

ZARZOK AND HIS CREATURES V. HUMANITY

“Now gather round and listen up, kids, because I’m about to tell you a story from my childhood. Back before I was a wise old man, I was just a little boy like you. Ah, the days of my youth, like the scent of fresh lemons. That halcyon summer, everyone in school was talking about just one thing: *Zarzok*. He was a villainous phenomenon, and he was sweeping the nation. But my story takes place after the rampage: His trial and punishment. I may have forgotten a detail or two, but this is pretty much exactly how it went. More or less:”

The whole world was on the edge of its seat as the date drew nearer and nearer and finally arrived. Almost every manufactured TV was tuned to channel #2 for the public trial. On the defendant’s seat was the Mad King himself in all his glory. His evil crown was aglow with the lights of the paparazzi. The bailiff made him remove the Cloak of the Damned due to being a fire hazard, but he clung to his black gauntlet. It was melded to his skin, he explained.

“All rise for the honorable judge.” A voice called. The jury, the many participants in the gallery, and the lawyers all stood. Eyes turned to Zarzok, who crossed his arms. “Zarzok.” “I rise for no mortal!” he pronounced. The judge spoke up, “Mr. Zarzok, rise immediately or I’ll hold you in contempt. Are you ready for prison?” Zarzok grumbled and got up. And kept getting up. He was actually floating upwards now. “Grahaha! You should ask if the prism is ready for ME!” “That’s enough Mr. Zarzok, please lower.” From above the whole room, he yelled down “I lower for no mortal!” So the trial continued with him up there.

Prosecution came forward, a humble little man named Dog Wood, attorney at law. He was a prosecutor’s prosecutor, in the game so long that he had seen it all. Until today. He felt way out of his league. “Are you ready to make your opening statements Mr. Wood?” The judge asked. Dog said nothing. “Mr. Wood?” The prosecutor wiped away a tear, a terrible reminder of his humanity. How could a mortal man ever match up to an evil king? Still, he solemnly rose to the occasion. “I’m ready to give it my best shot. That’s all I can do now, for the world’s sake.” “Very well. Begin.” As soon as Mr. Wood opened his mouth, an objection came from on high. “Did I say you could begin, insolent man?” Zarzok shouted. Dog had to fight away tears as the bailiff got a ladder to bring the evil one down. Someone had to fix this mess.

“Your honor,” Mr. Wood began, but he was interrupted anon. Not by Zarzok, but his titular creatures. They had flooded the courtroom, and now were sitting in the stands. There were dozens of them, fish-beasts, bug-people, and lizard-freaks. The Mighty Monstro himself stood and shook a gnarled claw for his ruler. Everyone was shouting and yelling. The court was ablaze in sound. “Silence, silence,” the judge yelled, pounding the gavel. Monstro’s hand grew three times in size, with wickedly long talons. “You cannot silence the Mighty Monstro! For, I have the Claws of Sin.” The judge scoffed. “Well, I have here the Hammer of Justice.” Monstro recoiled. “No... It was said to be lost to time...” The room finally quieted down. This judge guy meant business.

Thanks to his false starts, Dog had built confidence. “Ladies and gentlemen and creatures of the jury, today, what we have before us is evil itself on trial. Zarzok is not like us mortals, he knows no kindness or decency. Today, I aim to prove his terribleness without a reasonable doubt. Today, we will decide if Evil has a place in our world. And, tonight, hopefully, we can sleep soundly knowing Justice has prevailed.” Everyone around the world, or at least everyone with cable, cheered for Mr. Wood. It seemed like soon, the world would be saved. Not by a superhero, but a sweaty little lawyer. Yet, unbeknownst to all, a scheme was brewing on the sidelines... Zarzok’s loyal Lizardo, the evil toymaker, was at work on something to get his boss out of this pickle...

Zarzok was finally brought to the floor. His public defense attorney scribbled nervously in her notes. If Mr. Wood was sweaty, this woman, Ms. Raleigh was drenched. She had just gotten out of law school and *this* was the first big case she was stuck with? All her law practice was defending liquor-store shoplifters and parking violators, not Evil incarnate! Still, she tried her best to gather up a defense statement. “Everyone, what I’m going to show today is uhm. My client is not only not evil, he is uh. He is pretty good. My client is actually a very intelligent fellow, he even has a degree in--” ZAAAAAAAAAAP! Zarzok disintegrated her with lasers. “Blockheaded bimbo, how dare you call me YOUR client! I can defend myself!”

