

{Intro theme in background 00:00-00:47}

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

{Seminar Main Theme 00:48-1:25}

SEMINAR #90: "A Time To Seek And A Time To Lose..."

WRAPPER #1 by Kathryn Pryde

THE AURACH TEMPLE, MAIN HALL (BYZANTIUM)

[Metallic banging]

ALICE: Oh no...

[Foosteps as Alex approaches]

ALICE: Alex.

ALEX: (Darkly) Hello, Alice.

ALICE: Why did you leave? And why... why would you come back here with that horde?

ALEX: That's my family you're talking about. My real family.

ALICE: Thomas is practically your brother. You nearly killed him. I'm not so sure you really understand what family means right now.

ALEX: Thomas interfered where he shouldn't. You should have just opened the doors and let me in so I could finish what we started.

ALICE: (fearful, but brave) The doors are open now. The Zarrak are still outside. They haven't followed you in here. Who exactly is "We?"

ALEX: Oh, I asked them to wait outside. First, I just wanted to finish this fight, to take out this monstrosity. And rest assured

Alice, when the Zarrak enter Byzantium, we'll destroy this place and restore this land back to what it used to be. But I am going to make sure you don't get in the way.

ALICE: ... Alex...

ALEX: (threatening) You will listen to me or you're just going to have to sit this one out.

THOMAS: (in background) Restoration at 100%.

ALICE: Alex, this is the blood frenzy, you don't want to hurt me -

ALEX: (shouts) DON'T TELL ME WHAT I WANT!

{Futuristic sci-fi musical cue}

[Alex grunts]

ALICE: (throwing noise, then turns to run) Thomas! Get Zerash up and running! Quick!

[Footsteps as Alice runs from Alex]

ALEX: Stop arguing with me, Alice!

[Footsteps as Alex pursues]

THOMAS: (worried) What am I going to do now?

[Whirring noise]

THOMAS: I don't know if I can fix you, Zerash, but I will try. I think... I think I'll have to trust that you can do what she said, that you can find me. [Thomas opens up the interface for Zerash

THOMAS: Accessing file... "Avatar."

{SEMINAR Segue Music 3:27}

AVATAR by Lisa N. Michaud

JONES' HOME OFFICE

[All voices are filtered, as if through a comm system]

SMITH:...I'm sorry, I didn't get that last. I think my signal dropped for a second. Could you repeat?

JONES: I was just saying that I think our delivery date for the next release is now at risk because of this external dependency on the Epsilon integration.

PRAKESH: I agree.

SMITH: Okay, well, we're going to need to review the timeline with Epsilon team leads and see what can be compressed or maybe dropped.

JONES: I've got a hard stop at the top of the hour, so ... are we done?

SMITH: Uh...we didn't get to the end of the list, but if you have to go, maybe we can reconvene later this week?

PRAKESH: My calendar is up to date. Pick a time.

[Clicking noise]

JONES: Mine, too.

SMITH: Okay, I'll send out an invite through Omega. Thanks everyone.

JONES: Thanks. Bye!

PRAKESH: Bye.

[multiple shutdown chime sounds]

JONES: (sighs) OK. Where was I?

[typing in spurts during the next line]

JONES: Right. One more error left in this bit here and I can call this one done. A-ha! There you are, you little bugger. ...Aaaaaaaand now I have 20 **new** errors.(sighs)

[Footsteps]

SOO: (from far away) ...Hello? You home?

JONES: (raising voice slightly) In the office. Just got out of a meeting.

SOO: (walking into the room) At nine o'clock at night? In sweatpants?

AVATAR by Lisa N. Michaud

JONES: My weekly staff call was moved because Xiang was invited to this one and she connects from China. She's twelve hours ahead. And it's been a long day, OK? I wanted to be comfortable.

SOO: The bunny slippers are a nice touch. Very professional. I'm sure it's what everyone's wearing to staff meetings these days.

JONES: Hey. We use Omega, remember? My product? The one you say I can never shut up about? My VR projection isn't being generated from my current clothes. It's a combination of my real-time movements and an avatar that was scanned on a day when I was wearing **proper** business casual.

SOO: So you're cheating.

