

The Zimmer Insurgency
A novel
Jason Shannon

17 April 2165

*Devoneaux, Québec,
Republic of Panamerica
1115 Zulu*

It was an unusually brisk morning in the small town of Devoneaux, in the north of the state of Québec. Kayla stared emptily out the dusty window and slowly watched the sunrise. Today was her twenty-eighth birthday, and yet she felt as though her forehead should carry a dozen wrinkles, and the black hair that fell over her face should be long grey.

She watched the mail courier walk up the long driveway from the pockmarked country road. He was already wearing shorts. It was too chilly for her, though, on this cool April morning. She answered the door, signed for her package. A chill went up her robe. She gave a thumb print on his pad. That thumb print had cost her a lot.

The box was small. Inside was a single bottle of pills. She heard the shower shut off. Her husband walked briskly into the kitchen wearing nothing but a towel. She didn't hide the pills in her hand. He gave her a nice affectionate smack on the ass, grunted quietly at the pills, and opened the refrigerator to drink goat's milk straight from the carton. She'd almost come to like those little good morning spanks; it meant he was in a good mood.

"You sure those pills are working?" he asked, looking through the fridge for nothing in particular. He still thought they were fertility pills.

"Conception is really difficult for women in my family," she repeated again, almost methodically. She smiled thinly at him. "We're a dying breed, us."

He grunted again.

A buzzer dinged on the refrigerator. "That damned tiger's back," he said, half excited. He was in the next room before she knew it, and then out the back door wearing just a pair of overalls and a rifle in his hand. It could be treacherous living all the way up here in the north of Québec. After the cloning initiative to reintroduce extinct fauna to the world, some of the larger animals retreated into new wildernesses that had never known them before. One particular Tasmanian tiger kept hounding this western area of Devoneaux.

She wasn't so much afraid of Tassie tigers, though. She'd known worse beasts in her time.

She opened the pill bottle. It was still sealed with its little tinfoil safety seal. She gripped the flap on it and pulled up. Inside was the usual bottle of concealed contraception, and nothing else. Her heart fell for a second, and then she looked to the safety seal. It was double layered, and she unfolded it to find her new fingerprints, good for the day most like, and a small message above the print pad: I hope you're ready.

Was she ready? She'd spent years working to this. Trips to South America, dead drop packages from Aussie and Chinese Intelligence, new fingerprints, cheekbones and breast implants. Nightmares her husband never picked up on. This was her baby, her plan, her...

What would they even call it? An insurrection? A sedition? A rebellion? A revolution? What would the history books say? What would President de Mendoza label it? What would his lackeys in tinfoil hats?

But if one thing went wrong....

She went about her normal wifely duties. Nothing could be out of place. The mailman couldn't notice anything askew. The neighbours couldn't have any raised eyebrows. The Jehovah's Witnesses couldn't catch anything out of the ordinary. Not until her part in this began. She needed to be a good wife.

Shots rang out in the distance behind the house. Her husband had terrible aim, and she doubted

he'd come within a mile of it. He wasn't supposed to be firing a gun off within the municipal limits like this, but out in unincorporated Devoneaux, no one minded a hunting rifle going off. It was one of the reasons she liked it here, closer to Greenland than she was Toronto – anonymity. Even if a neighbour complained, her husband would have a stern talking to by a drunken local sheriff, and the report, if any, would never make it through all the regional hoops to bounce between this branch of the military or another. Québec City wouldn't redflag her with the illegals list, much less Panama.

She'd seen it once; the tiger. The thylacine. Half wolf, half tiger and all Australian, out of place on the wrong side of the planet. Tasmania was half underwater now, though. It was off in the bushes one day, just standing there. Sniffing around. She didn't call for her husband. She wasn't a good wife that day. It just seemed so... misunderstood.

Mary was out on her back porch, three quarters of a mile or so away, peering into the ravine. The neighbour. She didn't like the rifle, Kayla could tell. She'd never say anything, though, because she grew marijuana in that garden of hers. Drunken sheriffs don't give you lectures for that. She'd show up stoned to church every week, though there was a lot of substance abuse in this area. Back alleyways and illegal casino basements existed in Devoneaux. Kayla had stumbled into one, one day. Sting was everywhere, that pervasive psychedelic; the tainted milk. Zoned out pot smokers, though illegal, weren't the primary concern of the drug squads. This far north, the sheriff was worried about Devoneaux getting the reputation of a pirate port. Sting and pirates went hand in hand, she knew. Kayla rather agreed with the sheriff on this one; antipiracy was federal jurisdiction, and she didn't want an FBI detachment from Panama out here any more than the sheriff did.