So, Zarzok defended himself. “Can you please tell the jury why you should be declared innocent, succinctly?” “Muahaha, innocent? Me? I think not.” Everyone in the jury glanced at each other. *Was he calling himself guilty? And what happened to that lady? Why did she disappear like that? Much to think about...* The judge sighed. “Mr. Zarzok are you pleading guilty...?” “MY NAME IS MAD SCIENTIST-KING ZARZOK OF THE OTHER REALM!” There was a great guffaw from the crowd of creatures. That Mad King really knew how to assert his dominance! There was such a bedlam in the audience that no one realized when a single child approached the stand. Before the jury, a little girl with big sad eyes pleaded everyone to listen.

“What is it, little girl?” The judge asked. “This is highly unusual, but if you have something to say, you can go ahead and say it. You seem like a good kid.” She looked up with her big sad eyes, big and sad. A single, big, sad, tear rolled down her cheek. “Oh, friends, I really don’t envy you. I guess you’ve all lost your faith in others. All I ask of you is, please, don’t be cruel. You don’t know this man, but you might hate him just ‘cuz he’s not like you or I. Well, Mr. Zarzok, I have something to tell you: I’m not afraid of you! So put down that scary black gauntlet!” The Mad King had raised his weapon to obliterate the child but gave pause. Out of confusion, probably.

“You’re not afraid?” “No, ‘cuz I know how nice of a king you really are. Remember when I fell down into your world, through a big portal in my cafeteria? I tumbled into your realm, so afraid of all the creatures there. But you said ‘No, creatures, do not harm this child. She is a bird fallen to land. A butterfly with a broken wing. We must save her.’ And you got me back to me parents. Oh, thank you so much mister.” The girl ran up and hugged Zarzok. The jury went “Awwww.” Little did they know, she ran up to whisper a secret to the evildoer-- She wasn’t a little girl at all, but one of Lizardo’s automatons. And there was a bomb implanted behind those big, sad eyes.

“Okay, okay everyone, be calm,” the judge said. The crowd, creatures and humans alike, were driven to tears. But now, in the middle of the room, a countdown started inside the evil toy. **10.** People were crying and throwing up. **9.** The hammer of justice prompted them to sit. **8.** The judge spoke, “Let’s get back on track. Lunch is in ten so we need to start wrapping up, okay?” **7.** Dog Wood stood and prepared to make his case: **6.** “Everyone, I know the girl is very cute, but we still must listen to the word of law. Only by working together can we find out the truth.” **5.** “And don’t tell me you really believe that story? Can you imagine **this** man returning a lost child?” **4.** Zartzok had actually started levitating away from the blast zone, but subtly lowered when mentioned. **3.** “And a portal? Really, kid? I think you’re confused.” **2.** “Who’s ever heard of a portal opening in a cafeteria? Seriously.” **1.** “Anyways, I call my first witness, Gormalon the Great--” “WAAAAAAAAAAIT!” Zartzok yelled to the room.

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But no explosion came. “Gormalon the Great?” The evil one asked. “I haven’t seen your face in years.” Surely enough, Gormalon the Great had ascended the witness stand. He had the head of a goldfish, but could breathe on land thanks to an ingeniously placed fishbowl. Who came up with such a thing? Then, he spoke, with the sonorous nature of a gentle giant. “And I, yours, Master Zartzok. Five years, methinks.” Was it the jury’s imagination or was there a spark of **feeling** in the Mad King’s eyes? “You were my favorite science experiment I ever conducted, young Gormalon. I grew you from but a homunculus. Now you are a mighty adult, a fully grown and developed person.” Gormalon shook his head. “No, I am not fully grown yet. Your shadow has smothered me all these years I’ve known you. I thought... To leave your company would rid me of the pressure... Alas... You have never left mine memory. Today, I must say goodbye, and become truly grown.” A moment of silence. Tension. Then relief, as Zartzok sighed, “Sobeit.”

