

The other man in black

By Laura Brown

Rob Zura lives to avoid mediocrity. A bouncer at Hollywood Video, Zura vows to protect movies with his life.



He walks with purpose and talks with details. He is the bouncer at Hollywood Video, and he will protect those movies with his life. He stands at a towering 6'3" and is able to spit out movie quotes faster than he can pound his favorite energy drink. Customers and co-workers alike run in fear of the monster they call "Robzilla." Rob Zura : now playing at a Hollywood Video near you.

He can always be seen wearing black, even when he is not in his uniform. With his stringy black hair and wire rimmed glasses, one can easily picture Zura ripping off his name tag, throwing his glasses to the side, and breaking up a bar fight, or maybe even starting one. Simply put, he looks out of place behind the counter at Hollywood Video.

He started working there as a guest service representative, or GSR, in July 2002 when the Phar-Mor in Boardman closed its doors. Now, three years later, at age 30 he is the oldest GSR and employee at Hollywood Video, and has been passed over many times for any kind of promotion, mainly because he doesn't have a driver's license. Even though he has a college degree, Zura is comfortable where he is and still loves his job.

"I've met a lot of great people over the years and it's the high point of my work day when someone comes in and tells me that they really enjoy the recommendations that I gave them," Zura explains. "It's a job where you can have fun if you don't get too mired down by the sea of mediocrity."

He may have to swim through a "sea of mediocrity," but Zura spices up the work place by constantly quoting off-the-wall movies or making up catchphrases by combining the names of new release titles; for example, combining "Failure to Launch" and "The Family Stone" to make "Failure to Launch the Family Stone." He openly divulges the fact that he loves the comics and games of Yu-Gi-Oh (mainly for the artwork on the cards) and has been lifting regularly for seven years. He follows professional wrestling and bodybuilding, and has been known to immerse himself in orange self-tanner before entering a bodybuilding contest. It was through weight lifting that he began using rubbing alcohol regularly to wash his hands.

"It kills germs on contact and dries out my sinuses," he explains as though it is common to carry around a family-sized bottle of the powerfully odorous liquid. Most people, with that information alone, would be hooked and begging for more details about this giant-sized retail clerk. Yet, when an attempt is made to pry through the faded black collared shirt and discover what he feels is his most interesting trait, he shoots back with a somewhat philosophical answer. "What do YOU think is the most interesting part of me?" he replies, answering the question with a question. "If you ask me, I don't think I'm interesting at all. I just AM."

Though Zura thinks he isn't interesting, others may find it odd that he is 30 years old and still living at home with his parents. Because he doesn't have a driver's license, he has to get dropped off at work every day, and call for a ride when his shift is over. But the topic of his lack of a driver's license is off limits.

"I don't want to discuss that," he states simply.

Zura is more willing to talk about his passions in life.

"My passions change like the weather in Northeast Ohio," he finally blurts out after a minute of biting his lip and making a funny face. "It's always been that way. I guess my passion is chaos: ever changing, ever evolving, and not staying in any one shape for too long."

Unfortunately, most of his co-workers avoid him and customers always get more than they bargained for when they casually ask "how are you?" An average response from Zura will usually include a detailed description of any ache or pain he might have, his sleep cycle, whether he's hungry or not, or perhaps his thoughts on being at work that day.

"Most people will practically walk across the street just to avoid me or if I actually get a chance to talk to them, they just ignore everything I say," he says matter-of-factly. "I pretty much feel invisible until someone needs me."

Despite the way he's treated, he doesn't walk with his head down, nor does he speak with a depressed tone. In fact, he talks to everyone whether they listen or not and always walks into work with a smile on his face and rubbing alcohol in his bag. He hasn't given up on people or life yet, so where does he see himself in five or 10 years?

"Honestly?" he says. "I never saw myself living this long with the world being so messed up, so I have no idea. I guess I should come up with a plan."