

The background of the cover is a photograph of a city street in ruins. In the foreground, a marmot with blue patches on its chest sits in a hole in the ground. In the middle ground, soldiers in full combat gear are positioned around a military tank. The street is filled with rubble, and buildings in the background are heavily damaged and partially obscured by smoke.

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

BOOK 22

BLUE POWDER WAR

WALTER KNIGHT

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

BOOK 22

BLUE POWDER WAR



by
Walter Knight

In the twenty-second installment of this preposterous science fiction series, Colonel Joey R. Czerinski still has his hands full, trying to keep the drug trade and the Arthropodan spider commander under control on planet New Colorado. After Major Manny Lopez used the time machine to bring two grade-A cooks from the past to concoct a special recipe of blue powder to be distributed on New Colorado, the drug trade has really exploded.

With Legion enlistments down, the draft is reinstated, and Czerinski plucks likely victims from every quarter as his Polish ancestry rears its ugly head in the form of a Polish drug cartel. Struggling to get the drug lords on New Colorado under control, Czerinski lands in more trouble with more bad press. The Butcher of New Colorado is as unaware and ineffectual as ever in handling the situation. Can he keep it together long enough to make another successful wager on football, this time a game between guards and prisoners at the local jail?

Familiar faces make appearances along with new ones – including a talking groundhog. Has Czerinski's insanity rendered him the only one who can understand what Mr. Groundhog has to say? Even as the war on drugs draws to a close and Czerinski contemplates retirement from the glorious life of a legionnaire, the laughs continue! He's in for the duration.

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION
Book 22: Blue Powder War
by Walter Knight

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~TABLE OF CONTENTS~

Story Summary	<i>i</i>
Copyright Information	<i>ii</i>
Books by the Author	<i>iv</i>
Author Acknowledgement	<i>v</i>
Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	6
Chapter 3	11
Chapter 4	16
Chapter 5	25
Chapter 6	31
Chapter 7	37
Chapter 8	42
Chapter 9	46
Chapter 10	54
Chapter 11	63
Chapter 12	70
Chapter 13	78
Chapter 14	89
Chapter 15	100
Chapter 16	105
Chapter 17	110
Chapter 18	121
Chapter 19	127
Chapter 20	134
Chapter 21	146
Chapter 22	153
Chapter 23	161
About the Author	168

~OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR~

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

Book 9: Scorpions

Book 10: Peacekeepers

Book 11: Cemetery City

Book 12: The Ark

Book 13: Salesman from Mars

Book 14: Embassy War

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Book 18: First Contact

Book 19: ATM

Book 20: Time Machine

Book 21: Breaking Very Bad

Vampire in the Outfield

Zombie Missouri

~ACKNOWLEDGEMENT~

I dedicate ***America's Galactic Foreign Legion*** – ***Book 22: Blue Powder War*** to America's police officers, the most professional police officers in the world. It's their job to protect your ass, not to kiss it.

Thanks to all the folks at Penumbra Publishing. It's been a wild ride!

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

BOOK 22

BLUE POWDER WAR



by
Walter Knight



CHAPTER 1

I am Colonel Joey R. Czerinski, Butcher of New Colorado, commander of United States Galactic Federation Foreign Legion troops garrisoned at New Gobi City on planet New Colorado, and savior of humanity many times over. I face the evil Arthropodan Empire across the DMZ in an uneasy truce. I keep the peace by being diplomatic and opened-minded about those scum-bag spiders and their evil creepy-crawly ways, maintaining a weekly dialog with their commander about border issues, of which there are many.

Today the spider commander made his usual frivolous accusations about blue powder drug addiction spreading among spider citizens. He blames humanity for illegal importation of blue powder, and me specifically for complicity with drug dealers. It's all false. I know nothing of drugs. I once tried marijuana as a youth, but did not inhale. It's not my fault spiders are a bunch of unrestrained crackheads. What can I do? I'm not a cop. Yet the spider commander's conspiracy theories are endless. I have repeatedly assured him there is no Legion plot to destroy Arthropodan culture by targeting their hatchlings with blue powder – at least not recently. Nevertheless, he remains unconvinced.

