

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

BOOK 4

DEMILITARIZED ZONE



***The sweeping, satirical military space saga
continues...***

Decorated war hero Captain Joey R. Czerinski of the United States Galactic Foreign Legion faces new challenges when he and his platoon are ordered to planet New Colorado's New Gobi Desert to guard the demilitarized zone dividing human-occupied territory from areas claimed by the Arthropodan Empire.

A new alien spider commander – and nephew of the Arthropodan Emperor – creates more headaches for Czerinski with his strict policies and competitive attitude. In the wake of his many ill-formed decisions, a young local militia hero emerges, giving Czerinski and his platoon even more trouble to deal with. But it is all water under the desert as Czerinski takes everything in stride and plays a deadly game of tit-for-tat and one-upmanship with the spider commander to maintain order in the volatile DMZ.

With chupacabra, Walmart, and McDonald's thrown into the mix, the fourth installment of this politically incorrect military space opera aims straight for the funny bone.

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

Book 4: Demilitarized Zone

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~AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT~

I dedicate ***America's Galactic Foreign Legion – Book 4: Demilitarized Zone*** to the memory of my dad, Henry S. Knight, Jr., my American hero. Dad passed away July 11, 2010, at age 88. I've included a short story in his honor at the end of this book.

A special thanks to editor Patricia Morrison for still finding my books amusing escapist entertainment.

Also, hugs and kisses to my darling wife Barb, for her continued support.

~Walter Knight

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

BOOK 4

DEMILITARIZED ZONE



by

Walter Knight



CHAPTER 1

The United States Galactic Federation Foreign Legion Missile and Gunboat *Predator* patrolled the New Mississippi River all the way up to New Memphis. Past New Memphis lay the Arthropodan Empire. A demilitarized zone partitioned the planet of New Colorado since the last war, but New Memphis was a human enclave that existed north of the DMZ. It was the *Predator's* mission to maintain humanity's right-of-way on the river to New Memphis. Spider insurgents had threatened to blow up the *Predator* with suicide bombers riding in speedboats, but no attempts had occurred yet on this trip. Until now.

It was late at night, but I could see the profile of the approaching speedboat. Night vision technology allowed me to see much farther than the insurgents, even in the night fog. I ordered Corporal Williams to fire a cannon shell across their bow as I broadcast a warning on the PA system. "This is the United States Galactic Federation Foreign Legion Gunboat *Predator!*" I announced. "Turn off your engines and prepare to be boarded! Failure to comply will force us to take countermeasures to ensure our safety and the safety of other river traffic!"

"They are still approaching," advised our radar technician. "They're coming straight at us!"

"Blow them out of the water," I ordered. "Hit them with everything we have. The Legion does not pay you to bring ammo home!"

I am Major Joey R. Czerinski, hero of the Legion, and regional commander along the DMZ here on

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Planet New Colorado. I am more accustomed to ground fighting, but this section of the New Mississippi is also my responsibility. I arranged a ride-along to familiarize myself with riverboat patrol. A good commander learns the jobs of everyone serving under him.

Captain Gregoire let me take command of his boat as a courtesy. I felt I was doing everything by the book. The insurgents were warned. They had no one to blame but themselves if we sent them to the bottom of the river. Corporal Williams fired two missiles. I tracked the missiles on radar. Both hit, destroying the enemy. Our ship then ran aground, bottoming on shallow rocks.

As the fog cleared, it became more apparent I should have stayed on dry land where I belonged. Not only had I run the *Predator* aground, but I had also destroyed an automated lighthouse onshore. Dismayed, I put a fishing line off the bow of the *Predator*, and waited for the worst. My riverboat days were over. Captain Gregoire angrily approached me, carrying gear. I spoke first to cut off another tirade. "How long until we get off this sand bar?" I asked. "I don't want to be stranded too long."

"Sand bar? You ran us onto rocks!" shouted Captain Gregoire. "Thanks to your incompetence, my ship is ruined!"

"Does that mean it will be a while?" I asked, annoyed. "I'm late, for a very important date."

"The *Predator* is gutted!" fumed Captain Gregoire. "This ship is not going anywhere."

"Can't you call a tug boat to tow us home?" I asked. "Isn't anyone coming to get us?"

"It's a total loss," growled Captain Gregoire. "Helicopters will lift us out eventually. I will see to it

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you are busted back to private, if it's the last thing I ever do!"

