



AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGIONS

BOOK 10

PEACEKEEPERS



WALTER KNIGHT

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Blue is not Captain Joey R. Czerinski's favorite color – especially not to wear in the New Gobi Desert on planet New Colorado. Blue doesn't blend with dust and dirt – it's a beacon inviting terrorists and insurgents to take potshots at him and fellow legionnaires newly assigned as 'peacekeepers' to control hostilities between the spiders and scorpions. But whoever put Czerinski in charge of keeping the peace in this volatile area certainly didn't think things through. A paranoid psychopath interested only in personal gain is not the best babysitter to keep two warring alien factions at bay.

With the rise of two new terrorist leaders – one scorpion and one spider – things heat up in a hurry with the threat of nuclear detonation. But there's always a profit to be made even amid the bombings and riots – even if somebody has to take a dive to fix the fight. And as long as Pizza Hut and Taco Bell keep their doors open, everybody'll be happy ... at least for a while.

An old foe makes another showing and scares the bejesus out of Sergeant Green and everyone else in the hallowed tunnels of the Legion's armory and detention dungeon. Czerinski and his band face dangers, and sometimes those dangers get the best of a few. Death in war is an inevitability, but the trick is to keep on laughing at Death and going about the business of being the craziest bunch of soldiers this side of the galaxy! Laughter is truly the best arsenal in the tenth installment of the seriously screwy military space saga gone wrong.

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Book 10: Peacekeepers

Licensed and Produced through
Penumbra Publishing
www.PenumbraPublishing.com



Printed in USA
PRINT ISBN/EAN-13: 978-1-935563-59-4
Copyright 2010 Walter Knight
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Cover Art: Starla Markham

Also available in EBOOK
ISBN/EAN-13: 978-1-935563-58-7

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~AUTHOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT~

A Dedication to Bill Allin

My wife's cousin, First Lieutenant Orlando 'Bill' Hardin Allin, Jr., of the 87th Troop Carrier Squadron of the 438th Troop Carrier Group, was twenty-two years old when, on the night of June 5, 1944, he flew a C-47 transport with a 'stick' of eighteen paratroopers of the 101st Airborne over Normandy. His plane was the second of a three-plane formation that spearheaded the invasion of German-held France. Lieutenant Allin flew right wing for the 438 TCG Commander General Donaldson flying the 'Belle of Birmingham.' The planes were overloaded because of the extra ammo and gear taken aboard by each paratrooper. It took two assistants to load each paratrooper burdened with gear. Some paratroopers, weighted with gear, drowned in ponds that had not been detected by aerial reconnaissance. However, none of the paratroopers flown by the 438th TCG suffered such a fate.

The squadron flew blacked-out at wave height across the English Channel to evade enemy detection, avoiding islands, then rose to seven hundred feet for the final run. Low cloud cover and poor weather obscured their view, but they maintained their formation and delivered the first airborne troops to engage the enemy and begin the liberation of Europe. Surviving heavy ground fire, they returned to

England, loaded more paratroopers, and towed gliders for a daylight run behind the Utah Beachhead.

Lieutenant Allin made numerous paratroop drops and supply runs, including, under intense anti-aircraft fire, a drop to Bastogne three days before General Patton arrived. On another mission, he landed in fog with a load of wounded soldiers at an airbase on the Cliffs of Dover. Lieutenant Allin joked about his Dover landing, saying he almost became an enemy ace that day by narrowly missing parked British fighters before applying brakes on the slick runway and spinning the plane about to avoid going over the cliff.

Of course, these few words of tribute are not enough, and cannot come close to describing the terror of combat. Bill Allin is still alive, and has four adult children and a lovely wife. He is still healthy and very active. I ate dinner with Bill just this week.

I wrote this tribute because I believe we need to make efforts to remember the service of our heroes. Just today I was informed that the last WWI American Doughboy died at aged one-hundred-eleven. The last of our WWII heroes will be gone soon, too. I encourage others to talk to your fathers and grandfathers and record their service. Many want to tell their story, both for public history, and for private family histories.

These days there is a perception that Europeans, especially the French, do not remember or appreciate their liberation or American sacrifice. Wrong. "When the Germans came, they marched in singing. When the Americans landed, the Germans left crying."

There are many other tributes, including the following by a French village mayor, of the smiling Americans who dropped from the sky. "To these shores came the sons and grandsons of Europe. Descendants of those who had left the Old World to find a better life in the New World. They returned to free their ancestral homes from tyranny. Many, so

many, gave up their lives and their future so that we, our children, and grandchildren, might have a future. May we be worthy of the price paid by these gallant warriors.”