Gormalon spoke with his Great voice that tugged at the hearts of billions around the Earth: Every word sang as he told the story of growing up under the Mad Scientist-King’s wing, but never getting the chance to be his own person. The evil deeds forced upon him in villain school didn’t sit right, and he flunked out of prestigious Evil Academy. Then he ran away to become a chocolatier, which cruel Zartzok never accepted. For years he toiled away in the chocolate biz, his passion, but felt unfulfilled knowing he abandoned his only family. Besides, fish couldn’t even eat chocolate. The audience was enraptured with every throes of the story. The narrative ups and downs were beautiful. If he wasn’t a chocolatier, he could easily be a poet.

But it was Zartzok who paid the closest attention. It was only as the long story reached its end that he spoke: “Gormalon, it’s time for this to end.” “What do you mean?” “You were always such a stupid brat.”

Was it finally time? Was father charging the laser blast? Would it be painful? The chocolatier wondered all these things as Zartzok verbally laid into him: His insolence, his foolishness, his bad attitude... But there wasn’t an ounce of hate in his voice. *No, he was forcing those words out, wasn’t he? Why couldn’t father just disintegrate him already like he did that other person?* “I hate you!” Gormalon yelled. But no response came. “No enemies of our King will speak to him

like that!" Shouted Mighty Monstro. "Get him, boys!" He called forth his gang of creatures and they drew their swords. "Abandoning your own father!" The loyal Lizardo scoffed, setting his evil toy army to 'Kill Mode.' Suddenly, Gormalon was surrounded.

"SILLEEEENNNCCEEEE!" Zarzok screamed. "YOU CLAIM LOYALTY, YET TURN YOUR WEAPONS ON YOUR OWN BROTHER?! WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?!" He let loose a mighty laser, wide enough to cleave the whole courtroom in half. But, in the last possible moment, Gormalon dove in and took the entire brunt of the ZAP! Glass shattered and sprinkled to the floor. Gormalon the Great was Gormalon the Gone. "Gee boss, we're sorry."

"Sorry..." Zarzok repeated under his breath. Dog Wood, in awe of the scene, realized this was his opportunity. "So there you have it ladies and gentlemen of Earth. He has ruled with such great evil that his own goons deign familicide. Now, Mad Scientist-King Zarzok of the Other Realm, do you admit your wrongdoing?" "Indeed I do, Mr. Wood. If only I realized the error of my evil ways sooner, my son would still be alive. He did not deserve the fate he met today. Nor did he deserve those long years as my subject. Nor did he deserve anything but the very best from me, his father. Maybe I am not better than you mortals afterall... Send me to jail, jury, for I am guilty." He bowed his head, even though he'd never lower for a mortal. "Evil has lost," Mr. Wood declared. And billions of people joined in cheer for this decisive blow that surely saved the world from harm, from now until eternity. Unbeknownst to them all, Dog didn't share that sentiment. All he'd really done was beat down a grieving father. In truth, it made him feel quite sad.

There was a thirty minute recess, both for lunch and for the jury to make a unanimous decision. But they didn't need that long. No, they returned with their verdict in *thirty seconds*. Yes, it was an easy decision for them. The world held its collective breath. Champagne bottles were primed. Confetti was set to drop. Every mouth was forming the syllable "Guil-" to say in unison. And, then, the judge declared that the honorable jury found Zarzok "Innocent."

The Mad King's jaw was on the floor. "I... Innocent..." The judge, the bailiff, the billions watching from home, the humans in the audience, and even the onlooking creatures, from Lizardo, to the Mighty Monstro, to Zob Mondo and even Darth Icky were shocked. Dog walked up to him. "Mr. Zarzok, the jury couldn't find it in their hearts to sentence you to prison. Because that would be our own kind of *human* evil. Although nicer dressed than the Other Realm's, it's evil all the same. I implore you, take pity on yourself. Scoop up the shards of your broken life and put them back together into something new. Something stronger. Something *good*..."

"ALL THINGS GOOD SHALL SUFFER! LIZARDO, DETONATE THE BOMB!"

But in that fleeting moment, Mr. Wood wasn't scared. Sure, all that was good shall suffer. But it was better than being evil and feeling nothing at all. "I only ask that you live with it," were his last words before being blown to smithereens live on TV. The Cloak of the Damned flew into the courthouse window and rushed the Evil Zarzok away. Everyone else died.

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