

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

BOOK 3

SILENT INVASION



***The sweeping, satirical military space saga
continues...***

Decorated war hero Captain Joey R. Czerinski of the United States Galactic Foreign Legion faces even more challenges as the Arthropodan Empire ramps up its plans to take control of the prized planet, New Colorado. Double-crossing friends and adversaries on both sides, out to make a buck, put the Legion at the mercy of spider forces whose careful planning and military strategies seem to ensure Arthropoda will gain control over more territory in a campaign of silent invasion.

As the situation deteriorates for the human occupation, Czerinski realizes he can't trust anyone, not even his past business partner and constant cohort in mischief, Lieutenant Manny Lopez. The wolves are literally at the door, and Czerinski finds himself backed into a corner, wondering what he can possibly do to save the day and restore the Legion's control of planet New Colorado. With the odds against him, maybe the only thing Czerinski can do is take a dive and throw the fight – literally.

Nothing's a sure thing, especially in war – except that through all the ups and downs and continual serendipitous surprises, this ongoing satirical, politically incorrect, sweeping military space opera is sure to entertain.

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

Book 3: Silent Invasion

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~AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT~

I dedicate ***America's Galactic Foreign Legion***
– ***Book 3: Silent Invasion*** to the heroes of the Battle
of Ramree Island.

A special thanks to editor Patricia Morrison and
my loving wife Barb for their support.

~Walter Knight

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

BOOK 3

SILENT INVASION



by

Walter Knight



CHAPTER 1

My name is Captain Joey R. Czerinski, hero of the United States Galactic Foreign Legion, currently assigned to the City of Finisterra, Planet New Colorado, where I am fighting a growing alien insurgency. A recent second battle between human and Arthropodan factions has resulted in the United States Galactic Foreign Legion holding the planet New Colorado as human territory, despite the growing civilian population of spider-like Arthropodans on the planet. As we try to maintain order and control on New Colorado, I fear our position is deteriorating.

* * * * *

The Emperor of the Arthropodan Empire wanted the riches of New Colorado. Gold, oil, and uranium were discovered by the human pestilence after the last war. It grated on the Emperor that humanity's windfall was at the expense of Arthropodan effort. A large spider population still lived in the Northern Hemisphere of New Colorado. Immigration was adding to that population. Did not the spider species need the protection of the Arthropodan Empire against continued abuse from the human pestilence? Of course it did.

An Arthropodan fleet of starships bullied its way into orbit around New Colorado. By order of the Emperor, the Fleet secretly provided arms and advisors to a growing insurgency fighting for independence against the United States Galactic

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Foreign Legion. The Emperor did not necessarily want war with the United States Galactic Federation. At least not yet. The last two wars had gone badly. The Emperor wanted merely to use intimidation and the local insurgency as bargaining chips to negotiate a new treaty annexing the northern part of New Colorado back into the Arthropodan Empire, giving Arthropoda its rightful share of the planet's wealth. The Emperor's general staff and advisors encouraged even stronger action, but that was why they were not the Emperor! All comes to those who wait patiently.

"We have the larger space fleet," advised the Imperial Fleet Commander. "Most of the Legion's starships are guarding the Coleopteran Frontier on the other side of human space. Our main problem is that the human pestilence may have developed stealth technology that completely hides their starships. Already we have suffered isolated losses that cannot be explained."

"On the ground they are weak, too," advised Marine Special Forces Commander #1. "The human pestilence are trying to defend New Colorado with local forces and their Foreign Legion. Again, this is because their main military assets are on the Coleopteran Frontier. We should just take the planet while we have the human pestilence at a disadvantage."

"The humans have a huge military industrial complex," said the Emperor. "We are lucky their military might is not pointed in our direction. We need to keep it that way, while seizing our fair share of New Colorado."

"The human pestilence have an applicable axiom of law: possession is nine-tenths of the law," commented Special Forces Commander #1. "We will

land troops, hold our ground, and negotiate for peace and reasonably stable borders. We will not even need to use nukes.”

“Invasion might provoke a nuclear response,” warned the Fleet Commander. “Humans love to use nukes. They have done so many times.”

“So have we,” said the Emperor. “But if we use restraint, so will they. The human pestilence have to be more cautious about the risk of nuclear war because of the growing population.”

“You can not be sure of that,” said the Fleet Commander.

“New Colorado is a prize,” said the Emperor. “It will not be destroyed with nukes. Not by us.”

