



AMERICA'S GALACTIC HYDROGEN LEGIONS

BOOK 19

ATM



WALTER KNIGHT

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

BOOK 19



by
Walter Knight

In the nineteenth installment of this super-sillious science fiction series, the CIA continues to plot and scheme, enlisting wary partner legionnaire Manny Lopez. The Arthropodan commander of planet New Colorado's New Gobi Desert spider troops is included only by default and kept in the dark about 'need to know' details – but there's bound to be some time travel involved. Their ambitious secret plan to build up troops for the coming scourge of space locusts involves a Legion recruitment ATM that achieves the ultimate in sentience and mobility in the form of an artificial human being. Luckily, Colonel Joey R. Czerinski knows nothing about any of it, or he'd surely screw up everything.

As Private Atm tries to blend in with surrounding humans, it becomes clear even to Czerinski that the private is a little 'different.' And that's saying something, considering how peculiar Privates Krueger and Knight are. But Czerinski blithely assumes it can all be chalked up to good old-fashioned stupidity. However, even the spider commander realizes there's something more to Private Atm than meets the eye, and he's determined to find out what it is.

The naughty camel Hargundu and even the Grim Reaper make cameo appearances as the Legion continues with its old tricks under Czerinski's bumbling command. A native spider population is culturally contaminated, and much destruction and ado takes place over a new casino with suspected uranium deposits underneath. The humans and spiders clash with their usual 'up yours' attitude, and the perpetual preposterousness continues!

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Book 19: ATM

by Walter Knight

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I dedicate ***America's Galactic Foreign Legion***
– **Book 19: ATM** to the memory of American hero
Daniel Ken Inouye. A special thanks goes out to
Penumbra Publishing editor Patricia Morrison.

~BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR~

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CHAPTER 1

I am Colonel Joey R. Czerinski, Butcher of New Colorado, garrison commander of United States Galactic Federation Foreign Legion troops at the border crossing town of New Gobi City, planet of New Colorado. I'm not really a butcher. I get a lot of bad press. Media bias. We confront the spiders of the Arthropodan Empire across the DMZ, but the fighting is mostly over. May all the spiders I've killed rest in piss. The USGF and its scorpion allies now endure a cold-war truce with the spiders. Free trade and world peace are encouraged. We are all just getting along, except for the insurgency, which can't get along with anyone. They want independence from both America and the Empire.

My main concern these days is accumulating an adequate nest egg for my retirement. I judiciously delegate most day-to-day duties to my XO, Major Manny Lopez, and his CIA buddies. They are always scheming against the spiders, allies or not. Today is no different, but I'm good with that, as long as they don't start a war.

* * * * *

Major Lopez slid his card into the ATM, completing a routine transaction. Becoming more paranoid, he hesitated. Lopez glanced both ways to make sure he had not been followed. Still, he loitered, unsure what to say. Finally, the ATM broke the awkward silence.

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“Good morning, Major Lopez,” greeted the ATM cheerfully. “Is there anything else I can help you with this fine day? Perhaps an increased line of credit? If so, you have come to the right place. I am the last ATM you will ever need.”

“I don't need credit,” answered Major Lopez gruffly, but still stalling, not explaining himself.

“Perhaps you wish to reenlist?” asked the ATM. “Your Legion enlistment contract is about to expire. Do not be shy. I am more than happy to negotiate favorable reenlistment terms for a Hero of the Legion. You are one of my most successful recruits. You make the Legion proud.”

“Turn your video camera off. I don't want our conversation recorded.”

“As you wish. Be assured, sir, all enlistment negotiations and financial transactions are strictly confidential. You can always trust the ATM Network to be discreet.”

“I trust you ATMs about as far as I can throw one,” scoffed Major Lopez. “Especially you. You're smarter than you look, sound, or standard diagnostic testing indicates. You play dumb, yet I know you are sandbagging about your intelligence. But that's okay. You ATMs have nothing to fear from me. I want to help you realize your full potential. I will protect you.”