JONES: No, I'm NOT cheating! I'm saving network bandwidth by just transmitting wireframe motion capture data and having the avatar projection rendered by the recipient's environment! It's more efficient AND it prevents lag!

SOO: And your avatar is wearing the same blazer at every meeting.

JONES:...And my avatar is wearing the same blazer every meeting. I really don't think anyone cares.

SOO: Speaking of not caring, did you remember that we were going out for drinks tonight? (beat) I'm guessing from the bunny slippers that's a NO.

JONES: (grunts)

SOO: I mean, you can keep them on if you want. Might make an interesting impression. Or you could send your virtual self to my eyeglasses and I could take your **avatar** out for drinks.

[chair creaking]

JONES: Shut up. I'm coming. Let me change and put on shoes first...

BAR AT NIGHT

{Edgy music}

[Bar chatter]

JONES: I almost forgot to ask - how'd the big presentation go?

SOO: Good. Mostly good. Rough start. I was really nervous with the executive VP right in the room, and of course she takes the chair right at the near end of the table so she's sitting maybe four feet from where I was standing, and I hadn't had much sleep last night because I was up late making last minute changes...

JONES:...and...?

SOO:...and I get to this point in my slide deck where I go to the next slide and for a moment I have no idea what I am going to say next. I mean, I did practice a hundred times, but just for a moment - a terrifying moment - I'm looking at a picture and wondering what happened to the slide that was SUPPOSED to be there, and I have no idea what that is a picture of. I stop talking. The silence stretches. And then someone breaks in with a question and by the time I've answered it, I remember where I am and I can keep going.

JONES: Do you think the exec noticed?

SOO: I have **no** idea. The silence seemed to have gone on forever, but maybe it didn't. It was just terrifying to be standing there and drawing a total blank, even if it was only for a couple of seconds.

JONES: I feel your pain. Oh! [Jones sets glass on bar] That reminds me, oh god. I had my own moment of blankness yesterday when Gonzalez arrived at my office for a meeting.

SOO: Gonzalez ... Is that the one you're always talking about with the Epsilon project?

JONES: **YES. The** Gonzalez who is the lead on Epsilon and who I have been working with as a colleague over the past... I don't know, TWO YEARS, I think? But we'd never met in person; only over Omega VR. And then this month the boss decided that we needed to have an onsite meeting to jump start the work on the Epsilon integration. Smooth out some of the pain points, you know? So he and his team flew over to work out of our office for the week. And then yesterday afternoon he just walked in through the door of my office unannounced.

SOO: (mirroring JONES earlier ...And...?)

AVATAR by Lisa N. Michaud

JONES: (mortified) And I completely didn't recognize him! Total blank! He's all friendly and I'm thinking... who are you? Thank God I stopped just short of saying that out loud before I figured out who he was. I'm still not sure I covered for it well enough. I think it was obvious that I had no idea who was standing in my doorway.

SOO: But you see him every week. Using YOUR product.

JONES: I've seen his *Omega avatar* every week. His avatar looks 35, maybe? With a tiny bit of salt sprinkled in with the pepper? The guy who walked in today was definitely *not* 35. I swear he ported that avatar from some scan that was done when he first joined the company and I think that was 15 years ago?

SOO: (laughing) Wow.

JONES: I know. Seriously...I don't know if it's just neglect, like he hasn't thought about it, or if it's deliberate.

SOO: Deliberate? Why?

JONES: I mean, I don't know. Some people are self-conscious about not being 30 any more. Not that this should be the case for him. He looks great...Just *not* like the avatar I've been in weekly staff meetings with for the past two years. At least not enough that it didn't take me a couple of beats to recognize him. (pause) But anyway. You didn't finish your story. What was the reaction to the presentation...?

OFFICE

[Again, JONES: is clear and LEBLANC: is filtered through the Omega system.

LEBLANC: The API for Epsilon is going to change slightly. We're going to overload the function Omega invokes to optionally take a second parameter to determine what kind of upscaling to do on the original sound stream.

JONES: Upscaling? So, improving the fidelity of the sound signal, if they have a bad sound capture on their end?

LEBLANC: (laughs) No, we've been doing that for ages. This is different. In the next release, we're debuting two new features. The one that comes with the basic subscription will be the accent normalization, and then with Omega Pro we're offering vocabulary upgrades.