The Mayor of Sainte-Mère-Église, the first village liberated by the Americans, said it best. “We do not have the right to forget. Their example and their sacrifice must be forever imprinted in our memories. May they give us the strength, determination, and enthusiasm of their twenties, so that in our turn, today and for tomorrow, we can follow in their footsteps of courage, dignity, and moral duty.”

Because to this day there is still controversy about the D-Day invasion and some amount of argument among veterans regarding troop carrier squadrons, I want to address the matter. I am sure we have all seen Hollywood movies of D-Day, showing supplies missing their marks, and paratroopers dropped in the wrong place. The troop transport pilots trained extensively for D-Day, and their heroism and accuracy in flying is still a marvel to behold. They flew tight formations that night under harsh conditions, radio blackout, and enemy fire to deliver men and supplies. It is hard for me to imagine what those young pilots flying the planes, or paratroopers jumping out of the planes, were asked to do. I would like to think that I too would measure up if called upon by my country to do my duty, but I am not so sure. Such bravery, competence, and self-sacrifice is awe-inspiring, and I feel in their debt.

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by

Walter Knight



CHAPTER 1

“You will paint your helmets blue,” ordered Colonel Lopez, addressing his men. “You are still legionnaires, but you are also now peacekeepers.”

“Blue?” I asked.

“Captain Czerinski,” replied Colonel Lopez, lording over us with his new rank, “do you have something to add?”

I commanded the garrison troops at the border town of Scorpion City, Planet of New Colorado. Scorpion City used to be nothing but a radioactive hot spot in the road along the DMZ, but had grown. Even Walmart had moved to town.

I used to command the whole New Gobi Desert Military District before I got demoted. Now Lopez was in charge, and he was not above rubbing it in. I intended to rub back! “Blue stands out,” I argued. “Why don’t we just paint big targets on our helmets for the snipers?”

“Your nose is a big target,” commented Colonel Lopez, sarcastically. “How about I paint a big target on that?”

“I worry about my nose getting shot off, too,” I continued. “That is why I don’t stick my nose where it does not belong. Why are we getting involved between the spiders and the scorpions in the first place? Let them fight it out. And while we are on the subject, how come *your* helmet isn’t blue?” My legionnaires grumbled and nodded in agreement.

“Because it is you who will be working at the border,” answered Colonel Lopez. “Not me. The blue

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helmet is *meant* to make you conspicuous. Being identified as a peacekeeper will protect you by garnering respect from both sides. Your job is to keep the scorpions and spiders from fighting. Most bugs respect that. Peace on the border is in everyone's best interest."

"Where will you be, sir? Will you be joining us?"

"Are you kidding?" scoffed Colonel Lopez, speaking just to me in a lower voice. "It is going to get dangerous here on the border, especially if you are wearing those goofy blue helmets. I will be back at my air-conditioned office at Headquarters, with my feet up on my desk, sipping iced tea."

"Your brutal honesty is moving, sir. I have served with you since we were both privates. This is undoubtedly the stupidest idea you have come up with yet."

"You think so?" asked Colonel Lopez, keeping his calm, but I could tell he seethed. "Tell me about it. Blue helmets are General Daly's idea, so deal with it. You will follow orders, just like everyone else!"

Colonel Lopez left abruptly, tossing me a package of matching blue arm patches. Lopez was not happy with me smarting off in front of the men, but we had too much history for him to do much about it. *Deal with that!* Lopez had it coming after that 'iced tea' comment. I tried to read whether Lopez was really upset, but he had become increasingly stoic lately. He was still a punk. Oh well, life goes on ... for most. I picked up my helmet and started painting it turquoise blue, with broad sloppy strokes. What else could I do? Other legionnaires followed suit.

* * * * *

During the last war, the spiders retreated all along the Northern Frontier, except at Scorpion City. Here, they dug in and fought like fanatics against the Scorpion City National Guard. Possibly the reason for the spiders' tenacity was the fact that the scorpions ate their captives. Old-time honored habits and traditions died slowly, even though the Americanized scorpions were now a semi-autonomous part of the United States Galactic Federation. Also, the spiders were determined to fight because of recent valuable oil discoveries.

