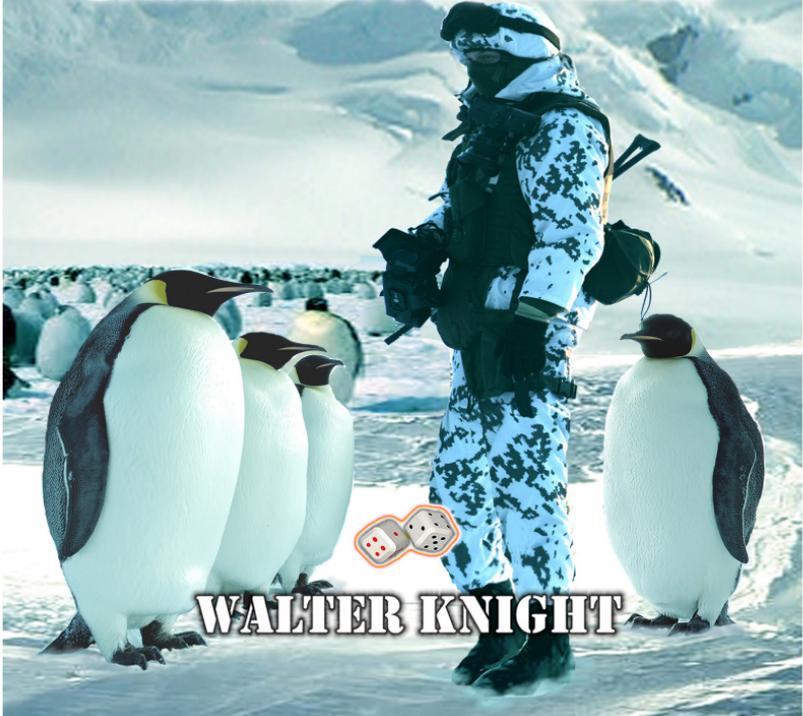




AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGIONS

BOOK 13

SALESMAN FROM MARS



WALTER KNIGHT

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

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SALESMAN FROM MARS



by
Walter Knight

The inmates are running the asylum as Donald Crisp the Third takes over as the main character in the ongoing space opera featuring thrills, chills, and spills in the United States Galactic Foreign Legion. With General Manny Lopez calling the shots, things can only go from inane to insane – and Czerinski just throws up his hands as Donald Crisp charges ineptly onto the scene.

A salesman from a long line of salesmen, Crisp is down on his luck and short on cash. Leave it to a USGF Foreign Legion recruitment ATM to make a deal he can't refuse ... a little loan with big consequences.

Crisp and his buddies, former Microsoft engineer Tony Pierce and former spider miner Shaky Jake, find themselves enlisted in the USGF Foreign Legion. Czerinski's never one to give up on a grudge, so the three take the chill off at planet New Colorado's South Pole, and later make a big splash in croc-infested Caldera Lake.

Crisp's ineptitude shines as he practices his salesman charms on the eternally irate spider commander. Oranges for scorpions, semi-sentient penguins, biting Blue Lizards, and ghosts from the past all make life difficult for Crisp as he does his best to survive while trying to escape the sharp edge of the Grim Reaper's scythe. Despite all his near misses, the Grim Reaper doesn't give up, and neither do the laughs in this thirteenth installment of the whacky military space opera.

AMERICA'S GALACTIC FOREIGN LEGION

Book 13: Salesman From Mars

*by
Walter Knight*

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~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
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Book 14: Embassy War

Novella related to the series

Vampire in the Outfield



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I dedicate ***America's Galactic Foreign Legion*** – ***Book 14: Salesman from Mars*** to American hero and explorer Elisha Kent Kane.

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CHAPTER 1

My name is Donald Crisp the Third. I never thought I would end up in the United States Galactic Federation Foreign Legion, but sometimes life spins out of control. I am a salesman and come from a long line of salesmen. My dad was a salesman, as was my granddad, my great granddad, and my great-great granddad. They got rich selling habitat domes on five-acre lots during the Martian real estate boom. I got nothing. They spent my inheritance long ago. All I got was a family legacy of salesmanship.

