

Guadalupe Hidalgo Is a Dirty Liar

by **Fiberglass**

Great, I thought.

I ducked into the bedroom, pulled on my dressing gown, and stepped into my slippers. While crossing the living room, I stepped on a hot-sauce packet, the contents of which sprayed all over the front of the love seat. I stopped to frown at the mess for a moment before continuing to the door.

When I opened it, five strange figures greeted me. They looked kind of like enormous potatoes with human-like arms and legs. The purplish skin of their bodies was pitted and wrinkled. *Rotten* potatoes. They possessed no facial features other than gaping maws with needle-like teeth. They swayed slightly in the breeze as if they were mere husks at its mercy. Whatever they were, it was clear they meant business.

I pushed the hair off my forehead and looked up and down the street, but there was no one else around to witness this outlandish tableau.

The one nearest me scraped its boots I had just gotten out of the shower when there was a knock at the door.

assertively on the straw mat and then flipped open a notepad and addressed me. Its voice sounded like what you'd expect from a den of articulate wasps. "Are you Jerry Goldsmith?"

I narrowed my eyes. The wind picked up, and a dead leaf skidded down the sidewalk, making a sound like a dryad unzipping his trousers.

"Yes."

It produced a pair of handcuffs from a pouch on its belt and extended them toward me with black-gloved hands. "You're under arrest."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I'm afraid you're going to have to come with us."

"What's this all about?"

"This will go much more smoothly if you don't resist, sir."

"Who are you? By what authority are you doing this?"

Truncheons appeared in the fists of its associates.

"All of your questions will be answered soon, if you'll just cooperate."

I sighed and proffered my wrists. This was certainly not what I had in mind for the morning. Not even close. Which is to say it was not drinking pineapple mimosas, listening to Deerhoof, and flipping through old issues of *Dragon* magazine.

It slapped the cuffs on me and led me to a tumbrel parked on the street. It was hitched to the skeleton of a horse. Satisfied that I was going to come quietly, the others put away their weapons and surrounded the conveyance as I climbed inside. The lead creature snapped its fingers, and the horse moved into the street, pulling me towards town and whatever fate awaited me there.

We stopped in front of a red-brick building in the square that I had never noticed before. I was led past a statue of a blindfolded Buddy Ebsen, up the stairs, and into a wood-paneled courtroom lit by braziers. The ceiling was at least twenty feet high. The jury box was filled out with more of the potato monsters. A human female sat at a table at the front, perusing a stack of papers. The judge gave me a stern look from behind his huge desk and fiddled with his gavel. To the right of his desk, there was a wrought-iron dock with a gigantic chair behind it. It was like something out of a fairy tale.

I was instructed by my captor to sit opposite the woman. She looked up and smiled mirthlessly. She looked down again and cleared her throat.

“My name’s Wendy. I’m the prosecuting attorney.”

“Where’s the defense attorney?”

“Oh, there won’t be one. This isn’t that kind of a trial.”

“What kind of trial is it?”

“I can tell you don’t know much about the courtroom system.”

“I know there’s supposed to be someone to represent me.”

She pointed to the paper in front of her. “It says here you fought in Vietnam.”

“Yes, I did. But it’s not the Vietnam you’re thinking of. It’s a different one on the other side of the globe. Much less well known.”

She nodded and made some notes on the paper.

“Is that somehow relevant to all of this?” I asked.

“You never know.”

A bailiff in a leather jerkin and breeches set a silver goblet of red liquid in front of me.

“Drink,” he said.

“What is it?”

“Just drink it.”

I lifted the cup and took a sip. It had a sweet taste not unlike fruit punch. The bailiff straightened and crossed his arms, watching to make sure I drank all of it. When I had finished, he took the cup and exited through a door on the far side of the room.

I turned around to find that the gallery was full of spectators. I made eye contact with a few of them, and they all regarded me with reproach. One of the potato monsters closed the doors and strode to the front.

“Okay,” it said. “Let’s get this thing started.”

