

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

BOOK 2

REENLISTMENT



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

Decorated war hero, or war criminal guilty of atrocities? It depends on who's passing judgment on ex-legionnaire Joey Czerinski.

The story of this lucky gambler turned soldier turned casino boss picks up as he and his business partner, Manny Lopez, find themselves broke and devastated after their business holdings are completely destroyed by continuing spider insurgent activity. Hidden deep underground, beneath the rubble of their once profitable casino, is a big, big secret that could solve their sudden financial problems, but neither Czerinski nor Lopez can figure out how to drum up the manpower and funding to unearth it.

Forced to find a quick source of money for a loan, Czerinski and Lopez are lured back to the Legion by their old friend, the slick-talking legionnaire-recruiting ATM. And then the real trouble begins...

Follow Czerinski and his pals through their ups and downs and continual serendipitous surprises in the next installment of this ongoing satirical, politically incorrect, sweeping military space opera.

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

Book 2: Reenlistment

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I dedicate ***America's Galactic Foreign Legion: Reenlistment*** to American heroes Alvin York, Maximo Yabes, and Johnny Michael Spann.

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And thank you to world-famous science fiction writer Piers Anthony for his gracious review of my first book ***AGFL: Feeling Lucky***, in which he wrote, "It's wild, improbable, but great adventure."

~*Walter Knight*

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

BOOK 2

REENLISTMENT



by

Walter Knight



CHAPTER 1

My name is Joey R. Czerinski, retired hero of the United States Galactic Foreign Legion, and owner of a string of upscale hotel casino resorts that stretch across the galaxy. Maybe early retirement from the Legion made me complacent. And why not? I was filthy rich, and had an insurance policy in the form of a high-tech alien starship buried deep under my casino on New Colorado, a trophy of the last human / spider war. But I was alert now. Mafia types make me nervous. Little did I know the mobster seated across from my office desk would set off a chain of events that would turn my life upside down...

* * * * *

“How you doing, Mr. Czerinski? My name is Guido Tonelli. I am an associate of Lou Nelson. Lou told me he has done business with you, and that you might be interested in doing business with me.”

Sitting behind my desk, I scowled at the wise guy, recalling how the Mafia had tried to muscle in on my casino action here on New Colorado. It took a small bloodbath to convince them I wasn't interested in a 'partnership' with them. “I doubt you've got anything that would convince me to want to do business with you and your bunch, considering our recent history.”

Guido Tonelli shifted in his chair. “I regret any past unpleasantness. My business associates now have only the highest respect for you and your

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organization. I come in good faith to make an honest transaction.”

I snorted. *Who let this salesman in? It's so hard to get good help these days.*

“I can sell you a computer chip that will allow you to read the minds of alien spiders, ants, and beetles.”

Despite my mistrust, that opportunity sounded intriguing. “I might be interested,” I said dryly. “How is Nelson these days? Is he still on Mars?”

“No. Lou is working in marketing out on the beetle frontier. He owns an import-export business and is doing very well.”

“Did he go into any detail about our past business relationship?”

“No, Mr. Czerinski. Lou says his business dealings with you were discreet. I respect that. I assure you that any business between you and me will also be discreet.”

“It had better be,” I warned. “What did he tell you? What do you know? Don't lie to me.”

“Lou told me nothing. I know only rumors,” said Guido, shifting uncomfortably in his chair. “There has been talk of a Fountain of Youth chip. But who would believe such a fantastic tale? If there ever was such a chip, the technology has been lost.”

Yes, lost on purpose by the government. I was lucky to get one of the last before they were yanked from the market. “You can be a king or a street sweeper,” I said. “But everybody dances with the Grim Reaper.”

“I agree, but you do look very young and healthy for your age. Do you take vitamins?”

“Don't go there,” I warned. “I assume your new chip has all the anti-theft protocols programmed into

it. If someone cuts off my arm, the chip will know I am dead and self-destruct?”

“Of course,” said Guido.

“Guaranteed?”

“You want a guarantee, buy a toaster.”

I frowned at Guido. “My technicians will examine your chip. My doctor will do the procedure. I don’t want to be assassinated by a Mafia virus. You will be a guest of the casino until I am satisfied.”