With this proud lineage of sales in my blood, I was confident my future was bright, and I could make my fortune anywhere, no matter how distant or barren the planet. However, sometimes reality does not match dreams.

Broke and desperate, I borrowed money from my dad and booked fourth-class passage to the frontier planet of New Colorado. Truth be told, my dad was glad to see me go. I had no money on my card, but hey, a good salesman does not need money. All I needed was something to sell, and suckers to sell to. Unlike my dad, an honest man of great integrity, I had no problem casting about for suckers.

The New Phoenix Spaceport terminal on Planet New Colorado was crowded with soldiers, tourists, and business people. Occasionally, a hideous spider-like alien scampered by. They hissed at each other, but I picked up bits and pieces of English from my translation device. Most spiders lived on their own half of the planet to the north, but commerce was

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increasing. The United States Galactic Federation and the spider Arthropodan Empire shared New Colorado. Their armies faced each other in a fragile truce across the Demilitarized Zone. A few spiders emigrated south and became USGF citizens. Many traveled freely, conducting business and trade across the border.

“How smart can aliens be?” I asked myself, following two spider soldiers. They appeared primitive. I eavesdropped on their conversation by following close. They talked about an infestation of crocodiles at a resort called Caldera Lake. *How odd.* My clandestine surveillance ended suddenly when I got too close. Wouldn't you know it, the damned spiders have eyes in the back of their head! I abruptly slammed into the larger spider soldier, the one with all the impressive medals and ribbons on his uniform. Obviously he was a commander. He grabbed me by the front of my shirt and lifted me up for a better examination.

“Human pestilence, what do you want?” shouted the spider. “Are you another pickpocket? We have laws for your sort here on New Colorado. Your days are numbered!”

“My fine sir,” I replied. “I do beg your pardon, but I am no common thief. I did not mean to accost you, nor was I attempting to pick your pockets. It is just that I was overhearing your problems with crocodiles. You know, we don't have such problems on Old Earth.”

“Is that so?” asked the spider commander, setting me down abruptly. “You've killed all the croc vermin on Old Earth? It is about time!”

“Oh, indeed no, general, sir. Crocodiles are on the Endangered Species List. They cannot be hunted or molested in any way. Excuse me, but my name is

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Donald Crisp the Third. My friends call me Don. It's fortunate you ran into me. This is your lucky day."

"*You* ran in to *me!*" corrected the spider commander. "It is never a lucky day to be accosted by you human pestilence rabble!"

"I can solve your crocodile problem," I advised, reaching into my backpack.

"Not likely," scoffed the spider commander. "Those crocs are a protected species here on New Colorado too. At Caldera Lake, tourists from the hotel casino resorts go out for a swim, and what happens? The crocs eat them! One death roll, and you have one less cash-paying tourist. I am telling you, the crocs are getting fat, and the game warden refuses to do anything about it!"

"That's not good," I commented. "Don't you use anti-crocodile repellent? We all pack croc repellent with sun blocker when we go to the beach back on Old Earth."

"There is such a thing?" asked the spider commander. "Now I find out about croc repellent? Look at my claw. It still has not fully grown back from my first swim at Caldera Lake!"

"I just happen to have some croc repellent on me," I said, producing two large tea bags from my backpack. "These anti-croc bags are guaranteed to ward off crocs, or your money back."

The spider commander snatched the bags and sniffed them. "It smells like tea," he commented, checking the label. "The Lipton Company manufactures croc repellent?"

"Yes, these bags do have a pleasant smell," I agreed, maintaining my salesman smile as I took the tea bags back. My perfectly capped teeth were an asset I was always quick to show off when doubted. "I

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am glad you warned me about the crocs. These are my last two anti-croc repellent bags. Obviously, I will need them when I go for a swim.”

“Where can I purchase more anti-croc repellent?” asked the spider commander. “I have never seen this product advertised on your human pestilence Satellite TV.”

“New Colorado does not have croc repellent yet,” I advised somberly. “Now that I see the need, I think I am going to make a fortune importing it. I am in your debt for pointing out the need. How can I ever repay you for providing this valuable information?”