“I will land Marine Special Forces troops at strategic points in the North,” said the Special Forces Commander. “Not armies or divisions at first, but small mobile units. They will link up with and arm the insurgency. The human pestilence can’t use nukes against small mobile units. We will explain that our fleet remains in orbit to deter more genocide and the well-documented abuse by the Legion. The Fleet will also deter the Legion from using strategic weapons.”

* * * * *

After a brief but heated skirmish, the Legion lost the eastern half of Finisterra across the river. I shook my head in dismay.

“Captain Czerinski, initial reports from East Finisterra indicate that heavily armed insurgents have attacked and captured Pizza Hut,” advised Lieutenant Manny Lopez. “Our troops are falling back to the Bridge.”

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I could see smoke rising from East Finisterra. We still held the downtown area near the bridge, but all outlying areas had been abandoned. "How did they get so strong so fast?" I asked.

"I am receiving a radio message from the insurgent commander," said Lieutenant Lopez. "He says he wants to negotiate a truce and establish a permanent border at the river. Do you want to talk to him?"

I snatched the radio. "This is Captain Czerinski of the United States Galactic Federation Foreign Legion," I said. "We do not negotiate with terrorists."

"I am not a terrorist," replied the insurgent leader. "I am the voice of the new government in East Finisterra. Be reasonable. All we want is peace and our own side of the river ... and Pizza Hut."

"Forget it," I shouted. "There will be no peace with terrorists. Today you want Pizza Hut, tomorrow you will want Taco Bell!"

"I took Taco Bell five minutes ago!" boasted the insurgent commander triumphantly. "And I am about to seize KFC."

"Can we verify that?" I asked, turning to Lieutenant Lopez.

"After we capture your three major food distribution centers, you will have no choice but to surrender East Finisterra or starve," said the insurgent commander.

"You know nothing," I countered. "We still hold McDonald's here on the west side of the river. Your plan is flawed."

"Tell him we hold a Subway Sandwich Shop, too," said Corporal Williams. "We will never surrender!"

"Shut up!" I ordered. "I'm being overrun by idiots"

and junk food bandits.”

“Come on, Czerinski,” urged the insurgent commander. “How long do you think you can survive on just Big Macs and Quarter Pounders? The grease alone will kill you.”

“He’s got a point there,” cautioned Lieutenant Lopez.

“Legionnaires are resourceful and resilient,” I replied defiantly. “Plus we have a Subway Sandwich Shop.” I nodded at Williams.

“Take that, you punk!” shouted Corporal Williams, letting out his famous rebel yell.

“Bologna won’t stop the inevitable,” warned the insurgent commander. “Father Winter will be here soon.”

I turned to Lieutenant Lopez. “Take a column of tanks across the bridge and blast that fool,” I ordered. “Where is our air support?”

“New ground-to-air missiles are keeping our Air Wing at bay,” said Corporal Kool. “And the Space Weapons Platform T. Roosevelt is in a standoff with the Arthropodan Fleet.”

* * * * *

I watched Lieutenant Lopez lead three tanks across the Finisterra Bridge. Immediately the lead tank was hit by an anti tank missile. The tank caught fire. Corporal Williams dragged badly burned Lieutenant Lopez out the rear door. After firing several volleys into East Finisterra, the other two tanks retreated off the bridge.

“Radio Sergeant Green to pull out of East Finisterra,” I ordered, hoping to save my remaining legionnaires. “We will hold at the river.”

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"We're giving up KFC?" asked Corporal Williams. "Those bastards."

"What we need is a nuke to show the insurgents who the top dog is around here," I commented. "Do we have any nukes left?"

"General Kalipetsis took all our nukes when the war ended," answered Corporal Kool. "We don't have permission to use nukes anyway. Not unless a real war breaks out."

"This is a real war!" I complained, slamming my fist into the wall as I paced.

"Corporal Tonelli has a nuke," said Corporal Williams. "I saw it."

"What?" I asked. "How would Tonelli get his grubby hands on a nuke?"

"It's an old Arthropodan Air Wing nuke he found when we were fighting in the tunnels of New Disneyland. He kept it, hoping to make some money on the black market."

"I'll shoot him," I mused out loud. "After I get his nuke."

* * * * *

Sergeant Green got the order to pull back from KFC. He was about to retreat anyway. The insurgents seemed to be everywhere, and they were better armed than usual. Mortars were now falling on his position. Sergeant Green ordered the KFC ovens booby-trapped. His platoon loaded into the armored car and raced for the Finisterra Bridge. Sergeant Green used the cannon and machine gun to cover their retreat. At the top of the bridge, they rammed a burning tank and knocked it out of the way. He watched with fascination as it fell off the bridge, splashing into the

water. On the far side of the bridge, they picked up Lieutenant Lopez. Molten metal from the blast splattered Lopez's face and shoulders, and he was moaning in pain. Corporal Tonelli pulled him up into the armored car.

