



AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGIONS



BOOK 12

THE ARK

WALTER KNIGHT



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by
Walter Knight

When a huge ship is found buried deep beneath a desert oasis in an unpopulated area of New Colorado's New Gobi Desert, the race is on between the United States Galactic Federation and the Arthropodan Empire to claim its secrets. General Manny Lopez simply wants to loot the technological treasure. However, the spiders believe the ship is the mythical Ark from their tales of old.

As Caldera Lake is suddenly overrun by the Galactic Foreign Legion and spider marines setting up camp on opposite sides of the line of demarcation running through the middle of the lake, it's soon discovered that the tranquil looking oasis does not offer a relaxing resort setting. Something's swimming in the lake, and it's hungry. Despite the danger, hotels and restaurants spring up to handle the influx of tourists and the curious making pilgrimages to catch a glimpse of the Ark.

The race between the two sides continues amid disagreements and skirmishes unavoidable in a clash of cultural differences. But it's all done in a sportsmanlike manner – at least that's what Colonel Joey R. Czerinski 'The Toe' and General Manny 'The Ear' Lopez claim.

Hungry crocs, graffiti taggers, midnight commando raids, tawdry torture, and lots of fried chicken all take a turn fuelling the laughter in this twelfth tale of the seriously silly military space saga.

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America's Galactic Foreign Legion series

Book 1: Feeling Lucky

Book 2: Reenlistment

Book 3: Silent Invasion

Book 4: Demilitarized Zone

Book 5: Insurgency

Book 6: Culture War

Book 7: Enemies

Book 8: Allies

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Book 11: Cemetery City

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Book 13: Salesman From Mars

Book 14: Embassy War

Novella related to the series

Vampire in the Outfield



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I dedicate ***America's Galactic Foreign Legion***
– ***Book 12: The Ark*** to American heroes Daniel
Joseph Daly and Dakota L. Meyer.

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CHAPTER 1

I am Colonel Joey R. 'The Toe' Czerinski of the United States Galactic Federation Foreign Legion, assigned to planet New Colorado. They call me 'The Toe' behind my back because my big toe was bitten off during combat by an alien, earning me another Purple Heart. The truth is that the incident did not take place during combat, but rather during a compromising situation I prefer not to discuss, because I don't remember that much about it. While I've sustained plenty of injuries, not all of them in combat, I've endangered my life enough that the Purple Heart commendation is deserved – just not for the incident of record.

After several wars, New Colorado remains divided at the Equator between humanity to the South and the spiders of the Arthropodan Empire to the North. Vast stretches of border are uninhabited, covered with desert dunes. The desert is where I find myself now...

* * * * *

I was ordered to investigate a weak alien distress beacon, of the type found on some starships. It emitted a signal from the vicinity of Caldera Lake, a long narrow oasis straddling the border a thousand miles from civilization. Caldera Lake was formed centuries ago from ancient glacial ice trapped atop a volcano buried by shifting sands. The oasis and its palms were a stark contrast to the miles of

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surrounding desert. Standing in the shade of a Legion shuttle for relief against the stifling heat, I gazed out at the calm waters of this odd isolated lake.

"There's nothing here," I complained. "This mission is a waste of time."

"The New Gobi Desert tourist guide says Caldera Lake has fish," advised Lieutenant Perkins, checking the database on his pad.

"Is the water drinkable?" I asked, stripping off my uniform for a swim. As always, the New Gobi Desert temperature was at least 110 degrees. "There is nothing here for us to find, unless something crashed and is hidden in that lake."

"The water is slightly salty," advised Lieutenant Perkins, still reading. "We need to filter the water before drinking. There may be unknown parasites."

"Whatever," I said, jumping in. "The water is great! It's warm, but soothing."

Lieutenant Perkins frowned as he continued reading. "Sir! It says something about crocs!"

At first, the word 'crocs' didn't quite register in my brain. "Crocs?" I asked. "What do you mean *crocs*? Are you talking about those big water lizards in the tropics, with all the crooked teeth?"

