

F ullscreen: a Z oom Trilogy

By

Karin Diann Williams

WHY I LIKE IT; *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes... In a lightning-speed feat of evolution, the Zoom play has become more than an underwhelming substitution for the real thing to a legit dramatic form of its own. If you don't believe that a teleplay written for a medium with self-styled lighting, glitchy sound, and actors' heads in little boxes, could be anything but tedious, then you haven't experienced what a talented playwright like Karin Diann Williams can do with a well-written script that not only transcends the platform's limitations but fully exploits them for material. In Fullscreen: A Zoom Trilogy, Williams gets up close and personal (cue the sound of Carter peeing in the background) using Zoom as her setting; she also gets marvelously meta with her play as a comment on the nature of Zoom interactions within the trilogy of the three vignettes. Although each one of the segments stands alone, you'll want to take a deep dive into all of them to get the most out of your virtually virtual experience.*

The first two vignettes are stories of young actors, the first, Girl #2 is a Zoom audition that proves to be just as soul-sucking as the real deal with a casting director who might even be more of a douche online than F2F (ref. Carter peeing in the background). In the second vignette, Text 2 Speech we encounter a diverse group of struggling actor/models (including our Girl #2 from the last scene) worried about being replaced by bots, CGI and 3D modeling. It's Pirandello-esque with four actors in search of a Zoom acting gig. It's also hilariously relatable with janky tech, muted mics, video freezing at inopportune times, and an actor's sudden disappearance when his camera cuts out. It's times like these that get beautiful young people to become socially conscious, send texts on the chat feature, put butterflies on their faces, and maybe even organize a virtual union. In One of Them, the third portion of this Zoom triptych extravaganza, we shift our focus to the virtual writing room, a Zoom meeting with elements of LARPing that might be a subliminal advertisement for Ritalin. The big question here (besides creative development) is how to recognize a cyborg and if it might even be one of us...

KIRK

Think about it. Who's ever met IRL?

They think about this.

LYRIC

If one of us was a cyborg, we could tell by their lame-ass dialog.

KIRK

(on mute)

[Has anybody written anything?]

GRIFFIN

What?

KIRK

[I haven't seen any pages yet. Does anyone have pages?]

TATE

You're on mute, Kirk.

KIRK

What?

(Hint: if you're reading A Zoom play in Fleas, you're probably not a cyborg, so READ ON!)
Spacing is playwright's own. JEC

Fullscreen: a Zoom Trilogy

by

Karin Diann Williams

Actor 1 – F/NB 20s - Wendy/Lyric

Actor 2 – M/NB 30s - Carter/Kirk

Actor 3 – M/F/NB any age - Saylor/Tate

Actor 4 - M/F/NB any age - Indigo/Moxie

Actor 5 - M/F/NB any age - Dex/Griffin/Girl #2

Girl #2

Wendy, a pretty young mixed-race woman, appears on a zoom screen. Her zoom background shows a fantasy castle in the air.

She looks into the camera and fixes her hair. She puts on lipstick, purses her lips, and smiles broadly.

A new screen appears, someone in silhouette: Carter, a shadow against glaring light.

Wow. Wendy? Wow.

CARTER

Hi.

WENDY

You're perfect. Absolutely perfect.

CARTER

Wendy.

WENDY

I'm Carter.

CARTER

Nice to meet you.

WENDY

You're exactly what I'm looking for.

CARTER

Carter turns with the camera and a face appears on the screen: Carter is white and a few years older than Wendy.

Thank you.

WENDY

Carter moves, carrying the camera which seems to be on a mobile phone. In the background we see flashes of a messy desk, an unmade bed, clothes on the floor.

That smile!

CARTER

I get that a lot.

WENDY
(giggles)

Zoey said you were perfect. But I didn't believe it.

CARTER

WENDY

What did you believe?

Carter moves into a kitchen, begins rummaging in the fridge, still holding the phone in one hand, without paying much attention to the image on the screen.

CARTER

It's not very often I turn on this camera and everything I've imagined – the girl in my head is just sitting there.

WENDY

Thanks.

CARTER

You're welcome.

Wendy looks down, takes a deep breath, and launches into a monologue.

WENDY

Fie, fie! unknit that threatening unkind brow...

Carter seems to have put down the phone somewhere: a ceiling fan appears on the screen.

CARTER

Huh?

WENDY

And dart not scornful glances from those eyes, to wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor...

Carter picks up the phone, peers into the camera drinking a can of seltzer.

CARTER

No need for speeches, it's fine.

WENDY

You don't want to hear my monologue?

Carter leaves the kitchen, heading down a hallway.

CARTER

What is that? Neil LaBute?

WENDY

Shakespeare.

CARTER

Neil LaBute is the bomb.

WENDY
It's *Taming of the Shrew*.

CARTER
Interesting.

WENDY
Thanks.

