

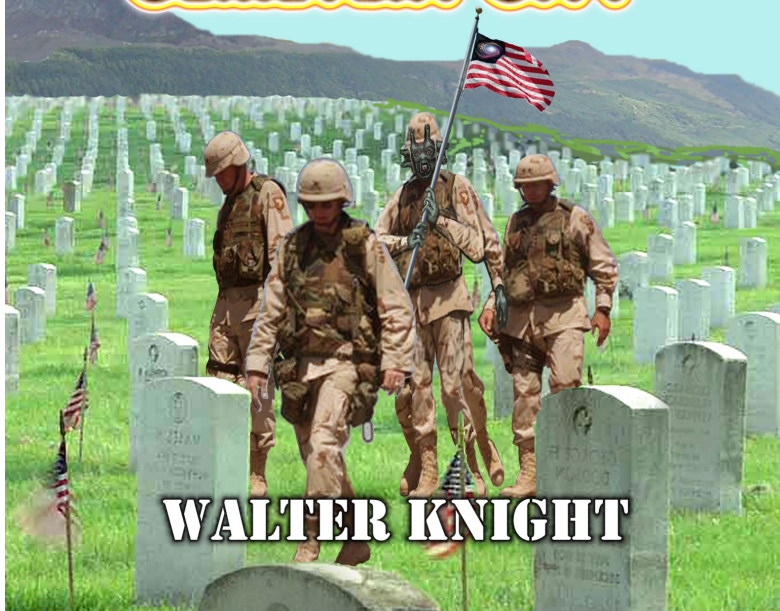


AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGIONS



BOOK 11

CEMETERY CITY



WALTER KNIGHT

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

BOOK 11

CEMETERY CITY



The United States Galactic Federation's 'gold rush' for rare metals used in advanced technology is about to begin on Planet New Colorado at a remote area in the desert known as Blue Rock Valley. The only problem: Blue Rock Valley is located north of the DMZ, on the Arthropodan Empire's side. However, Colonel Manny Lopez has a plan for that – claim-jumping with the help of a couple hundred dead legionnaires, including Private Camacho. But Major Joey R. Czerinski is the weak link in this chain of misappropriation. If anyone can screw things up, it's Czerinski – or so Lopez believes.

Progress quickly moves to Blue Rock Valley, and native Blue Lizards suddenly land on the Endangered Species list, despite becoming a tasty addition to Taco Bell's menu. In the midst of things, spider legionnaire John Iwo Jima Wayne makes a love connection that could prove to be deadly. The spider commander, already upset that the Legion has moved in on Arthropodan territory, decides to fight back, and Colonel Lopez gets caught in the crossfire.

Eventually the truth about Blue Rock is exposed, and the tables turn temporarily for Lopez, earning him a little dose of Czerinski-flavored payback. But Lopez soon makes a comeback and sends a jolt of dread to Czerinski and his loyal legionnaires. Private Knight writes himself into a corner and gets busted for it.

All in all, Czerinski doesn't have to lift a finger, because things go horribly, laughably wrong, despite his rare lack of bumbling interference in this eleventh installment of the seriously screwy military space saga.

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

Book 11: Cemetery City

Licensed and Produced through
Penumbra Publishing
www.PenumbraPublishing.com



PRINTED IN USA
ISBN/EAN-13: 978-1-935563-65-5
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Cover Art: Starla Markham

Also available in EBOOK
ISBN/EAN-13: 978-1-935563-64-8

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~AUTHOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT~

I dedicate ***America's Galactic Foreign Legion***
– ***Book 11: Cemetery City*** to American heroes John
Buford, Jr., and Thomas Ward Custer.

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

BOOK 11

CEMETERY CITY



by

Walter Knight



CHAPTER 1

I am Major Joey R. Czerinski, Hero of the Legion, Butcher of New Colorado, and garrison commander of United States Galactic Federation Foreign Legion troops on the distant planet colony of New Colorado. My good friend and longtime business associate, Colonel Manny Lopez, made a special trip from Old Earth just to talk to me. Since promotion to a cushy Military Intelligence staff job, Lopez thinks he knows it all, but he's still a punk. I don't trust him.

“Geologists discovered huge deposits of rare metals in the Blue Rock Valley of the New Gobi Desert,” advised Lopez, tapping excitedly on a large map display with his pointer stick. “There are enough rare metal deposits at this site to supply the needs of the entire galaxy. That is in stark contrast to the current rare metals shortage we now suffer. Our technological advantage over the spiders is acutely threatened by these shortages. The Blue Rock Valley is literally the United States Galactic Federation’s savior.”