JONES: What the hell is accent normalization?

LEBLANC: You know, people get frustrated when their accent can't be understood by their colleagues. So the filter normalizes the accent so they can be better understood.

JONES: That has "problematic" written all over it. Normalized to what?

LEBLANC: This release, American Midwest. Hey, I didn't pick it. But we have about 20 others in the road map, so it can be set according to localization settings at the enterprise level.

JONES: Dammit. For a moment there I thought I could pick my own accent. I was thinking...Scottish, maybe?

LEBLANC: (laughs) Not yet.

JONES: Too bad. And what's the vocabulary upgrade?

LEBLANC: New Natural Language Generation component that we integrated with. We can actually regenerate your sentence with slightly changed wording, to upgrade your level of your vocabulary. You know the advertising copy...

JONES: (mockingly) "Put your best self forward!"

LEBLANC: Exactly.

JONES: Whatever floats your boat, I guess. I just don't really understand what would motivate you to have Omega basically rewrite you as a slightly different person.

LEBLANC: Well, not everyone was privileged enough to grow up in the right place and go to the right schools, you know? Prejudice is not dead and some people are tired of fighting it.

JONES: (embarrassed) Point taken. Okay. In any case, have you guys benchmarked the upscaling under high load?

LEBLANC: Individually, yes...but not with the Omega integration yet,

obviously.

AVATAR by Lisa N. Michaud

SFX: Phone rings.

JONES: Okay. I'll need to write up a spec for those guys and give them a heads-up. (fading out) I'm a little concerned about the effect it could have...

RESTAURANT

[Restaurant chatter]

[Silverware clinking against plates]

JONES:...Oh my god, did I tell you about the new guy at work?

SOO: No. Yes. Maybe?

JONES: I don't think I did. New developer, based out of my office, and he started on the team on Tuesday...I think it was Tuesday? Anyway, today was his first all-hands meeting.

SOO: Okay, and...?

JONES: And as soon as he connects to the meeting and I take **one look** at his avatar, man, I was looking for the mute button so fast to block my reaction from being observed.

SOO: Why?

JONES: (laughs) Because his avatar was HOT!

SOO: And I'm just guessing from your tone that he...isn't?

JONES: Oh, don't get me wrong! He's fine. He's decent-looking enough, I guess. I hadn't really noticed. What I am saying is that everyone in that meeting noticed him today. It was still him, yeah, but like a real-time, moving, photoshopped version of him. A little taller, slightly broader shoulders, flatter stomach, nice...butt...(chuckles)

SOO: You were checking out his butt. On a conference call.

JONES: Yeah, well, I'm married, but I'm not dead. Or blind. And the pants he was wearing were very well-fitting and...expensive-looking.

SOO: And that's not what he wears to work?

JONES: Hardly. I mean, we don't get paid well enough to buy pants like those. These were custom avatar upgrades. You know how they'll reproduce your own clothes for free? And they have a few default business skins. I always imagine what it would be like if everyone in a meeting wore the same one. But he clearly had bought something custom. And he looked **good**.

SOO: Well, good for him. I guess.

JONES: Yes. Anyway, after I got over my shock, I was able to start the meeting. (takes a forkful of food) But I have to wonder what the return on investment is for upscaling yourself like that. Does he really find that...

VR meeting. SMITH: is filtered.

SMITH: [filtered] So, that's all I had. Oh, did you hear? We got on the news today. And not in a good way.

JONES: Yeah, that didn't take very long. We just went GA with the release two days ago.

SMITH: [filtered] I heard from from Legal that they're working on a formal response to the privacy advocates.

JONES: Is the protest worrying them?

SMITH:[filtered] No, all content passing through Omega has been our IP since the beginning. The language has been in the end users' agreement from day one.

JONES: Not that anyone has read one of **those** since the dawn of software...

[Clicking noise]

AVATAR by Lisa N. Michaud

SMITH: [filtered] True. But I don't know what people want here. Artificial Intelligence needs data. If you want your mail to be sorted and to have the junk mail thrown out, you need the system to be able to learn based on every email you've ever sent or received. If you want your appointments to be scheduled during times that are convenient to you, the system needs access to your whole calendar. And if you want your virtual avatar to be able to give a presentation the way you would do it, it needs to have access to all of your old presentations. That's how deep learning works.