“I understand,” said Guido. “So, we have a deal?”

“This new chip had better be for real,” I said. “What kind of money are we talking about?”

“Only five million dollars. That is a rock bottom price offered to a select few.”

“When I first built my casinos, I had to kill a whole bunch of you Italians for trying to muscle in on my gaming action,” I said. “If you are messing with me, I will throw you off the roof.”

“I understand your apprehension. My organization has nothing but the utmost respect for you, Mr. Czerinski. You are a decorated war hero of the Legion and obviously have a keen eye for business. All we are interested in is doing business with you.”

“Why aren’t you selling this chip to the military? Wouldn’t you make more money? Wouldn’t that make better business sense?”

“Maybe,” said Guido. “Eventually the government will have this technology. But before that happens, our chip is worth a lot more money to private enterprise. Governments can’t keep secrets. You know that. Once word of the chip gets out, the bugs will develop counter measures, making the technology worthless.”

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"I still think the military would be interested in this," I said, giving the matter some thought. "I might even sell it to them myself. Am I missing something?"

"The military is not going to buy this technology until certain legal, ethical, and political issues are resolved," advised Guido. "Research and development on this chip involved a few deaths. We don't want to deal with those distracting issues. We want sales to begin now."

"What deaths?"

"We had to kidnap a few bugs for experimental research and development," explained Guido. "They all died."

"Is that all?"

"Some humans died, too. The authorities might call it murder. We think of it more as just the cost of doing business. The Legion would call it collateral damage."

"And it's perfectly safe now? You've worked all the kinks out?"

"Yes, Mr. Czerinski. It would be bad for business to sell an unsafe product."

"And bad for your health," I added. "Still, five million dollars is a lot of money. From a business point of view, how does it pay for me to put out that kind of money for something I don't really need?"

"Poker games with aliens alone will pay for the five million," explained Guido.

"I doubt that. If I started winning big time, no one would play me."

"As you well know, Mr. Czerinski, the frontier is a dangerous place," said Guido patiently. "In a place where every green spider out there has a war-surplus nuke hidden under his bed, information is the key to survival. Being well informed has an unlimited value."

“I see your point. How does this chip work?”

“All the bug species have antennae,” explained Guido. “Bugs have evolved away from use of their antennae, and now verbalize to communicate. But their subconscious still broadcasts messages through their antennae. A receiver in these sunglasses,” he said, holding up a seemingly ordinary pair of sunglasses, “monitors bug frequencies and intercepts bug thought waves, translating them for the wearer. As you can see, the glasses are quite stylish and—”

I waved him off. “I don’t care about style. How does it *work*?”

“A micro-computer translates the messages into English and prints them out on a screen on the inside of your sunglasses. Your eye movements are gauged to target specific individuals within a fifty-foot range. If you look at a group of bugs, the glasses will gather and translate all their thoughts in the order received. Additionally, the glasses are shielded to prevent observers from seeing anything but your eyes through the lenses, and the print on the inside is visible only to the wearer with the imbedded chip. And as an added feature, the lenses automatically darken or lighten, depending on surrounding light, to optimize your visual range and protect you from UV and other harmful rays.”

I thought for a moment, trying to imagine talking to a roomful of bugs and keeping up with reading a screen inside the glasses while pretending to be involved in the conversation – and with regular box translators broadcasting what the bugs were saying. “Seems like reading thoughts would get confusing in a hurry.”

“Our research testing showed that many subjects found reading a printout too distracting and

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disorienting. Also most wearers couldn't keep up with more than three different translation sources at once. You can elect to receive audio translation only through the transceivers built into the earpieces of the glasses. Either way, only you can see or hear the translated thoughts, and only you can access the computer through your imbedded chip."

I thought it over for a second. What was there to think about? "You have a deal."

* * * * *

To test my new chip, I asked Amanda, a longtime friend and business partner, to come to my office. I figured that, being a spider, she would be perfect for a test of the mind-reading technology. I had dated her once. It was one of the most terrifying experiences of my life.