Scorpion separatists were equally determined to extend their control north of the border. A recent terrorist bombing destroyed Walgreen Drugs, rocking the spider side. Everyone knew retaliation was imminent. Most citizens were keeping off the streets. Their fears were justified. The Arthropodan Governor of the North Territory already agreed to a punitive strike by the local militia, thus avoiding direct involvement and the risk of a strain on diplomatic relations with the USGF. Construction on the scorpions' new Walmart south of the border was nearly finished, and that human pestilence abomination would make a fine target.

* * * * *

The sign at the border-crossing checkpoint read, 'Welcome to Scorpion City, An All-American Town.' A sign facing the other direction warned, 'You are entering the Arthropodan Empire. Obey All Laws.' In between the signs, two guard shacks ominously faced each other. Barbed wire and a barrier lift-gate restricted movement to this narrow checkpoint.

Newly promoted legionnaire Corporal Guido

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Tonelli sat in his air-conditioned guard shack, savoring the relief from the stifling desert heat outside. His respite would be short-lived. Truck traffic across the border was constant, and it was Corporal Tonelli's job to check and search all border traffic. A spider border guard interrupted Tonelli's break with an abrupt knock on the big plate-glass window.

"Hey, Guido! I love those pretty blue helmets you human pestilence are wearing," teased the spider guard. "Blue is a definite fashion statement. It is you for sure."

"What do you want?" replied Guido, annoyed. "You better get over to your side of the border before you start another war. This place has enough radiation without that. One more war, and we're all cooked. Read the no trespassing sign. There are no spiders allowed. You need a travel permit!"

"Aren't you a stickler for the rules today?" taunted the spider guard. "I don't need no stinking permit. Are you taking bets on the game yet?"

"No," answered Guido. "The database is down. Are you spiders jamming our satellite signals again?"

"Probably," said the spider guard. "I will check on that for you."

"You guys are really becoming a royal pain."

"I'm getting off-duty in an hour. When your computer is back up, I want to place five thousand credits on the Yankees for tonight's game."

"Anything else?" asked Guido, making a note on his pad. Business was slow these days, even with the playoffs approaching.

"Not now," said the spider guard. "But what is with the helmets? Are you celebrating Christmas already? Sorry, I did not get you anything."

"I'm a peacekeeper now," explained Guido. "So

don't be messing with the scorpions, or I'll call in air strike. *Capise?*"

"It is going to take a lot more than blue helmets to protect those scorpions," warned the spider guard. "Those scum-suckers need to be exterminated. That terrorist bombing at Walgreens Drugs was the last straw. I will try to give you about five minutes warning when our Air Wing strikes back."

"Thanks," said Guido. "You're a real pal. I hope you realize how bad for business your feud with the scorpions has become."

"They started it," insisted the spider guard as he left for his side of the border. "Just between you and me, I would not shop at Walmart all this week."

* * * * *

Major Desert-Sting of the Scorpion City National Guard personally inspected the surface-to-air-missile (SAM) battery being deployed next to Walmart. The scorpion officer addressed his guardsmen just prior to activation of the site.

"Captain Czerinski of the Legion Peacekeepers just advised me that due to the imminent threat of spider attack, the air space over Scorpion City is restricted. All flight violations of our air space are to be considered hostile and dealt with accordingly. We know the spiders are coming, we just do not know when. Do your duty!"

Desert-Sting flicked on the radar activation switch. Immediately an unidentified aircraft was detected, inbound from the border directly towards Walmart. Without hesitation, Major Desert-Sting fired two missiles, shooting down Colonel Lopez's shuttle as it left Legion Headquarters from the border.



CHAPTER 2

The automated public address alarm system pleasantly warned, “Attention Walmart shoppers. Evacuate the building as soon as possible. Run, but do not panic. The spiders are attacking. Drop down the nearest tunnel bunker located for your convenience in the front parking lot. Sam’s Club members can use membership cards for quick entry. Thank you for visiting Walmart, home for all your one-stop shopping needs. Have a nice day.”

* * * * *

I visited Colonel Lopez at the hospital. His whole body was in traction, and he was bound up like an Egyptian mummy. I checked his medical chart in disbelief that so many bones could be broken and not cause death. *Damn!* I placed a wrapped present by Lopez’s bed to cheer him up.

“Who shot me down?” he asked, disregarding the box. “What happened to my shuttle?”

“You were accidentally shot down by the Scorpion City National Guard,” I explained. “Shit happens. I don’t know why. They had just activated the SAM site when you lifted off. There’s a possibility you strayed over restricted air space.”

“Accident?” asked Colonel Lopez. “I flew out the same route I flew in. Don’t they get proper training before we turn those fools loose with SAMs? Who was the officer in charge?”