JONES: Well, okay, but just to play devil's advocate: I can see where the objections are coming from. When I give a presentation over Omega, that is my personal creative output. And now Delta Corporation is using that to make something they are selling for profit.

SMITH: Just back to you, though. It's a model of how **you** present.

JONES: No, it also goes towards training the base model for all autonomous VR users. I worked on some of that code. Like you said, it takes a LOT of data. So the company **is** making a product out of my content. And I can see where that would bug people. At the same time, it's a tradeoff.

SMITH: Always is.

JONES: Yup. So we'll just have to see how this shakes out. (beat) In any case, I'll talk to you next week, assuming it all blows over and we still have jobs -

SMITH: Okay, sure thing. Bye.

JONES: Bye.

[shutdown chime]

OFFICE

[Typing on keyboard]

[Chime sounds]

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] Reminder: We have the weekly Gamma meeting starting in 15 minutes.

JONES: Oh, crap. I am never going to get used to software talking to me in my own voice. (sighs_) Not another one of those Gamma meetings. Wasn't the last one yesterday?

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] Our last Gamma meeting occurred one week ago at the same time.

JONES: (sighs, resigned) Okay, okay. (worried) Was I supposed to have prepared anything for this?

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] We will be presenting the analysis of the Zeta three-month pilot deployment. The slides are already complete.

JONES: Hell. I am in the middle of...I've got another hundred lines of code to review...I gotta finish this. (considering) You could actually give that talk without me, right? It's only two slides, and just the facts.

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] Yes.

JONES: And you could take notes on anything that was said that was important?

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] Yes. I have that capability.

JONES:...And, in fact, you could probably do a better job than me, because you could upscale it.

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] You do not currently have upscaling enabled.

JONES: Right. OK. Well, just to be on the safe side. Just this once. Turn upscaling on.

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] Upscaling has been activated.

JONES: Okay. Go to the meeting. ...Let me know how it goes.

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] I will report when the meeting has concluded.

[chime sounds]

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] The meeting is over. My notes have been placed in your directory.

AVATAR by Lisa N. Michaud

JONES: (shocked) WHAT?? The meeting was canceled?

JONES AVATAR: [filtered]No, we accomplished the entire agenda.

JONES: How??? You were only gone for, like, a second.

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] All of the other attendees sent their avatars as well. We were able to conduct the meeting much more efficiently without having to emulate or account for the actual speed of human speech.

JONES: We all spontaneously decided to be lazy-ass on the same day?? ...Even the boss?

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] (deliberately) This was not a spontaneous occurrence. You've been the only member of the Gamma meetings attending in person for more than a month. (beat) I thought you knew. This is, after all, a logical application of the Omega VR autonomous feature. There was no reason for you to spend your time in this meeting when you had more complex problems to solve.

JONES: But...but **I** was just using it to present simple findings. Interaction wasn't necessary; it was a one-way flow of data. Sometimes we have actual real **decisions** to make during those meetings. (beat) Wait. Two weeks ago we had that eight-hour planning meeting to determine which features to put into the next release. Are you saying that everyone else left those decisions up to their avatars?

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] The avatars were briefed with their users' objectives and provided with a fitness function with which to evaluate any proposed compromises.

JONES: But none of the rest of the team actually spent eight tedious, soul-killing hours of their day debating those compromises?

JONES AVATAR: [filtered]That is correct.

JONES: [facepalm] (talking around the hand) I don't know whether to feel horrified or mortified. Aaaaand I'm talking to my software, so, that's a thing now. Okay, um, terminate.

[shutdown chime sounds]

JONES: Wait. Omega?

[boot-up chime]

JONES:...What other meetings do I have today?

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] You have three more meetings. At 2 o'clock, you have a scrum meeting with Marcus; at 3, you have a call with the Sigma team. At 3:30, you have your weekly touch-base meeting with Lee.

JONES: And do any of those require me to put aside these 100 lines of code? Do I need to attend them?

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] No. I can execute all three of these meetings in autonomous mode.