Carter arrives in a bathroom. Wendy watches with thinly veiled horror as Carter spins in front of the bathroom mirror, looking for somewhere to put the phone down.

CARTER
Damn! You look so familiar.

WENDY
Everybody says that.

CARTER
I feel like I know you from somewhere.

WENDY
You probably do.

Carter props the phone up, settling the camera on an image of the bathroom wall.

CARTER
Maybe from High School, or – I know – didn't you work at the Starbucks across the street from my first apartment?

WENDY
No.

We hear the sound of Carter peeing.

CARTER
Downtown? On Newark and Jersey! The Starbucks. That was you.

WENDY
It wasn't.

CARTER
Did we ever chat on Tinder?

WENDY
No. I've never been on it.

CARTER
Then where have I seen you before?

The sound of a toilet flushing.

WENDY
I've done a little modeling.

CARTER
Where?

WENDY
Stock photos.

CARTER
Huh?

The sound of water running.

WENDY
The ones you download from the internet.

CARTER
Isn't that every photo?

WENDY
The ones that artists use, in ads. That's how I make a living.

Carter's face appears on the screen.

CARTER
Wow. You mean people get paid for that?

WENDY
People get paid for that.

CARTER
Wow.

Carter picks the phone up and moves down the hall, back to the messy desk, gazing into the camera.

WENDY
You've probably seen me in print ads, or banners. I'm in a lot of those. Packaging, and billboards. Maybe those little pop-ups on your phone.

CARTER
I hate those things.

WENDY
Me too.

Carter's face appears once again.

CARTER

But you're in them.

WENDY

Yeah. I'm kind of everywhere. I can't really control it.

CARTER

That makes sense.

WENDY

You think so? Sometimes I don't get it.

CARTER

Just because you look so...

WENDY

What?

CARTER

Generic.

(beat)

I mean that as a compliment.

WENDY

I'm not sure if that's possible.

CARTER

It is! Because you're so intensely beautiful, but instantly forgettable.

WENDY

Thanks.

CARTER

It's really unique.

WENDY

Everybody thinks they've met me before.

CARTER

I still think so.

WENDY

I doubt it.

Carter turns, revealing a window looking out onto a gorgeous landscape

CARTER
Do you have this on your phone?

WENDY
What?

CARTER
I'd love it if you could log on from your phone, and put it across the room, so I can get a few full body shots.

WENDY
What?

CARTER
I'm taking screenshots.

WENDY
Oh.

Wendy moves away from the camera. For a moment, we see only the fantasy castle.

CARTER
Do you mind if I record this?

WENDY
Uhm...ok.

CARTER
For the investors.

WENDY
Sure.

CARTER
Investors, this is Wendy.

Another zoom screen pops in, showing Wendy in a cluttered studio apartment, her face in extreme closeup as she adjusts the controls on her phone.

CARTER
Where are you from?

WENDY
Cleveland.

She walks away from the phone screen and we see her standing in the middle of the room, now from two different angles.

CARTER

No, I mean where did you come from? Originally?

WENDY

Cleveland.

She turns a quarter-turn to the right.

CARTER

Before that.

WENDY

I was born there.

She turns again.

CARTER

But where before that?

WENDY

I don't know, the mind of God?

She performs a dance move, spinning gracefully in front of the camera.

CARTER

Perfect. Because what I need is the girl next door. Someone that everyday people relate to.

She goes back to her desk. Her face appears, surrounded by the fantasy castle. On the other screen we see her sitting at her desk.

WENDY

I can't believe you said that.

CARTER

Said what?

WENDY

Where are you from?

CARTER

It's just because you look so...

WENDY

What?

CARTER

Everything. I wondered what you were.

WENDY

I'm a stock photography model.

CARTER

People can relate to that, right?

WENDY

I guess. Since I'm so generic.

CARTER

I love it. I do. It's great... But it's just on the edge of creepy. Like those robots with the silicon masks and the marble eyes. On the outside you're totally normal. But inside its all gears and wires, churning, crunching. You're normal, but kind of, a little bit too normal, you know?

WENDY

Okay. Well, if you don't want to hear my monologue...

CARTER

I mean, I totally want you.

WENDY

You do?

CARTER

You're perfect for this project.

WENDY

Uhm. Okay.

A beat. Neither one says anything.

WENDY

What do I have to do? I mean, the casting call just said "girl number two."

CARTER

All you have to do is stand there.

WENDY

Yeah?

CARTER

Just be yourself. While we take a bunch of photos.

WENDY

Okay. I can do that.

CARTER

Yeah?

WENDY

I've got some experience.

CARTER

Nice.

WENDY

I'm good with the camera.

CARTER

Excellent.

WENDY

How much are you paying?

CARTER

Fifteen bucks an hour.

WENDY

That's all?

CARTER

But you'll get a cut of the residuals.

WENDY

What residuals?

CARTER

We'll also need some video, all kinds of video.

WENDY

Video of what?