The judge banged his gavel, and everyone turned to face him.

At this point I intended to protest, as it still wasn’t clear who was behind this nonsense, but I began to feel really strange. My skin felt tight, and when I looked down at my hand I could have sworn that it looked larger than usual.

“Jerry Goldsmith,” the judge said, “you are accused of the unlawful duplication of analog recordings.”

“Say what?”

In the short time it had taken him to say this, my chair had become very uncomfortable. In fact, it was now only capable of supporting one of my buttocks.

The bailiff returned and instructed me to stand, which was a relief. He looked shorter somehow, and I soon realized that I had grown several feet. He led me to the dock, and I sat down in the gigantic chair, which didn’t seem quite so large anymore.

“I seem to have considerably increased in size,” I said.

The judge scowled. “You must be new at this. We administer a growth potion to all accused persons. It makes it harder for them to abscond.”

I had to admit that that made a peculiar kind of sense. In addition to my clearly being too big to fit through the doors, my movements had become clumsy and my limbs fatigued by their newfound immensity.

Wendy picked up a briefcase and approached me.

“Do you recognize this?” she asked. She popped the briefcase open and palmed an object. She cleared her throat and placed it in my hand.

I looked down. It was a cassette tape—thought to me, thanks to my enlarged state, it seemed more like a micro-cassette—with the word *Abacab* scrawled in ballpoint pen on the yellowed label. If memory served, it was of the inexpensive variety that was once available from a drug store chain that no longer existed. The word itself almost certainly referred to Genesis’ 1981 album; the title track began to play inside my skull.

“Can’t say that I do.”

She smirked. “Then how about this one?” She pulled another cassette out of the briefcase. It looked identical to the other one but had *Iron Maiden: Somewhere in Time* written on it. In my head, “Abacab” was replaced by “Sea of Madness.” Seemed appropriate.

“Nope.”

She frowned. “I see. And these?” She handed me two tapes this time. One read *Dare to Be Stupid*, which I recognized as the name of “Weird Al” Yankovic’s rather excellent third album, released in 1985. The other had the title of Belinda Carlisle’s debut solo effort, *Heaven on Earth*, written on it. The driving chords of “Sea of Madness” stepped aside to allow the dreamy instrumentation of “Circle in the Sand” some cerebral airtime.

I was familiar with all four of the albums in question, but I had never seen the tapes she showed me. I owned the officially released versions. I could only assume that I was being accused of dubbing copies of the albums, a practice that was, as I understood it, popular among pre-teens with inadequate allowances.

“What are you getting at?” I asked, feigning ignorance.

“It is illegal to make unauthorized copies of musical recordings. These were found in your locker at your place of employment.”

“First of all, as I said, I’ve never seen any of these tapes before. Second of all, I left that job last year. Third, why were you going through my old locker?”

“We received a tip that you were in possession of the items in question, so we sent a squad to investigate.”

“A whole squad?”

“Can’t be too careful.”

“Who gave you this tip?”

“Guadalupe Hidalgo.”

“What?”

She placed the tapes back in the briefcase and closed it. “Guadalupe Hidalgo.”

“Oh, I heard you the first time, but that’s ridiculous. Guadalupe Hidalgo isn’t a person. It’s a *place*.”

“That’s what historians *want* you to believe.”

“Are you serious?”

“We’re in a court of law, you know.”

“Are we really? It seems like a kangaroo court to me. Or some kind of marsupial anyway.”

“You’re treading very close to contempt, Mr. Goldsmith,” the judge warned, brandishing his gavel as if it were Mjolnir.

“Fine. So, what, all that stuff about the treaty that ended the Mexican-American War is just made up?”

Wendy giggled. “Do you honestly think there was a war between the United States and Mexico? Now you’re the one who’s being ridiculous.”

“It’s historical fact!”

“As they say, pictures or it didn’t happen.”

I shook my head in disbelief. “Okay. Who *is* this guy, then?”

