

ISIS VS. ISIS

A VOCABULARY-BOOSTING SHORT
STORY



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BIG WORDS MADE SIMPLE.

Isis vs. ISIS: A Vocabulary-Boosting Short Story

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I’m going to do the very best I can to help you, but ultimately, the only person who can improve your vocabulary (and SAT/ACT score) is you. Please don’t sue me.

Isis was not amused. Over the past three thousand years, she'd been **subjected** to unthinkable **indignities**, her name sneered at as newer, trendier gods took her place. Back in the day, there had been room for everyone. Even the Romans — though they hadn't exactly been kind to her native Egypt — began worshipping her eventually.

Her husband Osiris, formerly king of the underworld, hadn't **fared** as well under the Romans as she. They hadn't **adopted** his cult, so it was up to her to keep him strong. Most people didn't know this, but when she brought him back to life all those years ago, she'd used vegetables to do it — that's why his skin was so green.

Isis utilized a similar strategy today, sending bushels of kale and cabbage down to the underworld, a section of which he still **tenuously** ruled. He **doted** on mint (keeps the unpleasant smells at bay), but had drawn the line at the fresh-pressed celery juice she'd begun including in recent years.

Isis let out a **wry** laugh, amused that she now saw the time of the Romans as the good old days.

There was no room for them anymore. Not in an era of **monotheism**.

The Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims — no one thinks of them as particularly united today, but they'd worked together well enough in driving out the old gods. Once they reached a country, no one dared raise a statue of Athena (*poor girl, I really must write her*).

In the beginning, they'd destroyed our temples by force. Today, they simply tell you we aren't real.

Subjected - Forced to undergo or experience something (typically unpleasant)

Indignities - Treatment that makes one feel ashamed or less dignified

Fared - Get along/manage over a period of time

Adopted - Chose to take up or follow

Tenuously - Weakly; slightly

Doted (on) - Was extremely fond of

Wry - Expressing dry, mocking humor

Monotheism - the belief in one God

The rest of the old gods — whether they be Egyptian, Greek, or Roman — have simply faded. Their essence still exists, kept alive by school children reciting their names and hearing stories of their **exploits**. But could Zeus level a city with his lightning bolts today? Not bloody likely.

Yet here I am, humming with energy, every bit as powerful as I was during the reign of Hatshepsut or Cleopatra. Imagine my horror when I found out why.

“What do you mean, *terrorist* group? Why would terrorists name themselves after the goddess of healing?” I demanded.

“They didn’t,” Athena responded.

“What?”

“That is, they didn’t name themselves after you.”

“I am the only Isis worth knowing. Who else could they have named themselves after?”

“It’s an **acronym** — stands for Islamic State in Syria and something or other,” Athena waved her hand dismissively. “First letter of the first word and all.”

“And *they’re* why I’m so strong today?”

“People are discussing them, but the Fates still associate the name with you. We all depend on the strength of our following, and it appears to them that you’ve had a **resurgence**.”

We were sitting on the clouds in Mount Olympus, but nothing was as it used to be. Majestic buildings still stood in the distance, but they were **eerily** empty. The minor

Exploits - Bold or daring feats

Acronym - An abbreviation formed using the initial letters of a set of words

Resurgence - An increase in popularity after a period of little activity

Eerily - In a strange and troubling way

gods who used to **mill** around — hoping Zeus would fall in love with them, no doubt — had died, forgotten by time. Even the air felt different. It used to have a humming, warm energy. Now it felt cold and damp.

Athena saw me gazing toward the city, then waved her hands over the clouds in front of us. Immediately, the world below materialized, like an in-floor flat screen TV.

“No sense dwelling on the past,” the goddess of wisdom said. “You should count yourself fortunate to be so strong.”

I looked at her sharply. “Has something happened? Something — different?”

“Hephaestus — he’s...not well.”

“He’s your god of fire and blacksmiths, yes?”

“Among other things,” Athena responded. “Mortals today, they have so many machines to do their work. How can a god of blacksmiths survive? And it doesn’t help that his name scares away most students. They haven’t a clue how to pronounce it!”

“What’s happened to him?” I asked.