CARTER

Video of you, in action. Sitting, standing, jumping – generic stuff.

WENDY

Okay.

CARTER

Running, maybe. Sleeping.

WENDY

You want to shoot me sleeping?

CARTER

Not really sleeping. I mean, maybe. Just for a few minutes. Doing what people do in bed, you know. Tossing and turning. Flopping around.

WENDY

Okay...

CARTER

And you'll have to be wearing a jumpsuit thing, like a skintight...you know?

WENDY

Not really.

CARTER

One of those onepiece – not naked – but, you know...

WENDY

A leotard?

CARTER

Exactly. Or you could be naked, if you wanted to.

WENDY

I'm fine with wearing a leotard.

CARTER

We have to get all the contours. To map you out, in 3D.

WENDY

Okay...

CARTER

So the character will be really *lifelike*, you know?

WENDY

But why not shoot it live?

CARTER

Shoot what?

WENDY

Why not, I mean... if you're building a character, why not just have me play the character, live, right there on the screen?

CARTER

What, you mean film you?

WENDY

Exactly.

CARTER

We're going to. In a leotard.

WENDY

But if I wore a costume, I could play the character. In the story.

CARTER

You will be.

WENDY

I could memorize the lines!

CARTER

Lines?

WENDY

What the character says, you know?

CARTER

That's going to be the voiceover artist.

WENDY

I've studied acting. I've got a degree.

CARTER

I think there a whole separate union for that...

WENDY

It's the same union.

CARTER

Really?

WENDY

Yes,

CARTER

Are you in it?

WENDY

No.

CARTER

Good. Because this is a non-union gig, like I said--

WENDY

Fifteen bucks an hour.

CARTER

Plus there's the residuals.

WENDY

From what?

CARTER

Whatever people want to make. When we license you.

WENDY

License me?

CARTER

The character. Your 3D model. Girl next door. With pre-programmed actions.

WENDY

Sleeping?

CARTER

Or waking up. Sitting, standing, running.

WENDY

Tossing and turning.

CARTER

Maybe we'll try some edgy stuff, like falling down stairs. Cracking up laughing. Crying.

WENDY

I get it.

CARTER

Kissing somebody! That would get a ton of clicks.

WENDY

Who?

CARTER

Just anyone. I don't know. Another model.

WENDY

Sure.

Carter begins screen sharing, scrolling through a website with photos of models.

CARTER

This is the beta version of our gallery. Lifelike 3D models. Ready for AR/VR, games and TV. These are just placeholders. This will be you.

Carter clicks an image. A slick 3D girl pops up. Wendy stares at the screen in horror.

CARTER

The point is you'll be available.

To download. WENDY

For years and years. Forever. CARTER

Wow. Forever. WENDY

Whenever anybody needs a cute best friend, or something. CARTER

Right. WENDY

You're perfect for that kind of thing. CARTER

Yeah. I get that a lot. WENDY

Carter stops sharing the screen.

So Thursday? CARTER

Sure. WENDY

Alright! I'll email Zooey. CARTER

Awesome. WENDY

Carter starts to compose an email. Wendy stays on, thinking.

Who's girl number one? WENDY

Huh? CARTER

If I'm girl number two, who's number one? WENDY

CARTER

Some other girl.

WENDY

What does she look like?

CARTER

You know.

WENDY

I don't know. I'm asking.

CARTER

The lead. She's the lead, so she looks like...

WENDY

The lead.

CARTER

Yeah, but not perfect like you. She's gonna need a ton of photoshop. Pretty heavy CGI. With you, I think we're gonna save...hours on that stuff, honestly.

Carter goes back to his email. Wendy thinks about what he said. Beat. Slowly, she smiles. End of play.

Text 2 Speech

Saylor (any gender/age/ethnicity) is on a zoom screen against the background of a serene beach. Saylor looks critically at the image on screen, then switches the background to a picture of a tiger in the jungle. Then to a weird Martian landscape.

Another zoom window pops in. Indigo (any gender/age/ethnicity) appears with a cluttered home office in the background.

Where are you, dude?
INDIGO

Dialing in from Planet X!
SAYLOR

Where's Duane?
INDIGO

I dunno.
SAYLOR

Did you memorize your monologue?
INDIGO

No, but I've got it all queued up in a window here, so I just need to click—
SAYLOR

Saylor's zoom screen winks out. Indigo laughs. Dex (any gender/age/ethnicity) pops in on another screen.

Where's Duane?
DEX

Running late. Maybe his wife's on the fritz again.
INDIGO
(Shrugs)

What do you think about that casting call..?
DEX

The one Duane sent?
INDIGO

Yeah. Exactly.
DEX

It's totally wack.
INDIGO

Absolutely. DEX

I mean, what the..? INDIGO

Right? DEX

It's scary. INDIGO

Saylor appears, on a screen with the Martian background.

INDIGO
Thing is, we can't just stand here and watch this happening. Can we?

