

[Seminar theme music]

ANNOUNCER

The last known remnants of Earth's people are adrift in space, aboard the Ark of Humanity. It's sole purpose; to instruct each generation in the history of human civilisation. Confined and categorised, none could leave, but one made a daring escape. Cut loose from all she knew with a holographic student as her only companion, she crashlanded on a nearby planet. This planet holds the sleeping archive of a culture even more ancient and unique than Earth. And the planet itself might change them more than they expect. This is seminar.

[Seminar theme music]

ANNOUNCER

Seminar, Episode 97: "A Time of War & A Time of Peace..."

[Seminar theme music]

[Post-explosion mechanical sounds and sparks accompanied by an approaching whirr]

THOMAS

... Alice? (even more worried) Alex? Where did you... go?

NEW

(groans a bit as they start to come to)

THOMAS

What have I done? Alice, you look... so different. Alex and I were trying to help you, but... Oh, what have I done?

NEW

(quietly) I know. I remember. (pauses) But... I'm not... Alice. And I'm not... Alex. And not... uh, at least... not as you knew him.

THOMAS

What do you mean? One minute, we were trying to save Alice and the next, there was this explosion. And then Alex was gone and you... you look like this now.

NEW

They are both me. And yet... not. (pause) What do you mean? What do I look like to you?

THOMAS

(confused, then trying to be scientific about it) Oh, well, you have a similar build to Alice, but your skin... it's purple like Alex's. But, you... you don't look exactly like either of them. Your eyes are shaped like Alice's, but your jaw is so much like his. Oh, where did Alex go? He'd explain this so much better than me.

NEW

Alex is... within me. He's... I... uh, I rem... I remember being him. I... But I also... (confused) I remember...(muttering) I remember being injured by him. Because I remember Alice too. (confused muttering)

THOMAS

Alright. So... you're... who... exactly?

NEW

I'm... New.

[Creaking sounds]

NEW

I need to speak with Zerash. We need to leave Byzantium. Now! I remember. I remember what Alex heard from the Zarrak. They've left for now, but they will return and in even greater numbers. We'll be overwhelmed.

[Footsteps moving away]

THOMAS

But, wait! If Alex is gone and you're not Alice, then I... I'm responsible for it! I helped Alex do this and that means... Did I kill them?

NEW

That's a very strange way to look at it. (pause) Ah, you don't understand. Uh, I'm not sure you could. Because I'm not sure I do. But... I can think of something that might help. There's a story I remember... "Sleeping Arrangements."

[Music]

[Sounds of pages being turned and children talking in the distance outdoors]

DAWN

(sighs) No... that won't work...Come on Dawn, focus!

[A pen scratches on the pages. Steps get closer.]

ALEX

We could use another camp leader out here, Dawn. Not sure if you noticed the field full of kids!

DAWN

(fake laughter) Yup! Same kids that need to know where they'll be sleeping tonight, Alex! I'm losing my mind!

ALEX

Boys in cabin A, girls in cabin B. No funny business at night. There!

DAWN

(grunts) Alex, I know you're turning 100 this year, but "funny business" can still happen in a same-sex cabin.

ALEX

OK, whoseever's gay goes in the opposite cabin.

DAWN

(sighs) This might be surprising for you, but a gay boy is not a girl. And even if you push every kid out of the closet, that's only one letter in the LGBTQI+.

ALEX

They're... adding math now?

[Metallic creaking the kind that an old seesaw would make, followed by kids cheering]

ALEX (CONT'D)

Oh, God!

[Footsteps moving away]

ALEX (CONT'D)

(distant sound) Children, I said no climbing the old windmill!

[Footsteps returning]

ALEX (CONT'D)

We don't have 20 cabins, Dawn! Boys with boys, girls with girls. If it ain't broken, don't try to fix it.

DAWN

It's always been broken, you've just been driving a junk car. Take uh... Gaby Stewart, for instance...

[Page turning]

DAWN (CONT'D)

Gaby is genderfluid.

ALEX

Gender-what? What letter is that?

DAWN

"P", as in person! Gaby can sway between masculine and feminine.

[Loud unfriendly noises from the kids in the distance]

ALEX

Crap! Kids! Please put down the assistant! We need him!

[Paper shuffling]

ALEX (CONT'D)

How about a sleeping bag?

DAWN

Sleeping bag... ?

ALEX

Sleeping bag! Gaby Stewart can sway between cabins. Can we go now? The blond kid was asking me if he could pet the alligator.