"Sir! Get out of the water! Do it now!" Lieutenant Perkins began firing his assault rifle over my head into the ripples behind me. I treaded water as fast as possible, looking back but seeing nothing.

"What was that all about?" I asked upon reaching shore. "There are no crocs here."

"False alarm," replied Lieutenant Perkins. "I just shot up a log floating just below the surface."

"Don't ever do that again," I ordered. "I can't even get a good swim without you ruining it for me! Damn rookie butterball lieutenants!"

As I cursed Perkins, another shuttle landed on the next dune, just across the border. Spider marines poured down its ramp, smartly establishing a secure perimeter. An Arthropodan officer strode up to me like he owned the place.

“Czerinski! You and your human pestilence are trespassing!” announced the spider commander. “Leave now!”

“We are on our side of the border,” I replied, still dripping wet from my swim. “The Legion will leave when it pleases us to do so, not before!”

The spider commander pulled a small electronic device from a pouch. Holding the device over his head, he shot a red light beam along the ground, east and west for fifty yards. The beam extended across the dunes, and even across my bare feet.

“This line shows the exact location of the border!” explained the spider commander, still holding the device aloft. “You will not trespass even one inch on Imperial territory!”

I took an exaggerated step back. “Are you happy now?”

“No!” replied the spider commander. “I am never happy when you show up. What are you human pestilence doing out here? Stealing our water?”

“We’re busted,” I said. “I drank some of your precious water a few minutes ago. Do you want it back?” Already naked, I urinated across the red line. The light flickered and went out as the spider commander jumped back to avoid being doused. “This place is worthless anyway.”

“I ought to cut your hose off!” shouted the spider commander, drawing a large jagged combat knife. “Tell me the truth! What treachery is the Legion up to now?”

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"I am scouting this beautiful beachfront property to determine its suitability for building a new hotel casino resort," I confessed. "So far, I love the view, and the fine swimming. You should consider investing. There will be a substantial real estate boom. Soon, this whole beach will be lined with casinos and condos."

"You better remember the North Shore is ours. There will be no human pestilence casinos or condos on the North Shore!"

"Of course," I agreed. "I was just giving you a heads up because you are my friend. I intend to buy five-acre lots as soon as possible. If you snooze, you lose when it comes to real estate investments."

"Why are you naked? You human pestilence are ugly enough with your clothes on. Without clothes, you are disgusting. Get dressed immediately. You will stay clothed at all times when visible from the Empire."

"Did I tell you our new casino resort will be a nudist colony?" I asked. "Naked gamblers from across the galaxy will flock to this very oasis for carefree fun and frolicking."

"For debauchery, you mean!" accused the spider commander. "There will be no frolicking in public view. You human pestilence are all a bunch of perverts! Don't think I don't know how you lost your toe. I saw the video on the database of you having sex with a scorpion."

"Not another word! You slander me at your own peril! Do you want to start another war?"

"Yes!" answered the spider commander. "I'll fight you any place, any time!"

"Now listen here," I replied, the voice of reason. "We both have a mission, so let's not makes things

more difficult. Caldera Lake could be a cushy assignment, and we need to make the best of it. For example, I just got out of the water from a swim. The water is great! It's so relaxing. Research indicates the high mineral content has medicinal qualities. You should try swimming. A swim might help lower your high blood pressure."

The spider commander peered suspiciously at the calm lake water, still keeping several eyes on me. "Are there indigenous creatures inhabiting that lake?"

"The fishing is great. There are small water lizards that frequent the shallows. They're quite friendly. Crocs are a favorite pet among children of Old Earth. The crocs like to bump against your leg while you wade. Don't worry. If they get too aggressive, just swat them on the nose. If that doesn't work, poke the croc in the eye with your bloody stump!"

"Your Old Earth pets have no business out in the wild. They are like their masters, an invasive nuisance species always sticking their snouts across the line where they do not belong!"

* * * * *

At midday, the temperature soared to 120 degrees. The spider commander and his new Military Intelligence officer waded cautiously deeper into the lake. With Arthropoda being a dry planet, swimming was a novel and refreshing experience. Maybe Czerinski was finally telling the truth about something. The spider commander kneaded his foot claws in the mud, contemplating the medicinal qualities of the so-called mineral water.