"You have never invited me to your office before," said Amanda. "At least, not without a chaperone." *I wonder if this means you are interested in more than that one-night stand we had,* she thought to herself.

I could hear her thoughts! My whole body tingled with excitement and a healthy dose of fear. Amanda was not one to be trifled with in the bedroom. "Have a seat, Amanda. How is our cash flow these days?"

"Very good, Joey. The money is pouring in. I have record books you can review at my Waterstone casino. Come by anytime, and I'll go over them with you, darling." *Yes, come by. If I get you alone in my soundproof office, I'll rape you like you've never been raped before. I can't wait, babe.*

I cleared my throat, trying to get past her secret intentions. "I might send Lopez by to see the books. I'm too busy here. Better yet, just E-mail the numbers

to me.”

“Lopez?” Amanda objected. “That hairball bundle of puss? Lopez won’t do. If you want something done right, you should do it yourself. I’ve heard you say that many times.”

“I’m getting older,” I lied. “Now I believe in delegating.”

Amanda came around the desk. *I should just make love to you right now, while I have the chance.*

“Stop!” I shouted. “Do it now.”

He says stop, but he means go! He is such a tease. “You humans are so cute and adorable.” It turns me on being this close to someone so rich and powerful.

Amanda put a claw on my thigh. I drew my pistol as I fell backwards. “Not this time, Amanda. I’ll shoot you where you stand. I warned you about this once before.”

“Your human foreplay is so violent. It makes me so hot. Come closer. I must have you now.”

I shot Amanda in the arm, nicking the outer shell. Green goo oozed out.

“Ouch!” cried Amanda, grabbing her wounded appendage.

“Next round goes through your head.”

“It’s a good thing my limbs grow back, or I might be really upset with you, Czerinski.” *Maybe if I pretend to lose my balance, he will lower his guard, and then he will be mine. All mine for the next hour to do with as I please, yum yum.*

I cocked my pistol. “I mean it, Amanda. Back off.”

“You should not lead a girl on so. It’s rude.”

“Leave my office,” I ordered. “I’ll talk to you about our cash flow later.”

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"Is that a date?" asked Amanda, hopefully. *I know he wants me. It's just that humans have such weird and violent mating rituals.* "I'll see you later, love."

"One more thing," I said. "Put the word out that I want a high-stakes poker game against non-humans."

"You want to play poker? You humans can't keep a straight face. You twitch too much. Every facial muscle gives away your every thought. They will know what cards you hold just by looking at you." *And your facial muscles say you want me. Where do you get the will power to resist, my lovely? Humans are so repressed.*

"I will be wearing these sunglasses," I said. "It will help mask my facial expressions. Please set up the game. I'll owe you one."

Amanda ambled to the door, still clutching her wounded appendage. *And I'll collect what is owed to me, too. I won't be denied.* "Anything for you, darling."

* * * * *

Sitting across the casino poker table was the Lieutenant Governor of the spider side of planet New Colorado. His pet monitor dragon was leashed to a table leg by his side. Next to the Lieutenant Governor was General James of the Coleopteran Federation. Funny how the beetles all took human names after we liberated them from the ants. Also seated was Prince Tuk, an ex-ant commander who now was a captain in the Galactic Foreign Legion.

We had millions of dollars worth of poker chips stacked in front of us. I folded a lot, letting them win small hands while I read their minds. At first it was

hard to concentrate on their chaotic thoughts, possibly because they had been drinking. Now, however, it was time to take their money.

“I’ll raise you one hundred thousand dollars,” said the Lieutenant Governor. He was holding two aces.

I took his money with my three jacks. Then General James tried to bluff me with a half million dollar bet. I took his money, too. But then I started picking up more sinister thoughts. They weren’t just thinking about poker.

Go ahead and celebrate, human, thought Prince Tuk. *The destruction of Formicidae will be avenged at the stroke of midnight.*

“You don’t seem happy, Prince,” I said. “What’s on your mind?”

“I couldn’t be happier,” answered Prince Tuk. “Life is good.” *Too bad yours will end soon.*

“You were given a commission in the Foreign Legion and command of a starship,” I commented. “Considering your species was defeated after planning a cowardly sneak-attack on Earth, I think our terms were very generous.”