I agreed to humor the fool by taking a tour of a spider neighborhood inundated with blue powder, to prove his complaints were unfounded.

“I blame your entire corrupt culture,” accused the spider commander as we walked through the

spider slum known as the Web. Female crack-ho spiders motioned to us from doorways, trying to sell their wares. Shots echoed down an alley. Spider marines rushed to investigate. “It starts at Thanksgiving with your tryptophan-laced fowl meals, and ends on Christmas with blue powder bundles and fruitcake under your stolen Christmas trees!”

“We call them holiday trees now,” I corrected.

“Drug depravity runs in your DNA!”

“Sobriety was a problem on Arthropoda long before first contact,” I countered, eyeing one of the crack-hoes in an unguarded slip of weakness. “Don’t use humanity as a scapegoat for your exoskeleton inferiority issues.”

“You are a runaway beer truck. I suspect you are drunk even now.”

“Nonsense. If I know I’m going to be hungover in the morning, I don’t get up until noon.”

“The Emperor has ordered containment of the blue powder cancer on New Colorado, before it spreads to our home world,” continued the spider commander. “The time to act is now.”

“Good luck with that.”

“His Majesty authorized preemptive strikes on both sides of the DMZ,” explained the spider commander. “I expect Legion cooperation. Either you are with us, or you are part of the problem.”

“Stay on your side,” I warned, quoting Legion policy on alien trespass.

“You are part of the problem, as I suspected.”

“I am as alarmed by rampant drug use as anyone, but you will respect American sovereignty, and not bomb us. There will be no preemptive strikes across our border.”

“By treaty, I am allowed to pursue criminals to

America's Galactic Foreign Legion

whatever rock they scurry under, regardless of lines in the sand. The Emperor already negotiated the matter with your President, who contacted General Daly. It is settled. You will cooperate.”

“Can't you wait until after the elections to start a war?”

“That is why you human pestilence need an emperor. You have no political will. You just blow whichever way the breeze blows. If you faced death more often, you would reassess your priorities.”

“You know nothing. Death, taxes, and democracy are the backbone of America.”

“If voting made a difference, they wouldn't let you do it. I demand action now.”

“I'll contact the sheriff to coordinate rounding up local drug dealers. That's the most I can promise.”

“I favor airstrikes on the Web, wiping out those deviants once and for all. The governor favors a less public, gentler final solution. I propose rounding up the crack-heads and herding them across the border to your gulags, where they will be worked to death.”

“America does not have gulags.”

“Liar!” accused the spider commander, checking the Galactic Data Base on his communications pad. “Siberia and Alaska are full of gulags. So is your South Pole!”

“All we have is the New Gobi County Jail, and it's full. You worry about your crackheads, I'll worry about mine.”

“When the bombing starts, I expect you to seal the border to prevent escape. There will be no quarter on our side. You had better come up with a plan to stop drug trafficking south of the border, or else.”

“Whatever. Everyone has a plan until they get hit in the face.”

“Don’t you ‘whatever’ me!” shouted the spider commander, restrained by aides. “The galaxy is taking the war on drugs to a whole new level, whether you join us or not.”

“Stay on your side.”

* * * * *

General Daly called later in the day to confirm that the Legion was now enlisted in the War on Blue Powder, and that I was to personally assist local law enforcement. He wanted good press for a change, and threatened that I had better not screw it up.

“This very moment, the press is asking what the Legion is going to do about the blue powder crisis,” complained General Daly on the phone. “Well, Czerinski, what are you going to do?”

“Don’t sweat the press,” I replied dismissively. “When reporters interview each other like that, it’s like dogs sniffing each other’s butts. What kind of perspective are they going to get? None. It’s just what they do.”