DAWN

(sarcastic laughter) Oh, brilliant! Y'know, there's a nice little garden in between the cabins. Guess the grass is cushiony enough for the non-binary, huh?

ALEX

I would get the irony if I knew what that word means...

DAWN

(sighs) See Danee over there? Well, they don't identify as male or female.

ALEX

I got it the first time!

DAWN

(laughs) Nope, Danee is not genderfluid. Just not a boy or a girl.

ALEX

How is that--? Danee has to be one at some point!

DAWN

Danee doesn't have to be either! That'd be like me asking you to choose between being smart or open-minded. (laughs) You're just none of those!

ALEX

Ouch! How long have you been keeping that one then?

DAWN

I don't know. How long have we worked together?

ALEX

Alright, alright. If you wanna complicate it, we'll just go by whatever anyone has between their legs. Check-mate!

DAWN

(fake laughter) Oh! And Marsha P. Johnson is turning in her grave! (beat) A: that's ridiculous, and B: would you be the one asking the kids about their privates?!

ALEX

We'd go to the parents for that. I'm not an idiot!

DAWN

Oh, I'm sorry. I was just wondering how you were planning on running the camp... from prison!

ALEX

Fine, let Danee, with two E's for some reason, sleep wherever she wants!

DAWN

Not a she.

ALEX

Whatever he wants?

DAWN

Try again.

ALEX

Uh... It?

DAWN

THEY! Jesus Christ! And that would not only be unfair to the rest, but would single Danee out.

[A horse neighs and gallops in the distance accompanied by laughter]

ALEX

Goddamn! How did he get on that horse? Wait... When did we get a horse?

DAWN

Uh... We don't have horses.

ALEX

Crap! Another thing to look into! Listen, cabin A for the boys and girls, and cabin B for the CDEFG's...

DAWN

Oh! Segregation. Genius! Maybe we can forget about it and separate them by race or religion! Jeez!

[Distant motorboat sounds]

ALEX

See? While we discuss this nonsense, they found the motorboat! Can't we deal with it as they start complaining?

DAWN

This is an important issue, Alex. Why wait if we can do something beforehand?

[Quickly approaching footsteps and panting]

CORY

(agitated) Sir...!

ALEX

Cory! How did you get out of that rope?

CORY

Had to make a deal with the kids. Where do we keep the marshmallows? They gave me 10 minutes.

ALEX

Hold on a sec, Cory. You're part of the LGBTQ...

[snaps fingers]

DAWN

...I+?

ALEX

Uh... I+ community, right?

CORY

Uh... yes, sir, I am.

ALEX

Awesome! Thanks for being so brave. Now, if you were a kid in this camp, where would you like us to assign you to sleep?

CORY

Uh... on a bed?

ALEX

I mean, in which cabin?

CORY

Uh... Well, cabin B faces the East, so there would be a nice sunlight in the morning...

ALEX

But for you specifically... being, you know...

CORY

Uh... I specifically like the sun.

ALEX

You're not listening to me, Cory.

CORY

(beat) Oh! Gotcha, gotcha! Well, being a cisgender, gay man who's both into sports and Broadway musicals, and who might fall into a 5 in the Kinsey Scale, I'd say... I really need those marshmallows, sir!!!

ALEX

Jesus! Big pantry, bottom left.

[Footsteps take off in a rush]

ALEX (CONT'D)

I'm running out of ideas, here. We shouldn't have to deal with this...

DAWN

(laughter) That's it! We shouldn't; the children should! You're a genius Alex.

ALEX

I'm kidding, Dawn!

DAWN

No, no. No, no, no. Hear me out. There's a whole world out there that's trying to classify those kids; telling them who they need to be and which cabin they should sleep in, instead of just listening to them.

ALEX

Oh, boy... here we go...

DAWN

The least we can do for those kids is give them a safe space in this camp. And that might be not forcing on them some stupid norms that some other rando made up.

ALEX

Right! And then sing Kumbaya around the bonfire?

DAWN

(soft laugh) Actually, that's scheduled for Monday.

[Long silence filled by birds chirping in the distance]

ALEX

It was way simpler when I went to Summer Camp...

DAWN

(sigh) News flash: back when you were a kid in the Middle Ages, someone was also being forced to sleep in the wrong cabin...

ALEX

(grunts) Whatever. The kids might be able to handle this better than us... I'm just glad I get my own cabin for when I need a break from them.

DAWN

Seems to me that you've been in your own little cabin for too long.

ALEX

This whole thing might be hard for me to understand, but let me assure you I'm an equal opportunity misanthrope.

