



928. The Abduction 🛸 (Learn English with a Short Story)

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1. Notes for the episode introduction

Hello listeners, welcome back to Luke's English Podcast. How are you doing today? I hope you're doing fine.

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So, this is a story episode, which means that, as usual, I'm going to tell you a story and then use it to help you learn English.

What is going to happen is that first I'll read the story to you. You can just try to follow it and understand everything, and then afterwards I'll summarise it, just to make sure you've understood the overall meaning of what happened in the story. And then I'll go through the story again, line by line, and I will explain bits of vocabulary as we go.

There's a lot of English to learn from this story, lots of useful phrases, regularly used expressions and vocabulary, which you could apply to a variety of different contexts. This is the sort of natural, up-to-date English that is used today, presented in a story and then explained by me afterwards.

The story is short, it's about 1,500 words long, something like that, which is short, but this episode might be long because I'm not just telling you the story, I'm also going to analyse and teach you a lot of the language. The story itself will probably take about 15-20 minutes and then the rest of the episode will be me teaching you English.

So, short story, but long episode.

If you want to practise your pronunciation with this, you could repeat each line after me. You might need to use the pause button after each line, or perhaps read the story out loud at the same time as me (that's shadowing). You could try doing this both with and without the story text in front of you.

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If the story is a bit long for you to shadow the entire thing, you could just maybe just focus on one part of it.

Also, you could record yourself reading the story and then compare your recording to mine and identify differences, identify maybe little bits of pronunciation that were problematic for you, certain sounds which were tricky, which you could then focus on, or you could just simply enjoy listening to the story without feeling the need to do anything else, it's up to you.

As usual, there is a PDF for this which contains the full story text and all my notes, my vocab notes and stuff like that. You can download that from my website, you'll find a link in the description, right?

So, let's get started, shall we? Yes.

So first of all, a general question, a general question. So think about this, as you listen to the story,

What kind of story is this? How would you categorise this story in terms of its style or its genre?

So what kind of story is this? And one other thing, by the way, the main character in this story is Spanish, he is a learner of English from Spain, so the main character is Spanish, and when he speaks, rather than me attempting to do some kind of Spanish accent, instead I'll just be reading those lines in my normal English accent, I think that would probably be best, rather than me attempting to do some horrendous Spanish accent which wouldn't really be appropriate. Anyway, so he's just going to speak in my voice,

maybe he listens to Luke's English podcast a lot and as a result he just speaks English without a particular Spanish accent.

Anyway, let's get started, so what kind of story is this? Here we go.

2. Full story text (1721 words)

The Abduction- a.k.a - The Bizarre Abduction of José Martinez

José Martinez was an ordinary man living in a quaint little town on the outskirts of London, in England.

Originally from Spain, José had moved to the UK to improve his English by immersing himself in the language and culture.

He managed to find work as a mechanic, fixing up old cars in a small garage.

His life was relatively simple and uneventful, except for one major hurdle — his struggle to understand all the different British accents and dialects which he encountered on a daily basis.

And the food of course.

And the weather.

And how expensive everything was.

And the draughty windows.

And the tiny kitchens.

And the carpet everywhere.

And the fact there were always two taps on every bathroom sink, so when he washed he either froze his hands in ice-cold water, or completely boiled them.

There was also the visa issue because of Brexit, but except for all that, it was wonderful.

One crisp autumn evening, José was closing up his garage, the sun setting in a blaze of orange and red behind the dark grey clouds.

As he was locking the door, he noticed a strange light in the sky.

At first, he thought it was a plane, then perhaps a drone, or maybe a ball from that weird game called cricket that people play in England.

But no, it was something even stranger than that. It moved erratically, zigzagging across the sky like a drunk mosquito.

Curiosity got the better of José, and he stood there, staring at the phenomenon, his mouth hanging open.

Suddenly, the light grew brighter and zoomed towards José at an incredible speed.

Before he could react, José was enveloped in a blinding white light and felt his feet leave the ground.

“Oh bloody hell” he said, because that’s what English people say in this kind of situation, and, you know, he was trying to blend in.

When he woke up, José found himself in a sterile, metallic room. He was lying on a cold, hard surface, like the world's worst spa treatment.

At first he thought he was still in England. He was cold and a bit uncomfortable, like normal.

Then panic set in when he noticed there was no carpet on the floor and he realised he’d actually been abducted by aliens.

He tried to sit up, but his body felt heavy, and his head was spinning like he'd just come back from a trip to the pub with his English mate Barry.

A door slid open, and two figures entered the room.

They were humanoid but taller, with elongated limbs and large, almond-shaped eyes.

Imagine a yoga instructor had had a baby with some kind of insect.

That’s what they looked like - standard alien stuff really.

Their skin had a bluish colour, and they moved with an eerie grace, like ballet dancers who took their job just a little bit too seriously.

One of them approached José and placed a device on his forehead.

José felt a slight tingling sensation, and suddenly, the room seemed to spin faster.

"Oh bloody hell" he said, again.

"Do not be afraid, José Martinez," a voice echoed in his mind, in English.

The alien's lips didn't move.

"We mean you no harm."

"Who... who are you? And why do you even have lips if you can do this mind speaking thing that you're doing to me, currently, at this very moment, right now?"

... said José, quite impressed with his own English, but also wondering if this was all a big trick and he was actually on a terrible TV prank show or something.

He glanced around the room to see if there were any cameras, but there weren't any.