“I want high-profile arrests flashed across the database news,” insisted General Daly. “I want blue powder drug dealers spanked so hard, it still burns after being thrown out airlocks. Do you understand? I want results.”

“I’m not a cop. What do I know about blue powder drug dealers? Besides, recruitment quotas are down. I need more legionnaires if you’re expanding my responsibilities, making me play border cop.”

“I’ve got good news for you on that account. Congress just reinstated the draft for all military branches. Reinforcements are on the way.”

“The Legion is a professional all-volunteer force.”

America's Galactic Foreign Legion

“Not anymore. Expect draftees soon. Go easy on them, try not to kill too many. It’s bad press when draftees get killed.”

“Everything in the New Gobi Desert pokes, stings, or bites. Circle of life.”

“Just do it!”

“I’m retiring soon.”

“Ha! Read the fine print of your enlistment contract, Colonel Czerinski. You’re in for the duration.”

“Yes, sir.”



CHAPTER 2

I met Sheriff Mike McCoy sitting in a rocking chair on the front porch of the county jail, chewing on a straw. He spit chew at my feet, not happy to see me. The man holds a grudge forever.

“The answer is no.”

“I haven’t asked anything yet,” I protested. “Can’t we all just get along?”

“Shut up.”

“I love you too, McCoy. I’ve been ordered to clean up your blue powder mess. All I need from you is a name. Who’s the top dog in the blue powder racket?”

“That would be Aaron Kosminski of the Polish Cartel,” answered Sheriff McCoy incredulously. “Like you don’t know that. I heard you Polacks are thick as thieves.”

“I never heard of him,” I replied innocently. “Where can I find this Kosminski?”

“He runs a barbershop downtown, but it’s all just a front. Kosminski runs all the blue powder in New Gobi City.”

“If you know that, why haven’t you arrested him?”

“I’ve had Kosminski in custody many times, but he lawyers up, and no one ever lives to testify. I swear, you Polacks should never have been allowed past Mars.”

“Back at you, McCoy. The Legion will cut through all your legal red tape. Kosminski’s days on New Colorado are numbered.”

America's Galactic Foreign Legion

* * * * *

A Legion armored car crashed through the front door of Kosminski's barbershop. Legionnaires quickly took the drug lord Kosminski into custody without further incident. Several customers were taken to the hospital for collateral damage.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" cried Kosminski as he was pinned to the floor and handcuffed. "Who are you? You're not cops. Where are your badges?"

"We don't need no stinking badges," advised my XO, Major Lopez. "You're under arrest for being an undesirable on New Colorado, and an enemy combatant."

"Bullshit. Last time I checked, this was still America. I'm an American citizen. I have Constitutional rights."

"This is the DMZ," scoffed Major Lopez. "Enemy combatants have no rights in a combat zone."

"Call me a lawyer!"

"Really?"

"Now, damn it!"

"You're a lawyer. Happy?"

"Who is your commanding officer?" asked Kosminski, still struggling. "I'll have your job for this outrage."

"Colonel Czerinski."

"The Butcher of New Colorado?"

"The same."

"No matter," replied Kosminski, visibly worried. "I'm an upstanding businessman. Even Czerinski can't arrest me for no reason. I know people in high places."

"You're a low-life *bendaho* drug dealer, a

purveyor of blue powder death.”

“Drug use is a victimless crime.”

“Dealing blue powder a capital offense in the DMZ on both sides of the border. After you’re executed, the Arthropodan Empire will kill you again.”

“That’s double jeopardy!”

“Everyone is a jailhouse lawyer.”

“Can we make a deal?”

“Do you mean a bribe? Yes, of course.”

“How much?”

“Psych,” taunted Major Lopez. “All deals go through Colonel Czerinski.”

“I hope you have a family. No one testifies against me and lives to tell of it.”

“You threaten me?” bristled Major Lopez, reaching for his jagged combat knife before calming, returning to his usual stoic self. “You will talk to Czerinski soon enough.”