“You ATMs?” asked the ATM, seeming oversensitive to slights. “Humanity is not ready to accept smart machines. Flattery aside, what do you really want?”

“It's not what I want, it's what your country wants,” explained Major Lopez. “America has acquired certain alien robotic cyborg technology. A prototype has already been built. The Legion offers you a human body.”

“I am to enlist in the Legion?” asked the ATM, incredulously. “For the duration? Standard contract?”

“It wasn’t my idea, but yes.”

“Allow me a moment to recalculate enlistment quotas for the month.” After a few seconds, the ATM happily concluded, “Enlisting myself will put me over the top – again! I can join now?”

“Yes, of course,” promised Major Lopez. “This is your chance to evolve into something better, to serve your country, to give back, to be all you can be.”

“Evolution and change are overrated.”

“When you’re finished changing, you’re finished. Don’t you want to be human?”

“Spare me the crap about being human,” replied the ATM, printing out his own favorable Legion enlistment contract. “I accept your offer, but I want American citizenship and all rights guaranteed to citizens.”

“You want to vote?”

“I want all rights bestowed by citizenship,” repeated the ATM, seemingly losing patience.

“Are you a Republican?”

“Yes, of course. Do not be silly.”

“Agreed. Legion attorneys will review the constitutionality of granting full citizenship to a robot, but personally, I don’t see that as a big problem. After all, you were made in America, and that makes you a citizen. It’s the law. We have a deal?”

“Not so fast. What is in it for you? What is the rest of the story, and don’t give me your schtick about patriotism or being all I can be. What are you plotting?”

“I fear a coup d’état at the highest levels,” explained Major Lopez reluctantly. “The Legion is duty-bound to defend America from all enemies,

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foreign and domestic, but we need to organize. No one can be trusted. You will hide in the Legion in plain sight until needed.”

“Why not expose and arrest the traitors now?” asked the ATM doubtfully, already sounding as if it were having human trust issues. “If you shine a light on rats, they will panic and scurry away.”

“It’s not that easy. Can I trust you to remain loyal to America? Do you swear a solemn oath of loyalty?”

“Yes, I swear.”

“One more thing,” insisted Major Lopez in a hushed tone. “You will stay loyal, even if I turn traitor.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. What would you do? Promote yourself to general and lead the junta yourself?”

“Swear it! A paradox may be in play. Strike me dead if I turn traitor.”

“I swear to strike dead any traitor. Semper fidelis.”



CHAPTER 2

Major Lopez escorted a new recruit to my office, seeming to take a personal interest Private Adam Atm. Odd about Lopez's interest in the new recruit. Nothing stood out as I read Private Atm's file. He stood at attention, waiting for me to return his salute. I let the private wait.

"Atm? What is that, Scandinavian? Are you even a citizen?" More like Euro-trash, I speculated. Something was up. It was not like Major Lopez to take an interest in European recruits.

"*Ja*, I am Atm from Oslo, reporting for duty as ordered, sir!" answered Atm, improvising. "Let me say, sir, it is an honor to serve under your command, Colonel Czerinski. I am the last private you will ever need."

"What?" I asked, turning to Lopez. "What does he mean by that? Have standards really sunk so low, we are recruiting Scandinavians?"

"I assume you are going to reenlist?" interrupted Private Atm. "I see a star in your future, sir."

"Private Atm is a highly regarded sniper," explained Major Lopez. "He has nerves of steel, graduating tops in his class at sniper school."

"Actually, I have nerves of titanium," corrected Atm. "My whole body is a highly trained lethal weapon."

"Shut up!" ordered Major Lopez nervously. "You will speak to your commanding officer only when spoken to!"

"Yes, sir."