All he could see was just weird alien technology all around him.

"Oh José, what have you got yourself into this time?"
he muttered to himself.

"We are the Xelara," the alien replied telepathically.

"We have been observing your species for centuries.

We have chosen you, José Martinez, for an experiment that will benefit both our kinds."

José's fear slowly began to subside, replaced by curiosity as well as a bit of annoyance.

"Look, if it's about my visa, I'm in the process of renewing it, honestly, I just need to..."

But the Xelara didn't let him finish.

"We have developed a technology that allows us to share knowledge through direct neural transfer," it explained.

"You will be the first human to receive this gift.

We will give you all our knowledge including everything we have learned and observed about the English people and their language.

In return, we ask that you share your Spanish culture and language with us..."

"Err... I'm from Barcelona" said José.

"and... well, haven't you heard of Duolingo... or podcasts?"

But the Xelara continued,

"Please, we ask you to share your language and culture with us, and that you let us... examine you."

“Huh?” said José, but before he could go any further, the alien activated the device on his forehead.

A flood of information surged into José’s mind – grammar rules, vocabulary, idioms, and all the nuances of the English language - every accent, even the Liverpool one.

It was overwhelming, like that time Barry tried to explain the rules of snooker after they’d drunk 7 pints of Guinness.

Plus, José hadn’t actually given his consent for any of this, which seemed a bit wrong, like some kind of space crime or something.

However, as the minutes passed, José felt his understanding of English deepen to an extraordinary level.

He could now speak, read, understand and write English with impeccable precision, and could probably give grammar lessons to Shakespeare, if he wasn’t dead.

Shakespeare I mean.

José was still alive of course.

In fact, at this moment, he felt more alive than ever before.

Days turned into weeks as José adapted to his new environment, the discomfort of his initial abduction wearing off with time.

The Xelara were fascinated by human culture, and José shared stories, music, and literature with them, along with his recipe for how to make the perfect paella.

He even told them a couple of jokes he'd picked up while living in England, although the Xelara showed no signs of having any sense of humour.

“Hey aliens, wanna hear another joke? Barry told me this one.” said José one afternoon.

The aliens just stared impassively, until finally one of them said, “Yes, please give us more examples of your fascinating earth humour.”

“OK. Guys, you're gonna love this one. Just promise not to probe me if it doesn't make you laugh, alright?”

The Xelara looked at one another.

“Never mind” said José. “Here's the joke”

“What did the Spanish fireman call his two sons?”

The Xelara stared at each other, nodding their heads. They seemed to be conferring together, trying to find the best answer to José's question.

One of them replied, telepathically, “Our research indicates that the most common male names in Spain currently are Martin and Matteo.”

“No no no” said José, chuckling.

“The Spanish fireman called his two sons José and hose B”

There was no reaction from the Xelara.

But José couldn't stop laughing at his own joke.

“Get it? José and hose B. Hoses, right? Firemen have hoses, and he's a fireman and... his first son is called José and then hose B and...”

But the Xelara didn't laugh. Instead they just looked at José, with their heads cocked to one side, unblinking.

“OK, too much wordplay” said José

“It's alright. I'll keep it simple. Here's another one. Ready? ...

What do you call a Spanish guy who's lost his car?

What do you call a Spanish guy who's lost his car?”

The aliens continued to stare, unblinking, at José.

One of them turned his head slowly, to look at the others.

“Spanish guy, lost his car. What is his name?” said José, his eyebrows raised.

The aliens didn't respond.

“CARLOS!”

José laughed out loud for a while, enjoying his own joke a bit too much.

The Xelara remained silent for a while, and then thanked José for introducing them to more earth humour, before politely leaving the room.

In return for everything they learned from him, the Xelara taught José about their advanced technology and interstellar navigation, which he thought was a pretty fair trade, ...

... even though he was quite sure he'd never actually use interstellar navigation unless he decided to start an intergalactic Uber service or something, but he didn't want to.

Despite their differences, and the fact they had basically kidnapped him, José found himself growing fond of his captors, appreciating their wisdom and the peacefulness of their society — despite their complete lack of humour, and their insistence on probing him as part of their “research”, which we probably shouldn't talk about now.

One day, the Xelara informed José that it was time for him to return to Earth.

They had gathered the information they needed, and as promised, they would send him back with his new knowledge intact.

They even promised to provide him with a new pair of trousers, as the others had been damaged during some of their research.

“Goodbye José, son of a fireman” they said, telepathically, waving their long graceful arms.

“Actually, my father was an office manager...” said José, but before he could continue, the same blinding light enveloped him once more, and when he opened his eyes, he was back in England, standing in front of his garage.

The sun was rising now, casting a golden glow over the familiar surroundings.

It seemed that he'd just been standing there in front of his garage all night, with his mouth hanging open.

The whole experience felt like a dream, but the enhanced clarity of his thoughts and speech told him otherwise.

His brain was positively fizzing with brand new advanced English vocabulary.

José resumed his life, but he was forever changed.

After finally getting his working visa and indefinite leave to remain in the UK, he became a respected author and public speaker, sharing his experiences through beautifully written stories and TED Talks.

He even started his own podcast which, annoyingly, became even more popular than Luke's English Podcast ...

But I suppose that's no surprise considering he was the only human on earth ever to have been abducted by aliens who then shared all their knowledge with him and so much more.

José's command of the English language, and his incredible anecdotes captivated readers and audiences everywhere.

