



DETAILS AT 11

By Taylor Jones



It is a Friday night when the Zorks come. I remember because this big fathead newsdude pops up in the middle of “Baywatch” and says, “We interrupt this program to bring you a special bulletin. Aliens have landed on the White House lawn! Details at eleven.” He looks a little nervous. Then David Hasselhoff is back in all his hunkiness.

“Hey, Mom,” I yell, “the aliens have come.”

“Very funny, dear. Are you still watching television? For goodness sake, turn that thing off this instant and go do your homework!”

I crack my gum loudly as I shuffle by.

“And spit out that gum; you’ll rot your teeth,” she adds as I slam the door to my room. I do not spit out my gum.

At 11:00 I switch on the little TV in my room, even though I have been expressly forbidden to watch anything after 10:00. As promised, there are the aliens, stepping gingerly from their ship. It’s a memorable First Contact, particularly because the first thing the alien ambassador says to the president is, “You stupid bum, get out of my face,” which I think is pretty funny.

The next thing he says is, “Allow me to shove yogurt up your nose.”

The Secret Service men get all tense. The president says, “Excuse me?”

The alien looks around, puzzled, then goes into a huddle with his cronies, flipping through this little book entitled *How To Spic Earthling: A Comprehended Guide*.

“Excuse my . . . kneecap,” he says, adjusting his spectacle-like things and peering at the book. “I am having a problem with transatlantic. Please do not lose your pants.”

The president nods gravely. “I understand perfectly.”

“I spank you,” says the alien.

Next morning my mom wakes me up early, even though it’s Saturday. “You just *have* to get up, dear,” she says, all flushed and bubbly. “The aliens landed last night. Isn’t that exciting?”

I just roll my eyes at her as she bounces out.

“I saw that, young lady,” she says, sticking her head back in. “Don’t get smart with me.”

I roll my eyes again, get up, lock the door, and turn on the TV.

The alien ambassador is enjoying a small party to celebrate the creation of “a fruited and salubrious peace between us peoples.” The representative of France very proudly brings out a bottle of champagne and, as a gesture of goodwill, allows the alien to pop the cork. Unfortunately, over loud protestations from the Frenchman, he shakes it rather violently before trying to open it, causing the cork (and much of the high-quality champagne) to shoot across the table with a loud bang and hit one of the Secret Service men in the crotch. This also makes a rather impressive bang. The guy falls to the floor, writhing in pain. “Excuse my kneecap very much!” the alien cries, distraught. “Was that an error in judgment?” The Frenchman and the Secret Service man are carted off on separate stretchers, the Frenchman repeatedly moaning, “Ooo, mon Dom Pérignon! Mère de Dieu! O the humanity!”

Gee, I think, these guys’ll end up on “America’s Funniest Home Videos” for sure.

Soon McDonald’s whips up a new “special sauce,” slathers it on a Big Mac, and calls it a McZork Burger. Thus the aliens are officially inducted into our culture. They never quite get the hang of the language, though; they are always mixing metaphors.

But this is not considered a great handicap, and soon the Zorks are throwing themselves into our way of life with gusto. My favorite Zork enterprise is the restaurant chain called Zork World: the food is better than McDonald’s, yet much cheaper, showing how much the Zorks have yet to learn. They have Zork steaks, Zork sausage, fried Zork: “Everything Zork” is their slogan. Everybody loves it. Zork World is doing a booming business. That is, until we discover that the term “Zork steak,” unlike McZork Burger, is not just a figure of speech.

This time the big fathead newsdude interrupts my mom’s soap to bring us a special bulletin. “This just in—a shocking Zork exposé: the Zork food served at Zork World is not called Zork just because it’s served by Zorks and cooked by Zorks. Zork meats served at Zork World are actually *the flesh of Zorks!* Zor . . . er . . . Details at eleven.” He looks a little frazzled. Then the soap is back in all its banality. My mom turns pale.

“I thought that was just a figure of speech,” she moans.

I am at that exact moment eating Zork on toast, with watercress. I chew thoughtfully.

“Tastes like chicken,” I say.

At 11:00, we are glued to the tube. The handsome, “Ken doll”-brain-type blond dude called MJ from CNN or NBC or CBS is interviewing the CEO of ZW on TV. It goes something like this:

Blond dude (putting comradely hand on the alien’s shoulder): So, Mr. Tworp (that was his name . . . go figure), how do you feel about the negative reaction people are having to the fact that you serve the flesh of your own kind in your restaurant chain?

Tworp (taken aback): Wha’, you don’ like my food or somethin’? I vork, I slave, just to make zis a good ting for you, and you come on national TV to put down my Zork vork? You put me in front of zis camera just to tell me you don’ like my food? I tell you—

Blond dude: Mr. Tworp, that’s not really what I meant—

Tworp: I vork and I slave for you people, and zis is the tanks I get? Abuse? Well, I tell you—

Blond dude: Uh . . . no, Mr. Tworp . . . I don’t think you quite understand . . .

Tworp: When I come to zis planet, I see—

Blond dude: Uh . . . uh, back to you, David!