She knew the sheriff rather well. Sheriff Gaillard. She could never quite get that French inflection right on his name. She spoke English, Spanish and gutter Portuguese, but couldn't master French for the life of her. The sheriff often attended her husband's biweekly poker games. Her husband would drag the kitchen table out to the back room and invite over the sheriff, Mary's husband – a sallow, quiet man that always looked tired – and a few others from in town, fill the house with smoke and vent about the economy this far north. They would bet with cigarettes – just as illegal as those gold coins that floated through the underground casinos, but more forgivable when reports of tobacco came across the governor's desk. They gambled with cigarettes, like the whole town was a common prison. Maybe it was. Maybe the whole damned country was.

Sheriff Gaillard was one of those that strongly believed in the Western Skein, as it had become known. Panamerica's great grid of commerce. One day, they all hoped, every island from Greenland to Baffin to Ellesmere to Banks and everything in between, all interconnected by maglev train lines. Just like the Pacific. It was the Aussies that were the most impressive from space. Up above, it was said, you could see this great web of tendrils, spokes and fibres running between every state in the Pacific. The Skein. They even had plaques labelling it that. Lines ran from Japan to New Zealand, Taiwan to Malaysia, the Philippines to Hawaii, Korea to Queensland. As many tracks as ran between New York and the ruins of Los Angeles, twice over, were scattered through the west Pacific. On a clear day it could be seen from high orbit. Or so they said; Kayla had never been in space.

She had seen the Skein, though. From the ground, that is. From inside. Years ago. And Sheriff Gaillard was crazy enough to believe they'd build the western equivalent in the Canadian Arctic Archipelago. A lot of people in this part of the world were. That was why her husband had come up – iron work on the maglev lines would be good money when it came. That was why she came up here – to wile away the time on the edge of the world where it would never be built.

This is where she needed to be. Desolate northern Québec. The edge of the world. But still in the country. In the country, internal, under the radar, but away – far away. Not in Bolivia, where she could set her watch to the train bombings. Not in Atlanta, where the National Guard was camped out to prevent anarchists from starting dumpster fires. Not in Panama City, blocks away from the President and his lackeys.

No, Panamerica already had a Skein, though it didn't carry that name, and it was nowhere near as impressive as the Pacific. It is in the Caribbean, stretching from Miami to Caracas, Honduras to

Cuba. To Haiti... but not that one island.... Kayla had been there, too, all those years ago.

On the run.

But in twenty-four hours time, it wouldn't matter. It wouldn't matter what the sheriff rambled about as he gambled away illegal cigarettes. It wouldn't matter that her husband pissed away one more day waiting for oodles of cash from a job that would never come. It wouldn't matter if the governor himself attended their church and cast a curious glance at the neighbour's giant pupils. It wouldn't matter if the scurvy dog Blackgoat sailed up the Hudson Strait with war galleys. In twenty-four hours time, she wouldn't be here. Whether today succeeded, or one domino failed to fall and she was dead or in a holding facility, she wouldn't be here. So pirates or the FBI or President de Mendoza himself could tear apart this very house and chase down that stoner down the way with police dogs for all she cared.

She heard the rifle go off out back again, and smiled to herself. She looked again to the note she now had tucked away in her pocket. She was born ready. And with any luck, that tiger would rip her husband's throat out so she wouldn't have to.

*Auckland, New Zealand,
Pacific Union
1145 Zulu*

Global insurgency.

That's what this was, Stephen Hammond realized, for the first time since he'd become entangled in this debacle. A conspiracy at the highest level. Well, he didn't like the term conspiracy. It made him sound like he was plotting to steal the mail of that tinfoil hat wearing lunatic in Panama City. Granted, they were plotting against the good general and his superiors, and it was being hashed out in secret, and they did occasionally meet in smoke filled rooms – though it was usually opium smoke in a den somewhere. But they weren't controlling the banks or anything ridiculous like that. They didn't meet quarterly to pull the global strings and instigate wars for the hell of it.

Stephen stared at satellite images of forested mountainside on Isabela, the largest of the Galápagos Islands. In less than twenty-four hours, the Panamericans would be launching their first shuttle from there to rendezvous with the *RPS Destiny of the Skies*, a massive colony ship in high orbit. Then, over the next couple weeks, more shuttles would launch, either from the Galápagos or various other remote islands annexed by Panamerica – Easter Island, or the Aleutians – and fill the endless hallways of cryogenics chambers aboard the ship. From there, the *Destiny* would travel the twenty lightyear journey to the star system of Gliese 876 where they would get a first hand look at the collection of planets and moons orbiting the small red star. It had become affectionately known as the Scarlet System.