“You’ve discovered gold and silver?” I asked. “That’s great. Another gold rush will help colonization along the border. We need more humans to offset the spider immigration of New Colorado.”

“Czerinski, I am not talking about gold or silver,” explained Colonel Lopez. “I mean the elemental rare metals combined with other substances to create the alloys used in all our high-end technology for weapons, communications, and space travel. These metals go into everything we use, from batteries to

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computers to spaceship engines. Humanity wants and needs those rare metals. You are going to get them.”

“Sorry, but I am not a miner,” I protested. “I did not join the Foreign Legion to dig holes in the ground, or to babysit miners. The Legion can’t be everywhere. If you are having problems with bandits, a private security company can easily handle a few bandits.”

“You joined the Legion for money,” commented Lopez dismissively. “Our problem is ownership of the land where the deposits are located.”

“You want the Legion to jump someone’s claim?”

“There is a cloud on the title. The deposits are located fifty miles north of the border.”

“What? The site is in the Arthropodan Empire? There is no cloud on the title. The spiders own that land. End of discussion, unless you want to start another war. Is that what you want me to do – attack first?”

“The spiders do not know about the deposits,” explained Colonel Lopez. “Special Forces were inserted at Blue Rock with geologists this summer. Core samples were secretly drilled.”

“When the Emperor discovers you intend to steal his rare metals, he will be pissed,” I warned. “The spiders are real sensitive about trespassing. Territorial imperative is ingrained into their DNA. The Emperor will send a battalion of marines to defend Blue Rock Valley, even if it was worthless.”

“Not if we negotiate a border variance,” suggested Colonel Lopez. “If the spiders give up claim to Blue Rock Valley before they know its value, it’s ours forever.”

“I told you before, they won’t give up Blue Rock even if it is worthless. To spiders, trespassing is as

serious as murder. You don't tread on their land without causing a serious problem in the neighborhood."

"Our lawyers and negotiators think we have a solution that will, at least initially, sooth the spiders' sensibilities to the trespass issue," insisted Colonel Lopez. "Border variances have been agreed upon before. There is plenty of precedent. For example, the spiders recognize the law of possession. If you establish possession, ownership is assumed. Look at New Memphis. New Memphis is an enclave of humanity deep inside spider territory."

"New Memphis is all about casino gambling and secret bank accounts. There's nothing in Blue Rock Valley to give us an excuse to establish ownership."

"Not *yet*. All we need to do is move in and apply for a variance."

"The only border variances I know of are those based on geological obstacles, such as mountain peaks and river bed changes," I advised. "Do you want me to divert a river to alter the border?"

"Can you do that?" asked Colonel Lopez.

"No. There is no water in the Blue Rock Valley. We cannot just go in there and set up camp."

"We can if we have a credible reason," insisted Colonel Lopez. "An excuse so important, even the spiders will back off for fear of offending humanity's national or cultural sensibilities."

"In the Blue Rock Valley? Are you going to declare the Blue Lizard an endangered species?"

"I never thought of that," replied Colonel Lopez, making a note on his pad. "Is there really a Blue Lizard? Never mind. I have a better idea. Military Intelligence has come up with the perfect pretense for occupying the Blue Rock Valley. I understand you

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own a chain of high-tech upscale cemeteries all across New Colorado.”

“So?” I answered, defensively. “It’s just another investment, of which I have many. So do you. Retirement is just around the corner.”

“You aren’t old enough to retire,” commented Colonel Lopez. “But there is a lot of money at stake in this project that could pad an early retirement, so at least listen to my plan. We want to establish a national cemetery at Blue Rock. Certain senators have already written a minor earmark into the budget to establish the Blue Rock National Cemetery. Even the President has signed off on the idea.”

“I can understand Military Intelligence coming up with such hair-brained stupidity, but how did you get Congress and the President to go along?” I shook my head. “Never mind. I can see it. They’re idiots, too. But still, you can’t just build a cemetery anywhere you want, especially on spider land.”