"Whatever," I replied, adding under my breath, "Annapolis Naval Academy asshole."

"I heard that! You will show proper respect!"

"Whatever."

Helicopters soon arrived, landing legionnaires to protect the *Predator* during salvage operations. I took command of a smaller riverboat that brought more supplies, and I proceeded up river at a leisurely pace to New Memphis. Captain Gregoire hitched a ride, sitting at the back of the boat, brooding. Every once in a while his eyes widened as he jotted down a note about how terrible a commander I was, and how it was all my fault his prized boat was gutted, and how I should never be allowed on the New Mississippi River again because I was a menace to commerce and everyone around me. I ignored the old duffer, concentrating instead on the speed and maneuverability of my new riverboat. This boat hauled ass!

About half way to New Memphis I saw a couple spider insurgents pop out of a spider hole along the bank of the river. One insurgent was aiming an RPG directly at me. The other had an old-style AK47. At first I did not react to the danger. It just seemed incredulous that someone other than Gregoire would want to kill me on a peaceful beautiful river like the New Mississippi. As Corporal Williams began firing his machine gun, I made a hard left and sped at the insurgents. The RPG went over us, landing harmlessly in our wake. As the insurgents ducked back into their hole, I smashed the boat onto the soft sandy bank and through the high grass. The boat bounced a few yards and came to rest next to the

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spider hole. I jumped off, firing my assault rifle into their hole. Then I dropped a grenade down the hole. When the smoke cleared, Corporal Williams went down the tunnel and retrieved spider bodies and equipment. It felt good to finally have something go right.

The good feelings ended when I explained on the radio to General Kalipetsis how I managed to beach two boats in one day. Also, in the confusion, Captain Gregoire had fallen overboard and was now missing in action. He had already been leaning left, scribbling his venomous notes, when he was lost overboard as I made the hard turn. No loss there, but it looked bad in my report.

* * * * *

General Kalipetsis was waiting for me at Legion Headquarters. “The spiders say we owe the Arthropodan Empire \$235,000 for destroying an automated lighthouse! What do you have to say for yourself?”

“Lighthouses don’t cost that much,” I argued. “Don’t let those spiders cheat you. I’ll bet the *Predator* alone costs much more. At least I didn’t destroy the second boat. It was just stuck in the sand.”

“You think this is funny?” asked General Kalipetsis. “The money will come out of your paycheck!”

“Now that is funny.”

“I know you have millions on your card,” said General Kalipetsis. “How does a mere major become a millionaire on Legion pay?”

“Lucky at cards?” I suggested. “All you have to do is tell those spiders that insurgents blew up the

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lighthouse. They can't prove anything."

"What about the *Predator*?" asked General Kalipetsis.

"We needed a new riverboat anyway," I said. "That rust bucket was due to be scrapped. Order a new one. Only this time get one of those slick new hydrofoil boats. They're fast. Bigger is better, you know."

"You will never find out how fast they are," said General Kalipetsis. "I received a report of seismic readings in Sector 27 along the DMZ. Go check it out. It might be spider insurgents digging more tunnels."

"Sector 27?" I asked, checking a map. "Isn't that in the middle of the New Gobi Desert? There is nothing out there but sagebrush and rattlesnakes."

"Good," said General Kalipetsis. "You won't be able to break anything. Let that be a lesson to you."

"I killed at least two insurgents," I protested. "Doesn't that mean anything? There might have been insurgents in that lighthouse, too. In fact, I'm sure of it."

"Insurgents in the lighthouse is not in your report or anyone else's account of what happened," said General Kalipetsis. "Take your sun-block. I hear the New Gobi Desert is very hot this time of year."

* * * * *

As ordered, I took a company of legionnaires to Sector 27. We were airlifted with our armored cars and equipment. After the planes left, it seemed so quiet. The only sound was a desert breeze through the sagebrush. There were no landmarks for miles around, just sand, sagebrush, and a dirt road.

"Every time you screw up, we get posted

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somewhere awful,” complained Captain Lopez. “What did you do this time?”

“Shut up and start pitching tents,” I ordered. “Find the border markers. They should be giving off a beacon signal.”

“Sir!” yelled Corporal Williams. “I see a spider!”

Sure enough. Through my binoculars I too could see a spider guard shack at the crest of the next hill. A spider marine was waving at us. I drove our armored car over to investigate.