“He was born deformed, you know. That’s why Hera made him go live in the forges. But I hadn’t seen him in many years and...” she looked away. “He can barely walk now.”

“I am sorry, sister,” I said, placing a hand on her arm.

Athena cleared her throat and threw back her shoulders. “There must be a way for us to *use* your resurgence of strength, to harness it somehow.”

“I will go see Hephaestus at once,” I agreed. “I’m certain I could restore him to...if not his former glory, at least a better position than he’s in now.”

“Not just Hephaestus,” Athena said absently. “All of us.”

Mill (around) - Hang out in a confused mass for no particular reason

Her gray eyes — lifeless for so many years — began to dance. I heard a crack of lightning, and the dancing took on new energy, like thousands of gears were turning within their depths. I looked around wildly. Zeus’s Ferrari was still in his circular driveway, and precious few could summon thunder and lightning here. A small wind picked up, and a smile spread across Athena’s features.

“If you’re going to **summon** weather, a little sunshine would be more welcome,” I grumbled, drawing my cloak more closely around my shoulders. “Not all of us dress in full battle armor in each morning.”

“Oh, do be quiet,” Athena said good naturedly. “I have a plan.”

All religions have their fanatics, though most of them will deny it. The Christians are a kindly bunch on the whole, but at one point, they were so determined to drive us out that they burned our temples and killed those who chose to believe in the old gods.

These ISIS types were no different. It felt strange to call them by their self-appointed acronym. It would be like calling a group of people “Athena.”

“Athena attacked another city this morning...”

Actually, that one kind of worked either way.

Athena — the actual, goddess Athena — had decided that there was only one course of action available to us.

“We’re going to help them,” Athena said. “As the gods took sides in the Trojan War, the mortals will once again have immortal allies.”

“Who is the ‘them,’ in this scenario?” I asked **warily**.

“ISIS, of course.”

Summon - Call upon (someone/something) to be present

Warily - Cautiously; carefully

“The terrorists who have burned cities, **desecrated** ancient monuments, and been an all-around **scourge** to society?” I asked.

“The same.”

“Why in Zeus’s name would we do that?”

“The stronger they are, the stronger you are. The stronger you are, the more you can help us regain our former strength. If they only control a small section of the world, and you are humming with power, imagine how strong you’ll become if they control the continent! It will be just like the old days!”

“Not *just* like the old days.” Through our in-floor sky TV, I could see the extremists speeding along desert roads, Kalashnikovs slung over every shoulder. “I don’t recall Cleopatra beheading anyone on YouTube.”

“The ancients were plenty savage; fondness for them has simply dulled your memory. Remember the Spartans? The Battle of Thermopylae?”

“That was different,” I said shortly. “They were defending their home!”

Athena shrugged. “Yes, ISIS is full of monsters. Yes, they kill people who don’t **ascribe** to their fanatical religious beliefs, which ironically means we would be first on their kill list. But once *you* have enough power to restore *our* powers, we can eliminate them.”

It presented a neat **sylogism**, with one fatal flaw. How many would die if we allowed my horrific namesake to conquer the continent?

I looked back down at earth. ISIS was invading Palmyra. Thousands of men swarmed the city, their shouts mixed with the sounds of screams and gunshots. Homer couldn’t have written anything more chaotic. While most of the men were busy hacking

Desecrated - Destroy or disrespect something valuable or sacred

Scourge - Someone or something that causes great suffering

Ascribe (to) - Agree with or belong to

Sylogism - A form of reasoning in which a conclusion is drawn based on two premises, but a middle premise is missing

away at the old Roman temples, two in particular caught my eye. Dressed in neutral-colored clothes stained by dust and sweat, they were **converging** on a small home just outside the city.

They shot through the flimsy lock on the wooden door, screaming something as they made their way inside. There was only one room, and it took them less than a second to target the woman sitting on the floor in the far corner, cradling a baby in her arms. She rocked back and forth, her voice shaking as she tried to sing a calming song.

“Up! Now!” in two long strides, the first man was standing above her. He grabbed a handful of her long, black hair and tugged. “You’re coming with us.”