“How about giving me your last two anti-croc bags?” asked the spider commander.

“Give?” I asked. “I don’t think so. I am a human pestilence of limited means. But, I’ll tell you what. Because you are a personal friend, I will sell you my last two bags of anti-croc repellent for five hundred dollars.”

The spider commander drew a large jagged combat knife from a sheath, holding it to my throat. “You would cheat me?” he asked.

“No,” replied, hastily. “Whatever do you mean?”

“I will not pay a penny more than two hundred dollars,” insisted the spider commander.

“Two hundred and fifty dollars is as low as I can go,” I insisted. “These are the only two anti-croc repellent bags on the whole planet. The price is only so low because you are my first customer and a dear friend. Networking is the key to marketing. I am counting on you to inform all your friends and associates of my fine product. I’ll even give you a ten-percent kickback on any database business you send my way!”

“Deal,” agreed the spider commander, snatching

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my tea bags. He swiped his card on my notepad, completing the transaction.

“Would you be interested in buying a limited warranty?” I asked. “You will get your money back if the croc repellent does not work.”

“What?” asked the spider commander. “I do not need no stinking limited warranty. You already promised my money back if it does not work.”

“Quite right. You are a shrewd business spider. I can see I am going to have to keep on my toes around you spiders.”

Our business concluded, we shook hand and claws and parted.

* * * * *

I sat at the spaceport bar, celebrating my newfound good fortune, ordering drinks and my first decent meal in quite some time. All was good in the world. Those spider rubes were easy pickings. A dusty young spider sat down beside me. Another rube, I figured, and nodded politely. “My name is Donald Crisp the Third,” I announced cheerfully, all smiles. I extended my hand. “I am in sales. What business are you in?”

“I just got back from prospecting in the North Territory,” advised the young spider. “My name is Shaky Jake.”

“An interesting name,” I commented. “I believe ‘Shaky Jake’ to be a proud drinking man’s name from Old Earth! How did you come by it?”

“I was named after my dad’s stubborn mule from back in the day,” replied Shaky Jake. “That is me all over. I am too stubborn to stop prospecting for gold, even though the Mother Load was likely mined out

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years ago.”

“Can I buy you a drink?” I asked.

“Yes, of course,” answered Shaky Jake. “I never turn down free drinks.”

“You have mules on New Colorado?” I asked, conversationally. “Sounds like you have all the comforts of home.”

“Almost all your human pestilence vermin have been seeded here on New Colorado,” advised Shaky Jake. “But why you brought anything as stubborn as mules across the galaxy, I will never figure out.”

“Mules are independent and hardy, a trait most fitting our adventurous pioneers and the pioneer spirit,” I advised. “Did you say there is gold up North? Tell me about the gold.”

“Do not get your hopes up,” cautioned Shaky Jake. “Prospecting up North is cold, hard, thankless work I would not wish on anyone. Most of you gold bugs are killed during the first winter.”

“I’m going anyway,” I announced. “I am not afraid of Father Winter. My motto is ‘always follow the money.’ But I need a guide to show me around. Are you going back?”

“Maybe.”

“How much would you charge to drive me North?”

“It is a rough road, that North Highway,” commented Shaky Jake. “But I spent all my gold nuggets, so it’s about time to go back. You can hitch a ride with me for one hundred dollars.”

“All I can afford is fifty,” I replied.

“Seventy-five,” countered Shaky Jake. “I usually don’t like company, but you seem a decent enough sort for a human pestilence.”

“Deal!” I exclaimed. We shook hand and claw.



CHAPTER 2

Crossing the border into the Arthropodan Empire was uneventful but ominous. A large sign at the border crossing stated, 'The Emperor welcomes you. Obey all laws or you will be shot. Have a nice day.' The smiley face drawn on the sign had spider fangs. Down the road, a smaller sign warned, 'Do not pick up human pestilence hitchhikers. 25 credit penalty per human pestilence for first time offense.' Another sign advised, 'Do not feed the wolves or make unnecessary stops. Carry a sanitation bucket if you have to relieve yourself.'