Stephen zoomed in on the Panamerican shuttle site. The shuttle itself was hidden somewhere not even satellites could see, yet he knew it was there. The lucky occupants were already gathered on the island, given free hotel accommodations in the town of Puerto Villamil. A good portion of that population was military officials, along with the geologists, climatologists, biologists, astronomers and various other scientists that would study the new worlds upon arrival, while the rest of the colonists remained in cryosleep. There were also Christian missionaries aboard the shuttle that would spread the good word to the new world – on the off chance they found any sentient life there following a false god. The bulk of it, however, was a large civilian population that simply wanted a new home. He couldn't blame them for that.

Stephen was a Pacific Intelligence agent. He was formerly a field agent, had fought the Muslim rebels in China during one of their Uyghur Uprisings, even made it as far as Titan during the Period of Anarchy. *Anything but anarchy*, he chanted to himself almost methodically. That chant was almost like the sign of the cross with Titanic vets. He retired to a desk after tweaking warlord politics out there in the deep of space. After what he'd seen out there, a desk was pretty inviting. Now he served as an analyst, sifting through satellite images and intelligence reports.

Today, however, he was simply watching surveillance footage of the Galápagos, as were many

intelligence agents the world over.

He sat in his cubical, with his work exposed to everyone who passed by. Hidden in a minimized screen, however, was satellite surveillance of a small town in northern Québec. An old friend of his was living there, preparing to travel halfway across the hemisphere to get to where she was going.

He hadn't seen Kayla in years, not since her brief stay in Tasmania. They'd called her a pirate, an anarchist, a Confucian insurrectionist, even a fundie Muslim, which he thought especially laughable now – with her eighth grade education, she probably couldn't spell Muhammad's name right.

Press statements from Panama were as plentiful as the dodos out on the front lawn. This was their glorious day of triumph; the Panamericans. President de Mendoza. His legacy. What the history books would record.

Not if this conspiracy went through, though. If Kayla had her way, de Mendoza would be remembered in a much different way. He had to stop with 'if'. Today needed certainty, needed blind faith that his cohorts were working in tandem, as faithful as he was. Zhuang didn't have doubt. Kayla certainly didn't, not if she went back to Panamerica after what they'd done to her.

He sighed, spinning around in his chair. In the next few hours, an international crisis would emerge, and he would be called into action. When that happened, he'd never see any of this again. He made a mental note to have lunch outside today, and feed the dodos some bread crumbs from his sandwich.

*Xinjiang Province,
Xiao Dynasty
1225 Zulu*

Zhuang Zei was still on his mandatory mourning sabbatical following his father's death. Though, in truth, he did little mourning, and with the demands of the twenty-second century, the ancient Confucian practice had more become a gold standard to aim for than a mandatory mourning period. He spent at least a day every week in Tianjin reading reports from counterfeiting division. But now he was in the deep wilderness, in the heart of Xinjiang, the Muslim province of the Dynasty. Three of the four rebellions suffered during the history of the Xiao had been Islamic uprisings from this province, one making it as far as Rangoon and claiming excess of five million to plague and famine.

But Zhuang himself was half Uyghur, so he never got the rude looks when he took the maglev to the end of the line in Ürümqi. He didn't stay long in Ürümqi. He rented a Mongol horse and escaped into the wild as soon as he could. He would tell his superiors in Tianjin he was seeking solitude to mourn his father.

He wasn't, though. He had barely spoken to his father after what had happened with his sister. He headed straight for the border.

The twenty foot fence was rusting in places, and at points had been torn down by Muslims looking to get into – or out of – the failed Kazakh state to the north. But where Zhuang was headed, the fence was pristine and rigged with electric sensors.

Ignatova was already waiting for him on the other side. Zhuang dismounted his horse and approached the fence. Both were careful not to touch it. The sensors would set off alarms in both the Forbidden City and the Office of the Premier in Samarkand. They merely spoke through it.

"Is the fingerprint in her latest contraceptives?" Sergei asked. He spoke Mandarin, but he had a thick accent. Zhuang would have that thought that after the time he spent inside the Xiao, he'd have a better grasp of the language. He was as white as sour cream, but with reconfig these days, he could mask himself as Han without much effort at all. But the accent.... The Russian accent was thick and obvious in most non-Slavic languages, none more so than Mandarin. He sounded like stereotypical Russian bad guy from a British thriller film. How he ever survived undercover in Nanjing, Zhuang would never know.