“He’s sitting right back there.” She pointed to a man with Hispanic features in the last row of the gallery. He wore an expensive suit of Italian make. A bandolier was slung across his chest, and he wore a pair of embroidered leather gloves with tassels hanging from them. His hair was styled into a pompadour, and he had a neatly trimmed moustache. He seemed to appreciate the attention he was getting.

“Would you care to join us up here, Mr. Hidalgo?”

He rose and walked to the front of the room, dramatically swishing an epee he had drawn from the scabbard on his belt.

“Guadalupe Hidalgo?” the judge asked.

“The same!” he replied, flourishing his weapon one last time before returning it to its sheath.

“Do you know the accused?”

“Indeed I do. We worked together for two years.”

“We’ve never worked together. You must have me confused with someone else.”

“I am deeply hurt that you don’t remember.”

“There’s nothing to remember. I’ve never seen you before today.”

“Deeply hurt, sir.”

I blew a raspberry. “Okay, for the sake of argument, let’s say that we *did* work together. What were the circumstances under which you became aware that I had illegally copied cassettes in my locker?”

“You showed them to me, of course. You seemed quite proud of yourself. Not only did you steal someone’s intellectual property, but you also found a way to do it on the cheap. I’ve got to hand it to you: you’re truly a criminal mastermind.”

“This is outrageous! I’ve been set up.”

Guadalupe laughed. “What a ludicrous thing to say. What reason would I possibly have for, as you say, setting you up?”

“I don’t know, but I’m going to get the bottom of this.”

“That’s rich. Do you have an alibi?”

“Yes. I haven’t worked there in eight months.”

“That means nothing. You left the evidence in your locker. No one else knew the combination.”

“Someone had to know. Otherwise, they couldn’t reissue the locker to the person who replaced me.”

“The position was left vacant.”

“Why?”

“After a bit of discussion, the management team concluded that your job served no purpose.”

“I could have told you that.”

“Thank you very much, Mr. Hidalgo,” Wendy said. “You’ve provided us with everything we need.”

He smiled, nodded, and gesticulated flamboyantly before returning to his seat.

“An open-and-shut case,” the attorney remarked with a grin. “The best kind.” I was vexed by the amount of pleasure she was deriving from this, but she was probably going to receive a huge bonus, so I couldn’t really blame her.

“We agree,” proclaimed the foreman of the rotten potato jury. “No deliberation necessary.”

“Well,” the judge said, “there’s nothing left to do but pass sentence.”

I looked down at my enormous hands. What was to become of me? Here I was, convicted of a crime I didn’t commit. And a really stupid crime at that. Who gets sent up the river for dubbed cassettes, for crying out loud? I’d probably be thrown in prison for the rest of my life. I’d never have a chance to clean that salsa off the love seat.

“Jerry Goldsmith,” the judge said, raising his gavel, “I condemn you to—”

“That man is innocent!” someone yelled.

Everyone turned to look. The tall, ghostly figure of an old gentleman stood in front of the courtroom doors.

“Who are you?” the judge asked.

“In life, I was Buddy Ebsen. What kind of philistine are you? *The Wizard of Oz*? *The Beverly Hillbillies*? *Matlock*?”

“That wasn’t you,” Wendy remarked. “That was Andy Griffith.”

“Oh, yeah. I get us confused sometimes. I think everyone does. Anyway, there’s even a statue of me out front.”

“I always wondered why that was there,” the judge said, “and why it’s blindfolded.”

“It’s a metaphor!”

“With all due respect, how do you know that Jerry Goldsmith is innocent?”

“Well, for starters, ghosts *know things*. Everyone’s well aware of that. But I’m not going to use that as an explanation. Instead I offer you this: it so happens that I am privy to many facts related to this case.”

The judge set down his gavel. “You may proceed.”

Buddy, resplendent in his spectral wool jacket and silk tie, floated to the front of the room and, with a quick wink, addressed me. “Isn’t it true that you are, in fact, Jerry Goldsmith...the Third?”

“Yes.”

The spectators gasped.

