

Just a Game

By

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INT. GAME SHOW STUDIO - DAY

A CONTESTANT (30s) and a game show HOST (50s) sit in the middle of a circular stage. They're surrounded by a packed audience, a la 'Who Wants to Be A Millionaire'.

Beams of plain light tilt down on the platform where the two sit. Suspenseful music fills the air, emitted from wall-mounted speakers. The host looks directly into the camera and speaks, as though it's for real. The music stops.

HOST

Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to our premiere episode of...

The audience enthusiastically chants the show's name as the announcer says it.

HOST AND AUDIENCE

'Right or Red'!

The audience cheers.

HOST

For those of you at home, 'Right or Red' is the show where right answers put you in the green and wrong answers put you in the red. Answer incorrectly and you'll still be in the game, but get two consecutive questions wrong and you're heading home with nothing.

The host invitingly turns toward the contestant.

HOST

It's time to meet our first contestant. Welcome!

CONTESTANT

I'm very happy to be here.

HOST

And we're very glad to have you. Now, you said on your application that you're a police negotiator. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

CONTESTANT

Well, whenever there's a delicate and potentially dangerous situation in the city, like a suicide attempt

CONTESTANT  
or someone being held hostage, I'm  
called in to hopefully depressurize  
it before it gets out of hand.

HOST  
Sounds exciting.

CONTESTANT  
In its own way, yeah.

HOST  
Have you ever failed?

CONTESTANT  
Nobody has a perfect track record.

The host starts laughing hysterically as the contestant  
retains his camera smile. Sparse chuckles can be heard from  
the audience.

CONTESTANT  
It's not really that funny.

HOST  
Okay, contestant! Are you ready to  
play...

Again the audience says the title along with the host.

HOST  
...'Right or Red!'

CONTESTANT  
Absolutely!

HOST  
Then let's begin!

An exciting burst of music plays as the lights' color  
changes to green.

HOST  
Our first question is:

The host pauses dramatically as the contestant licks his  
lips and takes a breath.

HOST  
What famous singer won the Oscar  
for Best Actress at the sixtieth  
Academy Awards?

CONTESTANT

Cher.

A quick buzz sounds off and the lights turn red. The contestant frantically looks at them and the crowd, searching for an explanation.

HOST

Oh, that's not quite right. The correct answer is Barbara Streisand.

CONTESTANT

No it isn't.

HOST

Are you ready for question--

CONTESTANT

It wasn't her! I swear to you that if you look it up the answer is indisputably Cher.

The host puts his hand to his ear, addressing his earpiece.

HOST

Jimmy, could you do something to move this along?

The host focuses on the voice from the device, looking away from the confrontational contestant.

HOST

Uh huh. Uh huh. Really. I didn't know that. I'll tell them.

The host turns back toward the camera.

HOST

It seems there's been a bit of a slip-up in the program. The answer to the first question was, in fact, Cher. The contestant will move on to the next question and be put back in the green.

The lights return to being green. The host turns back toward the contestant.

HOST

We're terribly sorry for the mistake, but in my defense they're very similar people.

CONTESTANT  
No they're not.

The host very nearly cuts the contestant off.

HOST  
Now that that's been settled are  
you ready for question 2?!

CONTESTANT  
Bring it on!

HOST  
Okay. Question two is:

Another pause and more music. The audience is eating it up.

HOST  
Whose head did Herodias receive on  
a platter in the New Testament of  
the Bible?

CONTESTANT  
It has to be John the Baptist.

BUZZ! The lights change to red.

HOST  
Close but no cigar. The correct  
answer is Jesus Christ.

CONTESTANT  
I don't believe this!

HOST  
I know. Sometimes we can't help but  
be wrong. Next question--

An AUDIENCE MEMBER's voice bellows from the crowd.

AUDIENCE MEMBER  
It wasn't Jesus!

CONTESTANT  
They're right. It's pretty  
obviously not Jesus.

The host puts his finger to his ear.

HOST  
Can you give me a fact check on  
that? Oh. I see. Why didn't you  
check before? Well, hindsight's

HOST  
twenty-twenty. Just give me one  
more chance. Please. Please.  
Please. Please. Please. I won't let  
you down.

The host turns toward the camera.

HOST  
It seems that the document listing  
the answers to the questions is  
riddled with inaccuracies,  
fabrications, and outright slander,  
and the producers would like to  
apologize to our gracious  
contestant.

CONTESTANT  
No problem.

HOST  
However, the producers have also  
decided to roll with the concept  
for today's episode to make things  
a little more interesting. So  
you're unfortunately still in the  
red.

CONTESTANT  
That's not fair!