Although he never saw the Xelara again, he knew their encounter had opened a new chapter in human-alien relations.

He cherished his time with the aliens, despite all the probing, which he wasn't convinced was absolutely necessary ...

... and every time José made paella, he couldn't help but chuckle, wondering if the Xelara had learned to make it too, and how they would find saffron in deep space.

3. The story with my vocabulary notes included

The Abduction - a.k.a - The Bizarre Abduction of José Martinez

*José Martinez was an **ordinary** man living in a **quaint** little town **on the outskirts** of London, in England.*

Ordinary (adj)

Normal, commonplace, typical, usual

- An ordinary person
- An ordinary day

- Ordinary circumstances

Examples

It was just an ordinary day at work, nothing exciting happened.

She's an ordinary person. There's nothing particularly special about her.

Quaint (adj)

Attractive, cute, old fashioned, with a specific style to it.

- A quaint village
- A quaint cottage
- A quaint custom

Examples

We visited a quaint village in the Cotswolds that looked like something out of a fairy tale.

Well-dressing in the Peak District in Derbyshire, England is a quaint custom that dates back centuries. If you visit the area between May & September, you might see lovely hand made decorations next to wells or sources of natural spring water. Like this: [Well Dressings - Visit Peak District & Derbyshire](#).

On the outskirts of London

On the edge of London, in the area surrounding London

Examples

*They live **on the outskirts** of the city, where it's quieter.*

*The new shopping centre is located **on the outskirts** of town.*

On the outskirts, on the edge of town, in the suburbs

Originally from Spain, José had moved to the UK to improve his English by immersing himself in the language and culture.

*He managed to find work as a mechanic, **fixing up** old cars in a small garage.*

Fixing up (phrasal verb)

fixing = repairing it

Fixing it up = repairing it totally, and also renovating it to make it look new and presentable

Quick Quiz: Fix or fix up?

1. My bike is broken. Can you _____ it?
2. I found this broken old bike in a market. I'm going to _____ and give it to my son as a birthday present.
3. They're _____ the spare bedroom before the baby is born
4. I spent the afternoon _____ our dishwasher, which had stopped working the night before.

Answers

1. Fix
2. Fix it up
3. Fixing up
4. Fixing

*His life was **relatively simple** and **uneventful**, except for one **major hurdle***

Relatively simple (adverb + adjective)

Simple when compared to other people's lives (relatively)

Examples

The exam was relatively easy compared to last year's.

The town is relatively small, but it has a lot of charm.

This species of plant is relatively unknown outside of the region.

*It's relatively quiet here at night, especially for a city.
He's relatively new to the company but has already made an impact.*

Uneventful (adj)

Without any major events, fairly quiet, not full of drama

- An uneventful life
- An uneventful week

Major (adj)

Big, significant

Hurdle (noun)

An obstacle which you have to jump over

A thing which gets in your way. A problem which you have to deal with in order to continue.

— *his struggle to understand all the different British **accents and dialects** which he encountered on a daily basis.*

Accents = ways people in different communities pronounce a language differently

Dialects = the ways that different communities use different words in a language (often considered non-standard varieties of a language)

And the food of course.

And the weather.

And how expensive everything was.

*And the **draughty** windows.*

And the tiny kitchens.

And the carpet everywhere.

And the fact there were always two taps on every bathroom sink, so when he washed he either froze his hands in ice-cold water, or completely boiled them.

There was also the visa issue because of Brexit, but except for all that, it was wonderful.

*One **crisp** autumn evening, José was **closing up** his garage, the sun setting in a **blaze** of orange and red behind the dark grey clouds.*

Crisp

Different definitions of “crisp” either for the texture of objects or materials, or for weather or a sense of clarity.

General definition: Firm, dry, and brittle to the touch (e.g., "crisp apple," "crisp paper").

Weather: Cool, fresh, and invigorating (e.g., "a crisp morning").

Clarity: Clear and precise in sound, appearance, or style (e.g., "crisp handwriting," "crisp audio").

When describing an autumn evening, "crisp" refers to the cool, fresh air often experienced during that time of year.

The temperature is typically chilly enough to make you feel invigorated but not freezing.

It might also express a sense of clarity in the atmosphere. Imagine cool air, blue sky, vivid colours, a freshness, perhaps a faint scent of woodsmoke or fallen leaves. The atmosphere is clear and fresh.

Closing up his garage

Closing = securing, finishing, closing a door or window

Closing up = the same as above, but also suggests a sense of completeness. In the case of the garage, that means that the whole garage is closed (not just closing the door) but turning out the lights, shutting down the equipment, finishing work, tidying away the tools etc and locking the door. Ending business for the day and locking the place up.

Up in phrasal verbs

The particle "up" often conveys a sense of completeness, thoroughness, or bringing something to its final state in phrasal verbs.

Use up

Meaning: To consume all of something until there's none left. Use it until there is nothing left.

Example: "We used up all the sugar while baking cookies." "I used up all the ink in my pen writing notes while listening to LEP"

Eat up (also drink up)

Meaning: To finish eating everything on your plate.

Example: "Come on, eat up your dinner before it gets cold."

Listen up

Not just listen, but listen with your full attention.

Clean up

Meaning: To tidy or make something completely clean.

Example: "After the party, we stayed late to clean up the mess."

Break up

Meaning: To end a relationship or event completely. Not just break, but break up, suggesting it is permanent.

Example: "They decided to break up after five years together."