The spider commander spied a croc slowly

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drifting closer like a log. Its nose and eyes appeared just above the water's surface, leaving a small ripple in its wake. Closer, closer. "Old Earth vermin!" shouted the spider commander, swatting the croc on its snout. The croc lunged its huge head out of the water, snatching the spider commander's claw. The croc violently pulled the spider commander under, beginning its death roll. The spider commander was saved only when his claw snapped off, allowing his escape to shore.

* * * * *

"That monster was never a child's pet you lying, treacherous human pestilence!" accused the spider commander, shaking his bloody shredded stump at me across the lake. "I'll get you for that!"

"Quit whining!" I yelled back. "Your claw will grow back! You'll be okay when the pain stops! Did you poke it in the eye?"

* * * * *

The spider Military Intelligence officer accessed 'croc's' on the Intergalactic Database. "The human pestilence nearly hunted crocs to extinction on Old Earth to make boots and wallets from hides. It is true that baby crocs were once sold to children at pet stores, but the crocs often were flushed down toilets as they got larger. Abandoned, the crocs survive by eating floating turds in sewers under major USGF cities."

"That monster was never anyone's pet!" repeated the spider commander, firing his pistol at a ripple in the water. The croc dived out of sight.



CHAPTER 2

We still received a weak signal from the crashed alien starship. "It's here," advised Lieutenant Perkins. "We are right on top of it. We must dig!"

Sensors indicated the alien distress beacon was buried directly below my command center tent. To ensure secrecy, I ordered a border boundary fence built and tents erected to conceal as much excavation equipment as possible. I established a single checkpoint at the border for traffic. The spider commander responded with his own fences and placed buoys and cable across Caldera Lake to prevent 'naked human pestilence perverts' from floating across to the Arthropodan side.

Legion engineers advised that seismic readings indicated a very large metal craft deep below ground. Estimates were the starship was about one mile in length, and about eight thousand feet down. The starship must have crashed at the base of the volcano before being buried by centuries of ash and sand dunes. This suggested the spiders' presence on New Colorado predated USGF colonization and terraforming.

Now my mission was clearer. All I had to do was tunnel to the starship and steal its treasure before the spiders discovered what we were doing. Half the starship rested on the Arthropodan side of the border, but that should not be a problem. We had a head start.

* * * * *

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Harrah's Hotel Casino Resort Corporation business agents David Silva and Mickey Romo flew to Caldera Lake on a specially chartered shuttle, just to visit me.

"Colonel Czerinski, I will get straight to the point," advised Silva. "Sources tell us you are contemplating building a destination casino hotel right here on the shores of Caldera Lake. Harrah's Corporation finds your plans totally unacceptable. The entire Eastern New Gobi is our territory. No one is allowed to build a casino here but Harrah's!"

"We were just trying to confuse the spiders," I explained.

"It is you who is confused, if you think you can continue with your plans," replied Romo. "We hear you are buying valuable beachfront property to build condos. Bad things will happen to anyone who tries to muscle in on Harrah's turf!"

"You work for Harrah's?" I asked. "Somehow I doubt that. Harrah's is a respectable gaming corporation. You two resemble Mafia thugs. Are you threatening me?"

"Yes indeed," answered Silva. "One word from us, and a gaggle of corporate lawyers the likes you have never imagined will descend on your world. I will bury you in litigation!"

"This camp will look like a lawyers' convention," added Romo, his chest puffed out. "You will be ruined."

"I don't know who you two think you are, but legionnaires are immune from lawsuits," I commented, dismissively. "It's the law, even written somewhere in the Constitution."

"Do not try to quote business law to me,"

advised Silva. "I earned my MBA from Harvard."

"Whatever. You're a fool."

"My MBA is from Stanford University," added Romo.

"No!" I replied, horrified. "Not Stanford! Can't we work something out?"

"You are in big trouble, mister," warned Romo. "No one messes with Harrah's and lives to tell about it. Be afraid. Be very afraid!"