DAWN

Why did you even take this job?

ALEX

I was 25. Huge student loan debt. Almost paid off! Now, can we go before someone burns down the Wisdom Tree?

[Notebook closing sound followed by two sets of footsteps walking away accompanied by music]

[Seminar theme music]

THOMAS

So... you're both. And... you're neither. But... I didn't kill them?

NEW

I told you. I'm New. But... I'm not upset. Alice was dying. She knew that when she tried to convince Alex to call off the Zarrak. And Alex knew that he might die helping Alice, but... he wanted to make up for his actions. To be the person he chose to be.

THOMAS

So, what now?

NEW

Now... I guess I get to choose what comes next.

[Sparks and distressed noises from the computer]

NEW

(incredibly sad, but resigned) Oh, Zerash... What did they do to you?

ZERASH

This Zerash has been d- d- damaged. Zarrak infiltration has rendered speech recognition... d- d- difficult.

THOMAS

To be fair, Zerash, I'm not sure you'd know... uh, their voice. This is... well, was... Alice and Alex. They're... New.

ZERASH

This life-form is not Alice, but biomarkers match both Alex and Alice. Symbiogenesis seems likely. (pause) Life-form designation accepted as... "New."

NEW

I like that designation. Thank you both.

THOMAS

Oh! Uh... we didn't do anything, I just told Zerash what you said you were called.

[Sad music]

ZERASH

Byzantium power is failing. This Zerash will remain functional for... approximately six hours.

THOMAS

Zerash, you can't leave us! If your power fails, what will happen to us?

ZERASH

Unknown.

[Footsteps followed by console activity sounds]

THOMAS

(realization) Hold on! New, you can still interface with technology...

ZERASH

Request accepted. New biomarkers logged. Retrieving requested file... "Casting Call of Doom".

[Seminar theme music]

[Typing sounds on a keyboard and an incoming call notification followed by a blip sound as the call starts]

DR. MELANCHOLY

Hello, Jessica!

JESSICA

(cheerful) Likewise, Dr. Melancholy! (beat, then confused) I'm sorry, is... is there a problem with your camera? I'm having trouble seeing you clearly.

DR. M.

I tested my video and microphone before I logged in.

JESSICA

It's just kind of difficult to see your face. Like there's some sort of haze.

DR. M.

(realizing) Oh, uh... (clears throat) That's just smoke from the torches.

JESSICA

(quizzical) Torches?

DR. M.

It is a secret lair. Torches are très chic. Here, I'll fan it away.

[Buzz of a fan]

DR. M. (CONT'D)

Better?

JESSICA

You still look kind of distorted.

DR. M.

That's just a holographic filter to disguise my facial features. Supervillains can't be too careful! To the reason for our chat! I want you to voice my Doom-Bringer, the (said rapidly, as an aside) unstoppable killing machine that will exterminate all life on earth.

JESSICA

(surprised) Wow! I'm... I'm so flattered! This is amazing! When do I get started?

DR. M.

(proudly) As soon as I write the script!

JESSICA

(skeptical) So you're casting the part without a finished script?

DR. M.

(defensive) I'm... I'm pretty busy these days. Creating an extinction-level machine takes a lot of effort, plus volunteering at the community soup kitchen and grading papers submitted by mad graduate students. Don't you have a day job, too?

JESSICA

Yes, I'm a robotics engineer. I do voice work for fun, but I'm just supposed to wait???

DR. M.

Don't worry, it'll get done soon.

JESSICA

(disappointed) Like I haven't heard that before. Good luck with your project.

[Blip sound as call ends.]

[Scene change tone]

DR. M.

Aiden, I was really impressed by your demo reel. If you're willing, I'd like to hear you read some lines for me.

AIDEN

Is the script done?

DR. M.

(brusquely) Getting there. (beat) Now, picture yourself standing over the torn, blasted remains of the city.

[Metallic stomping accompanied by explosions and shouting and screaming people]

DR. M. (CONT'D)

The Doom-Bringer marches forward, the perfect cadence of its metallic feet sounding a clear death knell for the citizenry. It stops, surveys the screaming, writhing masses of people and with a voice that freezes the blood and promises no mercy, it opens its mouth and...

[Anti-climatic sound contrasting with prior chaos sounds]

DR. M. (CONT'D)

(beat) ...says something you think would fit.

AIDEN

Uhhhhh...Rawr, I will destroy you...

DR. M.

Aiden, it's a merciless killing machine, not a monster. The Evil Animal Research Board is a nightmare to get through. Try again.