DEX
Of course not! No way.

INDIGO
Because the future of the industry, our whole profession...

Saylor begins to talk, but no sound is heard.

SAYLOR
[Seriously, this is so wack.]

DEX
Exactly. Now or never.

SAYLOR
[Sorry I'm late. I was just pulling up my monologue...]

INDIGO
Now. I think now.

SAYLOR
[This really is some crazy casting call Duane sent, huh?]

DEX
Saylor?

SAYLOR
[It's really insane...]

DEX
Saylor – your sound is...

INDIGO

You're muted.

SAYLOR

[Really? But the little mic is...]

Saylor begins messing with the mic controls.

DEX

We've gotta rise up, make a statement, maybe get the union involved--

INDIGO

Are you in the union?

DEX

No.

INDIGO

Me neither.

SAYLOR

I am. The Service Worker's International.

DEX

What's that?

SAYLOR

A union. I used to be in food service.

INDIGO

That doesn't count.

SAYLOR

Yes it does.

DEX

Not unless they give a shit about voiceover artists. Do they?

SAYLOR

Maybe?

DEX

Are robots taking over food service?

SAYLOR

Of course they are.

Really? Crap!

INDIGO

They're taking over everything.

DEX

What are you gonna do?

SAYLOR
(shrugs)

That's what we were just talking about. Maybe we shouldn't go out for this thing – this artificial intelligence...

INDIGO

We're basically putting ourselves out of a job.

DEX

But they're paying a thousand bucks.

SAYLOR

For one day.

INDIGO

One day of work, and your voice is trapped for all time.

DEX

Plus residuals.

INDIGO

That always sounds good, "residuals," but then it comes down to a check in the mail for twenty-five cents.

DEX

I've gotten those. Many times.

INDIGO

A check in the mail for twenty five cents?

SAYLOR

Fifteen cents even, ten cents.

DEX

Many times.

INDIGO

I gotta work more.

SAYLOR

DEX

It costs them more to print and mail the check than you get with the freaking residuals.

SAYLOR

But a thousand bucks.

INDIGO

I know.

SAYLOR

I could put a down payment on a Chevy Volt.

INDIGO

New or used?

SAYLOR

Used.

INDIGO

What for?

DEX

You can drive to the unemployment line.

INDIGO

They keep your voice, forever. And anytime somebody wants to hire you, they download a bot instead.

DEX

Text to speech.

INDIGO

Damn.

SAYLOR

Hang on, I gotta take this.

Saylor picks up a cell phone, answers.

Hey Babe!

INDIGO

It's time to rise up.

SAYLOR

What's going on?

DEX

You mean strike?

INDIGO

I mean strike.

SAYLOR

Yeah. I'm on another call right now.

DEX

Ok. Wow.

SAYLOR

Wendy says hey.

DEX

Hey, Wendy!

INDIGO

Hey, Wendy. We're going out on strike.

SAYLOR

Wendy, say hey to everyone—

Saylor holds the phone up to the camera. A woman, Wendy, is smiling and waving.

WENDY

Hey, guys. What's up?

DEX

Nothing much.

INDIGO

We're going on strike!

WENDY

Yeah?

DEX

Maybe.

WENDY

Can you do that?

INDIGO

Sure we can do that. Why not? What's stopping us?

WENDY

Are you guys in the union?

No. DEX

I am. SAYLOR

That isn't the point! INDIGO

Saylor swings the phone away from the screen.

I'll call you back after my class. SAYLOR

Retraining. That's what they're going to tell us. DEX

But-- INDIGO

Yeah, no. I'm over it. DEX

Me too. SAYLOR

This is the third time I've had to retrain. DEX

From what? SAYLOR

I started out in stunt work. DEX

Oooh. INDIGO

Busted my butt jumping out of burning buildings. DEX

All of that's CGI now. SAYLOR

CGI and 3D modeling. DEX

Sound of shouting, glassware breaking, thousands of tin cans clattering on top of each other.

Huh? SAYLOR

That's my ex. DEX

Oh. SAYLOR

DEX
(shouting)
With Ralph. I get him every other weekend.

Sounds of banging and breaking continue.

Can you shut that off? INDIGO

Dude, for real, can you stop it? SAYLOR

With the microphone! INDIGO

Can it already? SAYLOR

Click the little icon at the bottom of the screen. INDIGO

Huh? Where? DEX

Dex hunts around for the microphone.

The little mic! SAYLOR

Dex's camera winks off and then back on again.

The one that looks like a little— INDIGO

Oh. DEX

The loud sounds cut off abruptly.

INDIGO

Thank you.

DEX

[No problem!]

SAYLOR

[So what are we going to do about this casting call, huh?]

INDIGO

Saylor – your mic.

SAYLOR

[Huh?]

DEX

[Your mic is turned off. You're on mute.]

SAYLOR

[I can't hear you, Dex!]