Tworp: . . . zis place and I say to myself—

David: Thank you, MJ! Now, in a surprising turn of events, the Red Sox—

Mom switches off the TV and leaves the room, exasperated. As soon as she is gone, I switch it back on.

David: . . . Uzis bought at K-Mart and handily wasted the opposing team. They won by default. Details later on The Sports Edition. Now, on the stock market today . . . Dow Chemical is up 1½, McDonald’s up 1, Zork World down 72 . . .

The Great Zork Fiasco is all the newsdudes can talk about, especially when it’s discovered that even the high-class Zork establishments serve “genuine Zork,” and the Zorks themselves make a regular practice of eating Zork.

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get out of my face!”**

MJ has another shot at an interview, this time with a Zork sociologist. This interview is more successful. Here’s what I’m hearing:

MJ: Mr. Sniz (that was his name . . . go figure), I’m sure you’re aware that humans think it is a disgusting

practice to eat the flesh of other sentient beings?

Sniz (surprised): You're dragging me by the leg! Surely such a fun and civilized race as you humans don't have such hang-downs.

MJ: Hang-ups.

Sniz: Hang-ups. We Zorks think it is a great honor to be eaten; to what better use can you put the flesh of your body? I myself am scheduled to be served at Zork World in February of next year, and it took some doing to get my name on their menu before Valentine's Day! The Sweetheart Menu, I believe it is.

MJ: Well, ah . . . congratulations. But, seeing that humans do have a negative attitude toward this practice, what do you believe should be done?

Sniz: That's a hard question, MJ. We're sort of between a rock and a glass house, aren't we? If we persist in this custom of ours, we will continue to incur your disgust, but if we do not . . . think of all the hopeful Zorks waiting impatiently to be eaten! What will they do without the steady services Zork World provides? How will they handle their disappointment? I say, if you humans don't want to have Zork, don't have a cow, either!

This is instantly misunderstood and is taken not as the double entendre it probably is, or the homage to Bart Simpson that it surely is, but as some Deep Zork Thought. It is quoted on every station, and people ponder its unmistakable significance. The president comes on later that day and says, "I heartily agree with the honorable Mr. Sniz. If you don't like Zork, don't

view. Mr. Sniz comes on TV, obviously concerned about how his cow comment will affect his eventual transformation into Zork steak, and says repeatedly that we're reading too deeply into what he said, that all he *really* meant was, "If you don't want it, don't eat it, and don't have a problem with us Zorks wanting it." This is instantly turned into a rather large bumper sticker which many Zorks stick to the roofs of their cars, even though it doesn't make anything clearer to anybody. You can see all the stickers during the traffic report.

The Great Zork Fiasco escalates into The Zork Meat Wars, all covered by CBS or KGB or one of those stations. Protesters stand outside of Zork Worlds across the country with signs like "Eat a Potato, Not a Zork," and "Zork Indigestion is Caused by Guilt," and "Buy Land o' Lakes Lite: Half the fat, none of the Zorks."

The Zorks counter by throwing free samples at the protesters, and soon the streets are sticky with Zork, causing huge traffic backups in front of the Zork Worlds.

The president gets back on TV and makes a public apology about the JUST SAY NO thing. "That isn't really what I meant," he says, trying to loosen his collar. "What I actually meant was—" But then he is interrupted by a special bulletin about—oh, wow—the O.J. trial. I stare, glassy-eyed in anticipation.

All across the country, riots stop, throwing of meat stops, everything stops. And in Zork Worlds everywhere, people and Zorks come together under the dim glare of the television screen in the back room to watch as O.J. slowly steps from his car, walks across a short stretch of grass (leaving potentially incriminating footprints), and shuffles up the steps into the courthouse to face Appeals Trial #47.

"Details at eleven," the fathead newsdude promises. And everybody cheers.

A great change takes place in the Zork Worlds of America that day. Humans and Zorks shake hands and agree that their petty differences can be forgiven and forgotten as long as they are united in the common cause of watching and commenting on the O.J. trial, which is to say, united forever. The people go back to their veggieburgers, and the Zorks go back to their Zork steaks, and all is peace.

Later, the president is on again, saying, "I am most gratified that my speech had such a tremendous impact on all of you, and I can only hope that . . ." But I flip past him. It's time for the Pee Wee Herman Special. ★

This just in—a shocking Zork exposé: The Zork food served at Zork World is not called Zork just because it's served by Zorks and cooked by Zorks . . .

have Zork, and also don't have a cow! For what is it that we do every time we eat a hamburger? Why, we eat a fellow being. And what is it that we do each time we take a bite of fish? We eat a fellow being. And what is it that we do every time we fry up eggs and bacon in the morning? We eat *several* fellow beings! For God's sake, JUST SAY NO!"

My guess is that the president was just trying to make a point about the similarities between their cannibalism and our carnivorousness, but that he got a little carried away with the JUST SAY NO part. Anyway, the whole affair causes a wave of vegetarianism and other -isms to sweep the country like wildfire, making things even worse from the Zork point of