Medic Ceausescu immediately started an IV, trying to ease the pain and prevent shock. Corporal Tonelli's trained attack monitor dragon Spot tugged at his leash as Lieutenant Lopez was set down beside him. Smelling blood, the dragon whipped his tongue out. Spot took a tentative nibble of Lieutenant Lopez's shoulder.

"Get your lizard off me!" yelled Lopez as he drew his pistol and shot at the dragon. "That monster bit me!"

"Bad Spot! No biscuit!" said Corporal Tonelli, jerking the dragon back. Spot still tugged at Lopez's shoulder. Medic Ceausescu grabbed the pistol from Lieutenant Lopez as another bullet ricocheted off a bulkhead. The round struck Corporal Washington in the arm. Finally Private Tonelli struck his dragon on the snout, breaking its grip.

"No harm done," announced Guido as he pried Spot loose. "Spot just thought you smelled like a tasty grilled steak burrito."

"Burrito this, you spaghetti for brains New York trash!" yelled Lieutenant Lopez, struggling to get his pistol back.

"He shot me in the arm!" complained Corporal Washington, regaining control of his driving. The big spider legionnaire was usually even tempered, but he was hot now. "I will get you back for that!"

"Just drive," ordered Sergeant Green. "Get us out of here before they fire another missile. Your arm will grow back."

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At the command center, Corporal Tonelli and medic Corporal Ceausescu unloaded Lieutenant Lopez. A medical helicopter was called to transport Lieutenant Lopez to the hospital at New Memphis.

"Guido my friend," I greeted warmly as they entered. "I heard you have a nuke hidden somewhere that you were going to sell on the black market. I want it."

"Who have you been talking to?" asked Guido. "Just because I'm Italian, you automatically think I'm selling stuff on the black market? I'm tired of being picked on!"

"Not just stuff. You have a nuke," I said. "I want it to fight off the insurgents."

"General Kalipetsis won't go for that," replied Guido. "You won't get permission to set off nukes in town or anywhere else."

"General Kalipetsis isn't here." I smiled. "It's not a big nuke is it?"

"It takes two people to lift," advised Guido, admitting his guilt. "It's pretty big."

"It doesn't matter. We have to show the spiders who is the big dog on the block. It's us!"

"If you blow up East Finisterra, you will blow up the Singh Mining Corporation's gold mine and wreck the whole economy," warned Guido.

"The insurgents wrecked it all anyway. I can't think that far ahead. I just want to survive the day. Where is your nuke?"

"It's in a crate in storage at the brothel. How much are you going to pay me for the nuke? I need a return on my investment. I have partners to keep

happy.”

“I was going to have you shot for treason, but I will delay that if the nuke still works,” I promised. “Take the armored car and bring the nuke here. Corporal Williams will assist you.”

* * * * *

Guido stared at Williams as they left. “I’ll bet you’re the cheese-eating rat snitch who told Captain Czerinski about my nuke,” accused Guido. “Do you know how much money you cost me?”

“What do you care? You’re rich,” said Corporal Williams dismissively. “That nuke may save all our lives.”

“That beat up rusted old spider nuke will probably blow up and kill us when we try to move it,” complained Guido.

“Quit being a cry-baby,” Corporal Williams said. “We need the nuke to win this war.”

“We are not officially at war. Anyway, it’s a matter principle. I trusted you, and you snitched on me. That’s just not done and cannot be forgiven.”

“Sorry,” said Corporal Williams sheepishly. “How can I make it up to you?”

“Just make sure you ignore all the other stuff I have in storage,” said Guido. “Pretend you didn’t see any of it, and don’t snitch on me again.”

* * * * *

When the medical helicopter landed, medic Ceausescu loaded Lieutenant Lopez. Corporal Washington went along to assist with the stretcher and to have his damaged arm attended to. The arm

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was about to fall off, and I was concerned he needed medical treatment. Spiders usually do grow back missing parts, but I wasn't sure. There is only so much the medics can do with duct tape.

Guido and Williams loaded the nuke. The pilot complained about all the extra weight, but I told him *tough*. He complained more when I told him he was taking a detour.