HOST  
Tell it to the big man upstairs.  
His name's Carl and he likes  
enchiladas.

The host wheezes out more laughs. The rest of the stage is  
silent. The contestant looks at the host with disgust,  
swallowing contempt like the bitterest of pills.

HOST  
Are you ready for question three?

CONTESTANT  
My appendectomy won't pay for  
itself.

HOST  
All right! Question three is:

Suspenseful music plays, its tempo sped up due to the  
contestant being in the red.

HOST  
Who was the second president of the  
United States?

The contestant rigorously thinks about their answer.

CONTESTANT  
It was...

HOST  
Ten seconds.

Sweat forms on the contestant's brow as they lean back in  
their chair, hands clenched together at mouth-level.

HOST  
Five seconds.

CONTESTANT  
Abraham Lincoln. It was Abraham  
Lincoln.

BZZZZ! The lights go back to being plain.

HOST  
Sorry. It was John F. Kennedy.

The contestant screams.

HOST  
Thank you for playing. We're sorry  
it didn't work out but--

CONTESTANT  
Who wrote that answer sheet?

HOST  
I'm sorry?

CONTESTANT  
I wanna know who wrote that answer  
sheet. Somebody's gonna pay for  
this.

The host addresses his earpiece.

HOST  
Can you send in some security? Why  
not? I don't care if it's juicy  
television! I...Yes, sir.

CONTESTANT  
What'd he say?

HOST  
I wrote it. Okay?

CONTESTANT  
What?

HOST  
I'm the one who drafted and submitted the answer sheet for today's episode. Satisfied now?

CONTESTANT  
What about your writers?

HOST  
We don't have any writers. We didn't have the budget for it so I had to come up with the questions and answers for today's show.

CONTESTANT  
You couldn't look up the answers before submitting it?

HOST  
I was pretty sure I was right!

CONTESTANT  
Oh my god.

HOST  
I'm sorry you lost but under the new guidelines implemented by the producers--

CONTESTANT  
Do you drink bleach in your spare time?

HOST  
Now, that kind of vitriol isn't necessary.

CONTESTANT  
Have you ever worked as a crash-test dummy? Do you suffocate yourself to fall asleep?

HOST  
Please stop.

CONTESTANT  
Has anyone in your entire life held  
you responsible for any wrongdoing  
you've ever committed?

The host leans forward and pulls a pistol from the back of the waist of his pants. He fires it into the air, rubble from the ceiling falling near the two.

The crowd screams, its members ducking behind their seats. The contestant jumps from the noise, then cautiously raising their hands in front of them. The host points the gun at the contestant.

HOST  
Don't talk about me like that!

The contestant looks toward the producer's booth, arms still in the direction of the host.

CONTESTANT  
Who let him bring a gun?!

HOST  
I'm not stupid!

The host pulls the hammer back with his thumb. The contestant reverts their attention back to the crazed gunman.

CONTESTANT  
Take it easy now.

HOST  
All my life everybody's been  
calling me stupid and I haven't  
been able to do anything about it.  
Well, that changes today.

The host further extends his arm, preparing to shoot.

HOST  
Starting with you!

In a flash of movement the contestant forces the hosts arm to point back toward the ceiling as the host takes the shot. More debris falls.

The contestant punches the host in the face with their free hand, knocking him out. The contestant grabs the gun from the unconscious host's hand and stands up. The contestant addresses the startled crowd.

CONTESTANT

Comrades and countrymen! We are no longer subjected to the whims of the uninformed elite!

Audience members begin standing up again.

CONTESTANT

We are again free to enforce fact as fact and stand up to those who say otherwise!

More audience members stand up as triumphant resistance music begins to play.

CONTESTANT

We are not sheep, and we are not led as such! Together we can unite the people under a banner of knowledge and confidence, rather than lies and placation!

The whole crowd is standing now. The music is distinctly noticeable at this point.

CONTESTANT

Who's with me?!

The entire audience cheers. As the cheering quiets down we discover something unexpected: the contestant is a baritone.

CONTESTANT

(singing)

Stand tall, friends, arms in hand.  
Freedom reigns o'er the land.  
Never will we fall once more.  
Now's the age of splendor!

The music climatically rises with the contestant's voice, reaching an explosive finale on their last note. The audience cheers, some of its members waving around large American flags, as confetti falls from the ceiling.

ZOOM OUT FROM TV:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

An average CITIZEN in an undershirt and jeans watches the show from a ratty chair with his legs on a rattier footstool. He has his remote control in hand.

CITIZEN  
Too political.

As he turns off the TV we...

CUT TO BLACK