

"Vocabulary Test"

by  
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INT. TV NEWS STUDIO - AFTERNOON

1

A news update is beginning. We see a "Breaking News" graphic splashed on the screen. The ANNOUNCER speaks.

ANNOUNCER (V.O.)

This is a breaking news update  
from USNN - the United States News  
Network.

The screen fades to THERESA WILLIAMS, the pretty, young newscaster, seated behind a typical TV news desk. As she speaks, a graphic labelled "The Aliens Are Here!" appears on the screen behind her.

WILLIAMS

Good afternoon. This is Theresa  
Williams at the USNN anchor desk.

(beat)

We want to bring you up to date  
concerning the alien spaceship  
that arrived on Earth this morning  
and assumed a parking orbit over  
the White House. So far, all  
attempts to communicate with the  
vessel have failed, and the  
inhabitants of the ship have made  
no attempt to contact federal  
authorities. For the latest  
developments, we go to Harry  
Walters at State University in the  
nation's capital.

(beat)

Harry, are you there?

The image of HARRY WALTERS, a middle-aged reporter, appears on the screen behind Williams.

WALTERS

Yes, Theresa. I can hear you.

WILLIAMS

I understand that you have word of  
the disappearance of a professor?

WALTERS

Yes. Professor Margaret Lansing, a  
noted English professor here at  
State U, is reported to have  
disappeared less than 30 minutes  
ago before the eyes of her  
associate, Deborah Butler.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

WALTERS (CONT'D)

A distraught Professor Butler had this to say.

They go to tape. PROFESSOR BUTLER, a 40-ish English professor, is seated behind her desk - a collection of framed diplomas behind her. She is noticeably upset.

BUTLER

I. . . I still can't believe what I saw! Margaret and I were sitting in her office, having lunch and discussing Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," when she disappeared before my eyes. One moment she was there; the next - *poof!* She didn't even have time to finish her turkey and Swiss sandwich.

WALTERS

What did her disappearance look like?

BUTLER

Like *nothing*. There was no sound, no blinking lights. *Nothing*. One moment, she was making an interesting point about the poem. The next moment, she was gone.

A picture of Professor Lansing appears on screen, replacing the video of Butler.

WALTERS

Professor Lansing, seen here in a yearbook photograph, is a divorced, 49-year-old English professor who has been employed at State University for just over a decade. Federal authorities have yet to comment on this new development.

The picture of Lansing is replaced by Harry Walters.

WALTERS

(beat)  
Theresa?

FADE OUT.

2

INT. SINLAXIAN SPACESHIP - EVENING

2

The walls of the alien ship are covered with the flashing lights of computer terminals. The Earth can be seen orbiting below. PROFESSOR LANSING stands beside the alien captain, Egrethor. He is noticeably alien, but not extensively so. Several other Sinlaxians man the control panels and ship's helm. All the aliens are wearing brightly colored uniforms.

EGRETHOR picks up a tabby cat from the deck of the ship. The cat, unhappy, tries to squirm away.

EGRETHOR

What do you call *this* creature,  
Professor?

LANSING

That's a cat.

EGRETHOR

A *cat*? No, that won't do - not at  
all.

LANSING

I beg your pardon?

Egrethor puts the cat down. It scampers away.

EGRETHOR

From now on, that animal will be  
known as a *dog*.

LANSING

But we already *have* an Earth  
animal known as a dog.

EGRETHOR

Not any longer. What you once knew  
as a dog will now and forever be  
known by its Sinlaxian name - an  
oomphax.

LANSING

Oomphax?

EGRETHOR

That is what a very similar  
creature is known as in *our*  
language. You will not call either  
of those animals by its Earthly  
name ever again.

(CONTINUED)

LANSING

This is *ridiculous*, Egrethor.

EGRETHOR

Hardly. My people are here to take over your world, and we will now start molding it to our liking. We will begin by doing away with your language.

LANSING

Why?

EGRETHOR

Language is important. It gives people a commonality, an understanding, a *strength*. That is why we will deny you humans yours.

(sighs)

It *pains* me to have to use your tongue to communicate with you now.

LANSING

(sarcastically)

Sorry.

EGRETHOR

Do you remember the Sinlaxian words I told you?

LANSING

I don't see why -

EGRETHOR

*Do you?*

LANSING

Yes.

EGRETHOR

Good. . . because the survival of your race depends on it.

FADE OUT.

LANSING

An. . . inopala?

