Justice for All

By Nathan Hopp

 Everyone cheered at the results. By a margin of three-hundred and fifty-three votes, Patrick and Maria Desmond had both been found guilty of public intoxication, disturbing the peace, harassment in the first degree, child endangerment and public nudity.

 The man onscreen collapsed to his knees, his wife beside him sobbing and begging for everyone to not give her and Patrick a lengthy sentence. “We didn’t mean to!” she pleaded to us. “We were angry, and stupid, and reckless and—Please give us probation! Think of our kids! Where will they go?!”

 Her screams were cut off by commercial break. Coming up: Sentencing.

 Cheers turned to bored murmuring as everyone in the room returned to their previous conversations. Some spoke about the party, others about the latest video games to come out next year, or their favorite movies and clothing. Menial things compared to what everyone had witnessed minutes before. A few of us spoke about the trial.

 “So what’re you going to vote for, Jack?” my girlfriend asked curiously. “Three months jailtime? Six months?”

 “I’m going for a year!” my work colleague, a jumpy guy named Landon, announced in his drunken stupor. “Seriously…\*belch\* a parent who leaves their kid home alone to get wasted shouldn’t be a parent! Imma go for the maximum penalty!”

 I laughed. “Eh, I’m giving them probation, Alice.”

 “Benjamin!” she gawked in disbelief. “Did you even *see* the video they showed us? It’s clear they need to be punished for this!”

 I’d seen the video. Everyone and anyone with access to a TV or phone saw the video. It showed the Desmond parents drunkenly walking down the crowded street without any care. Then the footage revealed them making a scene after finding their van being towed. Unfortunately for them, Mr. Desmond started drunkenly urinating against a nearby fire hydrant while Mrs. Desmond nailed her coffin shut by getting too confrontational with the tow man. It resulted in him getting stitches. Now they’d become just another spectacle for the public to judge and sentence. Courtesy of the Judgement Network.

 With the surge in social media and the global need for criminal courts to compensate for more important cases (treason, fraud, online piracy, smuggling, etc.), the Judgement Network allowed the public to vote on the verdicts of smaller cases. What became a temporary social experiment turned into the norm within only a year. Whether it be via TV remote, touchpad, phone or laptop, anyone could participate in any broadcasted case. The Judgement even held several channels for different types of crimes.

 On Friday evenings, me and my friends made nights out of this. We’d order pizzas, geet some beer and vote for the fate of every person who went to court. Tonight’s chosen channel were Felonies. I remembered last week’s choice was Traffic Violations. Care to guess how many of us voted for the prosecuted to pick up trash on the highway?

 “It’s back! It’s back on!”

 They were still trembling in their seats, with Mr. Desmond covering his face as his wife hugged him closely. As the announcer repeated their charges, everyone watching felt a ping on their phones. I glanced down to see a pop-up flash on my screen. It offered me a choice of sentence lengths for either of them, all in a multiple-choice format.

 Without much thought, I cast my vote alongside my colleagues and girlfriend before our eyes fell on the screen. We were all judges, and we had done our patriotic duty.

 “…and we’re done!” the Announcer stated after a few moments. “The votes of all participating citizens have been tallied up. Patrick Desmond your sentence is to serve 1.5 years in jail, eight months’ probation. Maria Desmond, your sentence is nine months in jail and six months of probation.” Everyone either groaned disappointedly or smiled in satisfaction, all as the defendants were guiltily carried off to serve out their punishments.

 Before anyone could voice their frustrations though, the next court case quickly gathered our collected interest. The man onscreen wore a charming smile across his perfect face, his tuxedo disheveled and worn out from what had to be a terrible night. Despite his unruly appearance, we all recognized him. Whoever loved action films recognized him.

 “Oh my God, is that Jason Sladeholme?!”

 “Oh yeah, I heard he’d been arrested for a DUI!”

 “O yeah, that’s my hero there!”

 “I loved him in that remake!”

 As the Announcer explained the extent of his charges—driving while intoxicated, endangering human lives, speeding, etc.—my girlfriend and I were eager to save him. In accord to law, whenever a VIP was arrested for something, the government made their trial date random in an attempt to curb against biased voting. Fortunately for Jason Sladeholme, he was well-liked for his films. I certainly did, along with my girlfriend and coworkers, so we all pitched in our votes together. All the while, his smile wasn’t fazed by the odds.

 “So what are you up to this weekend?” Alice asked me. “I was thinking we could go to that new museum downtown. I heard the exhibits are beautiful.”

 Before I could agree, I groaned at suddenly remembering.

 “At work, filling out those papers Mr. Denemount needs for the monthly quarter…Sorry, sweetie.”

 “It’s okay,” she smiled. “There’s always the next one. Besides, I have a feeling you won’t be the only one the boss’ll need to get ready for that quarter…”

 “Ugh, will you lovebirds be quiet,” one of our nameless colleagues shouted from the front of the room. “They’re tallying the votes!”

 Minutes passed as they were tallied, until the Announcer decreed, “Jason Sladeholme, by a margin of one-thousand five-hundred and ninety-six votes, this court finds you…not guilty!”

 Again, everyone cheered at the results.