - and the bastard made the difficult things impossible. He let his eyes flick over to the empty glass. He should have had a second before placing the call.

"Yes, well - schedules." The slightly pointed conversation ground onward, annoying and painful in turns. It followed the typical pattern: the older Fournier wanted to talk about himself, how the partners still cared SO much about his opinions - even though he was retired, you understand - and how this minister and that one and a third all craved his input on the new infrastructure initiatives and on and on and ON.

The tedious discussion of the monorail between Quebec City and Montreal served a purpose, though. Finally - FINALLY - there was an opening for a transition to the useful portion of the conversation. "Speaking of the infrastructure, father, I think you'd be interested to hear some of the things we've been doing up here."

"Ah, yes, how goes your lark?" Leroy fought to keep the scowl off his face. Lark. As if. He was the largest heavy-mining industrialist in the entire moon. Well, second largest, for the past three years, but first again soon enough. Which father knew perfectly well.

"It goes well - lots of growth, lots of opportunity. There are -"

"I'm glad we're talking about this - I've been meaning to speak to you for a while. Addison has told me - ah - rather, I've heard a few things that concern me. Our government's previously...AMUSED...stance is being reconsidered. There's pressure from the international community. Our southern neighbor, needless to say -"

Leroy interrupted. Any why not? By the time his broadcast words reached Earth his father might very well be done with his rambling. "No, that doesn't make any sense. Addison assured me that our government was taking a very hands off-"

His words had apparently reached Earth, for his father was now speaking louder, to drown him out. "No, no, in diplomacy there are never assurances, only guesses and indications - you should know that. The point is, given the current

environment, this lunar stunt is perhaps not the smartest thing -"

Leroy's left arm made an involuntary move toward the glass, but he pulled it back and put both hands under the desk, where they were hidden from the camera. He balled and released one fist. He had to let his father prattle on until he finished - which always took far longer than it should.

When he finally wound down Leroy resumed his interrupted point.

"As I was saying, things are going very well here, but one of the bottom-feeding competitors is getting a bit of an upper hand. Cutting margins, using sub-standard Chinese equipment, you can imagine the rest. Which brings me to my point." He straightened ever so slightly and paused for effect.

"I see great opportunities to expand, to increase our leadership here. I need just -" he paused, as if to think. Leroy had found that avoiding an overly serious attitude toward money projected an impression of confidence that investors - foundations and government bureaus - often responded to. " - just forty million to shore up operating accounts, hire a few more consultants, and - of course - rent a few more tunnel boring -"

The old man interrupted him. "No, no, it's impossible. This little venture never made any sense, and it makes even less sense now. There are important people -." The two argued for several minutes. His father finally suggested that Leroy approach Martial at the Desjardins Group.

Ask his younger brother for help?

"Father, no. I don't want to bother him over something so small. I merely saw a possibility for investment and when I thought of the inevitable profits I thought of you and your associates. If it's not to your taste, then fine. Anyway, as you know, I'm very busy - I've got a meeting - people are waiting for me. Give my love to everyone."

Winding the conversation down took almost as long as getting it started in the first place and every minute of it was excruciating. Finally, though, it was done, and the connection broken.

So no funds from father, then. He shook his head. What the hell was he going to do? Leroy brought his hands onto the desk and reached past the camera to pull

the glass and the bottle of gin closer. He poured and drank quickly. This was the second time today he'd wasted good liquor by consuming it too quickly, but there'd be time to properly savor some later. Now, though, there were problems that needed to be addressed.

Leroy gestured at his monitor. It came alive and displayed the damned spreadsheet - the one he'd been staring at ever since the last newsletter from Davidson Equities Analysis. Leroy looked at the first column and felt his nostrils flare. By raw tunnel count he was falling further and further behind Martin. That damned American and his crappy collection of low-rent, cast-off, jury-rigged Chinese TBMs. He raised the glass to his lips and found it empty. Leroy put the glass down and let his eyes slide to the next two columns. In booked revenue and future contracts he was not only behind Martin but just weeks from falling into third position. Seltzer Excavation? Where the hell had they come from? That firm was nothing.

He breathed out heavily. He'd been the richest man in all of Aristillus and an industrial titan. And now? This? It wasn't fair. Martin used garbage machines, he used garbage people, and the man himself had no refinement or class whatsoever. Everything about him - his education, his dress, his accent, his headquarters - even that embarrassingly tomboyish girlfriend of his - was a joke.