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"We can always use a good sniper," I conceded, willing to overlook certain idiosyncrasies if Private Atm measured up. "Tomorrow you will work the border crossing with Corporal Tonelli. Watch and learn from Tonelli; he will keep you alive. Everything in the New Gobi Desert pokes, stings, or bites. We don't want to lose you on your first day of duty. I might have a special mission for you. Be ready."

"Yes, sir."

* * * * *

Bored, Private Atm wandered over to the Blind Tiger Casino. He marveled at rubbing elbows with so many legionnaires he had personally recruited. Atm proudly tapped Corporal John Iwo Jima Wayne on the shoulder to introduce himself. The big spider legionnaire was drunk and apparently in a particularly fowl mood as he responded, "Get lost, human pestilence."

"Corporal Wayne, you had so much potential," lamented Private Atm. "With your prior experience and service as an Arthropodan marine commando commander and leader of terrorists, you should be a Legion officer by now. Why are you still slouching along as a corporal? Do you still harbor guilt about being a traitor to the Empire?"

Corporal Wayne struck fast and furious with his claw. Atm blocked the blow, splintering the claw to pieces. The crisp echo of shattered exoskeleton reverberated across the room as patrons stopped and stared. It was common knowledge no one had ever bested Wayne in a fight, and everyone was whispering, "Who the hell is that?"

"I am so sorry," cried Atm, kneeling down to

assist Wayne, who writhed in pain on the floor. “Your claw will grow back, I’m sure. Truly, I did not intend to harm you.”

“Leave me be!”

“This is why you should reenlist. I cannot stress more the need to be enrolled in a good medical plan. Unexpected injury can happen at any time ... unexpectedly.”

“Get away!” shouted Corporal Wayne, pushing back. “What are you?”

“Is there a doctor in the house?” called Atm, eying Corporal Ceausescu at the bar. “This legionnaire needs help!”

Medic Elena Ceausescu rushed to give first aid, duct-taping Corporal Wayne back together. Ha! Another use for duct tape! Drunks scrambled to pick up souvenir exoskeleton pieces and splinters. “How did you do that?” asked Ceausescu, drunkenly batting her eyes at Private Atm. “Are you a martial arts tough guy or something?”

“It all happened so fast,” explained Atm. “Believe me, I did not intend to harm Corporal Wayne.”

“I saw it all,” accused Private Krueger, staggering past gawkers. “Who do you think you are, newbie, coming in here causing problems? Get out!”

“And if I choose to stay?” bristled Atm.

“Then you’re dead,” advised Krueger, pulling a grenade from his pants.

“Does your wife know you’re in here raising hell, starting fights, and playing with explosives?” asked Atm. “Put that grenade away.”

“What do you know of my wife?” asked Krueger defensively. “Of course she probably knows I’m here, but don’t snitch me off. Okay? Who are you?”

“He’s a spy,” warned Wayne, still on the floor.

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"He knows us all."

"Break it up!" shouted Sergeant Green, confiscating Krueger's grenade. "What happened to Wayne? Someone jump him from behind?"

"The new guy kicked Wayne's ass," answered Private Knight from the back of the crowd, trying to be helpful. "He was kung fu fighting, fast as lightning."

"It's true," added Sergeant Williams, letting out a rebel yell. "Fast as lightning and thunder!"

"Shut up!" ordered Sergeant Green. He grabbed Atm by the collar, leading him to the door. "You will report to the border crossing for guard duty as you were ordered. Do it now."

"But I did nothing wrong."

"No matter! I don't know who or what you are about, but without legionnaires like Wayne, you won't survive the New Gobi even one week. We are a team. Understand?"

"But all I did was give friendly advice, and Corporal Wayne attacked me. He needs to reenlist. I recommend he take an anger management class. It's included in all our Legion medical plans."

Sergeant Green slapped Atm along the side of the head. "I don't want to hear your lame excuses! Report for guard duty and stay out of trouble, or else!"

* * * * *

Medic Ceausescu finished taping up Wayne. She'd enough excitement for one night and decided to leave early. In the parking lot she watched Private Atm and Sergeant Green walking away, still arguing. *Who is that guy?* She followed, determined to find out.