"Of course," Zhuang replied. He found himself looking at the Kazakh landscape behind

Ignatova, remarking on how peaceful it seemed. Tall evergreens were everywhere that side of the border. It was hard to believe that just a little further into Kazakh, the CPSF had the Muslims under martial law, and had gone so far as to burn mosques and use entire neighbourhoods for target practice. Yet here, he could hear every breath his horse took. "I included the poison as well. Only time will tell if she's got the balls to go through with it."

"Do you think she does?" Sergei Ignatova was with the Continental Peace and Security Force himself, though Zhuang knew he didn't burn mosques or shoot up civilians. That was all Premier Petrova's doing, who'd demanded the crackdown on the failed states of the SA. Petrova was not helping the image of the Children of Lebanon, as they were called, by painting a global image that the moderate Muslims of the Lebanese Enlightenment could be just as vicious as the fundies. Ignatova, however, was one of the minority of Russians that still held to the Orthodox Church, and had refused assignments in Qatar because of the violence that was being demanded of him.

Zhuang could respect the Christians. They weren't all like that madman Feng. The Feng Rebellion; that was the fourth of the Xiao's rebellions. And the worst. Even now, it was openly debated if it would be the downfall of Xiao. After all, the most esteemed emperor, may he have lived a thousand years, ate and drank and fucked himself to death in his imperial harem after that. It was a great imperial shame that the emperor had been taken by opium and drink, while the madman Feng still lived, though his rebellion had been utterly extirpated. His great legacy, may it echo through the ages for a myriad centuries, would be his agrarian Red Reforms, and the Feng. Not a tough act to follow. And that bastard Feng still had followers in Korea and Australia with that damned Church of the Taiping. Zhuang had seen the imperial plans to assassinate Feng – even now they were plotting it, years after when the madman was in Aussie custody for his crimes against humanity. Zhuang strongly disagreed with assassination attempts – they wouldn't have the time to perform death by a thousand cuts inside Feng's Taiwanese prison compound before the Pacific authorities broke up the whole thing declared an international incident – but he was only counterfeiting bureau, not an assassin. But kind men like Sergei were what saved the Christian name. After all, their Christ had parroted Confucius when he spoke the golden rule five hundred years after the great sage.

A firing squad would be awaiting Ignatova if his involvement in this were to get out. Petrova would see to that, his more moderate, peace-loving Islam be damned. Then again, Zhuang's own fate would be far worse. The executioners of the Weizhung Guard still practised death by a thousand cuts, as both men knew from their clandestine involvement in the toppling of the Feng Rebellion. Almost Feng's entire court suffered such barbarism at the hands of the Weizhung. Zhuang had almost been posted to the imperial guard, but was lucky enough to get Chinese Intelligence instead. He thanked his ancestors for that. He was a good Confucian, and power, necessary as it was, must be justified. The boy emperor had yet to learn that. The Weizhung Guard had yet to learn that.

"She's got too many people riding on this," said Zhuang. "She won't cower away in the moment of truth." He had to believe that, or else he'd wind up in a cell next to his sister, if Chinese Intelligence didn't behead him first. They still had public beheadings outside the Forbidden City.

"We shan't see each other again, good friend," Sergei said.

Zhuang wished he could have shaken his hand in the Western tradition. Instead, a bow sufficed. "You have your cyanide if this goes wrong?" Zhuang said as a last thought as he turned for his horse.

"Of course."

*Panama City, Panama,
Republic of Panamerica
1330 Zulu*

The President of Panamerica was one of the few people in the world that drove an independent vehicle through city streets. After the Shanghai Accord and the banning of the old fossil fuels, internal combustion engines were relegated to the sand drifts of the old United Zaire or the

Southern Waste. Reports were, Petrova let the fumers run rampant east of the Caucasus. There were a few solar cars in the rural areas, but only the most important of people cluttered the walking streets in town.

The streets along *El Presidente's* route had been cleared and his motorcade raced through the largest city in the western hemisphere. President Octavio de Mendoza IV quietly read a news report over his ledger in the back on his limousine.

Yet try as he might, he simply couldn't concentrate. Today was probably the most important day of his career, a day that would live on in the history books for millennia to come. Today, they were launching the *Destiny of the Skies*, the first ship bound for the moons of the Scarlet System, as it was called. Or, rather, the first shuttle of the *Destiny*.