As a precaution, I radioed the insurgent commander and asked him not to shoot at our medical helicopter because it was full of wounded. He agreed, saying he was watching us closely from KFC. The insurgent commander complained about Sergeant Green blowing up the ovens at KFC, saying it showed a lack of good faith on our part. But he was above such pettiness and would let the medical helicopter pass. I could see hundreds of insurgents across the river waving and dancing. They were celebrating their victory. I was determined to put an end to that! The rest of the city seemed deserted. The local population of spiders and humans had either evacuated East Finisterra or gone underground into the mines.

The helicopter lifted off, taking a sharp turn toward East Finisterra. Guido set the timer on the nuke and dropped it out the side door over KFC. Then the helicopter darted southwest toward New Memphis. A ground-to-air missile arced up from East Finisterra, took a severe turn towards the helicopter, and hit with the force of a hammer. The helicopter dropped quickly, spinning out of control as it went down.

Lieutenant Lopez braced himself as he looked up at medic Ceausescu. "Elena, I am sorry for anything mean I may have said to you."

“Screw you!” replied Corporal Ceausescu.

“We’re about to die, and the last words on your lips are *screw you?*” asked Lieutenant Lopez frantically.

“Screw you and fasten your seat belt!” added Corporal Ceausescu.

“Put a,” responded Lieutenant Lopez as he clicked his restraining harness into place just before impact.

The helicopter bounced off trees before twisting to the ground. Medic Ceausescu pulled Lieutenant Lopez from the wreckage. The pilot died. Guido and Williams stumbled out of the helicopter unhurt. Spot tagged along. With Corporal Ceausescu’s assistance, Lieutenant Lopez led them away from the crash. It started raining as darkness set in.

“Some days just aren’t worth getting up for,” commented Lieutenant Lopez, still leaning on Ceausescu. “Thanks.”

“Drop dead,” replied Corporal Ceausescu.

“I probably will.” Lieutenant Lopez let go of the medic. “I can walk just fine.”

Suddenly the dark sky turned to bright light. They all shielded their eyes and dove for cover as they heard the sonic boom from the nuke they’d dropped on East Finisterra. The rain turned to mud from the fallout. Everything was coated with wet clay that came down like snow.

“Take your radiation tablets,” advised medic Ceausescu as they walked through the muddy forest. “I think that nuke was larger than the Captain expected.”

“We just turned East Finisterra into glass!” shouted Corporal Williams, giving a rebel yell and shaking his fist to the east. “Awesome, baby! That’s

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what happens when you mess with the Legion!”

“Where are we going?” asked Guido as they trudged along.

“If we keep going west, we will reach the highway,” answered Lieutenant Lopez. “We can hitch a ride from there.”

“This place creeps me out,” complained Guido. He could hear wolves howling up on a nearby ridge. “They’re stalking us.”

“I heard that the wolves seeded on New Colorado are smarter and larger than normal wolves,” said Corporal Williams. “They plan their attacks. It’s genetic engineering gone wild. I heard the wolves even wiped out a whole company of spider special forces.”

“Nonsense,” said Lieutenant Lopez. “El lobo only seeks out the weak. Maybe they smell my blood.”

“You have nothing to fear,” said Corporal Washington. “Fear of man is a survival instinct bred into all wild animals of Old Earth. It is me the wolves are stalking. They hope I will lag behind.”

“I told you they liked to eat spiders,” said Corporal Williams. “Don’t worry, Washington. We won’t let them eat you. I say we blast them.”

“Don’t waste your ammunition,” ordered Lieutenant Lopez. He thought he glimpsed a wolf off to the side. Then it was gone, hidden by the underbrush. “If there are insurgents out here, we don’t want to give away our position.”

“I just saw the biggest damn wolf there ever was!” shouted Corporal Williams as he fired full automatic into the forest. “I think I got him!”

Corporal Williams charged off into the forest. The others followed. They found nothing, not even a blood trail.

Finally losing interest in wolves, the legionnaires

walked for miles until they reached the North Highway. The wolves followed.

* * * * *

I looked out the slit windows of the command center bunker. The mushroom cloud still drifted over East Finisterra. I had seen nuclear explosions before, but this one close up seemed larger than usual. The devastation across the river was complete. West Finisterra was flattened, too. I expected the course of the New Mississippi River to change. The paperwork from the environmental impact statement would be extensive. *Damned paperwork!*

Miraculously, the Finisterra Bridge was still standing. Civilians were popping out of their spider holes and wandering about the rubble. The mines and the tunnel system remained intact. Radiation levels were high, and dust was settling everywhere. The spiders weren't much affected by radiation, but it was something to be avoided by humans. Refugees needed to take radiation tablets before fleeing south to New Disneyland or north to Camp Alaska.