The North Highway passed through a long stretch of thick forest. Scattered along the way were the remnants of destroyed Legion armored vehicles and tanks from a battle long past. Obviously these woods were once fiercely contested. I assume the spiders won. We did not linger. The woods spooked me. We drove all day, finally stopping at a small diner and inn at a wide spot in the road called Battle Creek.

"Aren't you two an interesting sight?" commented an old spider grill cook. "A human pestilence and a spider traveling together? Did you just bail out of jail together or what? You two look like a felony about to happen. Maybe I should call the sheriff."

"This is one of my dad's pals, Battle Creek Dick," advised Shaky Jake, making introductions. "He is a smart-ass, and older than the North Highway itself."

"I am hitchhiking north to make my fortune," I advised, shaking hand Battle Creek Dick's claw.

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"Crisp paid for the ride," corrected Shaky Jake. "Of course he is not really a hitchhiker. That is illegal." Shaky Jake smacked me with his claw. "What are you doing, spreading rumors like that? Trying to get me into trouble?"

"Sorry," I replied. "Can I have some water with my burger?"

"Nope," answered Battle Creek Dick. "The well went dry. I have to either drill deeper, or dig a new well."

"Don't forget to water-witch before you dig," I advised. "It will cost you to get an experienced water-witcher, but in the long run you will save time, aggravation, and expense."

"Water-witching?" asked Battle Creek Dick. "I have heard rumors you human pestilence can do that, but I thought it was all made up lies and stories."

"We take our dowsing quite seriously," I advised. "It takes a special skill just to select a proper divining rod, and to use it properly. Since you're a friend of Shaky Jake, and a friend of Shaky Jake is a friend of mine, I'll make you a proper divining rod that I guarantee will locate pools of underground water."

"How much?" asked Battle Creek Dick, suspicious. Obviously he did not want to part with his hard earned credits easily.

"For free of course," I replied, feigning shock at the thought that I would charge a friend in need. "Free, as long you let us stay at your motel, and eat this meal for free."

"That seems fair," replied Battle Creek Dick, still sounding hesitant.

"Fair? It's more than just fair. It would cost hundreds of dollars to get a certified county-approved

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water-witcher up here on such short notice. They charge union rates! And then there's permits and fees. Your Emperor wants his due, does he not? Besides, the good water-witchers are always booked up for months. You never know who is really good or bad until it's too late. But because you are a friend in need, I'll find you water for free. And after I find your water, I'll even let you keep the divining rod so you can find water for your neighbors too. You'll actually be making money after I throw in the free divining rod, because you can charge your neighbors for finding water."

"I do not have neighbors," advised Battle Creek Dick. "That is why I moved to Battle Creek, to get away from the crowds!"

"I don't much like crowds either."

Soon we were outside looking for a proper stick. I took a knife to a willow branch, splitting it down the middle to form a 'Y.' Immediately upon taking hold of the two ends, the divining rod jerked violently, pulling me on a direct course to the back yard of the diner. At the tree line, the divining rod plunged into the ground.

"Right here!" I announced. "There is lots of water down there, I guarantee it!"

"That is exactly where I was going to dig anyway," advised Battle Creek Dick, disappointed.

"Well, that just goes to show you have naturally good judgment. I commend you for that. It's rare these days to find someone with your good common sense. The cities are full of educated fools, but you didn't let going to school interfere with learning common sense. You were born with common sense!"

"That is true," commented Battle Creek Dick. "I hate schools, too confining."

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"Take us to our rooms," I ordered, changing the subject. "We need two rooms. Shaky Jake snores, and I need my beauty sleep. Do you have TV?"

"Yes, we even have Cable," boasted Battle Creek Dick.

"I thought Cable TV was illegal," I said in a hushed voice. "Friends don't let friends watch Cable."

"Not in the Empire," advised Shaky Jake. "The Cable Guy provides us spiders with all the Cable TV we want."

"That's dangerous stuff," I commented, wanting to drop the matter. "Give us an early wake up call. We don't want to dawdle. The gold fields of the North are calling us!"