He looked out his sunroof. It was probably above him now, twenty thousand meters up. And, in a little over ten hours, the first shuttle would be launching from a top secret location in the Pacific.

His limo proceeded into a tunnel, cutting off his view of the sky. He turned back to the news, in the hopes that he might be able to concentrate. Then he felt the vehicle start to slow. After a second, he realized where he was along his route and sighed; he was about to get some bad news.

The limousine came to a stop and he soon heard a knock on the glass. General Cervano entered with the President's chief of staff, Eric Brown. The general sat down across from de Mendoza, while Brown took his place at the President's side.

As the vehicle began moving again, de Mendoza folded up his ledger. "We're going to make history today, general," he said in an unenthused tone.

"No sir, our enemies are."

"Who is it now?" the President asked apathetically. "Muslim fundamentalists in Bahrain? Militant Confucian monks? Penguins and warrachs massing in Antarctica?" Cervano was one tin foil hat away from a straight jacket. He was the most paranoid of all the neocons in *El Presidente's* administration. He found anti-Panamericanism in the bureaucratic bribery in Samarkand. If some Aussie makes a crack at Panamerican gall surrounding the launch, he'll have de Mendoza in the bunker beneath the Presidential Mansion. "Let me guess," the President mocked, "pirates, right? Their little space dinghies are going to overwhelm the Air Force up there with the *Destiny*, eh? Tell me, have they figured out if Blackgoat is named for his goatee or a pet goat yet?"

The general went just the slightest shade of red, but those that didn't know him would never be able to tell. He had little ticks that showed his embarrassment. Undeterred, he set a ledger in front of *El Presidente*, showing a blurry satellite image of a man's face. The image then split itself in half to show a mug shot. "This is Tseng Tetrejevnyia," he said, not bothering to enunciate. He butchered the name; even de Mendoza could tell that. "We believe he was born on Kamchatka Island to a Chinese mother and a Russian father. He travelled throughout the country as a child.

"He enlisted in the Russian military under a fake name at the age of sixteen," he continued. "Since then he's popped up in every conflict throughout recent history, including Pake's Revolution on Mars and the Period of Anarchy on Titan."

None of the three of them chanted the phrase "Anything but anarchy." But then again, not one of them had been within a year's journey of Saturn.

"The Russians and the Association had nothing to do with Pake," de Mendoza said. Titan was another story. The Association was there, though it was mostly Arabian troops. Samarkand had very little to say about what went on up there. It was mostly regional governors, who wouldn't have any command over the Russian military on Earth.

"He defected from the Russian military after a year and a half, sir," Brown replied.

"He's a mercenary," Cervano explained, "soldier of fortune." He looked back to his file. "He speaks thirteen languages, at least, including Russian, Mandarin, English, Spanish, Portuguese--"

"I get the point," de Mendoza nodded.

"He's cropped up either as a novice recruit or an auxiliary soldier at MI6, Chinese Intelligence, Antarctic Security Agency, Continental Peace and Security Force..."

"Okay, well what do we need to worry about a mercenary for?" he retorted.

"Do you know who Black April is?" Cervano asked.

“I know *what* Black April is,” de Mendoza replied.

Everyone knew what Black April was. It was a dark time in Panamerican history. Granted, it happened before the Panamerican Revolution, yet it was their history nonetheless. Even to this day, Panamericans had no interest in extending the southern border because the ruins of Paraguay stand at the gates, and everyone remembers Paraguay for burning the economy to cinders.

“Black April wasn’t just the coup that led to the Shanghai, sir,” Brown explained. “After the collapse of Southern South America, millions of people died. Those that survived resorted to living off the land, or pillaging from the former cities. They organized themselves into communes, or gangs. Cartels.”

“One gang in particular called themselves Black April,” Cervano added. “They’re a rebel guerrilla group, that blame the north for their circumstances. They’re believed to be responsible for numerous train bombings in the southern states. They won’t be happy until we’re gone from the map.”

“And they’re planning a disruption for today?” de Mendoza deduced.

“We believe they’re planning to destroy the *Destiny*,” Brown replied. “Blow her out of the sky.”

“That’s impossible,” *El Presidente* replied. He knew that there were going to be hitches today, but some anarchist gang in the Southern Waste blowing the *Destiny* out of the sky? Impossible. Of course the Chinese would like to undermine Panamerican hegemony, and the Aussies were always looking to set themselves up as a superpower, and there was a roster a mile long of fundie evildoers from Yemen to neo-Taliban uprisings in the Kazakh steppe, but South American guerrillas? Brazilian anarchists? Those llama fuckers might be pumping in tankers full of coke, and the Antarctic were known to buy old caches of guns from the ruins of Buenos Aires, but no mere cartel would have the ability to sabotage the *Destiny*.