INDIGO

Turn on your mic!

Dex's camera goes off. Dex's mic goes on. Loud sounds of something grinding in the background, fingers raking across thousands of chalkboards.

DEX

You're on mute!

Dex's mic goes off again. Silence.

Indigo and Saylor look at one another.

INDIGO

Maybe it's time to tap out.

Dex's camera pops back on.

DEX

[Don't say that, dude! What are you talking about? We can't give up now. That's not who we are. Remember that time we went fishing? And you said there weren't any fish anymore, there never were any fish really, because it was a manmade lake, meaning they just dug a huge pit in the ground, they cleared all the brush and came in with heavy equipment, bulldozers, and earthmovers,

Beat. They watch as Dex talks, unable to hear.

Another beat.

SAYLOR

(mouthing words without sound)
Does Dex know we can't hear this?

INDIGO

I think so.

and later when they had gone deep enough...it had to be really, really deep, twenty, thirty feet you said, deeper than any grave ever dug...then they poured the water in, and it took days and days and days, but finally the water covered everything. They put in rental condos around the lake, boxy little boxes, two or three bedrooms – the third bedroom costs extra, so we rented the one with a pullout couch, and you said there weren't any fish in the lake, fish didn't seem to like it there, something about too much mercury...that water they pumped in, it was full of mercury, or chemicals, or something, or maybe they dug out the hole for the lake on top of an Indian burial ground, an unmarked grave, for the hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of Native American, indigenous – I gotta get this right – the everyday people who lived there one time...]

Dex freezes.

Shakespeare can be really dense.

Some deep shit, dude.

It's frozen.

Yep.

Frozen in the middle of the story.

That's how these things go, I guess.

Wow.

SAYLOR
You're on mute, Dex!

Indigo writes "You're on mute, Dex!" on a piece of paper and holds it up to the camera.

SAYLOR
Maybe that's Dex's monologue.

INDIGO
What do you think it's about?

SAYLOR
I have no idea.

SAYLOR

INDIGO

SAYLOR

INDIGO

SAYLOR

INDIGO

SAYLOR

INDIGO

It's a metaphor. We're trapped here, in the middle of this story, and Duane will probably never show up, and any minute now, all of us are gonna freeze.

SAYLOR

This is why we need 5G.

INDIGO

Right. Except it's gonna kill us. We're living on the brink of the apocalypse.

SAYLOR

So maybe we just ... jump, you know.

Dex's camera goes off.

INDIGO

Hmmm...

SAYLOR

Do you think Dex knows that...?

INDIGO

Who knows?

Indigo gets up and wanders out of frame.

SAYLOR

Hmmm...

INDIGO

In a way I'm glad the mic was off. Because the monologue I imagined is so much better than it actually was.

SAYLOR

True.

Dex pops back on, with the camera turned halfway up towards the ceiling.

INDIGO

The solution to all of our issues.

SAYLOR

Global warming?

INDIGO

That too.

DEX

This wifi sucks.

Wifi is one issue.

SAYLOR

5G.

DEX

5G. That's what I'm waiting for.

SAYLOR

Indigo comes back to the screen with a beer and a plate of nachos.

So, hey, did you guys figure it out?

DEX

Dex, you need to put your camera—

SAYLOR

Huh?

DEX

We're only getting the top of your head, Dex.

SAYLOR

Oh.

DEX

Dex tilts the camera down. A cat appears on screen.

That's Ralph.

DEX

Hey, Ralph!

SAYLOR

I get him every other weekend.

DEX

Awww, what a cutie. Hey, Ralph!

SAYLOR

Saylor holds up a phone to the screen with a picture of a cat.

This is Betsy!

SAYLOR

Betsy, awww...

DEX

SAYLOR

She's dead.

DEX

Wow...let's just say that life is full of complexity.

SAYLOR

Yeah.

INDIGO

So, what do you guys think? Are we striking or what?

SAYLOR

Striking?

INDIGO

That's what we were talking about.

SAYLOR

Oh. Right.

DEX

A thousand bucks.

SAYLOR

Let's see what Duane says. He's bound to be here soon.

All three look into the camera. Indigo eats nachos. Dex pets the cat. They wait.

Beat. End of play.

One of Them

There are four zoom boxes on the screen: Lyric is in a home office, Moxie is in a living room, Tate is outside, and Griffin is in bed. (All of these roles can be played by actors of any age/gender.)

One of them is an AI.	LYRIC
Which one?	MOXIE
They don't know.	LYRIC
Like Spock!	TATE
Not like Spock.	GRIFFIN
Spock wasn't an AI.	MOXIE
Spock was an alien.	GRIFFIN
That's what I meant.	TATE
From a more logical planet.	GRIFFIN
Kirk wants in.	LYRIC (looking at a phone)
Captain Kirk?	MOXIE
One of us. One of the writers.	TATE
Noah made Moxie the host.	GRIFFIN

Griffin gets up and carries the laptop into a kitchen, makes coffee.