“It was Major Desert-Sting,” I replied. “I gave him

a factory field instruction manual that was so easy to follow, even a national guardsman could do it.”

“What’s in the package?” asked Colonel Lopez, still not accepting my explanation, but letting the matter drop for now.

“I salvaged it from the wreckage,” I said. “I thought it would cheer you up.”

“You will have to open it. With this body cast, I can’t even scratch my ass, let alone open that.”

I opened the present, placing Lopez’s Legion helmet by his pillow. I had painted it bright blue. “Just for you,” I commented.

“What is this? You think this is funny?”

“Sorry, sir. I did at the time, but I can see now that maybe it was inappropriate. Please realize humor can be a difficult thing. This is proof.”

“Humor!” shouted Colonel Lopez. “You want to know what I think? I think you are responsible for shooting me down! That’s what that blue helmet proves! Get out of my sight! I don’t want you in my room, or even anywhere near this hospital!”

Lopez began thrashing about painfully, still restrained by the traction devices. He screamed for the nurses.

“Sir, you need to calm down, or you’ll hyperventilate,” I advised. I pinched the oxygen tube, causing Lopez to thrash about even more. *Oops*. Alarms started beeping, causing two scorpion nurses to rush in.

“What have you done?” asked one of the nurses, shoving me away from the IV tree.

“He’s trying to kill me!” shouted Colonel Lopez. “That *bendaho* tried to kill me!”

“What is a *bendaho*?” asked the nurse, checking her translation device for proper calibration.

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"I'm not sure," I answered. "Obviously Colonel Lopez is delirious from pain. You should increase his morphine drip."

"Get him out of my room!" shouted Colonel Lopez. "Czerinski is a cold-blooded psycho murderer. He always has been!"

"You're a fine one to talk about being cold-blooded," I replied, increasing his morphine drip with the turn of a knob.

"Sir, you need to stop touching the equipment," ordered the nurse. "Perhaps you should leave. Your presence only seems to agitate Colonel Lopez."

"We have served together since we were recruits," I said. "Lopez and I are best friends. He must be in shock. I'm sure he'll be glad to see me when I visit tomorrow."

"No!" insisted Colonel Lopez. "I want security posted at my door! Czerinski is to be barred from the hospital!"

"It seems that we can add paranoia to his delusional symptoms," commented the nurse, increasing the morphine drip again. "Captain Czerinski is your friend."

"Paranoia was a preexisting condition," I added, trying to be helpful.

"Czerinski is an assassin!" insisted Colonel Lopez, before finally nodding off.

"Do you have psych meds you can load him up with?" I asked. "Lopez self-medicates, but I think he needs some structure in his medication regimen."

"Scorpion medications are stronger than what you humans take, but are basically the same," commented the nurse. "It is just a matter of getting the right dose. I will consult with the doctor when he makes his rounds again."

“That will be fine,” I said. “The more psych meds, the better.”

“Assassin!” yelled Colonel Lopez, jolting upright, then falling back into slumber, mumbling something about assassins and untrustworthy Polish traitors.

* * * * *

Klaxons rang out as Major Desert-Sting tracked the cruise missile fired from the hills held by spider militia across the border. The missile circled around town, occasionally dipping below radar detection. As the cruise missile reached south by the spaceport, it darted directly north towards Walmart. Desert-Sting fired two SAMs. Immediately the cruise missile cut loose decoys. Taken by surprise, Desert-Sting fired more SAMs in desperation. Multiple targets were hit, but the bogeys kept coming. Debris rained down on the neighborhood, including a decoy that crashed harmlessly in the Walmart parking lot.

“Those cowardly spiders target innocent civilians!” shouted Desert-Sting, shaking his claw triumphantly to the north. “But this time we were ready!”

Cheering shoppers emerged from the Walmart bunkers and mobbed their scorpion National Guardsmen. A couple cars burned in the parking lot, but everyone was safe.

“Attention Walmart shoppers,” announced the public address system. “Walmart is pleased to announce our first bombing clearance sale. All electronics are marked at half price. All items from our gardening department are seventy-five percent off. Please shop responsibly and remember to shop Walmart first for all your one-stop shopping needs.”

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The crowd rushed the doors, fighting over shopping carts and limited available music sound systems and electronic devices. Agitated scorpion housewives snapped their claws and wickedly swung their stingers as they jostled for position down narrow aisles and in long lines. A greeter was trampled before nearby National Guard units finally restored order. Will Walmart ever learn?

