11 Legal Cases with Crazy Names

by Chris Higgins

The United States court system has played host to some pretty bizarre cases. Here are some in which the *names* of the cases jump out as totally bonkers—though the arguments are sometimes surprisingly bland.

1. BATMAN V. COMMISSIONER, 189 F.2D 107 (5TH CIR. 1951), CERT. DENIED 342 U.S. 877 (1951)

Oddly, this is not a case in which Batman sues Commissioner Gordon to stop him from using the Bat-Signal on peaceful summer nights. In the real *Batman v. Commissioner*, it's about a farm.

The case: Starting in the 1920s, Ray and Edith Batman worked their family farm in Ochiltree County, Texas, about as far from Gotham as you can get. And then a young Batman came along—Gerald Batman, a hard-working child who so impressed his father that the elder Batman decided to hand over a portion of the family farm to his son, forming a partnership.

The problem was that Gerald Batman was 14 when this "partnership" began, and the courts viewed it as a way for the elder Batman to dodge income taxes. Because the younger Batman didn't do much except receive assets from his father (and work the land when his school schedule permitted), the U.S. Tax Court deemed the partnership to be one-sided. The full name of the case was: *Ray L. Batman and Edith G. Batman v. Commissioner of Internal Revenue*.

The Batman family's partnership was actually recognized in a later case. After Gerald Batman grew up, he was recognized as a full partner in the

farm, and a 1956 case affirmed that some later years of the farm partnership were legitimate.

2. NEBRASKA V. ONE 1970 2-DOOR SEDAN RAMBLER (GREMLIN), 215 N.W.2D 849 (NEB. 1974)

When Nebraska sues a budget sedan, you know something weird is going on. The case: In 1974, the state of Nebraska seized a 1970 AMC Gremlin that was found to contain "an ounce or two" of marijuana. The car's owner, Donald D. Ruyle, protested Nebraska's seizure of his car, arguing in part that the car wasn't used to "transport" the marijuana, since it was parked and locked when it was searched, and the amount of marijuana in question was relatively small. Nebraska won, and kept the car. But Nebraska Supreme Court Justice Lawrence M. Clinton dissented from the majority opinion, writing in part:

A homely illustration might make the point: If one takes several bags of groceries from the supermarket to one's home it can be readily stated that he is using the automobile "to transport" the groceries. On the other hand, if one keeps a box of kleenex in the glove compartment for use when needed, can it really be argued that the automobile is being used "to transport" the kleenex?

Lesson learned: if you're driving a '70 Gremlin, keeping a few ounces of kleenex on hand "for use when needed" is acceptable. Marijuana, not so much.

3. UNITED STATES V. ARTICLE CONSISTING OF 50,000 CARDBOARD BOXES MORE OR LESS, EACH CONTAINING ONE PAIR OF CLACKER BALLS, 413 F. SUPP. 1281 (D. WISC. 1976)

Yep, we're suing cardboard boxes now. 50,000 of them, more or less.

The case: Similar to the Gremlin case above, this is a property forfeiture case. It was recently highlighted by John Oliver on his show *Last Week Tonight* in a segment on the use of property forfeiture in law enforcement.

If you want to learn more about the *Clacker Balls* case, I'll tell you two things. First, it's weirdly complicated. Second, in some listings, the full case name is even longer and crazier than what's listed above:

UNITED STATES of America, Plaintiff, v. AN ARTICLE of hazardous substance CONSISTING OF 50,000 cardboard BOXES more or less, each containing one pair OF CLACKER BALLS, labeled in part: (Box) " * * Kbonger * * It's Fun Test Your Skill It Bounces It Flips Count The Hits * * * Specialty Mfg. Co., Seattle, Wash. * *", Defendant.*

Clack on, you crazy balls.

4. I AM THE BEAST SIX SIX SIX OF THE LORD OF HOSTS IN EDMOND FRANK MACGILLIVRAY JR. NOW. I AM THE BEAST SIX SIX SIX OF THE LORD OF HOSTS IEFMJN. I AM THE BEAST SIX SIX SIX OF THE LORD OF HOSTS. I AM THE BEAST SIX SIX SIX OF THE LORD OF HOSTS OTLOHIEFMJN. I AM THE BEAST SSSOTLOHIEFMJN. I AM THE BEAST SIX SIX SIX. BEAST SIX SIX SIX LORD V. MICHIGAN STATE POLICE, ET AL., FILE NO. 5:89:92, 1990 U.S. DIST. LEXIS 8792 (W.D. MICH. JULY 12, 1990)

This case is sometimes referred to simply as "I Am The Beast etc. v. Michigan State Police," which is still an awesome case name.

The case: Okay, first we need to address the elephant in the room. Edmond Frank MacGillivray Jr. changed his name to I Am The Beast Sssotlohiefmjn

in 1998. His new, complex last name is an acronym for "Six six six of the Lord of Hosts in Edmond Frank MacGillivray Jr. now." That's not the problem in this case. The matter at hand was that I Am The Beast etc. was asking for $1,998,000,000.00 (just shy of $2 billion) in damages after his arrest for nonviolent protest at the Michigan state capitol building. He alleged police misconduct and a variety of other matters (well worth a read!). The case was dismissed.