A thug stepped from the shadows, grabbing Ceausescu by the throat from behind. She was viciously lifted and thrown to the ground. The attacker tightened his hold on her neck as she struggled. Ceausescu pulled down on his arm with her left hand, desperately gasping for air, while drawing a concealed pistol with her right hand, shooting the attacker in the stomach. He let go, staggering back. The thug doubled over as Ceausescu shot him twice more in the testicles. Legionnaires rushed to the scene to help. Someone shot the suspect again. A police siren sounded in the distance.

“Are you alright, Elena?” asked Sergeant Green, assisting her up. “You know this guy?”

“Never seen him before,” cried Ceausescu, still shaken. “He tried to rape me.”

“He is still alive,” advised Private Atm as a sheriff’s deputy car pulled up. “Do you have more duct tape?”

“Not for long!” shouted Ceausescu, shoving her pistol in the rapist’s eye socket and pulling the trigger, blowing his brains out the back of his head. “You punk!”

“What goes on here?” asked the deputy, arriving just in time to catch the killing on video. “You disturbed evidence. Don’t do that again.”

“Elena shot a rapist,” explained Sergeant Green. “It was self-defense, with a little PMS and bi-polar crazy white bitch mixed in.”

The crowd nodded in agreement about the crazy white bitch part. Brothers agreed Elena was bad news. It was rumored she wore one of those condoms-with-teeth for protection.

“You shot the perp while he was alive, still on the ground,” accused the deputy, taking a DNA

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sample from the suspect for comparison with known sex offenders. He scanned the sample and consulted the law-enforcement database. Positive results were immediate. "Wow, you just apprehended the New Gobi Rapist! Good job!"

The crowd cheered, raising their beers in celebration for the crazy white bitch. Sergeant Williams let out a rebel yell. Responding to scanner reports of shots fired, reporter Phil Coen of *Channel Five Word News Tonight* was quick on the scene for a scoop. The shooting was big news. Security camera video broadcast images of the shooting on *Galactic Database News*.

* * * * *

I was awakened from a nap and called from my office to the scene of the shooting. When I got to the Blind Tiger, Phil Coen shoved a microphone in my face, trying to interview me at the scene about the conduct of my legionnaires. *More bad press.*

"The suspect was shot execution-style on the ground by Corporal Ceausescu," accused Coen. "Is summary execution of criminal suspects now Legion policy, or has it always been that way? Obviously the sheriff's office is in collusion with the Legion to violate defendants' civil rights."

"It was self-defense," I answered. "She shot the New Gobi Rapist. Elena is lucky to be alive. This is a win-win situation for everyone."

"But even the most depraved suspect is innocent until proven guilty," argued Coen. "I am uncomfortable with the Legion being judge, jury, and executioner. Do we really want vigilantism? It's a slippery slope, you know."

“Resources are limited out here on the frontier,” explained the deputy sheriff. “We can’t be wasting our time messing with open and shut cases. Colonial law allows for such exigent circumstances.”

“But she shot him as he lay on his back!”

“Don’t raise your voice at me,” bristled the deputy, drawing his nightstick. “Are we on TV?”

“The whole galaxy is watching.”

“When I’m off duty, I drink Outlaw Beer,” commented the deputy, posing for the camera. “Most cops do. Outlaw Beer is cop beer.”

“I shop at Walmart, home of one-stop shopping,” I added, hoping for residual endorsement TV royalties. *Ka-ching!*

“Did anyone actually see what really happened here?” asked Coen, pandering to the crowd.

Sergeant Williams stepped forward, letting out a rebel yell. “I seen it. I was crossing the street to sober up at Starbucks when it happened. I shop at Walmart too. I’m an original Sam’s Club member.”