Tear up

Meaning: To rip something into small pieces completely.

Example: "She tore up the letter in frustration." She tore the letter when putting it in her pocket. She tore the letter up in anger.

Lock up

Meaning: To secure something completely by locking it.

Example: "Don't forget to lock up the house before you leave."

Dry up

Meaning: To become completely dry or to exhaust a supply of something.

Example: "The river dried up after the long drought." "Hopefully, my inspiration and motivation for doing these podcasts will never dry up"

The sun setting

The sun sets in the evening, and rises in the morning.

A Blaze = a fire

*As he was **locking** the door, he noticed a strange light in the sky.*

lock vs lock up

He locked the door, but you could say he locked up the garage.

***At first**, he thought it was a plane, then perhaps a drone, or maybe a ball from that weird game called cricket that people play in England.*

- At first
- Firstly
- First of all

*But no, it was something even stranger than that. It moved **erratically**, zigzagging across the sky like a drunk mosquito.*

Erratically (adv)

In an inconsistent, irregular and unpredictable way.

Example

*Tiger mosquitoes move quite **erratically**, which makes it harder to kill them.*

Zigzagging (verb)

Describing a movement - in diagonal lines

Example

*Apparently, when you are running away from a crocodile, you should **zig-zag**, because crocs find it hard to turn and are better at running in a straight line. Something to remember the next time you're running away from a saltwater crocodile. You can thank me for that later.*

*The path **zig-zags** through the mountains.*

***Curiosity got the better of** José, and he stood there, staring at the **phenomenon**, his mouth hanging open.*

Curiosity (noun)

A feeling of being curious - of wanting to know more about something

To get the better of someone (verb phrase)

When a feeling becomes powerful and takes over control of you, and guides your actions. An impulse which makes someone do something.

- Emotions got the better of him
- Curiosity got the better of her
- Anger got the better of me
- Fear got the better of her

Examples

*Her curiosity **got the better of** her, and she opened the mysterious box.*

*He wanted to stay calm, but his anger **got the better of** him during the argument.*

*I tried to resist, but temptation **got the better of** me, and I ate the cake.*

*His fear **got the better of** him, and he decided not to take the risk.*

*Suddenly, the light **grew brighter** and **zoomed** towards José at an incredible speed.*

The light grew brighter = the light became brighter

Sometimes, grow means become, especially with comparative adjectives.

Examples

*After listening to so many of Luke's episodes, my vocabulary has **grown** stronger.*

*I have **grown** more confident over the years.*

*I liked the first series of The Walking Dead (TV show), but it **grew** boring after about series 6 or 7. I mean, how many times can they repeat the same storylines over and over and everything seemed to happen on one single stretch of road in the Georgian countryside.*

To zoom = to go fast, usually in some kind of motor-driven machine.

Zoom is an onomatopoeia - a word which sounds like the thing it is describing. Zoooom!

Example

*I **zoomed** down the road on the motorbike, and then I crashed into a tree and died.*

It can be for other things too, not just motor-driven vehicles.

*The kids **zoom** down this road on their skateboards, making so much noise!*

*My son and his friend spent the morning **zooming** around the back garden, playing games. I don't know where they get their energy from.*

Zoom (teleconferencing software)

Why did they call themselves zoom?

To evoke a sense of: speed, efficiency, clarity and focus (zoom is also something you do with a camera when you focus in on a particular detail and make it bigger).

It's also just a memorable and snappy word.

*Before he could react, José **was enveloped** in a blinding white light and **felt his feet leave the ground**.*

To be enveloped in something = to be surrounded by something, or contained within something

An envelope is something you put a letter inside and seal it

To envelope or be enveloped is the verb for this (and it's for other things, not just for letters)

By the way, in letters you would write "Please find enclosed my CV" and not "Please find enveloped my CV" (just FYI)

In emails it is "Please find attached"

Pronunciation (word stress)

Envelope O o o

Envelop o O o

-ed ending

Enveloped /t/

/ɪn'vɛləpt/

Connected speech

The /t/ at the end of enveloped connects to the /ɪ/ at the beginning of "in".

/hi:wəz ɪn'vɛləpt ɪn ə 'blaɪndɪŋ waɪt laɪt/

Repeat: He was enveloped in a blinding white light

Notice how the words connect, and also how the /t/ sounds at the ends of "white" and "light" don't get fully pronounced.

Why? In this case it is because of elision.

Elision (cutting sounds)

The /t/ sound may be completely dropped when it appears between consonants or at the end of a word, especially in fast or informal speech.

Example:

"next day" → /nekst deɪ/ → /neks deɪ/.

"just go" → /dʒʌst gəʊ/ → /dʒʌs gəʊ/.

"White light" /waɪt laɪt/ (it's not completely missing - the tongue moves into position to make the t sound, but doesn't - so it's not "why lie")

Why does elision happen? Elision simplifies pronunciation, making speech more fluid.

Conclusion: Just notice how 't' sounds are often dropped or elided in fluent speech. They might also become glottal stops (in certain UK accents) "water" "better" or might become turned into a /d/ sound as often happens in US English. "Not at all" "water" "better"

A blinding white light

A white light which blinds you because it is so bright

He **felt his feet leave** the ground

His whole body went up into the air and started floating, and so his feet lost contact with the ground.

