

The Jury

I wake up many mornings, completely worn out, but I've finally figured it out, and I'm driven to write it down. Fortunately, as a science fiction author, I can guess that some of you will just dismiss it as a flakey story by a guy who should be committed to Bellevue, but some of you will get it.

This morning, I remembered last night. I wasn't supposed to, but I did. I was a member of a jury, and we were trying a case of a heinous killer from the Thorx VII system. Uva-payva, an alleged mass-murderer had pleaded 'not guilty', but the prosecutor was aggressive, and the evidence was stacked against him. There were 1,000 members of the jury – spirits drawn from all over the Galaxy. We were called *Ethicists*, and the judge, a tall Lorandian, reminded us to only follow our ethical prerogative when trying Uva-payva.

"He may be guilty, or somewhat innocent, or totally innocent, and it's up to you to decide. You are hereby given the ultimate power of life and death over a sentient being. There is no more serious job on any of your worlds. Each race here represents a different, yet similar view about ethics. When you have come to a conclusion, I will pass sentence on the accused. Madam Prosecutor, are you ready?"

A tall female-looking reptile nodded one of her 2 heads (the forward-looking one).

"Mr. Defender?"

A faceless, bright yellow balloon, about 1 meter in diameter bobbed up and down in acknowledgement.

"You may proceed."

The testimony went on and on, hour after hour. According to the prosecution witnesses, Uva-payva was one bad dude.

The judge finally said to us: "You are the universe's conscience. Are there any questions before you debate the accused prisoner's fate?"

I raised my hand and the judge pointed one of his tentacles at me. "Your Honor, how did I come to be here?"

"Humans are sentient and have a sense of ethics."

"Do all races in the galaxy have a sense of ethics?"

"No."

"But why me?"

The prosecutor looked at me with both heads baring razor-sharp fangs, and she was ready to object, when the judge raised several tentacles and put into my mind that I should stop.

Okay, I thought, we're being used! My sleeping "spirit" has been hijacked by who knows what, to sit in judgment of who knows who, for the purpose of who knows what? But I had been told to shut up and I did. The judge told me to be at peace, and concentrate on the business at hand.

Then we, the jury, met in another dimension, where time was not an issue. We communed with each other's spirits. We went over the testimony, some of which seemed to be a little weak, if you asked me.

A multitude of other jurors asked me "What do you mean weak? We thought it was strong."

I tried to tell them how the prosecutor had only hinted at some things that should be facts. I pointed out how the police investigators were under great stress to make a case. I emphasized the defense's arguments about how his client was in another city when the killings took place – and even though he couldn't conclusively prove it, it left me with some doubt.

"Of course he'd say that," they all complained.

"Yeah, right, but what if he's telling the truth? The detectives didn't have hard evidence."

"Sure they did," I heard.

"No, they didn't. Replay their testimony and listen carefully. They implied some things, but they didn't state them as facts."

The testimony was replayed, and a few spirits agreed that it was wishy-washy.

And then I remembered the movie *12 Angry Men* to them, and they understood me quite nicely.

Many of them asked "We have to acquit a mass-murderer because of sloppy police work?"

I just replied "If that was your brother, your son, your father, would you want a jury to convict him, based on that testimony?"

That convinced most of them; finally they all agreed.

"Earthers always brings a refreshing point of view," one of them added. "You're a very old and wise race. Thank you for coming." Others echoed his feelings.

"I still don't know why I was picked?"

"Sure you do," many of them replied. "And you'll be picked again."

Finally: "Your Honor: We, the jury, find Uva-payva 'Not guilty', due to a lack of evidence."

The judge made sure that we all agreed with the verdict. And then he thanked us, and told us not to repeat anything that we heard in the courtroom, because that might influence future cases against the defendant. And then he pointed a tentacle, and the defendant was released from his bonds and allowed to float away like a dark black cloud of poisonous gas.

The lead police detective stared a cold, hard stare at me with stalks of 100-facted eyeballs, and growled "You'll regret this, Earther. Uva-payva will do this again – you'll be responsible!"

But I just looked back at him and shook my head. "Don't steal my sleeping spirit, then use me as an *Ethicist*, and then treat me disrespectfully – that's not ethical."

The judge heard my thoughts and snapped to! The detective was immediately restrained and charged with making terroristic thoughts to an *Ethicist*. The detective screamed curses at me at the top of his vocal range, which is why I awoke suddenly, in a sweat, tired, wrung out, frustrated – just as he was promising destruction and vengeance against me and Earth.

I lay in bed for 10 minutes more, shuddering in a cold sweat. Was it a dream or was it real? I'm sure that it was real, so dear reader, I apologize, but I have to write it as a sci-fi story, else I'll be committed to the Looney bin. But listen up: I know that some of you have experienced this too, so please let me know that I'm not crazy.

NOTE: This story is in the format of "flash fiction," which allows a maximum of 1,000 words.