“There’s enough weaponry aboard to light up the night sky,” said Cervano.

“That weapons storage is nowhere near accessible by civilian hands,” the President argued. He found himself remembering the reports of train bombings in the south. There was one just last month in, where was that, Bolivia? Did anyone die in that one? He couldn’t remember. “Besides,” he said, “everyone aboard that ship was approved by the highest authority. Hell, half of them came across my desk.”

“Tetryevnya can pick any lock you put on that storage,” Brown argued back, “and he knows how to work any explosive.” Just whose side was Brown on here? He tended to yawn through most of Cervano’s inane ramblings at intel briefings. If he’d been won over...

“What kind of mercenary would go on a suicide mission?”

Cervano said calmly, “There’s also the possibility that one of our competitors is assisting.” The vehicle went silent. The wheels thumped over cracks in the pavement. Nobody wanted to talk about foreign intervention unless there was proof. And Cervano did have a bad habit of pointing fingers at Seoul or Zurich for every little problem. Hell, the man was this close to blaming the Weizhung Guard for his missing remote. “Chatter has increased a thousandfold since we announced the launch,” Cervano reasoned. “We’re ahead of schedule and ahead of the rest of the world. The Aussies aren’t far behind. If they were bankrolling Black April...”

“General, I don’t even want to think it unless you have some evidence to back this up,” de Mendoza commanded. “I know people are watching. Hell, we’re watching them build theirs. It doesn’t mean they’re plotting against us. I will not have my presidency marked by a global war.”

“Regardless of our competitors,” Brown quickly cut in, “Black April is proving to be a serious threat.” Brown’s still pushing it, even though Cervano’s basically implied the Brits have got snipers trained on this limo.

“Okay,” de Mendoza said, taking a second look at the ledger. “What you’re telling me is that you suspect this Black April cartel of hiring Tetryevnya, and they’re going to try and destroy the *Destiny*, is that correct?”

“That’s what we believe, sir,” Cervano replied.

“Let’s step up security around the ship,” he began.

“With all do respect, sir,” Brown replied, “perhaps we should consider launching at a later date.”

“Absolutely not,” *El Presidente* retorted. How serious was this? Brown knew how important this launch was to the administration. He’d been there briefing the President on all the specifics of cryogenics. Maybe he needed to do something about these guerrillas and the Russian mercenary, but postponing was out of the question. “We’re about to make history today. You need to find this mercenary and deal with him.”

“Don’t you worry about him sir,” Cervano replied. “We’ve got someone at Homeland Security.”

Brown was shaking his head. De Mendoza didn’t even need to hear it – Cervano had one of his assets. The assassins Seoul and Samarkand know about but Panama denies fervently. De Mendoza didn’t particularly like them because of the political bullshit they sometimes caused, but those incidents were few and far between and a good bluff usually handled things. Like Petrova didn’t have secret agents off the books. Or the damned Weizhung Guard. Maybe one of Cervano’s men was just what these guerrillas needed....

“She’s very...” Cervano chose his words carefully, “qualified. Tetrejevnyya has been spotted around the Mediterranean. Two partial body scans – Athens and Milan – in the past eighteen hours.”

“But our primary concern should be Black April,” Brown quickly added.

“Reposition the Navy,” de Mendoza ordered. “Make sure the Galápagos are well protected.”

“Aye, sir.” Cervano grinned.

“I want hourly updates,” the President decreed.

The general nodded. “Sir,” he asked almost hesitantly, “about the rules of engagement for our friend...”

“Don’t do it, sir,” Brown interrupted.

El Presidente snapped his attention back to his chief of staff. First he’s on board for action, now he’s not?

“Reposition the Navy, yes,” Brown agreed. “Maybe even send in an asset. Maybe.” He waved his hands downward in a slowing gesture to show his hesitance. “But strict rules of engagement. We’re talking untraceable poison, that sort of thing.”

“Put a tiger in a cage and it ain’t much a predator,” Cervano quipped.

“I’ve seen the file on the one you want to send in. Purple Heart, Silver Star, a roster of illegal ops damn near two pages.”

Cervano grinned.

El Presidente said, “Are we talking about...” what was that expression with assassins... “quiet or noisy?”

Cervano began sermonizing. “On a historic day of the utmost importance...”