AIDEN

Take me...to your leader? (beat) What, 'say something you think would fit' has no context! There should be precise instructions, like a computer program, not vague stuff like-

DR. M.

Then you're not the one for the job. Good day.

AIDEN

Wait!

[Blip sound as the call ends]

[Scene change tone]

DR. M.
Greetings, Micah! So wonderful to speak face to face!

MICAH
Of course! I think this is a great opportunity to advance my career.

DR. M.
(feeling hopeful) So, you're... you're okay with the conditions?

MICAH
I'm a new voice actress, so I think the experience is the most important!

DR. M.
Oh, thank god.

MICAH
I do have one question, though.

DR. M.
(Sighs as hope drains away) What is it?

MICAH
This isn't a POC role, is it?

DR. M.
(unsure) It's a Prototype of Carnage, yes?

MICAH
Person of Colour. (beat) It's important that you make sure any role you cast is accurately reflected by that actor or actress who brings life to it. Representation matters, Dr. Melancholy. Since you still seem to be working on the role, not to mention the script-

DR. M.
(defensive) It'll get done soon!

MICAH
(continuing) I'm going to have to pass on this project. Contact me if and when you figure it out.

[Blip sound as the call ends followed by music]

DR. M.
Hmmm....Representation matters....representation matters...

[Scene change tone followed by mechanical whirring sounds]

DR. M.
(shouting) Hello, XJ-32!

XJ-32
(robotic voice) Hello, Dr. Melancholy. Thank you for meeting me here. My wifi connection is insufficient to run the chat app you required.

DR. M.

(shouting) No problem! I'm just glad we had the opportunity to meet! I think representation is vital to good voice acting! And finding a good match is definitely a challenge!

XJ-32

(robotic) Of course. Finding a two-hundred-foot tall sentient robot is certainly a challenge.

DR. M.

(to himself) Two hundred feet? Damn, the Doom- Bringer is only a 150 feet tall. (beat, then shouting) Okay, ready to run some lines?

XJ-32

(robotic) I was constructed ready.

DR. M.

OK. Say, "I will destroy all humans!"

XJ-32

(robotic) I will destroy all humans.

DR. M.

Once more, with feeling!

XJ-32

(robotic, identical to previous) I will destroy all humans.

DR. M.

(shouting) Don't take this the wrong way, but your acting is a bit...wooden.

XJ-32

But I am a robot.

DR. M.

(shouting) Nevertheless, I'm not sure you're the right fit for the part!

[Blip sound as call starts]

RICHARD

Dr. Melancholy (mispronounced with "ch"), I just saw on Twitter that you're considering only specific backgrounds for this part. Isn't talent more important?

[Beeping sounds followed by an explosion followed by a computer tone]

DR. M.

Representation matters, dick.

[Blip sound as call starts]

DR. M.

Oh god, what now?

JARED

Hey man, what's up? I'm a voice actor you should aspire to hire.

DR. M.

Do you have a death wish?

JARED

I have a zest for life! Listen, I know you're trying to cast this role and stuff with some random voice, but have you thought about someone who can do badass impressions?

DR. M.

Who the hell are you?

JARED

(excitedly) Dude, I happen to do a flawless impression of Henry Cavill on "The Witcher." Everyone at the food court says so!

DR. M.

(sighs)

JARED (CONT'D)

(beat, then singing to the melody of "Toss a Coin to Your Witcher") Toss a coin to your actor, oh pay me aplenty, oh pay me aplenty...

DR. M.

That wasn't Henry Cavill. That was the guy with him!

JARED

Dude, close enough!

DR. M.

(disgusted) Who says you're a great impressionist?

JARED

Ah, you know, food court people. And social media. (stupidly proudly) 28 followers on Insta, baby. At least 12 are real people.

DR. M.

(curiously but hating himself for it) What are the rest?

JARED

(matter-of-fact) Porn bots. But with awesome content.

[Blip sound as the call ends]

DR. M.

This is why I'm exterminating all life on earth...

[Scene change tone]

GINA

I think this is a fantastic part. I'm all in.

DR. M.

(expecting a trap) So Gina...what attracts you to this project and my Doom-Bringer?

GINA

Well, I just identify with this armageddon-inducing automaton. I think it's a metaphor for the futility of life that anything can be snuffed out when you least expect it. When someone stares into its cold, lifeless mechanized eyes they will know the nihilism that Camus was so eloquently evoking in his novels. Death elevated to art form. You're an artist to the core, Dr. Melancholy.