“We can if we sneak the coffins and bodies in,” advised Colonel Lopez, in a hushed conspiratorial tone. “That’s where you come in. Being a big cemetery mogul and all, you must have lots of extra bodies lying about that we can slip in right under the spiders’ noses. You have monuments, too. We can scatter monuments, bodies, and coffins all over Blue Rock, burying them in the sand dunes. The Legion will bring in archaeologists who will claim that Blue Rock is the site of a long-lost colonial cemetery from before the First War. The spiders already know about our sensibilities and rituals of tending to our dead. They won’t dare object when we send legionnaires to protect the cemetery. Once we establish ourselves, we negotiate for a border variance. The spiders will resist at first, but we will move in colonists, start mining,

and build a Walmart and McDonald's. Once it becomes clear to the spiders we are permanently established, the law of possession will take effect. Our lawyers will argue their legal system recognizes 'possession' as established law. We may need to pay a small amount in compensation, but it will be worth it. I'll even bet those greedy spiders will readily accept our cash if they think we are just buying worthless alkali flats in the middle of nowhere. The spiders will laugh all the way to the bank about our desert cemetery, but the final laugh will be on them."

"It might work. You were saying something earlier about money and my retirement plans? What is my cut?"

"How can you think of money when serious national security issues are in play? Czerinski, you are one mercenary son of a bitch."

"I know, I disgust myself sometimes," I conceded. "However, secrets are hard to keep, especially when a lot of money is involved. Legionnaires love to talk. How do you expect to keep this quiet long enough to establish ownership? The spiders are going to be upset when they find out. In fact, some humans are going to be upset when they discover we moved bodies from other cemeteries. My cemeteries do not have extra bodies just lying around. I run a respectable business."

"Congress has authorized payment to the Legion of five percent of profits commensurate with each legionnaire's rank and involved risk," relented Colonel Lopez. "Are you satisfied now?"

"Holding out on me, eh?"

"We are partners, as always."

"Fine. Let's do it. Let's wake the dead and move them out!"

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"You really think we can pull this off?" asked Colonel Lopez, now having doubts. "Secrecy and timing will be everything."

"We will roll the dice," I answered enthusiastically. "Planet New Colorado has been a lucky lady to us so far. What's the worst that can happen? We get kicked out? Start another war? I've been kicked out of better real estate. You only die once – well, maybe twice," I amended, thinking of some of my earlier mishaps. "Let's get it over with."

"You will be the Mayor of Cemetery City," commented Colonel Lopez, crossing himself. "That is quite a heady responsibility."

"Sir, no more dead jokes. It's bad luck."

* * * * *

AP News Report:

Colonel Lopez, spokesman for the USGF Foreign Legion in New Phoenix, announced the discovery of a huge colonial cemetery in the Blue Rock Valley. The lost cemetery, uncovered by shifting sand dunes, was long forgotten since the First Galactic War.

Because of looting by spider prospectors and bandits, a small Legion expeditionary force occupied the cemetery site during negotiations with Arthropodan territorial officials. The sacred burial site is located fifty miles north of the border, in a worthless region of the New Gobi Desert.

Except for its value as an important cultural Mecca for humanity's first colonization attempt of New Colorado, the Blue Rock Valley is home only to the rare and endangered Blue Lizard. Hunted to near extinction in their natural migration habitat by spider poachers,

the Blue Lizard is trying to make a comeback, aided by an information campaign from the National Forest Service.

Already, colonists are applying for and being granted colonial travel permits to visit Blue Rock to search for long lost relatives murdered during the first spider invasion, and to get a precious rare glimpse of the endangered Blue Lizard so endeared to the first colonists.

Major Czerinski, famed Hero of the Legion and commander of the expeditionary force guarding the sacred graves of victims of the spider invasion, advised, "There are too many grave sites to find and exhume them all. The Legion, as usual, will do its best under difficult physical and emotional circumstances. There will be no more looting by the spiders. I promise that. I hope a permanent memorial can be established here. When I close my eyes and listen to the wind, I can almost hear the cries of those lost souls thanking us for coming to their rescue. This is a very emotional and spiritual moment for my legionnaires, for humanity, and for all of New Colorado."

Limited excavations at Blue Rock are already underway. The isolated site lies along the meandering Blue Rock River, a dry riverbed that used to mark the area's border during early Frontier days.

* * * * *

"You say Major Czerinski is in charge of legionnaires trespassing at Blue Rock, on Imperial land?" asked the recently assigned spider commander. "I've heard of Czerinski – The Butcher of New Colorado, Joey the Toe – and I smell a rat. If Czerinski is involved, the human pestilence are up to

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something. It is our job to find out what. The governor is extremely upset about their blatant trespass, but does not want to cause another intergalactic incident. You know how volatile the human pestilence get about their burial rituals. There is no reasoning with them on the subject. The governor wants us to investigate this matter and report back to him before taking action.”

“Our geologists surveyed the Blue Rock Valley long ago for oil and gold,” commented the Military Intelligence officer. “They found nothing. Perhaps they missed something.”

“Maybe,” said the spider commander. “Find out! And what about this business, accusing us of poaching migrating Blue Lizards? Are they edible?”