“Welcome to Hell,” said the spider guard. He seemed happy to see us. “Who did you piss off to get assigned here?”

“None of your business,” I said. “What is this? What are you doing here?”

“I am monitoring border traffic,” said the spider guard. “Can’t you tell?”

“There is nothing but lizards out here,” I said.

“Exactly,” said the spider guard. “And I am watching and counting every lizard that goes by. I was watching you land, earlier. If you human pestilence are invading the New Gobi Desert, I surrender! You can have it.”

“We landed here to investigate seismic activity,” I explained. “Are you digging tunnels?”

“To sneak across the border?” asked the spider guard. “Yes, that is it. You caught us!”

“I am serious,” I said. “I know you have been digging. What are you up to?”

“We have been drilling a well,” answered the spider guard. “I’m thinking about building a nice cool swimming pool. In a few hours, it’s going to be over 135 degrees out here. I suggest you find some shade.”

“Where?” I asked, looking about.

“Anywhere but here,” said the spider guard.

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“This shack is mine.”

“Is there any insurgent activity in this area?” I asked.

“What?” asked the spider guard. “No one is interested in this area. It is too hot. Insurgents are city dwellers. They would not last five minutes out here.”

In despair, I walked back to the armored car. At least it had air conditioning. Corporal Tonelli lingered by the guard shack. “My name is Guido,” said Corporal Tonelli. “Is there anything valuable out here?”

“Like what?” asked the spider guard. “Rocks? Do you want to dig for gold?”

“I have a case of vodka in the armored car,” said Guido. “Do you have anything worth trading for?”

“How about a cannon?” offered the spider guard. “RPGs?”

“Sorry,” said Guido. “I already have several of those. How many soldiers are in your unit?”

“That is top secret,” said the spider guard. “But bring over your case of vodka. I’ll give you the VIP tour.”

They walked beyond the next hill, where about a hundred spiders were camped. A well-drilling rig was digging through the dirt and rocks, throwing dust everywhere. So far, the spiders had not reached water. The spider guard introduced Guido to his commanding officer. Guido handed the officer a bottle of vodka.

“Thank you,” said the spider commander, happily pouring them all a drink. “Normally I would beware of human pestilence bearing gifts, but I will make an exception this time.”

“This is Guido,” announced the spider guard.

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“Why has the human pestilence and its Mafia come out here?” asked the spider commander, eyeing Guido with all eight eyes.

“Mafia?” asked Guido. “What do you mean?”

“You are Italian, are you not?” asked the spider commander, checking his database notepad computer. “I am well aware that all Italians are members of the Mafia. Your human sub-category Italiano runs all the rackets and gambling in New Memphis. Do you deny that? Are you planning to build another casino way out here? Or are you a smuggler?”

“I am a legionnaire,” replied Guido. “I go where I am ordered to go.”

“The Legion heard our drilling equipment and thought we were digging a tunnel,” explained the spider guard. “There is a whole mechanized infantry company on the other side of the hill.”

“I know that,” said the spider commander, pouring another drink. “I saw them land, too.”

“Have you been out here long?” asked Guido.

“It seems like forever,” said the spider commander, sighing. “How did you get chosen to come out here and spy on us?”

“We’re on a top-secret mission,” said Guido. “They chose the best of the best.”

“You pissed someone off?” asked the spider commander.

“Not me,” said Guido. “It was Major Czerinski.”

* * * * *

At the end of the day, I radioed a report to General Kalipetsis. “There is a whole company of spiders out here. They say the seismic activity we

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detected must have been caused by drilling.”

“They’re drilling for oil?” asked the general. “That’s ridiculous. There is no oil out there.”

“Water,” I corrected. “They say they want to build a swimming pool because it’s hot out here.”

“You believe them?” asked General Kalipetsis.

“They’re right. It is hot.”

“No!” General Kalipetsis yelled. “I mean, do you believe they are building a swimming pool?”

“Of course not,” I answered. “They must be up to something else.”

“I agree. I am sending you a company of engineers to build permanent barracks and to establish a secure border. Be alert. The spiders are up to no good. I am also sending our own drilling equipment to take some core samples. If there is anything valuable under the New Gobi Desert, I want to reach it first.”

“That’s a good idea. Send some Geiger counters, too. Maybe they’re looking for uranium.”