LYRIC

You have to let him in.

TATE

That's how it works. Like with vampires.

MOXIE

Who's Kirk?

TATE

Kirk's on our team.

GRIFFIN

Vampires...that's a good idea.

TATE

Kirk is the new guy.

MOXIE

Oh.

LYRIC

I worked with him on Black Mirror.

TATE

Click where it says "admit."

A new window appears: Kirk (any age/gender) is touching up the roots of their hair.

KIRK

What's going on? Did we finish the treatment?

GRIFFIN

What do you think about vampires? As a metaphor?

KIRK

Overdone.

TATE

Come on, vampires are timeless!

MOXIE

How do I get to see everyone?

Tate gets up and begins doing yoga.

KIRK

What do you mean?

MOXIE

All of you – all of the boxes?

KIRK

Turn on "Gallery View"

LYRIC

It's up in the right hand corner...

Moxie hunts around for the controls.

GRIFFIN

That view gives me a headache.

Griffin sits down, drinks coffee.

MOXIE

Where's the..?

KIRK

You click the little thing on the corner of the box, and then you pick "Gallery View"

Moxie does this.

TATE

How come Noah made Moxie the host?

GRIFFIN

That's a good question.

MOXIE

It worked!

GRIFFIN

Maybe it's a plot.

MOXIE

Now I can see everyone.

TATE

How about... aliens plot to take over the world?

LYRIC

They infiltrate human society with their AI...

GRIFFIN

Like a cyborg...

A 3D, digital humanoid--

MOXIE

That's what I meant!

TATE

How would they know who was one?

KIRK

It could be constructed out of other people's parts.

GRIFFIN

The selfies they posted!

MOXIE

Like Frankenstein!

TATE
(doing yoga)

Not like Frankenstein.

GRIFFIN

Sit down, you're making me nervous.

LYRIC

Frankenstein was a monster.

MOXIE

That's what I meant!

TATE

Tate picks up the laptop and sits on the floor.

I like it. Say there's this group of people, a team. On some kind of mission. But one of them is an AI.

KIRK

What they do is feed it...all the writing, all the literature.

TATE

The Sun Also Rises.

MOXIE

Exactly.

TATE

But how would they know?

KIRK

GRIFFIN

They don't know.

MOXIE

Can we put in a bullfight?

TATE

Ewww - no!

KIRK

One of us could be a cyborg.

They all pause, suddenly suspicious.

KIRK

Think about it. Who's ever met IRL?

They think about this.

LYRIC

If one of us was a cyborg, we could tell by their lame-ass dialog.

KIRK

(on mute)

[Has anybody written anything?]

GRIFFIN

What?

KIRK

[I haven't seen any pages yet. Does anyone have pages?]

TATE

You're on mute, Kirk.

KIRK

What?

MOXIE

I was testing the mute.

KIRK

On me?

GRIFFIN

What do you mean you were [testing the mute? Why are you messing around?]

MOXIE
(laughing)

This is fun.

TATE
[Griffin, you're on mute.]

GRIFFIN
[Moxie put everyone on mute.]

LYRIC
[Hey, I can't hear anyone!]

MOXIE
[It's fun being the host.]

GRIFFIN
[Fuck this shit! Moxie, make me the host-- Because one of us is--]

Moxie unmutes everyone.

GRIFFIN
Definitely a cyborg.

LYRIC
Which one?

TATE
A cyborg would know how to work the controls.

Goofy ears appear on Moxie's head.

MOXIE
It's a good concept -- let's run with it.

TATE
I'll do the alien dialog.

A different kind of goofy ears appear on Lyric's head.

GRIFFIN
Let's divide it up by acts.

LYRIC
What's our setting?

A goofy hat appears on Tate's head.

GRIFFIN

Are you doing that?

MOXIE

Doing what?

KIRK

How would we know if Tate was really a cyborg?

GRIFFIN

The alien dialog would suck.

LYRIC

And there might be a bullfight.

KIRK

It's alien dialog! How would we know if it sucks?

TATE

Hmmm...

KIRK

Think about it!

MOXIE

If one of us was a cyborg, we'd be done by now.

GRIFFIN

We could end this call.

TATE

I could go get Reiki.

LYRIC

Let's just divide up the acts.

GRIFFIN

We haven't nailed down the concept!

LYRIC

One of them is a cyborg. That's our concept.

GRIFFIN

Where's the conflict?

MOXIE

Who are the characters?

TATE

I think it should be like Spock.

LYRIC

Spock was not a cyborg!

A yellow thumbs-up appears on Moxie's screen.

KIRK

It plays them off against each other...it's sinister.

LYRIC

We can't slip into horror.

A flesh-toned thumbs down appears on Moxie's screen.

GRIFFIN

Why not?

LYRIC

Because the series Bible says "don't slip into horror."

TATE

Maybe it's too late.