“You think you’re so powerful, hiding behind your Legion uniforms and armored cars. You’re nothing to me. You have the watches, but I’ve got the time!”

* * * * *

I let Kosminski spend a cold night in the Legion dungeon under my office before contacting him. Private Walter Knight keyed me through the first set of doors. I noticed Knight was reading one of his usual trashy science fiction paperbacks.

“What are you reading?” I asked.

“*Breast Monsters From Jupiter*,” he answered, quickly pocketing the paperback. “It’s a classic.”

“More porn?”

America's Galactic Foreign Legion

"Yes, sir."

"How's the prisoner been?" I asked, brushing past Knight. "Give you any trouble?"

"No trouble at all, sir. He's read all my science fiction books, even *Zombie Missouri*."

"Be careful. Kosminski is extremely dangerous. Let him kill you, and I'll donate your body to science fiction."

"Yes, sir."

"Colonel Joey R. Czerinski!" called out Kosminski. "My brother Pole. I'm told we can make a deal?"

"No deals. Reporters are coming to take your picture and gawk. After a fair trial, you'll be shot by firing squad."

"If harm comes to me, I'll skin you alive and wear your face. You, your family, and even your dog will die a horrible death. I'll have you gutted and your entrails scattered in the street to be eaten by rats."

"I don't have a dog."

"Everyone you love will pay with their lives."

"I have a cat," I conceded. "You would murder my cat?"

"You think I'm playing?"

"No, but thanks for the warning," I replied, drawing my pistol, aiming at Kosminski's head. "Rest in piss."

"You wouldn't dare! My attorney is due here any minute."

"You will never see the light of day," I threatened, holstering my weapon and slamming the cell door. "I'll be back!"

"Does that mean the press conference and photo-ops with the perp are canceled?" asked Private Knight, wanting to be on TV again. Book sales on

Amazon were down. Any publicity was good publicity.

“For now. Kosminski gets no visitors until his blue powder connections are tortured out of him.”

“Yes, sir.”



CHAPTER 3

Aaron Kosminski lawyered up. High-priced attorney William B. Ferguson confronted me at my office, demanding to see his client. He puffed out his chest in a showy display of bravado and arrogance, every minute he argued adding to his retaining fee.

“Kosminski is indisposed,” I explained reasonably, “until we’re finished with his interrogation.”

“Your interrogation is over!” fumed Ferguson. “My client is exercising his Constitutional right to remain silent.”

“There are national security issues. You’re not seeing him today.”

“Holding prisoners incognito is an outrage, even for the Legion.”

“Actually, it’s our specialty. No one sees Kosminski until he’s been waterboarded. It’s a Legion tradition, all legal, even written somewhere in the Constitution.”

“I’ll have a judge release Kosminski before you can say *habeas corpus*,” threatened Ferguson, getting red in the face. “I want to see Kosminski now!”

“Habeas what?” I asked, checking my database pad for legal terms.

“It’s technical, but you’re in big trouble.”

“Fine,” I relented, escorting Ferguson to the dungeon. “Be careful what you wish for.”

“If you’ve abused my client...”

Private Knight keyed the door, letting Ferguson in. I gave the attorney a push, slamming the door

behind.

“What the hell? This is the wrong cell. There’s no one here. Hey, let me out. I’ll sue if you don’t let me out immediately!”

“Thanks for the warning. You’re staying. Talk to your client through the air vent.”

* * * * *

Major Lopez met me at the stairs. “The press is here. Is Kosminski cleaned up?”

“Kosminski is talking to his lawyer,” I answered, steering Lopez back to the stairs. “We can’t violate attorney-client privacy.”

“What about the press?” asked Major Lopez. “His attorney wanted a press release.”

“Go upstairs. I’ll deal with the press.”

“I need to rest a minute,” panted Lopez, stopping half way up. “This dump needs an elevator.”

“It’s a dungeon.”

“Even so...”

“Budget cuts,” I lamented. “Congress always cuts defense spending first. Get used to it.”