Note: I Am The Beast etc. apparently ended up in court again some years later.

5. DEATH V. GRAVES, CGC-06-451316 (SAN FRANCISCO SUPER. CT. FILED APR. 17, 2006)

This case doesn't have much of an online presence, though this summary is tantalizing (especially the last two words):

Complaint alleging that the defendants' vehicle crashed into plaintiff Alan Death's motorcycle; Death lived.

6. ASSOCIATION OF IRRITATED RESIDENTS V. UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, ___ F. 3D ___, NO. 09-71383 (9TH CIR. FEB. 2, 2011)

You can read all about this case, but it is a genuine snooze-fest. I'll summarize: it was about air quality and the "Association of Irritated Residents" won. (I'd argue that they won before they started, just by adopting that name.)

7. UNITED STATES V. ONE LUCITE BALL CONTAINING LUNAR MATERIAL (ONE MOON ROCK) AND ONE TEN INCH BY FOURTEEN INCH WOODEN PLAQUE, 252 F. SUPP. 2D 1367 (S.D. FLA. 2003)

The case: Another civil forfeiture case, except this time the item being seized was *a piece of the frickin' moon* (and, yes, a plaque). It's a surprisingly complex case, but it starts with this delicious bit:

I. FACTS
The moon rock was originally retrieved from the surface of the moon by astronauts on a NASA mission. In 1973, President Nixon, on behalf of the United States, made a gift of the moon rock and plaque to the government and people of the Republic of Honduras.

A. MR. ROSEN'S ACQUISITION OF THE ITEMS
While in Honduras on business in early 1994, Mr. Rosen learned from a friend that a retired colonel from the Honduran military was seeking to sell a moon rock. When he found out that the asking price was $1 million, Mr. Rosen said he was not interested in purchasing it, as it "sounded to [him] like the Brooklyn Bridge." Subsequently, however, Mr. Rosen did some investigating, and learned that a slide with specks of lunar dust had sold at a Sotheby's auction for $500,000.

It just goes on from there.

8. JUICY WHIP V. ORANGE BANG, 185 F.3D 1364 (FED. CIR. 1999)

Is Juicy squeezing Orange, or the other way around? It's hard to say, in this mixed-up patent law case.

The case: Juicy brought a case against Orange, arguing that Orange infringed on Juicy's beverage-dispensing patent. Orange argued that Juicy's beverage dispenser was not patentable in the first place "because it lacked utility," so any infringement shouldn't matter. Orange lost. So Orange appealed, repeatedly.

9. TERRIBLE V. TERRIBLE, 534 P.2D 919 (NEV. 1975)

The case: Elizabeth Terrible sued Joseph Terrible, in a post-divorce case that made it to the Supreme Court of Nevada. The dispute had to do with property owned during the marriage that was split up and sold as part of the divorce. The case is actually terribly boring.

10. SCHMUCK V. UNITED STATES, 489 U.S. 705 (1989)

The case: Schmuck v. United States made it to the U.S. Supreme Court in 1989. In a 5-4 vote, the court upheld the mail fraud conviction of a Schmuck from Illinois (specifically, Wayne T. Schmuck). The case involved Schmuck's prosecution for rolling back car odometers and then falsifying the cars' titles (that's where the mail fraud bit comes in; he mailed the title applications). But the issue didn't go to the Supreme Court because of odometer tampering by itself—the larger issue was whether the jury in Schmuck's case should have been instructed about the possibility to convict him for a "lesser included charge." Wikipedia has an incredibly detailed account of the case, ending with this gem:

In a short 1993 Yale Law Journal article on the increasing use of Yiddish loanwords in American legal opinions, Alex Kozinski, chief judge of the Ninth Circuit and UCLA law professor Eugene Volokh, noted that the fact that some people actually are named Schmuck made it hard to tell much about the history of the word's use in opinions. "We can't report on the degree to which schmuck has worked its way into legal English, which is too bad, because schmucks are even more common in courtrooms than schlemiels, schmoozing, and chutzpah," they wrote. "We can, however, mention that there's a U.S.

Supreme Court case named Schmuck v. United States; for what it's worth, the petitioner was a used-car dealer."

11. UNITED STATES EX REL. MAYO V. SATAN AND HIS STAFF (W.D. PA. 1971)

The case: Gerald Mayo attempted to sue the Devil, stating in part:

[Mayo] alleges that Satan has on numerous occasions caused plaintiff misery and unwarranted threats, against the will of plaintiff, that Satan has placed deliberate obstacles in his path and has caused plaintiff's downfall. Plaintiff alleges that by reason of these acts Satan has deprived him of his constitutional rights.

Mayo filed the suit *in forma pauperis*, meaning that he couldn't afford the costs of pursuing the suit, so wanted those costs waived. But when you're going up against Satan, the bill can be steep. The court refused, writing:
We note that the plaintiff has failed to include with his complaint the required form of instructions for the United States Marshal for directions as to service of process.

Translation: If you can't find Satan to serve him papers, you're outta luck.

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