* * * * *

Just before we reached the gold fields of Finisterra City, we stopped for a break to stretch our legs. It seemed stretching legs was especially important to spiders. Shaky Jake creaked and groaned with every move as he stretched and adjusted his exoskeleton segments. He went through a whole series of limbering exercises. I spent my time cutting branches and making more divining rods.

"You are wasting your time doing that," advised Shaky Jake. "The New Mississippi River runs right through the middle of Finisterra. They have no water shortage."

"I am a salesman," I boasted. "I can sell sand in the desert if need be. You will see!"

"I am just saying."

"I know. I didn't mean to snap. Don't worry. I have a plan. I will sell my divining rods, or my name isn't Donald Crisp the Third. And, you will help."

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I stood up on the roof of our vehicle and called out to passersby. “Gold-witchers for sale! Get your gold-witchers now while the limited supply lasts! Get yours now for only five hundred imperial credits, guaranteed or your money back!”

“Gold-witchers?” scoffed Shaky Jake, loudly, as a crowd gathered. “There’s no such thing!”

“Technically they’re called gold divining rods,” I advised. “I’ve noticed over the years there is always a Doubting Thomas in every crowd that has to be proven ignorant of what Old Earth science has to offer! Gather around folks while I prove gold divining rods can make you rich beyond your wildest dreams. All that gold is out there just begging for you to find it!”

“There is more than one doubter,” remarked another spider prospector, unslinging his assault rifle. “We have laws for your sort. Undesirables and vagrants are illegal here on New Colorado.”

“Someone call the sheriff!” yelled a spider from the back of the crowd.

“Get a rope!” added a human miner.

“He is a crook,” yelled a female spider. “He is the kind who would piss on your leg and tell you it is raining!”

“You would squander your chance at untold riches even before giving me the chance to prove myself?” I shouted back as the crowd pressed in around the vehicle. “You! The original Doubting Thomas. Take this stick. Hold on tight with both hands! Claws! Whatever!”

Shaky Jake hesitated until a nearby spider

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nodded. "Sure, why not? I will play along!" Shaky Jake said loudly enough for everyone to hear. "We can hang this human pestilence crook after I prove him a fraud and a fool!"

Immediately after gripping the divining rod, Shaky Jake was pulled across the street and down the block. The crowd excitedly followed. Shaky Jake continued around a corner to the county courthouse, where the divining rod abruptly turned downward into soft dirt. The crowd gathered around, pushing and poking one another to get a better view. The divining rod was stuck in a freshly planted rose garden by the sheriff's office.

"Luck is with you!" I exclaimed, catching up. "Not only have you found gold, but you are already at the courthouse, so you can file your claim!"

"I haven't found anything yet," groused Shaky Jake. Another prospector handed him a shovel. Shaky Jake immediately began digging, rose bushes flying to the side, dirt balls splattering the nearby windows. Soon, a big pot-bellied spider sheriff came bounding down the Courthouse steps to confront Shaky Jake.

"Now, see here!" bellowed the spider sheriff. "There's a whole passel o' vandalism goin' on here. Who do you think you are, destroyin' my roses like that? What is this mob? There is no hangin' scheduled today. Yet, looks like to me a whole bunch o' disorderly conduct goin' on!"

"I'm rich!" announced Shaky Jake, producing gold nuggets, and holding them out for the sheriff and all to see. "I just dug these gold nuggets up! I am hereby declaring this my claim, pending filing!"

The other miners excitedly began digging up the courthouse lawn. The sheriff snatched the nuggets

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and examined them up close. They were indeed small, smooth gold nuggets. “This gold came from a stream bed,” announced the sheriff, but no one was listening. “See how worn smooth by water they are?”

“You can keep those nuggets Sheriff,” replied Shaky Jake, nervously. “Have a few more. I have plenty. I am rich!”

“Don’t think I won’t be lookin’ into this funny business,” advised the spider sheriff, snatching the rest of Shaky Jake’s gold nuggets. “There’s a whole lot of funny business goin’ on here. Attention everyone! Stop diggin’! You are all trespassin’ and committin’ acts of vandalism. Trespassin’ is a capital offense here in the Empire, especially on government property! Disperse now!”