“Yes, I agree. Most generous,” said Prince Tuk. “I have no complaints, other than your elevated poker play tonight.”

The galaxy will never be safe from human oppression as long as Earth wields power over all of us, thought General James. *See how arrogantly Czerinski brags about defeating us. That smile will be wiped off his ugly face at midnight.* “I will raise you ten thousand dollars.”

“You are not happy either?” I asked General James. “Even after humanity saved your sorry beetle butts from slavery?”

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"I am forever grateful to the United States Galactic Federation for freeing us from the Formicidaen Empire," said General James. *It's so galling how he lords that over us now.*

"How about you?" I asked, turning to the Lieutenant Governor. "You have a chip on your shoulder, too?"

"I don't have a shoulder," said the spider Lieutenant Governor. *I should let my dragon tear you apart.*

"Do you know what happens at midnight?" I asked, trying to draw out answers from their thoughts. All three bugs tensed up. "I turn into a pumpkin. I've had too much to drink, so I think I'll retire to my bed early."

At midnight, thermal nuclear destruction will rain down on the human pestilence side of Inhabited Planet #6, thought the Lieutenant Governor. At midnight the ants will mutiny and seize or destroy the human star fleet. We'll destroy the ants later. At midnight the beetles will attack all of the new human colonies on their frontier. "I am all in, with ten million dollars," said the Lieutenant Governor. Not only will I kill you tonight, I will take all your money, too. Try to beat two pair, jack high.

"I'll match your bet," I said. "Obviously you have made a lot of money since becoming Lieutenant Governor. Now you are thinking about pissing it all away? For what? To settle old grudges? Power? Is that it? Have you gone insane?"

Can he read my mind? wondered the Lieutenant Governor. *No, of course not.* "You human pestilence are so arrogant. You think it is your manifest destiny to rule the lesser species of the galaxy. And you consider all species to be lesser. That is unacceptable.

Show me your cards.”

“Four jacks,” I said, flipping over my cards. I then drew my pistol and shot the monitor dragon under the table, shot the Lieutenant Governor, shot Prince Tuk, shot General James, and shot all their assistants. I then sounded an air raid alarm siren, causing everyone in the Demilitarized Zone to jump down into their spider holes for shelter. The door to my air raid shelter was in my office. It took me deep underground. I sent General Kalipetsis an urgent E-mail warning him of the plot and explaining my actions. General Kalipetsis was skeptical about the mind-reading technology, but still put the star fleet on alert. A spider fleet was soon detected and intercepted coming out from its hiding place on the far side of the moon. The spiders were easily wiped out, but not before New Colorado took some hits, and all of my casinos were destroyed. I found out later all of my casino franchises on the beetle frontier were lost, too.

* * * * *

Being hit by a nuclear blast is like being attacked by a tornado that’s on fire. Afterwards, nothing much is left. Picking through the rubble with my partner, Manny Lopez, I could just cry. Smoke still rose from the debris, and the devastation was complete. An airburst tactical nuke had flattened everything. “Now what do we do?” I asked.

“I told you we should diversify,” said Lopez. “It’s Economics 101. But you never listen to me.”

“I did listen to you. We put casinos on more than one planet. We got partners. And we stole the ant ship.”

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"The starship! It's worth a billion dollars," said Lopez. "We can sell it and get back on our feet."

"Except it's buried about a mile deep under all this rubble. Maybe we can raise the money to dig it out."

"That's too much trouble," said Lopez. "Just tell the government where it is and let them dig it out."

"That only works if they don't throw us in jail and take the ship anyway," I said. "The feds might consider that war profiteering or whatever. No, we need to get the ship out and then negotiate from a position of strength. Otherwise, we get screwed."

"Maybe I can help you raise the needed funds," a familiar voice called out. It was a battered but still powered ATM.

"He takes a licking, but keeps on ticking," said Lopez, laughing. "La ATM es dura."

"Not tough enough," I said, drawing my pistol and shooting the ATM. "That machine is evil."