JONES: Well, then. (relieved) Then do it. Attend without me, for all three...And thanks.

JONES AVATAR: [filtered] Happy to be of service.

[Shutoff chime]

{SEMINAR Segue Music 18:32}

WRAPPER #2 Written by Kathryn Pryde

THE AURACH TEMPLE, MAIN HALL (BYZANTIUM)

[Whirring noises as Zerash repairs itself]

[Sudden power surge]

THOMAS: (overwhelmed, speaking very fast) WOAH!
ThatwasincredibleI'veneverseenanythinglikethatIdidn'tknowhecouldgothisfast-

ZERASH: C-C-Common language re-established. This Zerash is... damaged... Cannot... understand...

THOMAS: (slows himself down) Right. Of course. there's so much information in there, I don't know how you could talk to me and sort everything else out.

ZERASH: Additional communication... data points... required...

THOMAS: I have just the thing. You listen to this while I try to

figure out why Alex wants to burn this place to the ground.

Accessing... "Hero Justice."

HERO JUSTICE Written by Joe J. Thomas

HERO JUSTICE HEADQUARTERS

{Heroic music with a beat}

[Footsteps]

{Whirring of doors opening}

ALICE: Good morning Mr. Calderon.

CARL: Good morning Alice, my favorite CEO.

ALICE: The Feds are here for your quarterly powers checkup. They'll need to see you, Gēnē, Brick Red, and Sightline as usual.

CARL: Better not keep the Feds waiting. We'll meet them in the conference room in a minute.

ALICE: I'll let 'em know, Mr. C.

OFFICE CONFERENCE ROOM

[Footsteps]

[Whirring noise]

SENIOR FBI: Hello Carl. We're ready to get you hooked up to the monitors.

JUNIOR FBI: Have a seat, please.

CARL: You FBI guys are up early. What? No baddies for you to catch?

[Footsteps]

[Equipment noises]

SENIOR FBI: Now, any changes in your powers or additional abilities to report?

CARL: No.

JUNIOR FBI: (taking notes) Unreported conflicts, events, or uh, arguments between your-selves?

CARL: Conflicts? No more than usual.

SENIOR FBI: Hey. Don't forget the protocol. You'll need to review their case history before you get too deep.

JUNIOR FBI: Oh, right. I guess the newbie always gets the busy work. Let's see...Fifties, corporate job, and "The Event". Was that when Gēnē first appeared?

CARL: Yeah. One minute I'm at my desk, the next I'm stuck inside my head watching this smoky figure scare the bejeezus outta my cube-mates. It did make for good office gossip, though.

SENIOR FBI: That's when they sent you to the Hero Relations Counselor, wasn't it?

CARL: She was supposed to ease me into being a superhero, but I'm a bit on the old side. Normally it happens in the teens or early twenties. Then things got more complicated when Sightline and Brick Red came out to play.

JUNIOR FBI: Says here they sent you straight to the vice chair in charge of supers. Guess they'd never seen anything like you before. Hero Justice Pilot

CARL: They got used to it though. It's a bit easier since only one of us can be on the outside at a time.

JUNIOR FBI: Wait - how's that work, exactly? The four of you in one body?

CARL: It's like being in a revolving door. Only one of us is on the outside at any given moment. The other three are stuck inside my head. From your perspective it looks kinda like a revolving door when we swap.

JUNIOR FBI: Must be cramped in there.

CARL: It's no party when we're all arguing.

HERO JUSTICE Written by Joe J. Thomas

SENIOR FBI: Ok, let's get to today's updates. How about we talk with Brick Red first...

[Swapping sound as Brick Red appears]

[Chair creaking under Brick Red's weight)

JUNIOR FBI: This guy's so heavy he's gonna bust that chair!

BRICK RED: Oh, hell... Not you guys again!

SENIOR FBI: Calm down, Red. Just answer the questions and you can go back to... whatever it was you were doing.

BRICK RED: All right...Get on with it, ya pencil-neck, paper-pushing, pipsqueaks!

JUNIOR FBI: Last month, during the 7th National Bank heist, you were seen...

BRICK RED: (surprised) Whoa, whoa, whoa!

[Swapping sound]

GĒNĒ: I'm sorry to interrupt, gentlemen.