"General Kalipetsis is on the radio," announced Corporal Kool. "And he doesn't sound happy."

"He never is," I replied, taking the radio. "What?"

"Lose that attitude real fast, mister," said General Kalipetsis. "Did you explode a nuke?"

"No sir," I said. "It must have been the insurgents."

"Don't lie to me," shouted General Kalipetsis. "I need to rely on my commanders to tell me the truth."

"Is this a secure frequency?" I asked. "Never mind! You took all my nukes. Remember? Besides, our tactical nukes aren't that big. It must have been a

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spider nuke.”

“I will not tolerate your deception,” advised General Kalipetsis. “Give me a reason not to relieve you of command.”

“Because my sector is the only place in the North that no longer has an operational insurgency,” I replied. “We killed them all.”

“Insurgents are attacking all the county seats,” said General Kalipetsis. “Be ready to move out toward either New Disneyland or Camp Alaska. And don’t set off any more nukes!”

“I did not explode that nuke,” I argued. “It must have been the insurgents who accidentally blew themselves up.”

“A man is never more truthful than when he acknowledges himself to be a liar,” said General Kalipetsis.

“Spare me,” I replied.

“I’m warning you,” continued General Kalipetsis. “No more surprises. No more nukes. No more lies.”

“That’s my story, and I’m sticking to it.”

“You lie so easily. I need reliable information. Don’t you know a lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is still putting on its boots?”

“All I know is we are facing more than just insurgents,” I answered. “There were thousands of heavily armed Arthropodan marines in Finisterra. We need air support. We have one medical helicopter carrying wounded missing south of here, shot down by a SAM. I expect more casualties from the radiation. We have a lot of digging out and rebuilding to do. Fortunately the miners up here are good at digging.”

“Did you blow up the Singh Gold Mine?” asked General Kalipetsis. “The biggest mother load on the

planet, and you nuke it. How am I going to explain that to Congress?”

“I have not been across the river yet, so I don’t know about the Singh Mine,” I said. “Are you going to do something about the spiders landing marines down here?”

“I’ll be talking to the Commander of the Arthropodan Fleet later today,” said General Kalipetsis. “They deny landing any troops. He says they are only in orbit to protect the local spider population and to prevent more genocide. Quite frankly, you setting off a nuke on the spider side of Finisterra is not going to help negotiations.”

“Threaten to blow their Fleet out of orbit,” I suggested. “Threaten war. That will get their attention.”

“No one wants war,” said General Kalipetsis. “I can’t make threats like that. We need to contain the fighting.”

“War is a horrible thing,” I said. “Let’s keep it that way so you don’t grow too fond of it. War can’t be contained. It needs to be unleashed.”

* * * * *

“What went wrong in Finisterra?” asked the Arthropodan Fleet Commander. “You assured me the human pestilence would use restraint. Instead, they used a nuke on their own city. Are they insane?”

“It might just be a local commander using excessive force,” said the Special Forces Commander. “Or possibly our team leaders gathered too many troops in one place, providing an irresistible target.”

“Local human pestilence commanders are allowed to use nukes that big?” asked the Fleet

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Commander.

"Maybe," replied the Special Forces Commander. "We are looking into it."

"I thought your Special Forces units would stay dispersed," complained the Fleet Commander. "You were supposed to assist the insurgency and use hit and run tactics. Instead, you group up inside the city"

"I ordered my ground units to stay dispersed," explained the Special Forces Commander. "But the insurgents prefer urban combat. My team leaders report that the locals are afraid of the forest. They complain of monsters."

"What idiocy is this?" asked the Fleet Commander, losing his temper. "What monsters?"

"There are wild animals that attack in packs at night," said the Special Forces Commander. "We have killed several. They are just another beast native to Earth's forests, put on New Colorado to control pests."

"What are they, monitor dragons?" asked the Fleet Commander. "I hate dragons."

"I brought a picture," advised the Special Forces Commander, pulling out a photograph of a dead wolf. "We shoot them on sight."

"It is hideous," said the Fleet Commander. "Are the human pestilence training these beasts to attack our soldiers?"

"No," said the Special Forces Commander. "The monsters are dangerous to humans, too."