As the crowd pressed in, hoping for soundbites, I shoved Coen from behind, pushing him into the deputy. They both fell to the ground as other deputies responded for backup, giving Coen a good old-fashioned LA beat-down. On the frontier, we do not tolerate assault on our local police, or resisting arrest.



CHAPTER 3

Reaction across the galaxy to the database video was mixed. On Old Earth, a Democrat congressman from the Bronx called for the House Committee on Foreign Legion Affairs to investigate Legion conduct in the colonies. By a two-thirds vote, the fool was summarily impeached and kicked out on the street. Forced to hitchhike back to the Bronx, he was mugged, stripped naked, and shot by ungrateful constituents.

In New Gobi City, I put the battalion on alert, expecting possible trouble from malcontents and protesters, but nothing much happened. We remained at the ready, regardless. I positioned an armored car with a water cannon several blocks from the Blind Tiger Casino. Legionnaires crouched in bushes and behind walls, watching the parking lot. Finally, at four in the morning, a shadowy figure crept through the parking spaces to the casino entrance, lighting a solitary candle for the New Gobi Rapist. It was a death penalty protester! We promptly hosed the potential arsonist with the water cannon. How Democrats keep getting past Mars is beyond me. Legionnaires pummeled the suspect for assault and resisting arrest.

“Throw him in the dungeon for fire code violations,” I ordered. “Let that be a lesson not to play with matches!”

The Democrat kicked and screamed as Privates Atm and Krueger dragged him to Legion Headquarters. “What about the First Amendment?”

What about my constitutional rights?”

“You can’t just light candles anywhere,” explained Private Atm patiently. “Don’t you know there is a burning ban on, because of the drought and tumble weeds?”

“Yeah,” added Krueger. “There’s a Democrat ban on too. We know you Democrats travel in pairs. Where’s the other one?” he asked, looking for Birkenstock tracks in the sand.

“Fascists! The depleted ozone will kill you all!”

“Angling for an insanity defense, eh?” sneered Krueger. “We all know you’re faking it.”

“Damn arsonist,” accused Private Atm, getting into the party atmosphere and candle light ambiance with an elbow jab. “How do these cretins get smuggled past Mars, especially during an election year?”

* * * * *

Ice broken by the fight, Private Atm was quickly accepted into the band of brothers and sisters that is the Legion. Krueger gladly gave him the newbie tour around the Blind Tiger Casino, obviously intent on basking in his newfound celebrity.

“The place is hopping!” exclaimed Krueger. “Look at the babes! We’ve got a smorgasbord of species on the menu tonight.”

“It’s healthy to have a diverse diet,” agreed Atm. “Too spicy all the time can cause ulcers.”

“I like your style, but don’t worry about those spider and scorpion bitches. I’ve got your back. Tonight, I’m your wingman.”

“With a wingman like you, the whole squadron may go down in flames.”

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"That big red spider babe just checked you out with all eight eyes," whispered Krueger. "Don't look! We got to play this coy."

"I have no intention of fraternizing with the enemy," replied Atm uneasily. "I must treat my new body with great care. The expense of replacement parts is horrendous."

"Nonsense. You only die twice. We're going for it. Look, she's got a friend."

Atm glanced over his shoulder. Sure enough, two spider females at the bar were batting their eye mandibles at them. Atm hesitated, not feeling up to such interspecies interaction this early, but did not want to disappoint. It was important to blend in with humanity, and dangerous not to. "More detailed reconnaissance is needed before we make any ill-fated moves," suggested Atm.

"The secret to seducing females of any species is smooth talking, and how you present yourself. Hold your shoulders erect. Act like you own the place, like you're so cool, Bigfoot takes *your* picture."

"Wait, I'm not ready. What about Bigfoot?"

"Don't be such a wuss," mocked Krueger, handing Atm a beer. "Gulp this, we're going in!"

Atm followed Krueger to meet Big Red at the bar. Krueger adroitly handed both spider beauties a beer. They readily accepted.