(CONTINUED)

EGRETHOR

Correct.

(beat)

That will be all for today. You may return to your quarters.

LANSING

Is that what you call that closet you've stuck me in?

EGRETHOR

It is adequate for a human. Go now.

Lansing starts to walk away, then stops and turns.

LANSING

Why did you pick me for this?

EGRETHOR

No reason. It could have been anyone. The fact that you are an English professor learning Sinlaxian from *me* does make this ironic. Wouldn't you agree?

LANSING

No.

EGRETHOR

You need to develop a sense of humor.

LANSING

I find that difficult when you tell me that the fate of every man, woman, and child on Earth rests in my hands.

EGRETHOR

It has to rest with *someone*.

(beat)

Not to worry. I'm sure you'll do just fine on the test tomorrow.

LANSING

Test? What. . . What test?

EGRETHOR

The *vocabulary* test. Why do you think I'm bothering to teach you all these things?

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

EGRETHOR (CONT'D)

Tomorrow morning, I will quiz you about the Sinlaxian words you have been taught. Your performance on that test will determine whether your race will be allowed to live as our - what would your archaic word be? - *servants*.

LANSING

You mean *slaves*.

EGRETHOR

"Slaves" sounds so demeaning.

LANSING

But that's what we would be, right?

EGRETHOR

*That* will be decided in the morning.

LANSING

(beat)

I. . . I can't do it.

(beat)

I *can't* be responsible for this. You'll have to pick someone else.

EGRETHOR

We will not! You are as fitting a representative of your people as anyone.

LANSING

But -

EGRETHOR

Without the test, your race has no hope, and only you will be allowed to take the test.

LANSING

Is that the *best* we Earth people can hope for - to be your slaves?

EGRETHOR

There are *worse* alternatives.

FADE OUT.

4

INT. SINLAXIAN SPACESHIP - MORNING

4

It is quiz time. Egrethor makes marks on a kind of pad as Lansing gives him the alien names for Earthly things.

Cat? EGRETHOR

Dog. LANSING

Dog? EGRETHOR

Oomphax. LANSING

Sky? EGRETHOR

Doleray. LANSING

Moon? EGRETHOR

(beat)  
Gibron. LANSING

(beat)  
That is all. EGRETHOR

How'd I do? LANSING

EGRETHOR  
You answered every question  
correctly.  
(beat)  
You have *failed* the test.

LANSING  
But -

EGRETHOR  
Your score proves that you and  
your fellow Earthlings are too  
dangerous to allow to survive.

LANSING  
*What?*

(CONTINUED)



EGRETHOR

The idea was to get a *low* score -  
to demonstrate the limited mental  
abilities suitable for underlings.

LANSING

But I didn't -

EGRETHOR

In our past, intelligent servants  
have plotted against their  
Sinlaxian masters and caused  
unrest. We will not allow that to  
happen again. We will import  
servants. You and yours will be  
done away with.

(calling to his crew)  
Ready the annihilation beam!

The Sinlaxians at the computer banks start pressing  
buttons to honor their captain's order.

LANSING

That's not fair! You didn't tell  
me what you were looking for on  
the test.

EGRETHOR

Of course not! If you had known,  
you wouldn't have given us a true  
accounting of your mental ability.

LANSING

You can't judge the entire human  
race based on *me*.

EGRETHOR

Why not?

LANSING

I'm a college professor. I'm a  
very learned woman. I spend a lot  
of time reading and studying. I'm  
*paid* to be intelligent.

EGRETHOR

Are you saying that *other*  
Earthlings would not be as  
intellectually dangerous as you?

LANSING

*Definitely*. There are thousands  
. . .

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

LANSING (CONT'D)

*millions* of people down on that planet who have *never* read a book in their lives! All they do is watch reality television, eat fast food, and go to car races.

EGRETHOR

So *they* would be suitable servant material?

LANSING

Oh yes.

EGRETHOR

(beat)

That would be *so* much trouble - deciding who should live and who should die one by one. There are *so many* of you.

(beat)

No. We simply don't have the time.

LANSING

But -

Three loud beeps sound. Egrethor looks pleased.

EGRETHOR

The annihilation beam is ready.  
Splendid!

LANSING

Please, you. . . you can't do -

EGRETHOR

I will tend to you later.

(beat)

Do you want to press the button and destroy these *inferior* Earthlings, Professor, or shall I?

FADE TO BLACK.