"Good," said the Fleet Commander. "I will show this photo to the Emperor when I give report. The Emperor will not be happy if you deviate from the original plan. You are to fight a guerrilla war from the forests so that the Emperor can deny direct

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involvement. You are not to provoke the human pestilence with large-scale engagements again. Our goal is to negotiate a joint occupation of New Colorado without going to war.”



CHAPTER 2

The Arthropodan Fleet commander and General Kalipetsis agreed to face-to-face negotiations at Camp Alaska. The Fleet commander landed with five shuttles and a thousand Special Forces marines. They promptly freed about two hundred insurgents held at the detention center, and set up a spider zone of control dividing Camp Alaska.

My battalion was ordered to Camp Alaska. I sat in on the negotiations. Lieutenant Lopez joined us.

“I strongly protest the landing of Arthropodan marines,” announced General Kalipetsis. “Are you trying to provoke a war?”

“No,” replied the Arthropodan Fleet Commander. “Quite the contrary. I am here to stop a war. The marines are merely a needed precaution. You will remember the last time I was here under a flag of truce, I was attacked and injured.”

“By occupying Camp Alaska and freeing dangerous terrorists from prison, you hope to prevent a war?” asked General Kalipetsis. “Excuse me if I doubt your credibility.”

“It is you who lacks credibility,” argued the Fleet Commander. “How many prisoners have died in your gulags? We freed those prisoners to save them from certain death at the hands of the Legion. If they did not die from your abuse, surely the approach of winter would have killed them all.”

“Your troops must leave,” said General Kalipetsis. “They are a provocation and violate our sovereignty.”

“The marines are just temporary,” said the Fleet Commander. “I propose they stay in place only during negotiations. We can agree that both sides will not reinforce existing troops or commit any aggressive acts.”

“What about all the insurgents you just freed?” asked General Kalipetsis.

“I promise to control the locals while we negotiate,” said the Fleet Commander. “That is the easy part.”

I stepped outside and radioed the T. Roosevelt Space Weapons Platform. “I want you to target the five Arthropodan shuttles that landed in Camp Alaska,” I ordered.

“We can’t do that,” replied the Commander of the T. Roosevelt. “We are surrounded by the Arthropodan Fleet. They have threatened to destroy us if we bomb any part of the planet, or make any aggressive moves.”

“That is a risk I am willing to take,” I commented. “I am ordering you to destroy those shuttles. Don’t make me come up there!”

I walked back inside to join the negotiations. “Do you really expect us to believe you will not land more troops or make any more aggressive acts?” General Kalipetsis was saying. “You have broken all your promises so far.”

“Yes, I give my word,” said the Fleet Commander. “The status quo is fine, for now.”

The loud explosions from outside rocked the building. We peered out the windows in time to see the destruction of the spider shuttles.

The Fleet Commander was furious. “What treachery is this?” he fumed. “This is your doing, Czerinski!”

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"I am merely enforcing our agreement per treaty not to land large amounts of troops," I responded. "Be glad I used restraint. I should have bombed much more. I will, the next time you violate the peace treaty."

"You human pestilence show time after time you cannot be trusted," replied the Fleet Commander.

"Now we have a new agreement on the table," said General Kalipetsis. "We accept the new agreement, but will not tolerate more violations. Is that acceptable to you?"

"I agree," said the Fleet Commander. "It is only my desire for peace that restrains me from avenging your belligerence."

* * * * *

The spiders quickly put up a fence dividing Camp Alaska to establish their zone of control. A checkpoint controlled traffic between the zones. Corporal Tonelli and Private Wayne drew guard duty on the Legion side that night. Their opposites on the spider side waved at them to come over and talk.

"Bring Spot," said Private Wayne. The monitor dragon had been growling across the fence all night. Private John Iwo Jima Wayne, an ex-Arthropodan Special Forces team leader and now a legionnaire, did not trust other spiders. "Be ready for anything."

As they approached the spider guard shack, a large monitor dragon challenged them. It was restrained by a spider marine pulling on its chain.

"Sorry if Satan scared you," said the spider marine, patting his dragon on the snout. "He does not like human pestilence or traitors."

"It will take more than a fat lizard to scare

legionnaires,” said Private Wayne.

“Pull your dragon back,” said Guido, as he tried to control Spot. “I don’t want them to fight.”

“Of course you don’t,” said the spider marine. “You would not want your pup to be eaten.”

Guido sized up the other dragon. Its head was huge. Old scars covered its face. Satan was larger and more muscular than Spot. “My dragon has many combat kills,” bragged Guido. “Spot would tear your dragon’s throat out. That would be bad for the ongoing peace negotiations.”