*"Oh bloody hell" he said, because that's what English people say in this kind of situation, and, you know, he was trying **to blend in.***

To blend in

= to be the same as everyone else, so that you're not obviously different, not sticking out

To blend = to mix with something else (blend ingredients while cooking - blend egg and cream when making a quiche)

To blend in (with something) - when talking about something people do = to be the same as everyone else, perhaps so people don't notice you.

José wants to act like British people so he can integrate into society, and do the same things that the local do.

Like me when I wear a stripy t-shirt in France. Nobody need ever know that I'm actually a British guy who can't order a jug of water in a cafe in French without the entire restaurant instantly switching to English. If I wear the stripy t-shirt, and keep my mouth shut, and maybe smoke a cigarette and go on strike while getting stuck in a traffic jam and talking about food, I will blend in perfectly and everyone will assume I am French.

*When he woke up, José found himself in a **sterile, metallic** room.
He was lying on a cold, hard surface, like the world's worst spa treatment.*

Sterile (adj) = clean and with no bacteria

A laboratory should be a sterile environment (unless of course you're growing bacteria there, but you know what I mean)

An operating theatre (where surgery happens) should be sterile, that's why the surgeons and nurses have to wash themselves before they go in, and wear clean, sterile clothes.

The instruments used by doctors in hospital should be sterile - needles, swabs, those wooden things they put on your tongue

when you say “aaah”. If they put a thermometer in your mouth they will need to sterilize it first, especially if it’s been used by someone else just before you, and especially if you live in France because here they tend to check your body temperature by putting the thermometer in your bum. They love doing that, because it is apparently “more accurate”.

Metallic = made of metal, or similar to metal

- A metallic room “He woke up in a cold, sterile, metallic room”
- A metallic taste “Water from a can sometimes has a metallic taste”
- A metallic sound “I could hear a metallic sound coming from the next room, as if someone was scraping or sharpening a tool”
- A metallic colour “Do you like the colour of my new car. I chose metallic blue.” “Oh yes, that’s very nice”

At first he thought he was still in England.

He was cold and a bit uncomfortable, like normal.

People often complain that England is a bit cold and uncomfortable - perhaps draughty. At least this is what I often heard from students I taught in London, who were staying in rented accommodation in London, or a local homestay. Not just Spanish students. People often complained that England was a bit uncomfortable in a few ways, and I used to think “What is the matter with you people? Everyone is so sensitive.”

Then panic set in when he noticed there was no carpet on the floor and he realised he’d actually been abducted by aliens.

Panic set in

If something sets in then it takes effect, starts to happen, becomes noticeable.

If it is a feeling, then the feeling gradually arrives and then stays. José suddenly started to feel panic. Panic set in.

Other Examples of "Set In":

- Feelings or emotions:

"Jane suddenly realised she had lost her phone. As the reality of the loss set in, she began to cry."

(The feeling of loss became firmly established.)

- Unwelcome or persistent conditions:

"Winter set in early this year, with heavy snow in November."

(Winter began and became established.)

- Negative developments:

"If untreated, the infection can set in and become serious."

(The infection can take hold and worsen.)

This reminds me of that time I got sick in Japan (did I ever tell you about that?) where I got a nasty throat infection and it started to **set in** and became very nasty. I couldn't seem to get the right treatment from several doctors, who didn't care or didn't diagnose it properly, until I eventually got it sorted out. Fun times.

To be abducted by aliens

Kidnapped is a synonym of abducted. So, a person can be abducted by people, or kidnapped by people. But we never say "kidnapped by aliens".

He tried to sit up, but his body felt heavy, and his head was spinning like he'd just come back from a trip to the pub with his English mate Barry.

To sit up = I guess this just means to sit, right? Because the only time you we say “sit up” is when you are lying down and then you go into a sitting position with your upper body vertical, but you’re not standing.

So, we might as well just say “sit”. “He tried to sit”, but really it means what I said - to go from lying down vertically, to a sitting position (maybe with your legs still horizontal).

Funnily enough, to “sit down” as you probably know, means to go from a vertical (standing) position, to a sitting position.

So, sit up, and sit down.

His head was spinning

Spinning means going round and round really fast, like a basketball on someone’s finger.

If your head spins, it means you feel dizzy, like when you have drunk too much alcohol, or if you have just spent 30 minutes listening to someone explain the use of the present perfect continuous passive conditional verb form when combined with past modal verbs of deduction in reduced participle relative clauses in English grammar. Maybe your head is spinning just from listening to me say that sentence.

In cartoons, they usually show little birds or stars spinning around someone’s head.

*A door **slid** open, and two **figures** entered the room.*

Slide - slid - slid

It was a sliding door. Aliens never have normal doors on spaceships do they?

Two figures = a figure here means the outline of a person's body. We call a person a 'figure' when we can't really see them clearly. So, "I saw a figure in the distance" or "I saw two figures walking up the dark street". You could say "people" in those examples, but "figures" is more specific.

*They were **humanoid** but taller, with **elongated limbs** and large, **almond-shaped** eyes.*

Humanoid (adj) = it looks like a human (same body shape) and maybe moves or acts like one, but isn't a human

Elongated limbs

Limbs = arms and legs

Elongated = long and thin, narrow and slender - more than usual
Their arms and legs were longer and slimmer than in normal humans

- An elongated face
- Giraffes have an elongated neck
- Some fish have elongated bodies to help them swim through the water

Almond-shaped = shaped like an almond (obviously)

Note the pronunciation of "almond" (the L is silent)

Other words with a silent L

- Calm

- Palm
- Yolk
- Walk
- Talk
- Could
- Would
- Should
- Folk
- Half

*Imagine a yoga instructor **had had** a baby with some kind of insect.*

*That's what they looked like - **standard alien stuff** really.*

Had had → yes this is possible, normal and frequent. It happens when the verb “have” is put into past perfect form.