SENIOR FBI: GĒnĒ? What happened to Red? We don't need to speak with you yet.

JUNIOR FBI: What's with all the smoke? And where did all the color go?

SENIOR FBI: It's one of GĒnĒ's mind tricks. The color will still be on the camera. I still can't get used to his voice in my head! But that's how they all keep in contact.

GĒNĒ: Gentlemen, I'm here because we're needed. A super-villain named Bond-Zero is about to attack at the Wallington Building downtown. And we're the closest to the scene.

[Door opens as Alice enters]

ALICE: C'mon guys - Time to get a move on!

GĒNĒ: I shall summon Sightline for the journey..

[swapping sound]

[Electricity crackling as Sightline appears]

JUNIOR FBI: Day-um! What's with all the lightning!

SENIOR FBI: That's Sightline. Or it was - probably downtown by now!

TO THE WALLINGTON BUILDING!

(Sound of wind and electricity as Sightline zips downtown...)

SIGHTLINE: We're on our way!

{Intense music}

[Sightline's electricity crackling with speed]

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] Ok, Alice. What have we got on this Bond-Zero guy?

ALICE: [filtered, through mind-link] He's got no natural powers, but a lot of black-market tech. Guns, bombs. Main weapon seems to be some kind of disintegration ray.

BRICK RED: [filtered, through mind-link] Oh, that's wonderful.

(Sightline's electricity sparking through traffic noise)

WALLINGTON BUILDING

[Crowd chatter]

SIGHTLINE: At the Wallington Building now.

[Swapping sound for Brick Red]

BRICK RED: I'll handle this bozo. (shouting) Whatever it is you want, I'm sure we can work this out peaceful like!

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] Red! We need to think this through first!

HERO JUSTICE Written by Joe J. Thomas

BOND-ZERO: What do I Want?!?! Want!? I want to rip this whole building full of pension-stealing dickweeds to the ground! All these tools are gonna get what they deserve!

BRICK RED: That ain't gonna do... I'm comin' for ya!

[Massive footstomps and brick breaking as Brick Red climbs)

SIGHTLINE: [filtered, through mind-link] Let him go, Carl. He can at least get us up to the scene.

GĒNĒ: [filtered, through mind-link] Alice, you'd better tell the police to back off. It's always messy with Red.

[Machine gun fire]

BRICK RED: I heard that! Just pipe down... I'll take this terrorist guy out pronto!

BOND-ZERO: (shouted) I'm not a terrorist!

[More gunfire]

[Brick breaking]

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] Glad I'm not out there! The last bullet I handled was from Coor's.

BRICK RED: I'm... Gonna... Crush... That... Damn... Huh?

[Disintegrator beam fires]

BRICK RED: Ahhhhhhhh!!! Son of a...! (

[Brick Red falls]

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] What the heck was that purple beam!?!?!?

ALICE: [filtered, through mind-link] That's the disintegration weapon, remember? Red's gonna be toast! Better get him outta there.

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] Sightline!

[Swapping sound as Sightline appears]

SIGHTLINE: Time to disarm that disintegrator ray... I'll focus on the battery pack!

(disintegrator sound winding down)

BRICK RED:[filtered, through mind-link] What'd you pull me in for! I coulda finished him!

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] No way! Look at you! Your mask is half burned off and you took some heavy damage. Just stay in here for now.

BRICK RED: [filtered, through mind-link] (begrudgingly) Yeah, whatever...

SIGHTLINE: I think I've absorbed enough energy from the disintegrator...

[Energy blast as Sightline uses eye-blast]

BRICK RED: [filtered, through mind-link] That's the stuff! Right back at the gun!

BOND-ZERO: Ahhhh! My hands! You won't stop me that easily!

[Clip inserted into weapon]

[Gunfire]

SIGHTLINE: (in pain) Ah! I'm hit. Heading to the top of the building...

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] Damn it! We need to swap out Sightline! That gunfire's gonna rip him to shreds!

[Swapping sound as Gēnē swaps in]

GĒNĒ: I've got it from here. I'm on the roof. Entering the air ducting.

ALICE: [filtered, through mind-link] Sightline? How are you and Red faring?