“The engineers will be escorted by another company of mechanized infantry,” advised General Kalipetsis. “I want to be able to reinforce the DMZ before the spiders do the same. When the engineers are done building your new home, start them to work on a permanent paved road. I want to be able to truck supplies to you on a regular basis.”

“Can I have a swimming pool too?” I asked. “The spiders had a good idea about drilling a well. You would not believe how hot it gets in the desert.”

“What?” asked General Kalipetsis. “No! This is the Legion, not a country club. Focus on the job at hand. Find out why the spiders are interested in New Gobi.”

“Yes, sir!”



CHAPTER 2

I was told that a VIP would be arriving, so I waited at our new airstrip for his plane. The VIP arrived with our supplies on a shuttle. He was a very large and cheerful-looking man. Kind of reminded me of Santa Claus.

“Good morning, Major. My name is Ronald Carter,” he said, shaking my hand. “I represent the McDonald’s Corporation.”

“The aircraft maker?” I asked.

“No,” said Carter. “We make hamburgers. You are thinking of McDonnell-Douglas Aircraft. We are much bigger than them.”

“I hope you brought us some happy meals,” I said. “I’m starving.”

“McDonald’s wants to be the first restaurant in New Gobi,” continued Carter. “General Kalipetsis told me to contact you about acquiring a prime building site.”

“Build anywhere you want,” I said. “See those two guard shacks facing each other? That’s the border. Everything on this side is United States Galactic Federation territory.”

“I am interested in a border location so we can serve both human and spider customers,” said Carter. “Good relations with the spiders is important to McDonald’s.”

“I heard the insurgents have been bombing restaurants,” I said. “Why do you want to build here? There is nothing in New Gobi, and we are on the front line.”

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“You are here,” said Carter. “And I hear more legionnaires are on the way. McDonald’s feels safe being surrounded by so many hungry soldiers.”

“But we might deploy elsewhere at any time,” I argued. “This is all temporary. I’m still living in a tent.”

“Maybe, maybe not,” said Carter. “I hear you are building a highway through town. I see big things happening to New Gobi City. Construction will begin immediately.”

* * * * *

The only unusual activity I noticed on the spider side was a large tent at the edge of their camp. It had a guard posted outside at the front. I wanted to know what was going on inside the tent, and decided Guido was the man for the job. “Corporal Tonelli, I heard you have been getting chummy with the spiders,” I said, nodding across the border to the other guard shack. “Find out what the spiders are doing in that circus tent next to their camp.”

“Rumors are that it’s a large motor pool for vehicle repair,” said Guido. “I’ve seen lots of trucks come and go from there.”

“Satellite photos show that none of the trucks enter the tent,” I said. “Ask your buddy what they’re doing in there.”

Guido shrugged and walked to the other guard shack. He was meaning to visit anyway, being that the spiders had air-conditioning in their shack and outbuildings.

“What’s in the big tent?” asked Guido. “My commander wants to know.”

“I heard a rumor there is a crashed shuttle that

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is being repaired,” replied the spider guard. “But the tent was there before I arrived, and they do not allow me inside.”

“Aren't you curious about what they're doing in there?” asked Guido.

“It is not my job to be curious,” said the spider guard, shrugging. “Curiosity killed the lizard.”

“Can you find out for sure?” asked Guido. “I'll pay you a thousand dollars to check it out.”

“You want me to spy for you human pestilence?” asked the spider guard. “No way.”

“How about for two thousand dollars?” asked Guido. “It wouldn't really be spying. You would just be doing me a favor. If there is really something top secret going on inside the tent, you don't have to tell me about it. I'll understand. I just want Major Czerinski off my back about it. He's paranoid about that tent, and thinks you all are up to no good out here.”

“I will look into it,” promised the spider guard. “For five thousand dollars.”

When Guido left, the spider guard immediately reported their conversation to his commanding officer.

“Why did you tell the human pestilence we were working on a crashed shuttle?” asked the spider commander. “It is an obvious lie.”

“Because Guido did not believe my story about the tent being a motor pool,” explained the spider guard.

“Why not just tell Guido the truth?” asked the spider commander. “It would have lessened tension. We do not need more Legion guns on the DMZ. I agree that Czerinski is paranoid. But he is dangerous, too.”

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“I was just messing with him,” said the spider guard. “Besides, Guido said the Legion would leave once they were satisfied we are not doing anything sinister out here.”

“You do not want them to leave?” asked the commander, incredulously.