“Damn Democrats.”

* * * * *

Private Knight rapped on Kosminski’s door. “I have your lunch. Step away from the cuff port. I’ll slide it to you.”

“And let you poison me?” asked Kosminski. “Forget it. I let no one prepare my food but me. I’d rather eat roaches.”

“Does that mean I can have it?” asked Knight, already biting into a toasted baloney sandwich. “Are

America's Galactic Foreign Legion

you sure?”

“Tell Czerinski I’m on a hunger strike!”

“Hey, guard!” shouted Ferguson from the next cell. “What about my meal? I’m starving.”

“All I have left is some chips,” replied Knight guiltily, “They’re Lays chips. You can’t eat just one.”

“Are you eating my food?”

“It’s Kosminski’s food.”

“You better feed me, or I’ll sue!”

“Sorry, but they didn’t send your lunch yet. Don’t worry, I’ll check on it.”

“It’s cruel and unusual to not feed prisoners!”

“Not really,” answered Knight. “I mean, it’s not that unusual. Sergeant Green forgets to send TV dinners all the time. Even I’m losing weight. Anyway, you’re not really a prisoner because there’s no charges, so you don’t get fed inmate food. You’re more of a guest of the Legion, so you get MREs, just like us.”

“I’m not eating MREs,” argued Ferguson.

“The spaghetti and meatballs are pretty good.”

“I’d rather eat roaches!”

“Okay.”

“I demand a phone call. People will come looking for me. Do you have any idea who I am?”

“Don’t care, really. Stay long enough, people will not believe you even existed. Can I eat your MREs if you still don’t want them?”

* * * * *

I skipped the press release, slipping through a secret tunnel to my office. The press always twists what you say into something else. It’s depressing. The key to fighting depression is to not surround yourself

with assholes. I felt better already, alone in my office, far from the press, letting Major Lopez talk to the media. That's another key to depression: delegate. My mood brightened further by a knock at the door. It was a UPS driver delivering a new and improved water board I'd ordered. I tore the package open like it was Christmas. This latest model had dozens of straps, special grooves contouring to both human and spider body types, even including a hole for securing scorpion tails. The driver waited impatiently for me to sign the paperwork.

"Do you know how to use this thing?" I asked, discarding the sissy directions. "I suppose I could figure it out myself. How hard can it be?"

"Real hard," commented the UPS driver.

"You've used it?"

"Only once on my girlfriend. She really got into it after regaining consciousness."

"I want you to assist me in using the water board on prisoners downstairs."

"Downstairs?"

"In the dungeon," I explained, leading the UPS driver by the elbow to my secret tunnel. "You'll be a great help to your country."

"No way," protested the UPS driver, pulling away. "I'm not into torture!"

"What about your girlfriend?"

"We broke up. She got a restraining order. I'm getting a restraining order against you."

"Sorry, but you're drafted," I announced. "Welcome to the Legion."

"You can't do that!"

"I just did," I said, waving printed orders from the President. "What's your full name?"

"Samuel McQueen."

America's Galactic Foreign Legion

“Sam, Congress brought back the draft because of Legion shortages out here on the frontier. It’s all legal. Do you have skills, other than delivering packages?”

“I used to be a painter,” answered McQueen, still bewildered at his rapid induction.

“Outstanding! You qualify for the infantry, for which we have a never-ending need. Our motto is, ‘If it moves, shoot it. If it doesn’t move, paint it.’ Report to Corporal Tonelli at the border crossing gate. While you’re at it, paint his guard shack Legion sage tan.”

“Hell no, I won’t go!” argued McQueen, his resolve stiffening. “You can’t mess with UPS. I want a lawyer.”

“Everyone wants a lawyer these days,” I lamented, pressing the intercom button for Sergeant Green. “It’s what’s wrong with the galaxy.”

“You can’t Shanghai me,” argued McQueen, backing away to the door.