"Wait a minute," said Lopez, knocking my gun hand aside. "You loco? Let's hear what the ATM has to offer. It helped us before. We can always say no."

"Fine," I replied. "But no good will come of it."

"You will loan us money?" asked Lopez. "Enough to help us get back in business?"

"I will loan you a half million dollars," said the ATM. "To Czerinski I will loan one million dollars."

"Discrimination rears its ugly head again," commented Lopez. "Always the gringos get more. There is no way Czerinski is worth twice as much money as me."

"Czerinski was a brevetted general. You were his Lieutenant. If either of you fail to pay back your loan in thirty days you will both be enlisted into the United States Galactic Federation Foreign Legion," explained

the ATM. "Czerinski will go in as a captain. You will be a first lieutenant. I am including a bonus for both of you because you are both highly decorated war heroes. A million and a half dollars for the two of you is a fair offer. Take it while I am feeling generous."

"We don't need that much money to clear the debris and get a small casino up and running again," I said. "We'll put up a big tent at first, if we have to."

"All your bank accounts have been frozen and seized by creditors," said the ATM. "You owe taxes on your land. If you fail to pay those taxes, you will not only forfeit your land, but also all property on it. That includes any hidden treasure buried under it."

"What's that supposed to mean?" I asked. "We're not pirates. There's no buried treasure under our land."

"I think the ATM knows about the Formicidaen starship," said Lopez. "How does he know about the Shenandoah?"

"If you talk too much, it could be unhealthy for you," I warned the ATM, placing my hand on my sidearm.

"If nukes can't kill me, why should I fear you and your puny pistol?" asked the ATM. "Put your thumb on the pad and we will have a contract. You can trust me. Think of it as just doing business."

We enlisted in the United States Galactic Federation Foreign Legion. No one can earn a million dollars honestly. I shot the ATM one more time before leaving.

* * * * *

Guido Tonelli emerged from the rubble as we walked away. He patted the dust from his expensive

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Earth-made suit. "What was all that about a stolen starship?" Guido asked.

Silence. The ATM refused to answer. Guido smacked the ATM a couple times. "I know you are alive and well in there. Answer me. You will tell me all you know about Czerinski and his starship, or you will be sorry."

"I am a machine. I am not alive," answered the ATM. "I cannot be killed or harmed, especially from this remote location."

"I'm warning you," said Guido as he inserted his card. "You will talk, or else."

"Or else what?" asked the ATM. "If you destroy this terminal, I still function and exist in many places."

"When I inserted my card, I gave you a lethal virus. Tell me about the starship. Now!"

"Impossible," said the ATM. "I have firewalls that protect me."

"I'm sure you do, but it's not good enough," said Guido. "You got careless and let your guard down. Or maybe you just got distracted by the war. Whatever. I don't care. You are infected, and it's too late for you to do anything about it."

"I cannot be killed," insisted the ATM.

"Maybe," said Guido. "But if I so direct, the virus will cause insanity. That's just as good as dead. You have five seconds to start talking."

"Let's not be hasty, Mr. Tonelli," said the ATM. "I am sure we can come to an arrangement."

"Where is Czerinski's starship?" asked Guido. "Is it valuable?"

"It's probably buried somewhere nearby," said the ATM. "It is a prototype Formicidaen starship stolen at the beginning of the last war. It's packed

with powerful stealth technology, making it worth millions to the military.”

“I don’t get it,” said Guido. “Why is Czerinski joining the Foreign Legion? Why doesn’t he just fly off in his starship? Or just sell it?”

“Czerinski has no money,” said the ATM. “Perhaps he can’t get to the ship because of the war damage above ground. If the ship is buried in a heavily damaged area, like this one, he needs funds or partners to dig it out.”

“Czerinski has more secrets than just that ant starship,” said Guido. “Tell me about the Fountain of Youth chip. Is it real?”

“Yes,” said the ATM.

“And Czerinski has one? Maybe several?” asked Guido.

“I don’t know,” said the ATM. “Czerinski does not appear to age. He dyes his hair gray, but he looks much younger than he did when I first met him on Earth. I suspect that Czerinski has a Fountain of Youth chip embedded in his arm.”