“What does that have to do with anything?” the attorney exclaimed, clearly irritated that her victory could be unraveling.

“What indeed.” He smiled. “The theme song to my detective drama *Barnaby Jones* is one of the most celebrated in television history. As with anything of this sort, there are those who,

due to jealousy and other factors, are trying to take that away, to undermine it, to eradicate it from our collective memory.”

I couldn't help but notice that Guadalupe was showing signs of agitation and nervousness. He removed his gloves and cast them to the floor, drawing unwanted attention to himself.

“You see,” he continued, “the composer of the theme was Jerry Goldsmith, the *grandfather* of the accused.” He gave everyone a moment to absorb this. “He died of natural causes, so the perpetrators of the plot didn't have to bother with him. His son, Jerry Goldsmith Jr., fell victim to a mysterious ‘accident’ two years ago. That just left the accused, and they wanted to dispatch him in a particularly devious manner that would make it impossible for his death to be traced back to them.”

“He wasn't going to receive the *death penalty*,” the judge pointed out.

“Of course not,” Buddy said. “But knowing he'd be sent to *prison*, they planted a willing associate in the cell block they knew he'd be assigned to. Over time, this associate would observe Jerry's routine and devise an opportunity to stab him through the heart, and once the deed was done, they'd break him out.”

“Wow,” the judge said, “that's an incredibly convoluted plan.”

Wendy snorted. “And I suppose, Mr. Ebsen—or should I call you *The Late* Mr. Ebsen—you know who's behind this elaborate scheme?”

Buddy stroked his chin and smiled. “Naturally. Or should I say 'supernaturally.' No, forget I said that.”

“Well?” Wendy said, crossing her arms over her massive chest. (Oh, did I neglect to mention that she had huge boobs? Okay, yeah, she had huge boobs.)

“It's not hard to figure out. None other than the man lodging the complaint against Mr. Goldsmith: Guadalupe Hidalgo.”

At the mention of his name, every eye in the courtroom turned to him. He spread his hands, his mouth dropped open, and his eyebrows rose so high that they disappeared into his hairline.

“How dare you!” he exclaimed.

“He didn't act alone, though. The ghost of Henry Mancini cooked the whole thing up. We've already sent *him* to undead prison.”

That's a shame, I thought. *I liked the Ripley's Believe It or Not! theme.*

Guadalupe got to his feet, somewhat unsteadily. I could tell that he had to make an effort to keep his words from breaking into tiny pieces and tumbling from his lips. “Do you honestly expect anyone to buy this?”

“Mr. Hidalgo,” the judge said, “please return to the front of the courtroom.”

He moved into the aisle, hand on the hilt of his epee. He swept his gaze, eyes narrowed in consternation, across the judge, Wendy, Buddy's ghost, and me and then glanced at the double doors behind him.

“You can't prove any of this,” he said, panic creeping into his voice. “If you'll believe the testimony of a ghost, you'll believe anything!”

“Actually,” the judge said, “the bookcase in my chambers is full of documented cases in which spectral witnesses have proven the deciding factor in sending men and women to the gallows.”

Hidalgo blanched.

“Of course,” the magistrate continued, “we don't have a gallows here.”

“No?” the cornered man said, stroking his weapon's hilt with his index finger.

“Certainly not.” He turned to the jury box and nodded. “He's all yours, guys.”

The potato monster who had cuffed me earlier seized Guadalupe from behind and carried his screaming, struggling form toward his thirteen assembled brethren. I turned away in disgust as they tore him to shreds and devoured him, his bandolier and epee clattering to the floorboards. Justice didn't look anything like how I had imagined it.

Wendy walked over to the dock and looked up at me. “I'm sorry you had to see that.”

“The thing is, I *didn't* have to see it.”

“I suppose you've got me there.”

“So, am I off the hook?”

“I'd say so.”

I nodded. “How long until the potion wears off?”

She looked at her watch. “Maybe fifteen minutes.”

“You wanna put aside our differences, get coffee?”

“Yeah,” she said, “I think we could both use some.”