MOXIE

How do I make the hand blue?

KIRK

You can't make it blue.

MOXIE

Why not?

Glowing butterflies appear on Lyric's cheeks. Lyric giggles. Tate and Griffin crack up.

GRIFFIN

What's our deadline for episode one?

MOXIE

Tomorrow.

KIRK

Tomorrow?!?

TATE

One of us is a cyborg.

LYRIC

I'm not.

Well I'm not!

MOXIE

Lyric bursts out laughing.

What?

MOXIE

Tate sent me something in chat.

LYRIC

How do you do that -- send someone a chat?

MOXIE

Tate cracks up laughing. Lyric cracks up laughing.

I think it's of them.

GRIFFIN

Who?

LYRIC

One of us?

TATE

Look at your chat, Kirk.

MOXIE

Kirk frowns, types something. Moxie types something. Griffin types something.

I figured it out.

MOXIE

All of them send private chats, occasionally looking up to see if the person they're chatting with got the message.

I think this is working.

KIRK

Maybe we should do breakout rooms.

GRIFFIN

Breakout rooms?

MOXIE

It's in the master controls--

GRIFFIN

KIRK

Why did Noah make Moxie the host?

GRIFFIN

I'll be the host.

KIRK

Make me the host!

MOXIE

How do I..?

KIRK

"Meeting Options."

MOXIE

Where is..?

KIRK

Look under "Meeting." On the menu. At the top.

MOXIE

I don't think I have that.

Moxie's words start appearing on the screen. Suddenly, anything anyone says is appearing on the screen.

KIRK

There at the very top, next to the little windows icon.

MOXIE

I'm on apple.

KIRK

Next to the apple.

Suddenly, everyone is gone except Kirk and Griffin.

GRIFFIN

Damn.

KIRK

Exactly.

GRIFFIN

Do you think tomorrow is realistic?

KIRK

No way. It's impossible.

Not happening.

GRIFFIN

No.

KIRK

But I think it works as a plot device.

GRIFFIN

Everyone else appears on screen again. Tate is using a vibrator (somewhere fairly tame).

I was in a breakout by myself.

TATE

What do you think a cyborg would do in that situation?

LYRIC

I hate it when it does that.

TATE

Does what?

GRIFFIN

Types what we're saying.

TATE

Why?

MOXIE

It's creepy.

GRIFFIN

Turn off the captions!

KIRK

I like it.

LYRIC

Click the little "cc"

KIRK

Wow.

TATE

Did that work?

MOXIE

TATE

It worked.

KIRK

So it's a psychological thriller. Five people who've never met, working together on zoom, in the middle of a global pandemic.

LYRIC

Not very realistic.

KIRK

Hours and hours together in this ambiguous digital space. And one of them is a cyborg. Will they figure out who it is? Or will they just continue--

TATE

We're slipping into horror...

GRIFFIN

How is that horror? In any shape or form?

LYRIC

(over chat)
{I pinned Kirk.}

KIRK

Because we've lost the fundamental thread that stitches us together, as human beings! We've programmed ourselves. And in the process, we're killing our humanity.

MOXIE
{What?}

LYRIC

{Kirk is stuck to my screen.}

GRIFFIN

The Bible says "techno paranoia." So I don't think we can kill our humanity.

MOXIE
{How do you do that?}

TATE

I don't think that's actually possible, on a practical level –

LYRIC

{First you hover over them. See the little pin?}

MOXIE

(on mute)
[Oh, wow.]

LYRIC

[It's cool, right?]

MOXIE

[That's so cool!]

GRIFFIN

We have to murder a *character*.

A cyborg? TATE

A human. GRIFFIN

Someone sympathetic. LYRIC

Lyric moves to a couch and begins taking pictures of the zoom screen.

How about you, Tate? GRIFFIN

What the fuck? TATE

Tate is sympathetic. LYRIC

How? TATE

You're kind of inept. And awkward, in a cute way. No offense. MOXIE

None taken. TATE

We can cross Tate off. KIRK

Cross me off what? TATE

The list of who might be a cyborg. LYRIC

Okay. Is that a good thing? TATE

Tate starts doing yoga again.

Lyric is a little bit too logical. GRIFFIN

MOXIE

Like Spock.

TATE

Exactly.

LYRIC

Meaning what?

GRIFFIN

Meaning it's you.

Griffin goes to get more coffee, abandoning the screen.

MOXIE

It was Lyric's idea, originally.

TATE

That proves it.

MOXIE

No it doesn't.

LYRIC

We still haven't worked out the plot!

MOXIE

Let's take a vote!

TATE

Can we do that?

MOXIE

We can do anything!

GRIFFIN

Nothing goes beyond these walls.

MOXIE

Wait – does that work over zoom?

TATE

Nothing goes outside this zoom.

KIRK

Nobody's recording.

MOXIE

Let's take a vote. Who thinks Lyric is really a cyborg?