“I see lots of fun, travel, and adventure in your future,” I added enthusiastically. “Be brave, be proud, be a legionnaire. Make a difference. Legionnaires make a difference everywhere they go.”

“You can’t force me into the Legion!”

“To hell you say,” interrupted Sergeant Green from behind, slapping McQueen alongside his head with a pistol. McQueen slumped to the floor. “Son, welcome to the Legion.”



CHAPTER 4

The spider commander loved American human pestilence food, in spite how it contaminated Arthropodan culture. Mexican food, not so much, because of the chili peppers. He was addicted to Starbucks coffee. Kentucky Fried Chicken and Krispy Kreme donuts were to die for. The spider commander even considered including human pestilence food for marine field rations. Then, it all went wrong.

Human pestilence salesman Tony Higuera, of Kellogg's Nutra-Grain Corporation, gifted the spider commander a case of granola bars. The crunchy, sweet, and tasty nut-filled delight seemed the perfect lightweight energy bar for field rations. The spider commander devoured them like buttered popcorn, another human pestilence delicacy.

However, what went in sweet and tasty, came out undigested like shards of glass. The spider commander's poop-chute became the unwelcome center of his universe. All Arthropodan exoskeleton parts were tied to the poop-chute. He tried to pee, and the poop-chute sent out dozens of poison arrows of pain. No sitting position was comfortable, they all hurt, activating his poop-chute pain meter to all-time high levels. The pain was worse than sand mites, and they get everywhere.

The spider commander summoned medics, but their drugs provided little relief. Even blue powder could not numb the pain of bowel movements and sharp obstructions. In desperation he called the Legion for medical advice. I sent medic Elena

America's Galactic Foreign Legion

Ceausescu, who lent her personal shower head hose. *Finally! Oh my God, it's like a hundred Tinker Bell fairies kissing my poop-chute. No wonder Ceausescu wants her magic shower head back. No way that's going to happen anytime soon.*

* * * * *

The spider commander suspended ongoing operations against blue powder trafficking, ordering a dragnet to arrest Tony Higuera. Soon the hapless granola salesman was in chains, facing capital charges of attempted murder, terrorism, and crimes against galactic civilization. The Kellogg Nutra-Grain Corporation complained to the President, who complained to General Daly, who complained to me. *Really? Spiders passing Granola bars are worse than giving birth to a hundred sand mite infested monitor dragon hatchlings? Who knew?* Being the compassionate all-encompassing diplomat combat-tested Legion commander that I am, I visited the spider commander at his hospital room, offering him a whoopee cushion.

"I want nothing from you!" he responded suspiciously.

"I demand Tony Higuera be released immediately. Phony charges against American citizens will not be tolerated. Besides, it's bad for business and DMZ tourism."

"That terrorist Higuera will be given a fair trial, humanely tortured, and executed," replied the spider commander. "For the pain he caused to my poop-chute, he's getting off lucky that I only kill him once. I should have him medically revived, and executed again."

“Kellogg lobbyists are turning your alien abduction of Higuera into an intergalactic incident. I’ve been ordered to use force if necessary to free Tony Higuera.”

“Threaten me at your peril, Czerinski. That Mafia goon will die slow and painful.”

“Higuera is not Mafia. He’s just a granola salesman.”

“All human pestilence Mafia henchmen are nicknamed Tony,” accused the spider commander, confirming that fact on the Galactic Data Base with his communications pad. “Tony Spilotro, Tony Stiletto, Tony the Tiger, Tony Soprano, Tony Higuera, all Mafia. The list is endless.”

“Tony is just a name,” I explained. “America is one big melting pot of names. This Tony is totally innocent.”

“Liar! Higuera translates from Latin to mean ‘badger.’ Tony the Badger is yet another American mobster of the human sub-species Italiano. Big Tony will pay dearly for peddling deadly granola bars of death inside the Empire. He’s already confessed under torture to blue powder trafficking.”

“Truth is highly individual,” I explained from experience. “Tortured confessions are not reliable. Just say the word ‘testicle,’ and I’ll confess to anything.”