“Care to put money on your brag?” asked the spider marine.

“How much can you afford to lose?” asked Private Wayne. “We won’t risk a combat dragon for chump change.”

“It could be millions,” said the spider marine. “I have many friends who would want to take your money, too.”

“No,” said Guido. “Captain Czerinski would not allow it.”

“No stomach for a fight?” taunted the spider marine. “I heard you human pestilence are squeamish. I will give you two-to-one odds, being that your dragon is only a pup.”

“Do it,” whispered Private Wayne. “Your dragon has seen combat. I know this marine’s dragon. He is pampered, overfed, and fights only at sporting events.”

“I will give you three-to-one odds,” challenged the spider marine. “That is the best offer you will get.”

“Deal,” said Guido. “How much can you afford to bet?”

“As much as you can afford to lose,” said the spider marine. “My commanding officer will hold the

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bets.”

“All bets will be made through Bonanno Bookies of New Memphis,” said Guido.

“What?” asked the spider Marine. “I am not letting human pestilence in New Memphis hold my money.”

“Then the fight is off,” said Guido. “It’s the law. We have no choice on the matter.”

“Then it is not happening,” said the spider marine. “I knew you would find a way to worm out of the fight.”

“Ask around,” said Guido. “This much action has to go through Bonanno.”

The spider marine conferred with his partner. Then he made some phone calls. “I have decided to allow all bets to go through Bonanno Bookies,” said the spider marine, glumly. “You will lose your money, anyway.”

* * * * *

“The destruction of our shuttles needs to be avenged,” insisted the Special Forces Commander. “There was crew aboard those shuttles. This is like a claw slap in the face.”

“No,” said the Fleet Commander. “At least not yet. Look at the big picture. When our mission started, we were arguing with the human pestilence about whether our fleet should stay in orbit. Now we are negotiating borders on the planet’s surface. Our marines have occupied half of Camp Alaska, and we have freed all prisoners. All this happened without a fight.”

“We cannot let them bomb us without retaliation,” said the Special Forces Commander. “To

allow their treachery would invite more.”

“All in good time,” said the Fleet Commander. “Camp Alaska is just a crossroads. The prize is the oil and uranium fields. We will extend our zones of influence out from Camp Alaska until the prize is ours. That is the mission the Emperor gave us. We will not deviate from the Emperor’s plan. We will follow orders.”

“Of course you are right, as usual,” said the Special Forces Commander. “That General Kalipetsis is a fool. He will give us what we want. It’s Captain Czerinski I worry about. I think Captain Czerinski acted on his own to destroy our shuttles. And it was Czerinski that used a nuke to destroy Finisterra.”

“General Kalipetsis is smarter than he appears,” said the Fleet Commander. “But I agree. Something needs to be done about Captain Czerinski.”

“Leave it to me,” said the Special Forces Commander. “I will kill him personally.”

“His death has to look like an accident, or at least from unknown causes,” cautioned the Fleet Commander. “Have a subordinate kill Czerinski. I do not want our negotiations team linked to the assassination.”

“I will use nerve agent dipped onto the tip of an assassin’s claw,” said the Special Forces Commander. “Just one scratch will kill him instantly.”

“Remember, we need to be subtle,” said the Fleet Commander. “We cannot be linked directly to his death.”

“Czerinski has a reputation for brawling,” said the Special Forces Commander. “In the chaos of a bar fight, our assassin can easily scratch Czerinski. The Legion may be suspicious, but they will not be able to prove anything.”

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"Do it," ordered the Fleet Commander. "I like your plan."

"One other thing," said the Special Forces Commander. "What do you know about this dragon fight between our champion and some Legion dragon? I did not even know the Legion had dragons. I am seeing fliers posted all over both sides of Camp Alaska, announcing the fight."

"I know all about that. I have two million credits bet on our champion," answered the Fleet Commander. "I suggest you bet now before the odds increase. I have been given complementary tickets rinside if you want to join me."

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The fight was Saturday night. Privately owned helicopters brought spectators all the way from New Memphis and New Disneyland. Cable and Satellite TV set up to broadcast the fight planet-wide. A stretch limousine brought Carlos Bonanno to town. Bonanno set up a meeting with Guido and the spider marine dragon handler. Bonanno brought both human and spider muscle to the meeting.

"I thought the whole Bonanno Family got whacked by the Legion in New Memphis," commented Guido. "Obviously we missed a few."

"Our misunderstandings are ancient history," said Carlos Bonanno. "I look to the future. That is where the money is to be made."