LYRIC

You guys are being such idiots. I'm not!

GRIFFIN

What would a cyborg say?

LYRIC

A cyborg wouldn't say "I'm not!" because that's what they're going to anticipate, total and complete denial, so the cyborg would second-guess everyone.

Griffin comes back to the laptop.

GRIFFIN

I think that proves my point: a little bit too logical.

TATE

Unless it was programmed to be the one who's emotional, and crazy.

MOXIE

Can they program that?

GRIFFIN

Who knows?

KIRK

They can.

LYRIC

It's a stretch.

GRIFFIB

That's our plot! Techno gaslighting.

MOXIE

Is that a thing?

LYRIC

Whatever.

MOXIE

That's what a cyborg would say.

Tate comes back to the laptop.

TATE

I really liked the Spock idea.

KIRK

Take a step back! Let's all just...take a step back for a second. What are we doing here?

MOXIE

Uhm...we're writing a series?

KIRK

Why did they hire us?

GRIFFIN

Because they need content?

MOXIE

Because next week they go into production, because they've got a contract with the network, which has already sold the audience for the thing we haven't written yet.

TATE

They're going with an all VR cast – those new digital actors.

GRIFFIN

They've got the animation crew down to three or four people – that's what I heard.

MOXIE

The concept we're working on came directly from platform analytics – what we're doing is, we're filling a gap in their entertainment portfolio.

LYRIC

We're filling a gap in somebody's day. Someone who wants to come home and watch a dystopian psychological thriller anthology with dinner.

MOXIE

What are they coming home from?

LYRIC

Data engineering?

KIRK

Hmm...can a cyborg do that?

TATE

Of course they can.

LYRIC

We're doomed.

GRIFFIN

That line is very Scooby-Doo.

MOXIE

So, okay. We kill the cyborg.

Which one is it?
TATE

Let's take a vote.
MOXIE

Put it in chat ... everybody put your vote in chat.
GRIFFIN

Let's all do it at the same time.
MOXIE

Ok. One, two, three...
GRIFFIN

Moxie.
KIRK

That's ridiculous.
MOXIE

"Moxie, Moxie..." You won.
KIRK

Come on – it's obviously you, Kirk. Everybody who thinks it's Kirk, give me a thumbs up.
MOXIE

Everyone reacts: Moxie, thumbs up - Griffin, thumbs up - Kirk, thumbs down, Lyric, smiley face - Tate, laughing face.

Do you honestly think this is funny?
KIRK

Everyone cracks up laughing.

Okay, it's Kirk.
GRIFFIN

Definitely Kirk.
TATE

Griffin puts up a thumbs-up sign. So does Tate. Then Lyric and Moxie.

Kirk looks around at everyone.

It's not me – it's you, right? I know it is. Isn't it?
KIRK

The zoom screens freeze. End of play.

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *We are living in a world where art – that most fundamentally visceral human pursuit – is becoming increasingly mechanized, transformed and commodified by the technologies that shape our culture. We have learned how to digitize and replicate ourselves, another perilous, irresistible bite of the apple.*

A few years back, I was working on a series of interactive eBooks for a client. It was a training series for salespeople, and one of the characters was a thirty-something executive called Wendy. The artist I was working with pulled some stock photos of a thirty-something executive – and I understood immediately why he had chosen to cast the young model as our main character. She was pretty and charismatic, with a look that seemed almost infinitely malleable. It was impossible to say exactly who she was, or where she came from – but I could imagine young executives around the globe thinking “just like me.” Smart, but non-threatening. Sexy, but attainable. Relatable. Transparent. Unforgettably forgettable.

It was not long afterward that I began to see her everywhere. On subway cars, on billboards. On those irritating popup ads that take over your phone. Plastered to the ancient stone viaducts of foreign cities. Wendy was everywhere. Haunting me. How had I never noticed her before? I puzzled over this for years, whenever I encountered her beaming out from a magazine cover or banner ad. Who was this mystery woman, who had to be the most famous, anonymous stock photography model in the world?

It only took a few minutes of internet sleuthing to find out. Her name is [Ariane](#) – but think for a moment before you click. Once you’ve seen, you can’t unsee. This play was written for her.

AUTHOR BIO: Karin Diann Williams writes speculative fiction, plays and screenplays. Her work has been produced by San Diego's Fritz Theater (where she served as playwright-in-residence from 1992-2001), NYC's Looking Glass Theater, Art House Productions, Space 55, Long Island Theatre Collective, New York New Works Festival, Flush Ink! Productions, the Gertrude Stein Repertory Theatre Digital Performance Institute, Lamia Ink!, Collaboraction Theater, Boston Theaterworks, and many more. As a Partner in the motion media company CulpepperWilliams, she wrote and produced The Captive (Webby People's Choice Award & NYTVF "Best Web Series" Award) and the independent feature Jordan. Her plays are available through Original Works Publishing and YouthPlays.