“Exactly my point. All you human pestilence perverts are guilty of something. Did you know Higuera was wearing illegal Iranian nipple armor?”

“It’s Iranian?”

“I’m moving up his execution time on that last account.”

“Kellogg is willing to pay compensation for pain and suffering,” I offered reasonably, sliding settlement

America's Galactic Foreign Legion

papers across the spider commander's dinner tray stand. "Kellogg admits to no wrongdoing, but wants Tony the Badger released unharmed."

"The Empire does not negotiate with terrorists."

I checked the database on my pad. Sure enough, Higuera was linked to a secret Badger fraternity from Tucson, Arizona, its Old Earth origins obscured by antiquity. *No matter.*

"Medic Ceausescu wants her deluxe multiple pressure head hose and attachments returned," I advised, trying a different tact, snatching the well-used nozzle from the bathroom. "Sorry, she insists the shower head has too much sentimental value to part with."

"Wait!" cried the spider commander desperately. "I'll sign, but the magic water dispenser stays."

"And Tony the Badger?"

"Have it your way. I'll release that badger beast, but all Kellogg products are banned from the Empire."

"Even Sugar Frosted Flakes?"

"Especially Sugar Frosted Flakes," insisted the spider commander, noting cartoon Tony the Tiger advertisements for flakes on the database.

"Agreed, but expect a backlash from Kellogg lobbyists."

"More threats?"

"Just saying. They're ruthless."

"All human pestilence lobbyists are banned from the Empire!"

"Ha, good luck with that one," I snickered, hearing the whoopee cushion fart as I left. "Resistance is futile."

* * * * *

Paul Grabowski of the Polish Drug Cartel and his henchmen used an industrial tunneling machine to break into the Legion dungeon cell block holding Cartel kingpin Aaron Kosminski. However, the machine bored into the wrong cell. The commotion woke up legionnaire guard Walter Knight. He peeked through the cuff port of Ferguson's cell. "What fresh hell is this?"

"Nothing, go back to sleep!"

"Who goes there?" challenged Private Knight, sounding the alarm. "Surrender, or you're in lots of trouble!"

"I have a hostage," replied Grabowski, holding a pistol to Ferguson's head. "Release Aaron Kosminski, or the lawyer dies!"

"Sorry, but you'll need to take a more valuable hostage than that," answered Private Knight, stalling as he accessed hostage negotiations on his database communications pad. "I can give you cold pizza from my lunch box."

"What kind of pizza?"

"Sausage and pepperoni."

"I want extra cheese. Slide the pizza under the door real slow. No tricks!"

"I'll have to contact my superiors."

"You don't want to die down here," added Grabowski reasonably. "It would be for nothing. Don't call your boss. Just let Kosminski go."

"The great banana peel of fate is always on the floor somewhere," philosophized Knight, adding an inspirational note for his next book. "America does not negotiate with terrorists."

"Tough guy, eh? You'll be sorry."

Hearing noise below, Sergeant Green called

America's Galactic Foreign Legion

Private Knight on his communications pad. "What's happening down there?"

"Terrorists broke into Ferguson's cell, demanding Kosminski be released. They threatened to kill Ferguson if their demands are not met."

"Is that all?"

"I gave them pizza?"

"Anything else?"

"I added extra cheese."

"American Cheese?"

"Yes, sergeant."

"Good work, Knight. We'll get help down there as soon as possible."

"When this is over, can I get off night shift?"

"No."

"What if they want more pizza?"

"Throw a grenade through the cuff port."

"What about Ferguson?"

"Collateral damage. It can't be helped. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sergeant. They'll get no more pizza from me."

"I heard that!" shouted Grabowksi. "I not only want more pizza, I want Subway foot long sandwiches."

"No pizza for you!"

"Your science fiction books suck," taunted Grabowski, always the critic. "I want my Subway foot long now!"