“You know what that kind of time with low O₂ on Mars can do to you?”

“Enough,” de Mendoza said. He tired easily of their banter. “Cervano, do what you will. Let me know as soon as Tetrejevnyya is dead.” Brown’s face fell.

The limo came to a stop to let Cervano out. The general quickly got into his own chauffeured vehicle, which had been tailing them. Brown lingered a minute in the limo’s doorway.

“You realize what you’ve authorized him to do, don’t you?”

“Keep me informed, Eric,” the President said impatiently.

Brown stepped back and closed the door. The limo pulled away, leaving Brown alone on the street. As the President’s limo rolled away, de Mendoza thought it strange that Brown liked to walk everywhere. He was always refusing rides.

El Presidente shrugged it off. He tried to return to the news.

*

The full novel is available in paperback and ebook. Audiobook coming June 2023.

Copyright © 2013 by Jason Shannon

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions.

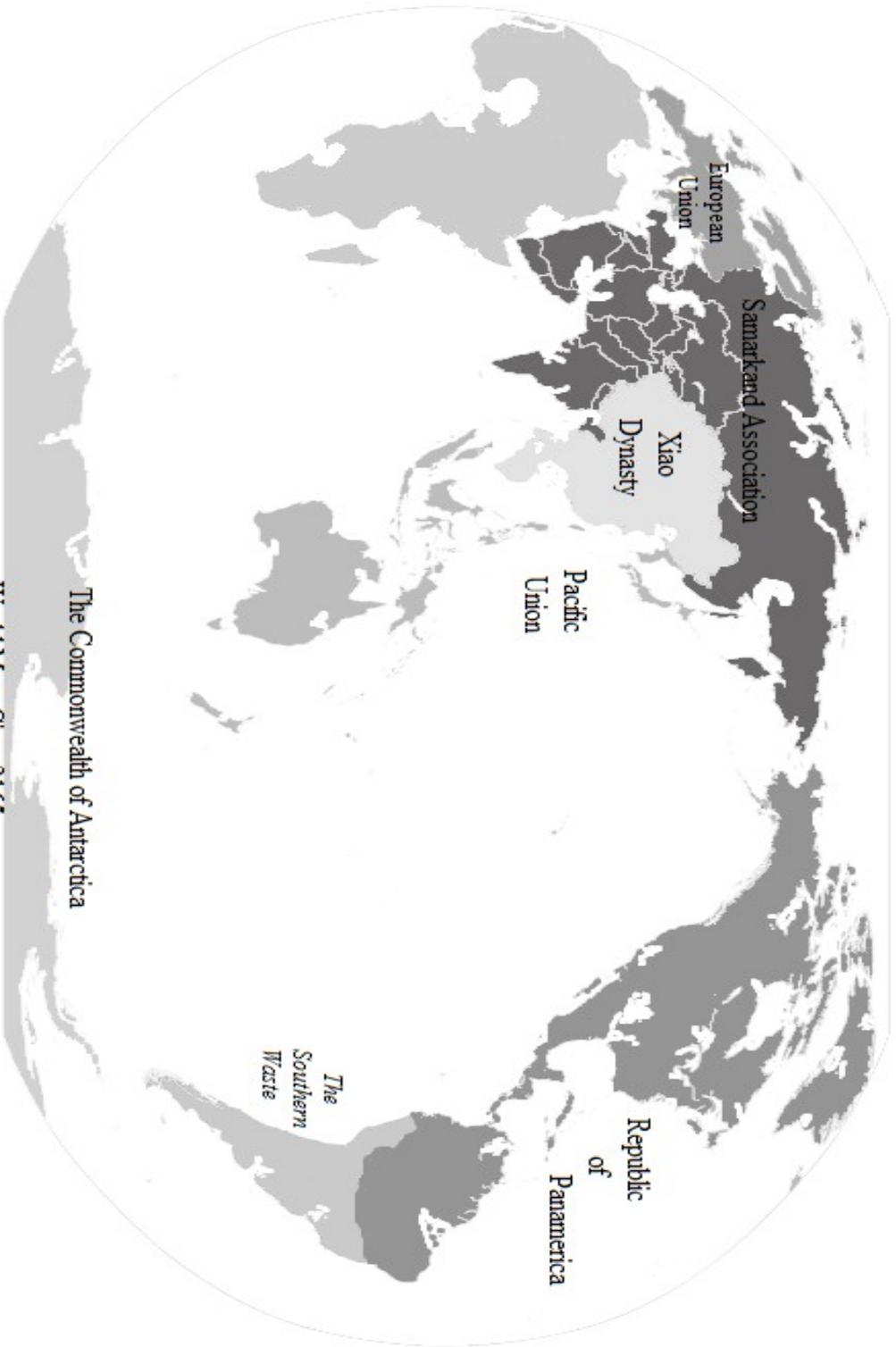
No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without prior written permission by the author, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, or locales is purely coincidental.