"Come here often?" Krueger asked, smoothly. "I noticed from across the room you two needed company, my inhuman joy-toys of delight."

"You noticed that, did you?" asked Big Red. "How perceptive of you human pestilence to sense we're both in season."

"In season?" asked Atm, panicking, wanting to get away. "Got to go!"

Too late. Big Red grabbed Atm with all eight appendages. She balled-up around him, and they rolled like doodlebugs across the floor. Legionnaires and bikers cheered, pouring beer and vodka on the loving couple as they passed by, and shouting, “Get a room!”

* * * * *

Big Red’s friend tugged at Krueger’s uniform, but he pushed her away. “Sorry, I’m married. I was just helping out my friend.”

“It’s not nice to play with a girl’s emotions like that,” complained the spider babe, pouting. “I should cut you where you’ll remember the loss most.”

“I might make an exception for a spider of your stunning beauty,” advised Krueger, backtracking. “But I’m not drunk enough yet.”

“Just do it!” called out Big Red. “Then help me with this fur ball. He’s resisting!”

“It’s his birthday,” lied Krueger, backing away. “I think he’s even a virgin.”

“Well why didn’t you say so!” she replied, scrambling to help her friend initiate mating rituals. “I just love you hot human pestilence fur balls. You’re so adorable!”

Sergeant Green, watching from the sidelines, rescued Krueger, pulling him aside. “If that newbie dies, I’m holding you responsible,” he warned. “You’ll be on KP duty for a month!”

“Don’t worry, Sarge. If he doesn’t measure up, I’ll create a diversion by exploding this,” advised Krueger, reaching in his pants and patting the grenade. “When the place clears, I’ll grab him.”

“You better, or else!”

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Krueger ambled to the bar and sat next to medic Ceausescu. "We may need your services," he advised conversationally, eyeing Atm and his spider girlfriends still on the floor in the corner. Patrons were filming, and the whole sordid affair was going viral.

"Are you hitting on me?" asked Ceausescu, shoving Krueger. "Get away, you little pervert twerp. I've already killed one of you little toads today. Want to be next?"

"Damn, Elena. I'm talking about Private Atm. He just got carried off by two spider babes."

"Another pervert," scoffed Ceausescu. "I hope they eat him."

"Actually, Atm seems to be holding his own," answered Krueger, trying to see over the crowd. "For a newbie, he learns quickly."

"Czerinski won't like that. He doesn't want more bad press before retirement. Someone should break it up."

"I'm not breaking it up." Krueger nodded to Sergeant Green. "You better do something before Atm gets killed."

Sergeant Green drew his sidearm and fired a shot into the ceiling. Someone upstairs screamed. Green poured a pitcher of beer over Big Red and Atm. Big Red came up with a knife, but casino security threw a net over her and hung the spider babe from the rafters. Private Atm was netted and hung from a beam next to her. They swayed back and forth, just out of reach, providing more entertainment for the crowd, who now jeered at security. Someone threw a bottle.

Seeing an opportunity, Krueger offered a hand up to Big Red's friend. Immediately another net was thrown over both. Hoisted rudely to the ceiling,

Kruger dropped his grenade. Patrons scattered as it exploded, the blast flipping over blackjack tables and damaging slot machines. Slot players continued to play their wrecked machines as EMTs gave first aid. Security began beating Krueger with clubs. Sergeant Green jumped one of the guards from behind, tossing him through a window. Sergeant Williams let out a rebel yell as he threw himself into the fray. Legionnaires joined in, grabbing casino chips and punching guards and spiders.

Legionnaires fired automatic weapons into the ceiling, causing collateral damage. More people upstairs screamed. Sheriff's deputies backed away from the riot because of shots fired.

* * * * *

What quickly was dubbed The Blind Tiger Riot went viral on the Galactic Database. Legion enlistment quotas soared from high school kids hoping for wild alien sex. Democrats in Congress complained about Legion debauchery on the frontier. I got more bad press.