- When I stood up I realised I had had too much to eat.
- I decided that I had had enough.
- After we'd had a break, we got back to work.

Standard alien stuff = the usual, typical, normal things you get from aliens in this kind of story or film

*Their skin had a **bluish** colour, and they moved with an **eerie grace**, like ballet dancers who took their job just a little bit too seriously.*

Bluish = something like blue, close to blue, kind of blue

We use the suffix “**-ish**” to say “something like” or “approximately”

We use it with adjectives “It’s new-ish” “it’s a kind of blueish-greenish colour” and also with approximate times and numbers “She’s 30-ish” or “Let’s meet around 12-ish”

Eerie = strange, weird, odd, bizarre. Eerie also means a bit creepy. She heard the eerie noise of the wind howling through the trees.

eerie feeling - He had the eerie feeling that he had met this stranger before.

Grace = a quality of moving in a smooth, relaxed, and attractive way

The ballroom dancers moved with such grace and elegance

Note: “ballet” is pronounced without the /t/

*One of them **approached** José and **placed** a device on his **forehead**.*

Approached = moved towards him

Placed = put something in a specific place

Forehead = the part of the head at the front, above your brow, where you “head” a football

Vocabulary for parts of the head? Why not

- The forehead
- The temples
- The crown
- The jaw
- The chin
- The cheekbones
- The brow
- The philtrum
- The hairline

- A parting
- The scalp
- The skull

*José felt a slight **tingling sensation**, and suddenly, the room seemed to spin faster.*

“Oh bloody hell” he said, again.

A tingling sensation = a feeling in your body or parts of your body as if tiny little needles (or perhaps just small points) are touching your skin

You get it in your legs when you have been sitting in one position for too long

If you hold our your arm, as the blood drains from it you get a tingling sensation

Generally it describes a slightly strange sensation on your body which could be due to a loss of blood circulation, or fear, or excitement or perhaps some kind of electro-magnetic signal or something like that, or alien technology. I imagine when an alien places a brain-communication device on your forehead and switches it on, you would feel a tingling sensation.

If you have ever been abducted by aliens and they connected mind-reading technology directly to your brain and communicated with you telepathically - let us know in the comment section if it gave you a tingling sensation

*"Do not be afraid, José Martinez," a voice **echoed** in his mind, in English.*

The alien's lips didn't move.

"We mean you no harm. "

To echo = when sound repeats because it bounced off different surfaces - like when you are in a large cave and you shout "hello!" and you hear your voice bouncing back - that's an echo.

Presumably, the alien's voice echoes inside José's mind, because, well, his mind is a bit empty or something, and the sound just bounces around inside his skull. Either that or it is just the effect of the mysterious technology.

We mean you no harm = We do not intend to hurt or harm you (but this is the phrase you definitely use when you encounter a frightened creature or species from another planet. We mean you no harm. We come in peace. Now, please, take me to your leader)

"Who... who are you? And why do you even have lips if you can do this mind speaking thing that you're doing to me, currently, at this very moment, right now?"

... said José, quite impressed with his own English, but also wondering if this was all a big trick and he was actually on a terrible TV prank show or something.

A prank = a practical joke or trick.

E.g. Swapping the sugar on the table for salt (or vice versa) and then watching your brother pour loads of salt in his coffee and filming his reaction when he tastes it and nearly throws up all over himself because it's so disgusting, and then laughing about it.

(Pranks aren't always filmed though)

A TV prank show is one where people play pranks on other people and it's all filmed with hidden cameras.

He glanced around the room to see if there were any cameras, but there weren't any.

All he could see was just weird alien technology all around him.

*"Oh José, **what have you got yourself into this time?**" he muttered to himself.*

What have you got yourself into?

To get yourself into something = to cause yourself to be in a certain situation

Imagine, meeting some strangers in a pub and getting to know them a bit and they invite you to their home for a game of cards and you say "OK" and when you arrive things are strange and there are other people there, and it seems that they're having a kind of strange party and they are doing weird things and they want you to join in and you think "Oh, how did I become part of this! I just want to leave please!" and you escape to the toilet and think "Oh, what have you got yourself into this time?" (not that this has ever happened to me you understand, it's just an example)

*"We are the Xelara," the alien replied **telepathically**.*

"We have been observing your species for centuries.

Telepathic = being able to communicate with other people only using your mind, using special “magic” mind connections, and not words or physical signals

To communicate telepathically = to communicate like this, using mind magic

To be honest, if this kind of telepathic communication technology ever gets to earth and is introduced here, then my job as an English teacher is finished. This is why I think we should have a very hostile and aggressive anti-alien policy on earth and José should immediately inform the army about this alien encounter, so they can send special space commandos from earth, into space, to track down the Xelara and shoot their space ships with rockets, in order to protect my job. It won't happen though, will it.