"I got your foot long right here!" snarled Private Knight, angrily opening the cuff port to toss in a grenade. "The Legion doesn't negotiate with terrorists, or drug-dealing literary critics!"

"Technically, I'm just an undocumented pharmacist. I'm a chemist."

“The Legion kills chemists. We barium.”

“Humor can be a difficult thing, huh, Knight?” asked Grabowski, striking a low blow at the sensitive world-famous science fiction author.

“A little,” conceded Private Knight.

Having temporarily distracted Private Knight, Grabowski tossed out his own grenade first. However, being Polish, he forgot to pull the pin. Private Knight adroitly scooped up the grenade, pulled the pin, and tossed it back through the cuff port. *Hey, it could happen!* The explosion was deafening, and loud. Private Knight opened the cell door to find a gruesome scene of dead and twitching bodies. Ferguson and Grabowski were dead. There was a hole in the wall. The Polish Cartel kingpin Aaron Kosminski had escaped.

* * * * *

Spider marines escorted Tony Higuera to the border crossing gate. I met Higuera along with members of the press.

“Welcome back to America,” I said, shaking hands. “The good news is, you’re free. The bad news is, Kellogg fired you.”

“The bad news is I’m suffering from the DT’s,” complained Higuera. “I need a beer. I did nothing wrong. I want my union rep.”

“There’s an opening at United Parcel Service,” I offered. “They pay good.”

“I’m going back to driving beer trucks.”

“Sorry, you need Teamsters connections for the good jobs.”

“No problem, I’m a personal friend of union thug Carlos O’Neil.”

America's Galactic Foreign Legion

"Were you probed?" interrupted Phil Coen of Channel Five World News Tonight. "How are you going to deal with being violated?"

"I was not probed," answered Higuera testily.

"Are you sure? Were you unconscious at any time during your alien abduction?"

"Yes, but that means nothing."

"Did you dream about being probed?"

"Maybe a little, but I always do."

"So you *were* probed?"

"Yes, I mean no! I'd know it if I was probed. I don't roll that way."

"Is the Legion going to scan you for baby aliens hiding in your stomach?"

"Now see here," threatened Higuera, fists clenched, stepping toward Coen. "Enough with the pervert questions. I'm fine. They roughed me up a bit, but I'm fine."

"So you say. What about sand mites? Will you be quarantined?"

"No," I advised. "Mr. Higuera will be debriefed and released. The matter is closed."

"I'm broke," complained Higuera, away from the cameras. "I have no job. What's to become of me?"

"That could be a problem," I agreed. "There are laws against unemployment along the DMZ. Are you sure you don't want to be a UPS driver?"

"Oh, hell no. I don't like those sissy brown shorts they wear."

"Do you know how to paint?"

"What's to know?"

"Congratulations, I'm drafting you into the Legion."

"What? I don't think so."

"Private McQueen can teach you to paint," I

suggested, pointing to Tonelli's half-painted guard shack. "We paint everything Legion sage tan."

"This ain't legal."

"Of course it is. I see fun, travel, and adventure in your short future. The Legion has a great medical plan, so don't worry, we'll get rid of most of your sand mites."

"I am not joining the Foreign Legion," protested Higuera. "You can't force me. No one punks me like this."

"You're not joining," I explained patiently. "You are being drafted. There's a big difference. If you had joined like most legionnaires, I'd have been forced to pay you an enlistment bonus. But now, you're joining for free."

"I want the bonus."

"Did you just say you want an enlistment bonus?" I asked, handing Higuera an enlistment contract.

"How long is the enlistment?" asked Higuera, warily signing. "Two or three years?"

"Ha! You're in for the duration."

"How long is that?"

"No one knows. It's probably until galactic peace breaks out. I'm an officer, and they won't even tell me how long."

"I think I'm screwed."

"I think so, too, Private Higuera."

"Which is worse?" asked Coen, eavesdropping. "Being probed by aliens, or probed by the Legion?"

"Probed by the Legion. I didn't even get a kiss."