“He just wants the gold for himself!” complained a disgruntled prospector as the crowd moved across the street.

“Not to worry!” I shouted, following the crowd. “I have a hundred more divining rods in my car. There is enough for everyone! I’ll sell them for ... a thousand credits apiece!”

“You promised only five hundred credits apiece earlier,” argued a spider carrying an assault rifle. “Are you trying to cheat us?”

“No, sir!” I answered. “You are quite right. Thank you for correcting my mistake. I did offer these divining rods for only five hundred credits, and I will stick to my original offer, even if it cuts sorely into my meager profits. You are a sharp cookie! I can tell it will be tough doing business with such an intelligent and worldly species as you spiders.”

“Damn straight!” said the armed spider, waving his five hundred credits as a line formed.

“Do you take VISA platinum?” shouted a spider

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trying to cut in line.

"Oh, hell, no," I said. "Do I look like a credit card company?" Everyone laughed at the card holder.

"Take your platinum card and get to the back of the line," someone sniped.

"It's all a fraud!" announced a human prospector from across the street at the sheriff's office. "Don't trust that crook! He's a con man."

"Shut up human pestilence!" replied Shaky Jake. "You human pestilence just want to steal our gold for yourselves like you always do! I am on to your evil ways!"

"He is right!" added another spider, jostling for position in line. "Those human pestilence are always stealing our gold, but today they do not have the Legion here to help. Finally we have an honest human pestilence who will sell us the divining rods we need!"

I quickly sold all one hundred divining rods. That added up to a lot of credits. I stashed the cash in my fur cap and paid off Shaky Jake for his excellent acting. We prepared to skedaddle out of town. One of the spiders followed me down the street.

"Hey you, salesman!" he called out. "Want a job?"

"Nope," I said. "I'm going on vacation."

"I can give you a job that will take you quickly out of town," advised the spider. "I know that interests you, especially after ripping off all those dumb miners. At least, you better be interested in getting out of town quick."

"I'm listening," I replied, nervously. "Those divining rods have a money back guarantee you know. I wouldn't cheat anyone."

"Whatever. The job is simple. I own a long haul

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truck and trailer. All you have to do is drive across the New Gobi Desert to Lopez Farms, pick up a load of oranges, and transport them to Scorpion City for sale. We will split the profits 50-50.”

“Scorpions eat oranges?” I asked. “I don’t think so.”

“Marketing research indicates scorpions love oranges,” advised the spider. “They all have sweet fangs. This will be the first delivery to the scorpions. I will be rich!”

“What’s the catch?” I asked. “Why don’t you drive?”

“I am a spider,” he explained. “The scorpions do not like spiders. I would draw too much attention. They are just as likely to eat me as the oranges. The spiders won’t hassle you human pestilence at the border. So, what do you say? Are you ready to make some easy money?”

“Are you sure scorpions don’t eat humans too?” I asked.

“Not usually.”

“No way,” I decided. “I don’t even know how to drive a truck.”

“I do!” advised Shaky Jake. “I even have a driver’s license. We are partners.”

“That sheriff is going to be hunting you both real soon,” cautioned the spider. “If he does not arrest you for selling those phony dowser rods, he will pick you up for the wanted posters I saw at the Post Office.”

“What wanted posters? I’m not wanted!”

“Don’t worry,” advised the spider, in a hushed conspiratorial tone. “I tore them down for you. We are friends in business, remember?”

“I don’t even know you.”

The spider handed me a wanted poster. It had

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my identification card photo on it, announcing in large print, 'Donald Crisp III, wanted dead or alive, preferably dead, for selling defective products, to wit: life endangering defective anti-croc repellent. Said human pestilence and felon Donald Crisp III is to be considered armed and dangerous, and presumed willing to use deadly force to resist arrest. Do not take chances. Kill him!' The Imperial Warrant was signed by the Supreme Commander of the New Gobi Desert & Caldera Lake Military District.

"I'll take the job," I announced. "We will leave now!"

"Good choice," advised the spider. "Next they would have put your picture on the postage stamps. You do not want postal employees looking for you."

"I'm driving first," advised Shaky Jake. "Remember, we are partners!"