"I'm listening," said Guido. He brought Private Wayne and Corporal Williams along, but felt uncomfortably outgunned by the mobsters. "What is this all about?"

"I have in this vial an Adrenalin activated

poison,” said Bonanno, holding the vial up for all to see, and turning to address the spider marine. “You will inject this poison into your dragon fifteen minutes before the fight. When the dragons clash, the Adrenalin will activate the poison and kill your dragon instantly. Your dragon’s throat will be torn out so fast, no one will notice why or how the champion’s guard was lowered for just an instant. You will dispose of the body quickly afterward.”

“I will not agree to that!” objected the astonished spider marine. He got up to leave with the several of his marine friends. “The arrogance of you human pestilence never ceases to amaze me.”

“And the naivety of you spiders never ceases to amaze me,” countered Bonanno.

One of Carlos Bonanno’s bodyguards blocked the spider marine’s path, placing a threatening claw on his chest. “I understand how you feel,” said the spider bodyguard. “To compensate you for your loss, we will give you ten percent of the take. You will be rich. This is an offer you cannot refuse.”

“I do refuse!” said the spider marine. “My dragon Satan is a champion. I will not throw his life away for money!”

“The gambling on this fight has gone planet-wide,” said the spider bodyguard. “There is now too much money involved for us to let this go to chance. Your dragon must lose, because the smart money says so.”

“I do not care about your betting,” said the marine spider. “Who are you to expect me to do the bidding of the human pestilence? You are a disgrace.”

“This is not about the human pestilence,” said the spider bodyguard. “You say you do not care about money? Do you care about the safety of your family

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on Inhabited Planet #3?”

“How do you know about my family?” asked the spider marine. “What are you?”

“We are the La Costra Nostra,” said the spider bodyguard. “Our organization operates on both human and Arthropodan worlds. We will kill you and your entire family if we can not come to an understanding here and now.”

The spider marine looked to his comrades. “Don't do it,” said one of the other spider marines. “Death to the human pestilence!” The others joined in the chant.

The spider bodyguard shot the chanting marine in the head. He turned to the dragon handler. “Please, it does not have to end this way. Everyone can be happy and make a profit. It's just business.”

“OK. I agree,” said the spider marine, patting Satan on the snout. “You win.”

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An hour before the fight, an Italian named Gino walked into my office like he owned the place and tossed two duffel bags full of cash onto my desk.

“What's this?” asked Lieutenant Lopez.

“It's both of your cuts,” said Gino. “Fifty thousand dollars each.”

“For what?” I asked, examining the duffel.

“For the fight,” said Gino.

“What about the fight?” I asked. “It's legal. I'm not shaking you down for a payoff.”

“It's the law,” said Gino. “The commanding officers get a cut whether you do anything or not. We prefer you don't do anything.”

“Thanks. I'll take the money,” said Lieutenant

Lopez. "I'm not turning down free money."

"Nothing is free," I said, putting my duffel under my desk. "I'll take my cut. But, when the fight is over, you will conclude your business in Camp Alaska and get back to New Memphis where you belong. Next time, get permission from me before entering Legion territory, or I will hunt down and kill all of you vermin who stray into my territory."

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The two dragons pulled at their leashes. Guido and the spider marine let them close enough to almost taste. Both dragons wanted a kill. Both were released at the same time, to the cheer of the crowd. Spot drew blood first, striking with lightning speed at Satan's throat. The lunge missed, however, and Spot was only able to bite Satan's shoulder. Satan shook off the smaller dragon, muscling in for the kill. The poison took hold, shutting down Satan's brain just as he was about to finish Spot. The hesitation allowed Spot to tear out Satan's throat, abruptly ending the fight. Guido pulled Spot off the dead dragon and led him around the ring to the cheering of the crowd. The spider marine knelt down to hug his fallen dragon, and to cover Satan with a tarp.

The crowd went wild as Guido continued parading Spot around the ring. They gave Spot a standing ovation. I clapped and cheered, too. I thought I was going to lose my money tonight.

Suddenly, a spider next to me gave me a shove. "Watch where you are going, clumsy human pestilence!" yelled a spider, reaching out with his claw. The spider was jostled by the crowd just as he was about to strike. His claw went wide, scratching

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Gino instead. Gino fell to the floor in spasms at my feet, and died. Lieutenant Lopez shot the spider in the back of the head. The assassin fell dead on top of Gino. The crowd kept cheering, not noticing my close brush with death.