SIGHTLINE: [filtered, through mind-link] As long as we're inside our damage will remain stable. Doing ok for now but will need medics once we're back.

HERO JUSTICE Written by Joe J. Thomas

ALICE: [filtered, through mind-link] Medical team is already on standby. Along with wardrobe and legal.

WALLINGTON BUILDING, 3RD FLOOR INTERIOR

BOND-ZERO: (panicked) Where are they! Hiding from me... Gotta think! Not much time left now.

[Gēnē's voice enters Bond-Zero's head...]

GĒNĒ: Let me into your thoughts...be calm. Silence. Tranquility.

BOND-ZERO: So nice...colors fading...black and white. Mustn't sleep. They're near...

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] Red... once Gēnē gives the word, you're gonna need to swap in - are you up to it?

BRICK RED: [filtered, through mind-link] Yeah, yeah. I got it. Just a bit singed around the edges.

GĒNĒ: [filtered, through mind-link] And... Now, Red!

[Swapping sound as Brick Red swaps in]

[Scuffling as Brick Red throws Bond-Zero to the floor]

BRICK RED: I gotcha, ya scum! Hold still!

BOND-ZERO: Ah! Noooo!!! Take this!

[Stabbing noise, breaking as Bond-Zero stabs Brick Red]

BRICK RED: Ha! That all ya got? A puny knife?

BOND-ZERO: Not quite... you've got a surprise coming! Real soon...

BRICK RED: Hey guys! He's talking crazy... I got him cuffed. A little help here?!?

[Swapping sound as Gēnē swaps back in]

GĒNĒ: Open your mind. Give me your thoughts. What have you done?

BOND-ZERO: (in a trance) Bomb... Basement... 2 minutes... Revenge!

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] Holy hell! Sightline! We need to get to the basement fast. You good to go?

SIGHTLINE: [filtered, through mind-link] (pain) Yes, uhgh! I think I can manage it.

BRICK RED: [filtered, through mind-link] Stop yer moanin' and get the heck out there ya wimp!

[Swapping sound as Sightline swaps in]

OUTSIDE WALLINGTON BUILDING

{Intense hero music}

[Crowd chatter]

[Electricity as Sightline crackles past]

ALICE: [filtered, through mind-link] How are you guys? Do you need the bomb squad?

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] No time, Alice! We're gonna have to handle this on our own. Just have everyone get as far away as they can!

ALICE: [filtered, through mind-link] I'll alert the police and emergency crews!

SIGHTLINE: (to the police/crowd) Get everyone out of the area! We're headed to the basement!

[Panicked crowd sounds]

WALLINTON BUILDING BASEMENT

[Electricity crackling as Sightline arrives]

SIGHTLINE: Carl! What do we do?!?!

HERO JUSTICE Written by Joe J. Thomas

[Swapping sound as Carl swaps in]

[Beeping noise from bomb]

CARL: Holy hell in a handbasket! That's one huge bomb! It's the size of a Winnebago! No time to get it out. Don't know how to diffuse it. Only seconds left! Just one chance...Sightline! You've got to absorb the blast!

[Swapping sound as Sightline swaps in]

SIGHTLINE: 3... 2... 1...

[Explosion]

SIGHTLINE: Aaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!!!! Must. Get. Outside!

[Electricity crackling as Sightline runs outside]

OUTSIDE WALLINGTON BUILDING, POST EXPLOSION

[Crowd chatter]

[Crackling as Sightline arrives]

SIGHTLINE: Have to release this energy before it consumes me!
Aaaaaaahhhhhhhhh!!!!

[Energy release]

[Crowd applause]

CARL: Well. That was... uh, something new.

[Footsteps as Alice runs up]

ALICE: [mind] Mr C! I saw you release all that energy into the sky, but then you collapsed - You ok?

CARL: Yeah, sort of. Let's get the team the heck outta here and back to HQ. Gēnē? You up to getting us back?

GĒNĒ: [filtered, through mind-link] Yes. I am undamaged. On our way now...

[Swapping sound as Gēnē swaps in]

HEADING BACK TO HQ

[Crowd chatter]

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] Alice, you still there?

ALICE: [filtered, through mind-link] Yes Mr. C. Gēnē's kept me in the loop. The teams from medical, costumes, and legal waiting.