"Did you really graduate from Stanford?" I asked, upset. "You don't have blond hair or a California tan. I didn't mean that crack about you two being Mafia. It was just a joke."

"I'll excuse your indiscretion this once," replied Romo. "But, do not let it happen again. Harrah's owns destination hotel casinos across the galaxy. We intend to build here at Caldera Lake, too. The Harrah's management likes the tropical beachfront theme concept. Sorry, but the nudist gamblers idea was a bit over the top for us. It won't work. Flying dice and sharp cards might incur too much civil liability."

"That's too bad," I replied. "I really thought I had something special there."

"It is my understanding that you have prior casino ownership experience," commented Silva. "You owned a string of casinos, but they all got bombed or confiscated during the wars. I remind you that's what happens when you play with the big boys. Did you notice the spiders didn't nuke even one Harrah's hotel resort casino?"

"I did notice that," I replied. "That's not fair. Does Harrah's have juice with the Emperor?"

"I know him personally," bragged Silva. "The good news for you is that you, as local Legion

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commander, are entitled to a percentage of the gaming cut set aside for local officials. We expect prompt signing of all necessary business and gaming permits. That's the law. Are you willing to play ball with Harrah's?"

"It would be good for your continued good health to do so," threatened Romo.

"I can play ball," I agreed. "I'd love to play ball with Harrah's."

"Great!" exclaimed Silva. "The first thing you need to do is move your headquarters tent. This exact spot is perfect for the new golf course we're building. Work begins immediately, and I want that unsightly hole filled in."

"What hole?" I asked, innocently.

"The hole you are trying to hide under that big circus tent next door," advised Silva. "You didn't think we saw that? What is it with you legionnaires? It seems like you people are always digging the ground up! You are worse than gophers, prairie dogs, and moles combined."

"You're worse than termites," added Romo, trying to be tough.

"The digging will continue," I replied sternly. "But, I will clean up the mess. Perhaps we can disguise the excavation to look like hotel casino construction."

"Colonel Czerinski, have you not been listening?" asked Silva. "This is the new home of our five-star golf course. That God awful hole to Hell is too big for a PGA regulation sand trap. It needs to be filled now!"

"Caldera Lake is full of crocs," I advised. "You two fools will be croc food if you interfere with my hole."

The two Mafia wannabes stepped aside and

began whispering, apparently not realizing I could still hear them.

“The neurotic sounds serious,” rasped Romo. “Should I threaten to sue him again?”

“He’s hiding something,” replied Silva, whispering back. “Maybe the Legion is digging missile silos. The Legion have always been a bunch of fanatical warmongers, you know.”

“I heard that!” I complained. “I am not building missile sites, yet. I have my reasons for continuing the dig. It’s top secret. Just humor me on that issue. Okay? Otherwise, I can be quite difficult.”

“He’s like a little kid in a sandbox,” whispered Romo. “Let him make his sand castles or whatever he’s doing in that hole.”

“We can tolerate one hole,” announced Silva. “But you will need to sign and initial an addendum to our contract stating you will not dig any more holes!”

“Agreed.”

“A wise decision,” advised Silva, shaking my hand. “We were advised doing business with Joey The Toe would be difficult, but I find you most reasonable.”

“I do not like that nickname any more than I like the Butcher of New Colorado slander the media hangs on me,” I advised, placing a hand on my pistol holster. “Don’t do again, or my attorneys will be in contact with your attorneys.”

“Sorry, no offense intended,” replied Silva, visibly shaken by the mere mention of my attorneys. “Did you say something earlier about crocs in Caldera Lake? Do you mean crocs, as in large ugly crocodiles with big yellow gnarly teeth?”

“There’s just a few.”

“Crocs would be bad for water sports,” Silva

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remarked. "No one water skis with crocs lying about, making a nuisance of themselves. Can you kill them?"

"No," I answered. "It would be a game violation to poach crocs. The Forest Service would be real upset. Perhaps you can put up a net?"

"A swimmers beware sign warning of crocs should be enough to avoid any frivolous civil liability to Harrah's," advised Silva.

"That's a good idea," I commented. "That's why you MBA guys get paid the big bucks."