*We have chosen you, José Martinez, for an experiment that will benefit both our **kinds**.* "

Our **kinds** = our types of people (but it's the sort of old fashioned sounding language that you often hear in science fiction, especially Star Wars, especially The Mandalorian. “I need to return the child to his kind” or “Your kind aren't welcome here” or “You are the last of your kind” etc

*José's fear slowly began to **subside**, replaced by curiosity as well as a bit of annoyance.*

Subside = go down, become less strong or less extreme
We also use it to talk about when buildings sink down below ground level (like a castle built on a swamp, would subside)

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But here it means become less, like lessen, reduce, do down, drop,
Annoyance (noun) annoyed (adj) irritated (adj)

*"Look, if it's about my visa, I'm **in the process of** renewing it, honestly, I just need to..."*

To be in the process of doing something = it's ongoing, not finished yet (sounds a bit formal, like a visa renewal process)

To **renew** your visa

To **renew** your passport = make it new again

But the Xelara didn't let him finish.

*"We have developed a technology that allows us to share knowledge through **direct neural transfer**," it explained.*

Transfer = moving information from one thing to another (bluetooth for example)

Neural = related to the body's nerve systems and the brain.

Direct neural transfer = moving information directly from one brain to another brain (a bit like using a WIFI connection or bluetooth to transfer a PDF to your friend, rather than sending it by email)

"You will be the first human to receive this gift.

We will give you all our knowledge including everything we have learned and observed about the English people and their language.

In return, we ask that you share your Spanish culture and language with us..."

"Err... I'm from Barcelona" said José.

"and... well, haven't you heard of Duolingo... or podcasts?"

But the Xelara continued,

"Please, we ask you to share your language and culture with us, and that you let us... examine you."

"Huh?" said José, but before he could go any further, the alien activated the device on his forehead.

*A flood of information **surged** into José's mind—grammar rules, vocabulary, idioms, and all the **nuances** of the English language - every accent, even the Liverpool one.*

Surged into = Quickly rushed in

A **surge** = a sudden rush of something, or a sudden rise

An electrical surge (suddenly more electricity in the system)

Water surged into the boat = it quickly moved in (tip: get off the boat, it's going to sink)

Nuances = small, subtle details

If you know all the nuances of English then you know all the specific, subtle little details, specific rules, meanings, words, and you know them in a very detailed way

*It was **overwhelming**, like that time Barry tried to explain the rules of **snooker** after they'd drunk 7 pints of Guinness.*

Overwhelming = too much! Too much information and it's confusing

Snooker = a British (originally) game involving using a long wooden cue to hit balls around a large table with pockets in the corners and sides. The rules are quite complicated

*Plus, José hadn't actually **given his consent** for any of this, which seemed a bit wrong, like some kind of space crime or something.*

To **give your consent** = to give your permission or agreement that something can happen, especially something that involves you and possible risks to you

You have to give your consent to doctors before they do surgery on you

When a child wants to go on a school trip, the parents have to give their consent for it to happen

The aliens seem to be experimenting on José, have abducted him and sharing all his knowledge, which he didn't actually agree to or give them permission for. He didn't give them consent to do any of these things. In normal circumstances, that might be considered some kind of crime, depending on the circumstances

However, as the minutes passed, José felt his understanding of English deepen to an extraordinary level.

*He could now speak, read, understand and write English with impeccable **precision**, and could probably give grammar lessons to Shakespeare, if he wasn't dead.*

Shakespeare I mean.

José was still alive of course.

Precision = the quality of being precise, meaning exact, specific, accurate, careful

Surgeons doing an operation on someone's heart need a lot of precision (for obvious reasons)

To pass a proficiency exam in English you need to show precise levels of control over grammar and vocabulary

Professional tennis players are able to serve the ball with incredible precision and power, targeting a specific part of the court.

In fact, at this moment, he felt more alive than ever before.

Days turned into weeks as José adapted to his new environment, the discomfort of his initial abduction

***wearing off** with time.*

Wear off (phrasal verb) = If something wears off, it becomes less strong in its effects - the effects gradually disappear.

Common collocations with "wear off"

Pain - I broke my leg. After I took the painkillers, the pain wore off.

Drugs / medication - But when the painkillers wore off, the pain came back!

Excitement - When I was a child, I would get so excited on Christmas Day but the excitement usually wore off by the next day and I would be left with a feeling of sad emptiness.

The effects of something - The effects of the anaesthetic wore off quickly and I was fine in the evening

Alcohol - As the alcohol wore off I started to get a headache.

Discomfort - I had to sit on the floor, but the discomfort wore off when I was able to stretch my legs again.

But loads of other things too

The Xelara were fascinated by human culture, and José shared stories, music, and literature with them, along with his recipe for how to make the perfect paella.

He even told them a couple of jokes he'd picked up while living in England, although the Xelara showed no signs of having any sense of humour.

“Hey aliens, wanna hear another joke? Barry told me this one.” said José one afternoon.

The aliens just stared impassively, until finally one of them said,

“Yes, please give us more examples of your fascinating earth humour.”

“OK. Guys, you're gonna love this one. Just promise not to probe me if it doesn't make you laugh, alright?”

The Xelara looked at one another.

“Never mind” said José. “Here's the joke”

“What did the Spanish fireman call his two sons?”

*The Xelara stared at each other, nodding their heads. They seemed to be **conferring** together, trying to find the best answer to José’s question.*

To confer is to talk to other people in order to make a decision
I asked the kids a question - “Do you want a burger or pizza?”
They spent a moment conferring with each other, before one of them turned round and said “BOTH!”