“It is boring out here,” replied the spider guard. “Are we doing anything under that tent that I should be concerned about?”

“Now you ask that question?” said the spider commander. “It is on our side of the DMZ. We will do as we please. It is none of the Legion’s business.”

“You told us the tent was to provide shade and quarters for civilian mining engineers taking core samples out in the desert,” said the spider guard. “I never questioned that explanation. I do now.”

“You had no need to be told otherwise,” said the spider commander. “You still do not.”

“What shall I tell Guido?” asked the spider guard. “What is the truth?”

“Tell Guido you want ten thousand dollars,” answered the spider commander. “Tell him we are digging up fossils. I will split the money with you.”

“Is that the truth?” asked the spider guard. “Fossils?”

“That was an order,” said the spider commander. “Do not ever question one of my orders again.”

* * * * *

The spider military intelligence officer had been viewing satellite photos all morning, prior to his briefing with the governor. Now he was ready for his presentation. “It appears the Legion is building a base along the DMZ in the New Gobi Desert,” announced

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the military intelligence officer. "We have a small company of marines at the scene. Our local commander requests reinforcements. He says the human pestilence is threatening to overwhelm his defenses."

"We posted that fool out there to keep him out of trouble," commented the governor. "He's some sort of shirt-tail relative to the Emperor. I see now that fool can find trouble anywhere. What I want to know is, why is the Legion building a base in the New Gobi Desert?"

"The New Gobi has no strategic value," advised the military intelligence officer. "But look at this photo. The human pestilence were digging a long rectangular hole between these buildings. It was lined with cement, then covered by a tent. And, they are constructing a highway to New Gobi."

"Could that hole be a command bunker or a missile silo?" asked the governor.

"I have instructed our local commander to find out," said the military intelligence officer.

"Send an armored battalion to reinforce the DMZ in the New Gobi," ordered the governor. "And station an Air Wing squadron for support. That highway they are building is proof that the Legion is bringing in more troops and equipment. They are up to no good!"

"I agree," said the military intelligence officer. "And look at this outrage! Right on the border! Do you see it? Golden Arches."

"What?" asked the governor. "What does it mean?"

"It is one of their major food distribution centers," explained the military intelligence officer. "The Golden Arches have the capacity to feed thousands."

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“Those bastards!” fumed the governor. “What is the human pestilence up to this time?”

* * * * *

“Our scientists are digging up fossils,” reported the spider guard, when he met with Guido. “That is all.”

“Fossils?” asked Guido. “Do you mean like dinosaurs?”

“Old bones and stuff like that,” said the spider guard. “I could not get a lot of details.”

“Do you expect me to pay ten thousand dollars for a bogus story like that?” asked Guido. “Why are Arthropodan marines guarding a fossil dig?”

“I do not know,” said the spider guard. “Perhaps the fossils are valuable, and the scientists need protection from bandits. We are very serious about our history.”

“Did you eyeball the inside of the tent yourself? Or is your story just more second-hand rumors?”

“A very reliable source told me,” said the spider guard. “I cannot tell you who.”

“For ten thousand dollars you had better tell me who, and a lot more,” said Guido. “I’ll give you half the money now, and half later when you bring me a fossil. I need proof. Major Czerinski is not going to buy your fossil story without proof.”

“I will try,” said the spider guard. “But it will not be easy. The tent is guarded.”

“And find out why security is so tight if there is nothing but dust and bones in that tent,” demanded Guido. “Find out about the guard postings, too.”

* * * * *

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Guido passed the information about the spiders' secret tent to me, and I discussed the matter by phone with General Kalipetsis.

"I do not see any military value in prehistoric fossils," said General Kalipetsis. "What would they do with old bones?"

"The guard said they take their history seriously," I said. "Or maybe it's all a lie, and they're just jerking us around."

"What history?" asked General Kalipetsis. "The spiders are not from New Colorado. We were here first. This was a dead planet before we arrived."

"That is it!" exclaimed Captain Lopez, listening in on the conversation. "The dig is not prehistoric, and they are not looking for bones. The spiders are digging up old exoskeletons. They aim to prove that the spiders were here first, long before humanity terraformed New Colorado."

"They could assert a rightful claim to the whole planet!" added General Kalipetsis. "That is not going to happen! I am sending more of the First Division to the New Gobi Desert. I want that dig stopped now."