Yet Martin was in the number one position, and Leroy was number two, and slipping. Not to mention that he was too tight on cash. He gestured at the monitor and brought up a different spreadsheet, and then balled one fist. He was FAR too tight on cash.

Damn it. Martin was the cause of this humiliation. That arrogant bastard should pay.

He drummed his fingers on the desk, then suddenly stopped. What if he **COULD** get Martin to pay? Not metaphorically, but literally? His eyebrows pulled together as he thought.

Leroy gestured at the monitor, calling up the intercom. "Send Silverman to my office."

Backtalk.

He stabbed the intercom button angrily. "Yes, from the mapping group! Do you

know another one?"

That stupid girl - every little thing needed to be spelled out. Sometimes he was almost tempted to just place his calls himself, but what sort of man did that? Martin, probably. It would be just like him: a slap-dash man running a slap-dash firm. No sense of dignity at all. Not him, though. He might be temporarily in a slight crunch, but he'd never be déclassé.

Leroy sat and thought for another minute then triggered the intercom again. "And the private investigator - you know the one. White. Call him. Set up an appointment."

He reached for the bottle. This just might work. A humiliation for Martin. A cash influx for him. He took a sip and chuckled slightly to himself. His father wanted to cut him off? Well, necessity is the mother of invention, isn't she? He took a sip. Yes. He could make this work.

## **Chapter 8**

### **2064: Amtrak Maine to Florida High Speed Rail, Atlanta, Earth**

General Restivo sat in the stopped train and fumed. The trip to Florida would've taken just a few hours by plane, but the biodiesel SNAFU in the five year plan meant he was stuck on this damned relic.

He rubbed his hands over the armrest. At least the VIP car had air conditioning and leather seats. He'd decided to stretch his legs earlier by taking a walk to the cafe car, and the AC had been out in half of coach. The un-air-conditioned cars were ovens in the Atlanta sun and half the passengers had stripped to their undershirts.

Suddenly there was a series of small jerks and the train was moving again. Thank God.

As quickly as the jerks had started they stopped. The train coasted and slowed - and then the sun was eclipsed. Restivo looked out his window and saw that they were in the shadow of a vast urban farming tower. The glass in the lower levels was smashed and the steel beams of the unfinished upper floors were ornamented with wind-blown plastic bags.

He shook his head. How perfectly fitting: a broken train parked in the shadow of a broken building. He let the thought run further: a broken train holding a general from a broken military of a broken country. He put the idea out of his head; it was too depressing.

\* \* \*

Two train connections and almost nineteen hours later Restivo sat in a green-painted room so old that it didn't even have wallscreens.

Captain Dewitt sat across the table from him. Restivo looked at the younger man and evaluated him. His haircut was a bit sloppy and his uniform was within regulation but not particularly crisp. A soldier hoping to please the brass - maybe even get a DC posting - knew that starch, collar stiffeners and better-than-issue after-market ribbon bars were all de rigueur.

The younger man seemed at ease with the inspection - in fact, he barely seemed to notice it. He was sitting upright, fingers steepled, looking around the room.

Restivo pursed his lips and nodded. He'd already vetted the captain through channels both formal and informal. Now he had to commit. But here? Careers were made and lost on infighting and leaks; a bugged conference room would be nothing new.

"Captain, in the mood for a short run?"

\* \* \*

They were three miles out of the built-up section of the base, working up a good sweat in the early morning Florida heat.

Restivo prided himself on keeping in shape despite the slack his position afforded him. The old Suggested Physical Standard had gotten easier when it was made unisex, and became a joke when it was modified again for the Alternatively Abled Soldiers, but Restivo still measured himself by the old standards, and exceeded the "male, 40-42" requirements despite being almost twenty years older.

Dewitt easily kept pace alongside, giving the impression that he wasn't running

but was just out for a stroll. Restivo thought about pushing harder for a moment and then thought better of it. Not only was Dewitt much younger, but Restivo needed some wind to get his point across.

Restivo looked around the empty section of the base. There was no way to be sure that the utility poles weren't bugged, or that a drone wasn't loitering somewhere overhead with a directional microphone trained on them, but they had to talk somewhere. "Captain, here's the deal: we don't yet know for sure how things are going to play out, but we might end up having to put boots on the ground somewhere new."

Dewitt shrugged as he ran. "Sounds good, sir."

"Wait 'til I tell you where."

"Rangers lead the way."

"Hoo-ah and all that, but this is different." He paused. "We need you to go to the moon."

Dewitt's even pace stuttered. He ran in silence for a moment before responding. "I suppose I should ask some questions. I've only heard rumors."