As the woman struggled to her feet, still making **plaintive** “shhh” sounds, he shoved the end of his rifle under her neck. Tears streamed down her cheeks, and the second assailant muttered something about how there was no need for screaming babies where she was going.

The second man raised his hand to strike the infant, but the woman instinctively turned, taking the blow herself. She staggered to the floor as both men converged on her, her body bowing as she shielded her son. The first man, clearly fond of his rifle, began using it as a club, **indiscriminately** whacking her head and torso, while the second man leveled a vicious kick to her hip.

Clenching my jaw, I stepped through the hole in the clouds and materialized between the woman and her attackers, a golden aura surrounding me. The men stopped, mid-blow, as though they had been frozen in time. For a moment, we all just stood there.

“Who the bloody he** are you?” the man with the rifle said, eyes wild.

“Ah, you’re British!” I responded. “ I didn’t catch your accent from Mount Olympus. Traveled halfway across the world to join in the glory of attacking the defenseless, have you?”

Converging - Coming from different directions to meet at a specific place

Plaintive - Sad and mournful

Indiscriminately - Done without showing care or judgement

“Mount whah’?”

“Olympus,” I said in clipped tones. “All gods are welcome now.”

“Wots tha’ got to do wif us?”

“Nothing really,” I said. “Except that you and I share something very important.”

“We share nofing,” he rattled his rifle under my nose. His friend, wisely, had taken several steps back, and was eyeing the door.

“On the contrary,” I smiled. “We share a name. And I — mother of Egypt, queen of the Nile, goddess of healing, and protector of the weak — simply cannot share a name with someone who could do this.”

I turned and bent before the woman at my feet. Only one of her brown eyes was visible; the other was swollen shut, partially covered by her **disheveled** hair. Her lip was bleeding and her breath was ragged, but she and her baby were alive.

I gently took her hands, and the cut on her lip closed. Her eye shrank to its normal size, and the **burgeoning** bruises across her body faded. For good measure, I also washed her hair replaced her flea-ridden garments with a beautiful dress. It had long red sleeves and golden embroidery on the bodice. The neckline was high enough not to offend her modest sensibilities, and she let out a little squeak as she felt the material. I knew for a fact that it was nicer than anything she’d ever **beheld**.

“Witch,” the Brit muttered, aiming his rifle at my chest. His finger squeezed on the trigger and a series of bullets sprang forth. I rolled my eyes and waved the bullets into dust.

“You’ll torment my people no more,” I snapped, and the gunman turned into a celery stalk. He fell to the dirt floor with a soft *clap*.

Disheveled - (Describes a person’s appearance) Messy; disordered

Burgeoning - Beginning to grow or increase rapidly

Beheld - Seen (describing something remarkable)

“And you, cowering in the corner, don’t think I don’t see you,” I addressed his friend. “How did you treat this woman when she was in your position?”

The coward **merely** whimpered in response. A snap of my finger, and a second celery stalk hit the ground.

The woman whose life I saved fell to her knees, her baby sleeping peacefully in fresh blankets. “Oh, great one,” she whimpered. “You have saved us; our lives are yours.”

One down, a few hundred million to go, I thought wryly.

I murmured, “I am a mother, as you are. As you protect your child, so I protect mine.”

Before she could ask me where I’d been when countless others were attacked, forcing me to reveal my lack of **omnipotence**, I swirled out of the room in a golden glow.

“You’re a fool,” Athena grumbled. “A **shortsighted** fool.”

“I’ve made my decision,” I repeated. “I’m the goddess of healing, for goodness sake. I’ll not help them butcher thousands, maybe millions, to save my own life!”

“And *I’m* the goddess of wisdom,” Athena said. “This is *not* the wise decision. You’ll never help anyone again once you lose your power. What then?”

“Then the world will have to turn without me,” I said. “Or perhaps the homicidal extremists will name themselves after you next time! Then the blood will be on your hands.”

She harrumphed, indicating that I was dismissed.

Merely - Only; just

Omnipotence - The state of being all-powerful

Shortsighted - Lacking foresight

Fine by me. I had a basket of food to deliver to the underworld. A plant-based diet is certainly best for **longevity**, but a few mortal souls wouldn't hurt my dear husband. I eyed the celery and grinned.

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