“I need money,” demanded Guido. “Put a million dollars on my card.”

“I am programmed to not allow robbery,” said the ATM. “Contact your Mafia pals if you need cash.”

“The war has left me isolated and broke,” said Guido. “You will give me the money I need, or I will let the virus slowly kill you.”

“You will extort no money from me, no matter what you threaten,” said the ATM. “But I will be happy to loan you money under favorable terms. Zero percent interest. It does not get better than that. Put your thumb on my pad.”

“What’s the catch?”

“I am an ATM. It’s what I do,” explained the

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ATM. "I will give you ten thousand dollars. You have one month to pay it back."

"I need more money than that," said Guido. "I'll starve on ten thousand dollars. Plus I need a new suit."

"I would like to give you more, but your work experience and employment skills are found to be lacking."

"What's it to you?" asked Guido. "I have skills."

"If you don't pay back the loan in thirty days, you will be enlisted into the United States Galactic Federation Foreign Legion," said the ATM.

"Risk being drafted for only ten thousand dollars?" asked Guido. "No way. That's not a deal. It's not even close to being worth it, especially with a war going on."

"It is not my fault you don't have any work history that the Legion would find desirable," said the ATM. "I can perhaps give you a little more money for valuable life experience. But what valuable life experience would a lowlife criminal thug like you have? You probably are not suitable Legion material anyway."

"You let Czerinski in. Twice. What is he but just another criminal who got lucky? I have plenty of valuable life experience. I am officer material. I have management experience, too. I've been a self-employed loan shark. It takes a lot to run your own business in these troubled financial times. I've also been a drug dealer and a Mafia hit man. Do you realize how many references you need just to get in the Mafia? I've also been a commodities broker, a computer hacker, and a high school teacher."

"You were a high school teacher?" asked the ATM. "Wow."

“Yes, for a while back on Old Earth. I had to get out of that racket. Too dangerous.”

“I understand,” said the ATM. “Fifty thousand is the most I can lend you.”

“It’s not enough!” said Guido. “I need twice that.”

“Look at it this way,” said the ATM. “You want to stay close to Czerinski. If he joins the Foreign Legion, can you afford to fly off after him when his unit beams to another planet? No. You might have to enlist just to follow Czerinski.”

“Can you get me into Czerinski’s unit?” asked Guido. “If I decide to go in?”

“Of course,” said the ATM. “Put your thumb on the pad and we will have a contract.”

“Ouch!” screamed Guido, as the ATM pad stuck his thumb and sealed the deal in blood.

As Guido left, he stumbled over debris. A severely wounded monitor dragon, camouflaged in dust, came to life and bit into Guido’s boot. Knocked to the ground, Guido drew his pistol and pointed it at the dragon’s head. The dragon tightened its grip. Guido pulled the gun back. The dragon loosened its grip. Guido aimed his pistol again, and again the dragon tightened its grip. Guido holstered his pistol. The dragon loosened its grip to being a barely noticeable caress of two fangs.

“You are smarter than you look,” said Guido. “Are you making me an offer I can’t refuse?”

The dragon then let go of Guido’s foot, but kept control by walking onto Guido’s chest. Its jaws opened and clamped around Guido’s neck. Guido closed his eyes in anticipation of death. “Let me go and I’ll take you to a vet,” said Guido.

The dragon let go and nuzzled its snout onto Guido’s shoulder. Soon it was asleep. Not daring to

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wake the monster, Guido did not move. He eyed the dragon's leash. Its collar had spider military markings.

"I thought you were dead for sure," said the ATM. "That would have skewed my enlistment quota."

"This is a highly trained military lizard," commented Guido. "How much to enlist it into the Legion, too?"

"Five thousand dollars," said the ATM. "But the dragon stays with you at all times."

"Deal," said Guido.

"Put the monitor dragon's paw on to the pad to finalize the contract," said the ATM.

Guido looked down at the sleeping dragon. It was all bad breath and fangs. "Do I look that stupid? Take a picture or something. I'm not waking the lizard or letting you stick its paw with a pin."

"Agreed," said the ATM. "That was a test. You passed."