"Forget the rumors - most of them are ours. We own most of the IMs, and the wiki editors are willing to see reason. The real version is this: the anti-gravity drive seems to be real and there really is a colony up there."

"So what's the mission, and why?"

"Your portion is covert insertion followed by recon."

"Why?"

"Don't worry about why."

The two men ran on for a moment, and then Dewitt broke the silence. "General, I always worry about the why. People in DC are worrying about the economy, aren't they?"

"Captain, people in DC have been worrying about the economy since before you

or I were born. If you want to progress in the Army, cut the speculation and focus on your mission."

"Not exactly my strong suit."

General Restivo turned his head and saw the hint of a smile on Dewitt's face. Restivo chuckled. "Yeah. So I hear." He paused. Ah, fuck it. "Yes. It's the economy. DC is buzzing about it. Things are getting worse, and this mission is a chance to pull our asses out of the fire."

Dewitt ran on in silence again as he digested this. Restivo liked that. The captain wasn't worried about impressing him with his speedy responses or strained attempts at cleverness.

"OK, general. Tell me details."

"We haven't finalized the mission yet. At this point we're building capabilities."

"Every one of the 18 Special Operations Groups is fully capable."

Restivo turned to look at him. There wasn't a trace of humor on Dewitt's face, but Restivo was fairly sure the younger man was playing with him.

The General slowed, and then stopped in the shade of a huge palm tree. Dewitt stopped with him and stood on the asphalt of the empty road. "Captain, let's put the bullshit aside. I'm talking to you and not one of the other group leaders because your file shows that you're one of the few soldiers who's NOT playing the career game." Restivo looked around. A platoon was running in formation on a cross road a half kilometer distant, but no one was close enough to overhear them. "I know, just like you know, that most of the units are staffed with political appointees, ticket punchers, cripples, and third raters."

Dewitt furrowed his brow and looked around, mirroring his own earlier scan for bugs, bystanders, and drones. Clearly Dewitt was wondering if this a trap. Which was reasonable. It wouldn't be the first time a mid level officer had been tricked into saying something unacceptable.

"Uh, General - what are you saying?"

"I'm saying that we I need REAL troops - bad asses who will get the job done. I

need men who can carry packs, lift ammunition, and shoot." Restivo paused and wiped sweat off of his forehead with the back of one hand. "Not to mention troops who can walk without canes. Look, Captain, I'm talking to you because I know you've gotten poor ratings for saying some things like this -"

"Sir, those allegations were -"

"I know, I know. At a private party, off-base, after a few beers, and you were recorded by a sniveling little shit bucking for promotion - which he got. I read the file. And I also noted that the whole case was dropped, for no reason - which is another thing that tells me that you know how to make stuff happen."

Dewitt said nothing.

"I don't give a shit - about *ANY* of it. The point is, I'm building a real unit and you're leading it."

Captain Dewitt took a deep breath and nodded gravely. "The moon. Well. Fuck me." For the first time since they'd met Dewitt let a smile escape onto his face.

The captain was hooked. Restivo grinned himself - it was pretty exciting. "I need you to staff up a team - whoever you need. Don't talk about it out loud, but none of the usual quota bullshit applies. Make it all men. Or just bull-dyke lesbians. I don't care if it's half Jews, all black, or three quarters good old boys with mouths full of illegal chew. Whoever you need, put it into the IDHRS, and you'll get them. Whatever equipment you need, same deal. Two rules: don't borrow more trouble than you actually need, and this is for real, so make it work."

Dewitt stood silently for a long moment, thinking it all over. Restivo looked at the sky. The sun was getting higher. It was going to be a furnace today.

Finally Dewitt said, "OK, I'm in."

"Of course you're in. Generals don't ask."

Restivo bounced on his toes a few times and launched back into the run. Dewitt was caught flat footed by the sudden start but caught him moments later.

"OK, so what next?"

"We've got a special group at NASA and they need to talk to you about low-G training in the vomit comets, space suits, a bunch of other stuff."

"When?"

"Your old commander already knows you're on special assignment. As soon we get back and you shower you meet with the NASA techs."

## **Chapter 9**

### **2064: level 6 Morlock Engineering construction tunnel, Aristillus, Lunar Nearside**

The echo of Mike's motorcycle's engine pulsed: louder, then softer, as each of the unfinished side tunnels flashed past. The tunnel was dark ahead, and then Mike was past the last ceiling lightpanels and was riding in the gloom. In the distance ahead he could see a puddle of light - the sharp white splash of construction lights closer to the tunnel face.