DR. M.

Not so much an artist as a sociopath hellbent on the utter devastation of the planet and the complete annihilation of the human race.

GINA

(dreamily) 'Annihilation'... you and the Doom-Bringer speak my truth.

DR. M.

(cautiously hopeful) OK, do me a favour, please. Read the audition line for me one more time.

GINA

(clears throat) HUMANITY IS TOO WEAK AND FOOLISH TO LIVE AND SO IT FALLS TO DR. MELANCHOLY TO END THIS FUTILE EXISTENCE! BOW BEFORE HIS GREATNESS AND DESPAIR BEFORE YOUR BRUTAL END!

DR. M.

(sniffing) That... is beautiful. You're hired.

[Scene change tone followed by explosions and screams]

DR. M.

(laughing maniacally) The time of reckoning is at hand! Humanity will meet its doom!

[Footsteps approaching accompanied by more explosions]

TIM

(shy but annoying) Hi, Dr. Melancholy, my name is Tim. I-I-I know that it's past the deadline for auditions, but do you think you could open them back up for me? See, I really wanted to audition, but I got sick and then I had to go take care of my Grandma, and then-

[Laser beam sound followed by thump as a body falls to the ground]

DR. M.

Failing to heed the casting deadline can be very deadly. (laughing)

[Footsteps approaching at a run]

AIDEN

So can treating people like dirt! (into a loudspeaker) Vocal Avengers, assemble!

[More running footsteps and metallic stomping]

DR. M.

(confused) What is this?

RICHARD

We found each other on the casting site. Huh... ha!

AIDEN

We decided that there was plenty of room in the 'giant robot' genre-

JESSICA

To pool our own talents for a collaborative project-

XJ-32

(robotic) To kick your ass.

[Metallic stomping noises]

DOOM-BRINGER/GINA
HUMANITY IS-

[Laser noises and explosions]

DOOM-BRINGER/GINA
HUMAAAAANNNNNITY IIIIISSSSSS-

[Explosions]

JARED
Dude, I think XJ follows me on Insta. Just remembered. (laughs)

DR. M.
(grieving, still unbelieving) What the hell are you doing here?

JARED
What, dude? Jessica brought the robotics expertise, Aiden brought the know-how about programming, XJ-32 because robot, and I had the most important job of all...I brought the snacks.

JESSICA
Treat your voice actors with respect and they'll work with you all the way. Treat them badly-

JARED
And we assemble a kick-ass team of vocal avengers to remove the competition, dude!

DR. M.
Please, put me out of my misery.

[Firing sound followed by the scene change tone and then music]

[Seminar theme music followed by the whirring of a machine]

THOMAS
I know our relationship is new, New. But, you want to build a robotic death machine?

NEW
No, no. Try not to sympathize with the villain of the story, Thomas. I know from experience. The point here is that we need to work together, to bring our unique strengths to cultivate a solution. (beat) We have to leave. It's time to go back home to the Ark. All the students will want to know that we have the coordinates for Earth. And maybe, once we get there, we could go back. The Ark doesn't have to wander aimlessly in space. We can point it back to Earth and find out what happened to the planet I knew to be home.

THOMAS
OK. And how do we do that?

NEW
Zerash, I have one last request for you. Can you power up the shuttle bay?

[Music]

[Seminar theme music]

ANNOUNCER

Featuring the voice talents of:

Dan Foster as Thomas

Xena Briar as New

Aiden Rudd as Zerash

(beat)

In "Sleeping Arrangement":

Briar Zachary as Dawn

Brendon P. Jenkins as Alex

Tomasz as Cory

Written by Andrés Vergara

(beat)

In "Casting Call of Doom":

Galan Pierce Lackey as Dr. Melancholy

Ellie Gossage as Jessica

Danny Spiller as Aiden

Miranda Leonard as Micah

H. E. Cassen as XJ-32

Garan Fitzgerald as Richard

Danny Spiller as Jared

Rukshin Shafer as Gina

Jeff Robinson as Tim

Written by Adam Blanford

Directed by Garan Fitzgerald, Jeff Robinson, Adam Blanford and Tilly Bridges

Shorts edited by Tilly Bridges

Wrapper written by Kathryn Pryde

Seminar theme by V. C. Morrison

All other music by Josh Molen at thetunepeddler.com

Produced by Pendant Productions

(beat)

Seminar co-created by Kathryn Pryde and Tilly Bridges

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[Music]

ANNOUNCER

For more information, visit pendantaudio.com. Thanks for listening.

[Music]