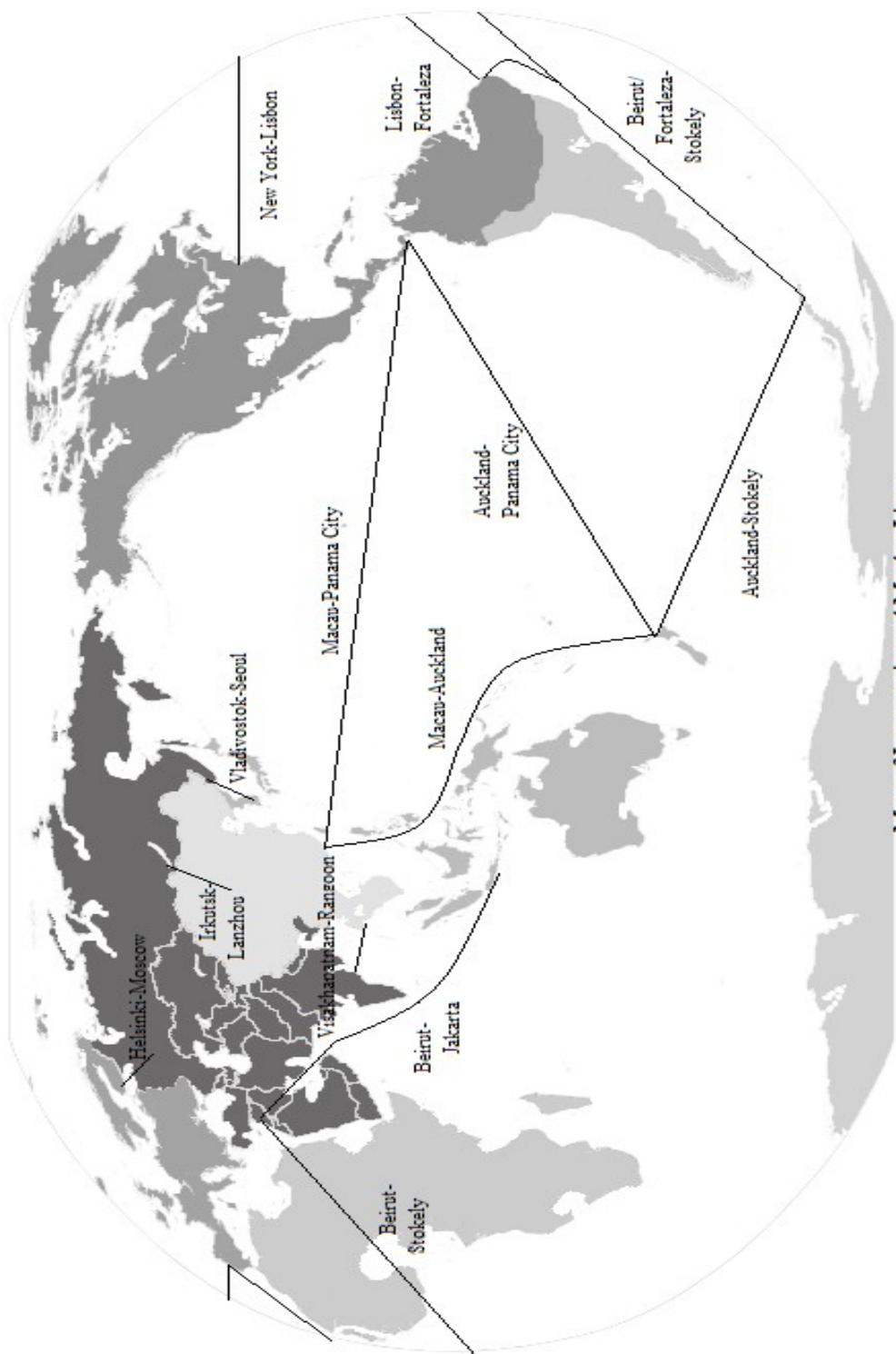
Cover art by Mike MacLeod

ISBN-13: 978-1519178312

ISBN-10: 151917831X



World Map, Circa 2165



Map of Intercontinental Maglev Lines