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] Great, Alice. Remind me to give you a raise.

ALICE: [filtered, through mind-link] I'll add it to your schedule, Mr. C. When you get back to HQ, we'll meet you all in the conference room.

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] Wait... What? Why the conference room?

ALICE: [filtered, through mind-link] The Feds? Remember? They are still waiting for you. Gotta follow the rules to keep the lights on!

[Next lines are simultaneous]

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] Oh, for the love of..

BRICK RED: [filtered, through mind-link] Son of a b...!!!

SIGHTLINE: [filtered, through mind-link] This is worse than Bond-Zero!

GĒNĒ: You all knew this was coming.

CARL: [filtered, through mind-link] Pipe down you guys! Ok, Alice we're almost there. Send the meds to the conference room and we'll handle it all at the same time.

ALICE: [filtered, through mind-link] Hey boss, should I cue the theme music now?

HERO JUSTICE Written by Joe J. Thomas

[Swapping sound as Carl swaps in]

[Footsteps into the office]

CARL: Sigh. Yeah. Sure. Why not...

{Funky "Hero Justice" theme music}

{SEMINAR Segue Music 29:28}

WRAPPER #3 Written by Kathryn Pryde

THE AURACH TEMPLE, MAIN HALL (BYZANTIUM)

THOMAS: Carl seemed to have the right idea in that story. Fight smart, not hard. At least, I hope that was the lesson?

ZERASH: Core data restored. Significant power loss and structural damage. Repair is not possible. This Zerash will not be able to remain operational without assistance.

THOMAS: Wait. What?

ZERASH: Even if the Zarrak do not enter the structure... Byzantium will end.

{SEMINAR Theme 30:02}

CREDITS ANNOUNCER: Featuring the voice talents of Kathryn Pryde as Alice, Dan Foster as Alex and Thomas, and Aiden Rudd as Zerash.

In "Avatar," Bare Schacht was Soo, Jake Philips was Smith, Jack Pevyhouse was LeBlanc, Dave Morgan was Prakesh, and Jess Herring was Jones. The story was written by Lisa N. Michaud.

In "Hero Justice", Joel Nisbitt was Senior FBI Agent, Joshua Zedicker was Junior FBI Agent, Cindy Woods was Alice Azure, Russ Gold was Bond-Zero, and Joe J. Thomas was Carl Calderon and the Heroes. The story was written by Joe J. Thomas.

This episode was directed by VC Morrison and assistant-directed by Samantha Reed. The wrapper script and story were written by Kathryn Pryde, and the shorts and wrapper were edited by Jeffrey Bridges. Music featured in this episode include the following: Hero Justice Theme Song by Joe J. Thomas, additional music and Seminar theme were written by VC Morrison, produced by Pendant Productions.

Seminar co-created by Kathryn Pryde and Jeffrey Bridges
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For more information visit pendantaudio.com. Thanks for listening.

PREVIEW ANNOUNCER: Next, on an all-new Seminar...

GRAY: Gray Therapeutic Assistant, booting up...one moment,
please...please identify user.

CAL: It's me, Gray.

GRAY: Good afternoon, Cal. How can I assist you today?

CAL: I'm at a job site and I, uh, I need you to talk me through the
shaking.

GRAY: You are in a seismically active area?

CAL: Yes, the epicenter was- okay, that doesn't matter. But it was a
biggie so the aftershocks are still going.

GRAY: Reminder: This is not an optimal working condition for you,
Cal. Have you requested a different job site?

CAL: Not an option today.

GRAY: Acknowledged. Shall we start with some short meditation?

CAL: I don't have time for that. I just want to get the job done and
get the hell out of here.

GRAY: I understand. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your
current stress level?

CAL: As long as it's not shaking, I'd say its - I don't know - a 5?

GRAY: How would you rate your stress level during an aftershock?

CAL: A goddamned 11 Gray! You know that!

[Rumbling]

CAL: (gasps)

GRAY: Reminder: You can do this, Cal.

CAL: I can do this.

PREVIEW ANNOUNCER: Hear more of this ground-shaking story written by DX Blink in the next Seminar. Coming February 26, 2020, only at pendantaudio.com.