“I suppose you could eat a Blue Lizard if you were desperate,” replied the Military Intelligence officer. “But they taste like shit. Our scouts report the Blue Lizards are everywhere. They are a nuisance. Our troops can’t help but to run them over in the roadway because there are so many. Already one vehicle slid into the ditch because the tires were greased with Blue Lizards.”

“What?” asked the spider commander, incredulously. “That is exactly the kind of intergalactic incident the Governor is concerned about. Order all troops to be careful and mindful not to harm any Blue Lizards until our scientists can investigate the lizards’ status on the Endangered Species List. Drivers are to keep their speeds low enough to avoid Blue Lizard fatalities. Any Blue Lizards that are run over are to be removed from the roadway and secretly buried in the bushes.”

“Yes, sir,” replied the Military Intelligence officer. “Satellite photos show the human pestilence are

frantically digging holes everywhere, and that skeletal bones and coffins are stacked all about. Truck loads of new human pestilence are arriving every day for unknown reasons.”

“We will travel to Blue Rock to investigate this nonsense for ourselves,” announced the spider commander. “This outrageous trespass must end!”

* * * * *

The spider commander led a column of Arthropodan marine armored cars to a roadblock established by the Legion at the perimeter of Cemetery City. A sign above the guard shack manned by legionnaires warned, ‘Caution! Blue Lizard crossing. \$1,000.00 fine for harming any endangered species.’ Corporal Guido Tonelli strode up to inspect the spider commander’s tires. His leashed monitor dragon, Spot, padded silently along. Using a small pen knife, Corporal Tonelli extracted a small lizard foot and claws from the tire tread.

“Look at what you have done!” accused Guido, holding up the small dried foot. “This is exactly the kind of reckless behavior that has put the Blue Lizard on the Endangered Species List. You monster!”

“Shut up you fool!” replied the spider commander. “Those stupid lizards are no more endangered than the fleas you human pestilence carry in your fur.”

“So you don’t buy any of that Blue Lizard bullshit on the news?” asked Guido. “I thought I had you on that one. Please don’t tell Czerinski, or I’ll be in big trouble.”

“I did not believe one bit,” said the spider commander. “In fact, I don’t believe anything you

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claim to be doing here. Take me to Major Czerinski at once! I assume from your press report that he is still in charge?"

"Yes, sir," replied Guido, saluting. "Only one vehicle may enter at a time because of the danger of running over Blue Lizards. Sorry, sir, those are my orders."

"Fine!" said the spider commander, as the gate arm lifted.

Guido drove his jeep past rows of coffins and legionnaires busily moving the coffins from one stack to another. They stopped at the command center tent. Spot jumped from the jeep, pouncing on a Blue Lizard, crunching noisily as he ate. Across from the command center tent was another sign, 'Welcome to the future building site of Cemetery City's new Walmart Super Store, home of all your one-stop shopping needs. Join Sam's Club now to take advantage of special opening-day discounts.'

* * * * *

"Greetings commander," I said, opening the reinforced framed tent door of my makeshift command center. The translucent tent material let in diffuse light but was fairly good at keeping out the heat. "Come on in. Please close the door after you so those damn Blue Lizards don't sneak in. They're a real pain in the ass."

"What is this all about?" asked the spider commander. "Why are you trespassing on Imperial territory?"

"If you want, I will give you a tour of our new digs," I offered. "It's quite an archaeological discovery from the first colonial days before you spiders invaded

New Colorado. You remember the invasion, when you originally trespassed on all of New Colorado, *our* property.”

“A treaty has settled all that!” replied the spider commander, dismissively. “We have established borders now, and you are trespassing. I demand an inspection of your so-called digs as part of my investigation. I brought scientists with me who want to take DNA samples and conduct date testing from soil samples, coffins, and artifacts.”

“Impossible!” I argued. “You spiders have looted and desecrated our dead long enough! I have orders to keep you away from all artifacts. It’s bad enough you run over Blue Lizards in complete disregard to their status on the Endangered Species List. But now, you want to rummage through the coffins of the deceased? Not on my watch.”

“Your story about a lost cemetery is as full of shit as your Blue Lizard tale,” commented the spider commander. “There are Blue Lizards everywhere!”

“Yes, but there are two species of Blue Lizards,” I explained. “There is the everyday variety of long-tailed Blue Lizard. And then there is the rare and elusive short-tailed Blue Lizard. Scientists insist the two do not interbreed, but they do have some sort of social or symbiotic relationship.”