Then he was in the construction zone, slowing and weaving between parked equipment and pallets of parts. Mike stopped the bike next to a stack of drums of lubricant, set the kickstand, and cut the engine. Ahead the yellow safety rail marked the end of the road deck.

He took his helmet off and hung it on a handlebar. Even from here it was clear there was a problem. When a tunnel boring machine was running, the shriek and roar of the cutter-head splintering lunar basalt was deafening. This tunnel was nearly silent. He looked up, and then sniffed. The normal dry grit taste of rock dust was missing. The conveyor belt suspended from the tunnel ceiling was still. Something was well and truly fucked.

Mike swung off the BMW and jogged down the first flight of stairs, one hand brushing the chipped enamel of the railing. He reached the landing and vaulted over the chain, falling two meters to the bare rock of the tunnel floor. Mike stood from his crouch and grabbed headphones and a self-rescue breather from the rack, and then turned and jogged along the mammoth power lines that stretched along the bare rock. Two techs looked up from their slates, saw him, and gave a startled greeting. Mike gave them just a quick nod as he rushed past.

Closer to the tail end of the boring machine the signs of a problem multiplied: shouting, pumps alternatively starting and stopping, loud hisses of pneumatics releasing pressure, and a dozen robotic delivery vehicles full of lining blocks queued up with no place to go.

Mike reached the TBM and climbed the stamped steel rungs, brushing past a mining engineer. Another start, then, "Mike? Kelley says -"

Mike ignored him and plunged deeper into the machine toward the rock face. The catwalk meandered as it cut through the huge machine, first hugging the right side, then rising to pass over a cluster of actuators, and then dipping again beneath the lining block claw. The machine was built to grind through hard rock 24 hours a day, turning electricity into a constant stream of rubble; human ergonomics was a secondary concern at best.

Mike finally made it to the end of the walkway. Even through his headphones the pumps and cooling equipment were loud.

Kelley, the crew chief, was bent over a monitor. Mike tapped him on one shoulder and shouted, "We broke through?"

Kelley turned. "Yeah!"

"Sand? Gravel?"

Kelley shook his head, and shouted back over the machinery. "Void!"

"Bullshit! Sonar said no cracks -"

Kelley shrugged. "Don't ask me!"

Mike started to yell over the noise, and then reconsidered - it was a pain to shout over the equipment and the TBM wasn't going to do any more work today anyway. "Shut it down!"

Kelley nodded, turned, and tapped at the screen. Electric motors stopped, the hammering sounds from dump valves slowed. Pressure tanks hissed as they relieved themselves. It was still loud, but no longer deafening.

Mike took off his headphones. "There can't be another tunnel here; we registered

this cubic."

Kelley shrugged again, happy to hand off the problem to someone with more authority. "Fucked if I know, boss." He pointed at the monitor. "We're snaking a camera in now; you tell me."

Mike nodded and was stepping toward the monitor when his phone buzzed. He'd set it to only allow high-priority calls through. Shit. What ELSE was on fire now? He pulled it out and looked at it. Fournier? Calling him? He scowled. What did that douchebag want?

He was about to slip the phone back into his pocket, and then realized it was an opportunity to knock the snob down a peg or two.

He tapped the phone. "Leroy, what the -"

"Please hold for Mr. Fournier."

Mike rolled his eyes. The jackass couldn't even place his own calls.

"Martin, are you there?"

"What do you want, Leroy?"

"Martin, can you hear me?"

"Sorry it's loud - some of us work for a living."

Leroy shouted back. "Martin, I can't hear you, but if you can hear me, it seems like your band of idiots has dug into one of my tunnels. We need to get this resolved. Call me back when you're someplace civilized."

Mike pulled the phone away from his ear and scowled at it, then pocketed it.

Kelley caught his eye. "We've got video from the camera, and-"

"Let me guess - we broke into another tunnel."

"Yeah. How'd you know?"

Mike didn't answer, stewing.

"Boss? How did you know we broke into another tunnel? There can't be one here. Compliance and registry said -"

Mike's right fist balled.

### **Want to read the rest of the story?**

To read the whole story ("The Powers of the Earth" and "Causes of Separation") - science fiction about antigravity, lunar colonization, open source software, genetically modified dogs, AI...and really really big guns – please back my kickstarter at

E-books start at just \$6.

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/tjic/powers-of-the-earth-sf-with-spaceships-dogs-and-bi>

The kickstarter ends in just a few days ( 18 April ), so do it now!