*One of them replied, telepathically,
“Our research **indicates** that the most common male names in Spain currently are Martin and Matteo.”*

Indicates = shows

*“No no no” said José, **chuckling**.
“The Spanish fireman called his two sons José and hose B”
There was no reaction from the Xelara.*

To chuckle = to laugh a little bit

But José couldn’t stop laughing at his own joke.

“Get it? José and hose B. Hoses, right? Firemen have hoses, and he’s a fireman and... his first son is called José and then hose B and...”

But the Xelara didn't laugh. Instead they just looked at José, with their heads cocked to one side, unblinking.

To cock your head to one side = to change the angle of your head, making it lean to one side slightly, as if you don't really understand something

*"OK, too much **wordplay**" said José*

"It's alright. I'll keep it simple. Here's another one. Ready?"

...

Wordplay = when you play with words - making rhymes or using double meanings with words to create other meanings. A lot of jokes or puns involve wordplay. Wordplay or puns can be difficult to understand if it's not your first language, depending on the pun of course.

What do you call a Spanish guy who's lost his car?"

The aliens continued to stare, unblinking, at José.

One of them turned his head slowly, to look at the others.

*"Spanish guy, lost his car. What is his name?" said José,
his eyebrows raised.*

The aliens didn't respond.

To raise your eyebrows = to have an expression of expectation, surprise, curiosity, interest on your face

“CARLOS!”

José laughed out loud for a while, enjoying his own joke a bit too much.

The Xelara remained silent for a while, and then thanked José for introducing them to more earth humour, before politely leaving the room.

*In return for everything they learned from him, the Xelara taught José about their advanced technology and **interstellar** navigation, which he thought was a pretty **fair trade**, ...*

Interstellar = between stars, through space

Fair trade = a good exchange where the two things have equal value

*... even though he was quite sure he'd never actually use interstellar navigation unless he decided to start an **intergalactic** Uber service or something, but he didn't want to.*

Intergalactic = between galaxies

*Despite their differences, and the fact they had basically kidnapped him, José found himself growing **fond of** his*

captors, appreciating their wisdom and the peacefulness of their society

To be fond of something = to like it, to have warm feelings towards it

Captors = people who are holding someone captive or in captivity, kidnappers, abductors. The Xelara captured José and they are his captors. It seems he has a bit of Stockholm syndrome, where kidnapping victims actually develop a relationship with or attachment to their kidnappers.

*—despite their complete lack of humour, and their **insistence** on probing him as part of their “research”, which we probably shouldn’t talk about now.*

Their insistence on probing him

They insisted on probing him as part of their research

To insist on + -ing

If someone insists on doing something, it means they demand to be allowed to do it, or perhaps force it to happen and don’t take no for an answer

- He insisted on taking her out to dinner
- He insisted on paying for the meal
- He insisted on walking her home

One day, the Xelara informed José that it was time for him to return to Earth.

*They had gathered the information they needed, and as promised, they would send him back with his new knowledge **intact**.*

Intact

If something is **intact** it means it is in one piece and not damaged - in its original state

- Our house was burned down but, ironically, we found the toaster on the floor, intact.
- It is hard to come out of a scandal with your reputation intact.
- My undefeated record as a boxer is still intact. Did you know that about me? I have an undefeated record as a boxer. I have never ever been defeated in a boxing match, to this day. I have also never won a boxing match or indeed had a boxing match at all. But I do have a 100% undefeated record which is still intact to this day.

They even promised to provide him with a new pair of trousers, as the others had been damaged during some of their research.

“Goodbye José, son of a fireman” they said, telepathically, waving their long graceful arms.

“Actually, my father was an office manager...” said José, but before he could continue, the same blinding light enveloped him once more, and when he opened his eyes, he was back in England, standing in front of his garage.

*The sun was rising now, casting a golden glow over the familiar **surroundings**.*

Surroundings

Your surroundings are the things which surround you - in this case it is the streets, houses, trees etc of his local area.

It seemed that he'd just been standing there in front of his garage all night, with his mouth hanging open.

The whole experience felt like a dream, but the enhanced clarity of his thoughts and speech told him otherwise. His brain was positively fizzing with brand new advanced English vocabulary.

José resumed his life, but he was forever changed.

*After finally getting his working visa and **indefinite leave to remain** in the UK, he became a respected author and public speaker, sharing his experiences through beautifully written stories and TED Talks.*

Indefinite leave to remain = a status you can get from the government which means you have the right to stay in the country permanently. If you apply for residence and are accepted, you might be given a status like this. You can find out more at <https://www.gov.uk/browse/visas-immigration>

He even started his own podcast which, annoyingly, became even more popular than Luke's English Podcast ...

... but I suppose that's no surprise considering he was the only human on earth ever to have been abducted by aliens, who then shared all their knowledge with him, and so much more.

*José's command of the English language, and his incredible anecdotes **captivated** readers and audiences everywhere.*

To captivate people = to hold their attention so they can't leave or stop reading/listening

A captive = someone who is being held somewhere (like a hostage or prisoner)

To capture someone = to catch someone

In captivity = being held, and not having freedom

Although he never saw the Xelara again, he knew their encounter had opened a new chapter in human-alien relations.

He cherished his time with the aliens, despite all the probing, which he wasn't convinced was absolutely necessary ...

... and every time José made paella, he **couldn't help but chuckle**, wondering if the Xelara had learned to make it too, and how they would find saffron in deep space.

Can't/couldn't help but do something = can't help doing it

- I can't help but smile when I think of all the times we spent together

Certificate & Medal Award