“You claim to be protecting a mutant lizard?” asked the spider commander. “Do you ever tell the truth about anything? Next you will be claiming snails need protection!”

“Are you questioning my credibility?” I challenged, feigning anger. “I always tell the truth.”

“You even lie about your lying!” accused the spider commander.

“No reason to get testy about it. I’m only

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following orders, just like you. The politicians will ultimately decide the fate of our sacred cemetery and the Blue Lizard. Would you like some iced tea?"

"Thank you," said the spider commander, accepting a tall glass. He drank heartily. "I appreciate a drink in this worthless desert. Tea won't grow on Arthropoda. Not enough water."

"We still import our tea and coffee from Old Earth," I commented. "The climate here is also wrong for tea cultivation."

"Great stuff," commented the spider commander, relaxing and accepting a second glass. "Do not think you have distracted me from my mission! I will get to the bottom of your trespass and treachery before I leave Blue Rock Valley!"

We left the command tent, passing a stack of coffins, approaching a group of legionnaires taking a break from the hot sun. "You, there!" said the Spider Commander. "Did you just dig these coffins up? Where did they come from?"

"None of your business," replied Private Krueger. "Are you the lizard killer I heard about from Guido? You disgust me. I have nothing to say to you."

"Order this human pestilence to talk to me," requested the spider commander, turning to me. "I demand cooperation for my investigation. Remember, you are all trespassing on the Arthropodan Empire and are all subject to our laws."

"Krueger, I order you to cooperate," I said.

"Yes, sir," replied Private Krueger, giving the spider commander the one-fingered salute. "What do you want to know?"

"Where did all these bones and coffins come from?" asked the spider commander. "Do not tell me they came from here. There are not enough holes dug

for that. This is a fraud!”

“So, you confess to running over Blue Lizards?” asked Private Krueger.

“I confess to nothing,” shouted the spider commander. “It is you who will confess!”

“Guido found a Blue Lizard foot squished into your tire treads,” accused Private Krueger. “You’re guilty. I can see it in your beady little eyes, all eight of them!”

“Is this legionnaire retarded or what?” asked the spider commander, turning to me.

“Quite possible,” I conceded. “Standards have been modified because peacetime recruitment has fallen off since the economy picked up.”

The spider commander noticed another legionnaire, a fellow spider. “Traitor!” he exclaimed, pointing at Sergeant Wayne. “You! What do you have to say for yourself? You are assisting the human pestilence in this fraud?”

Sergeant John Iwo Jima Wayne, one of the most decorated and worst-tempered spider legionnaires in my command, put down the coffin he was carrying and addressed the spider commander. “You accuse me of deceit before I even say a word?” He drew a large jagged combat knife and neatly sliced off the tip of the spider commander’s claw.

Legionnaires swarmed on Sergeant Wayne, dragging him away from the spider commander. The spider commander staggered back to his armored car, still clutching his bleeding claw.

“Someone build a jail and put Sergeant Wayne in it!” I ordered. “I am so sorry. Your claw will grow back won’t it? I hope this unfortunate incident will not in any way affect ongoing negotiations or the warm and friendly relations enjoyed between our two nations.

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Still friends?"

"You all will pay for this outrage!" shouted the spider commander, as his armored car carried him back to the checkpoint. "This is war!"

"I think he's upset," I commented. I turned to Sergeant Wayne as he was being dragged away. "You're busted back down to private again! What were you thinking? What was I thinking, making you a sergeant?"

* * * * *

We dug in and braced for an expected spider attack that did not come. Instead, the spider commander's Military Intelligence officer sent me a note, saying, 'Major Czerinski: My commander regrets the earlier incident and the flaring of tempers. Your legionnaire, true to his Arthropodan roots, was adequately provoked into action and should not be blamed for responding as he did. My commander also realizes you wear a metal prosthetic hand and toe, and that, in comparison, his slight injury and the temporary loss of his claw tip is nothing to your losses. Further inspections will continue until we determine the true intent of your trespass in Blue Rock.'

I crumpled the note with my metal hand. "We have just begun to butt heads," I commented out loud. I sent helmet camera video footage to Channel Five World News Tonight, showing Blue Lizard parts being scraped off the spider commander's tires by Corporal Tonelli. I also sent video of the spider commander's confrontation with Sergeant Wayne, describing it as an unfortunate cultural misunderstanding between fellow spiders, but

evidence of frayed tempers. The video also showed the stacks of coffins in the background. I then sent a top-secret message to Legion Headquarters, suggesting our scientists investigate the possibility of protecting a rare snail species rumored to dwell in the Blue Rock Valley.

