

Preston: Hello class! My name is Doctor Einstein! It is good to see so many happy faces in front of me! I want you to look on the tables in front of you. There should be a thick stock card with your name in large letters on one side, and a back story on the flip end. Perhaps some of you know who I am. I am a movie producer who's been involved in a handful of blockbusters. My father, Hale, built this place. Entertainment has been in my family a long, long time. You guys all come from Central Casting. A few of you have had minor speaking roles in movies. Some of you have only been paid as extras. Others? This is your first assignment! I want to emphasize that my name is Doctor Einstein, and I'd like you to address me that way. Now and then you can call me Professor Einstein, but if you ever address me as my real name--the one I go by outside of this place--you will be sent to the principle's office! You will be looking for a new assignment from Central Casting! Also, every one of you is wearing a name tag. It's not big enough for me to see from the front of the room, so if you have a question, I need you to hold up your stock card so I can read your provided name. If you refer to yourself as your actual birth name, you will be sent to the principle's office! You will be expelled! You will not come back! I hope I make myself clear! Now, let's get to our first subject. Right now, I'd like you to refer to your provided bio. You don't have to read the whole thing. Just tell me your name, where you come from, and what your major is. We tried to create bios which reflect movies you've been part of. If you were an extra in a sci-fi movie, we said you were a physics major. If you were an extra in a jock movie, we said you're studying physical education. Feel free to improvise a little, but don't go crazy. Not just yet. First question: Who knows what a decompression chamber is?

[Brock held up his stock card.]

Preston: Brock? Let's hear from you!

Brock: My name is Brock Singer. I am from Portland, Oregon, and I study marine biology. Decompression chamber? It's used by deep sea divers. I know this. I was part of the Titan submersible project. What a tragedy that was! Anyhow, when you dive deep into the ocean, it's vital that you don't rise or sink too fast. If you rise quickly, nitrogen bubbles form in your blood stream. You can die from this. Scuba divers use decompression chambers to slowly acclimate themselves to different pressure levels. This way, no nitrogen bubbles form, and the dive goes as smoothly as possible!

Preston: Great answer, Brock! You explained what a decompression chamber is as good as anyone could!

Class, I'm sure you know what metaphors are. *We are in a decompression chamber.* You have a life outside of this classroom! You have parents, siblings, and friends! They know you as a certain name, and that's not what you're going by today! They know you to behave in certain ways! If you go to a pizza joint with them, they expect you to watching some sporting event or another, drink a few beers, and have a good time! There's a certain pattern you've gone by for years, and we're not taking that away from you! Not permanently, at least. For a short period, you will be leaving that world. You will enter something new! Here at Bancroft Studios, you can walk down to a pizzeria and it might resemble a cantina from a Star Wars movie! You might see aliens playing songs in a band! You will see things here that you don't see anywhere else. And did you notice how barren this city is? Why build a large movie studio in the middle of nowhere? I mean, we're close to LA, but this is a little much, right? I'd like another volunteer.

[Anna raised her stock card.]

Preston: Anna? Can you describe your drive here?

Anna: It's a little weird for me. I've only done work in the city. I understand it, though. My name is Anna, and I was born and raised in Los Angeles and I am a theatre major. I grew up with a lot of people in the movie industry. I know a lot of hair dressers and casting agents. A lot can be said about a place like this. For one, the rent must be way cheaper than Universal Studios. You're out in the Boondocks! It's got to be dirt cheap to produce here. Also, it gives us a chance to stay in character. If I was part of a big production in Hollywood, I would be tempted to party with my friends. I couldn't stick to my role as easily. It would affect my performance. I drove here, and I thought the trip was serene. It was refreshing to get away from the LA traffic. The 101, 210, 405? I live half my life on those freeways. I could use a break from all that. I like being here.

Preston: Class. All of you entered from the door on my left. Correct? From the outside, it doesn't look like you're entering a college classroom. It looks like you're entering a movie studio. This is Stage 19. It's impossible to miss the sign as you come in. And I think we've done a good job a making this look and feel like a regular class, from the chairs, tables, white board, clock, waste baskets, and wall posters. I think we've done a good job. Look behind you. There's another door. When you open it, it leads to a hall. Make a right, and there's yet another door. Anna? I'd like you to go outside this classroom. Walk through the rear door, walk down the hall, and go outside. Spend a couple of minutes there. If you want to jot down your experiences and what you see on your notebook, feel free to do so. Don't hold back.

[Anna rose from her chair and exited through the rear door.]

Preston: Okay! While she's gone, let's keep getting to know each other. Does anybody know who Roy Thurman is?

[Neil raised his stock card.]

Preston: Neil? What can you tell us?

Neil: Roy Thurman was a billionaire who disappeared in 2004 with other tycoons. These guys were crazy rich, but they led secret lives so not many people knew who they were. It wasn't a lot different than the Titan submersible that Brock brought up, though. Some of these tycoons are way too adventurous for their own goods! The Titan, ironically, went to visit the wreckage of the Titanic. That's the original story I know of where a bunch of rich people went for a voyage and never came back. The Hindenburg was another example. Roy Thurman was part of a line of rich people that bit off more than he could chew. They never found his body! They never found most of the people who boarded the cruise liner he was on! They went to Madagascar, then disappeared. There were only a few survivors, and the ones that came back sounded like crazy people!

Preston: On a scale of one to ten, Neil, how would you rate this room? Does it feel like a college classroom to you?

Neil: Yes! Absolutely! I've taken a few community college classes! I like this place!

Preston: And, what would you say if I told you Roy Thurman is alive? He is here! He is at Bancroft Studios! Not far from where we're at inside Stage 23, there's an office. It looks like something a psychiatrist would use to evaluate patients. There's a classic brown couch for disturbed people to lay on. *They call those fainting couches, by the way.* Stage 23 is operated by a great friend of mine. Let's call him Siggie as we're all trying to get into character for what comes next. What if I told you that Roy Thurman did not die? Rather, he went through a portal! His entire cruise ship went through a portal not very different than the portal at the Bermuda Triangle! Roy found something on the other side of a dimension door! It was a land like ours, but it had its own quirks. He discovered Stonehenge as it existed in its original form! The rocks were not thrown to the ground as we see them today! But Roy was prone to anger! He had jealousy fits! And he became a dragon! He tried to control his rage, but it was too much! The forces of the Universe absorbed his jealousy and rage, and they knocked stones off their places! Then Roy decided to become a bogeyman! That's right! He could've come back to Earth as a regular person doing regular things, but he wanted to be a monster! Crazy as it sounds, he wanted to hide under children's beds! He wanted to hide in their closets! He wanted to scare them! That's the kind of guy Roy was! Something changed, and Roy got confused. He got sick of it. I can't explain the whole process, but he came back. He's here now at Stage 23. He talked to Siggie this morning. Roy doesn't know what to believe about his own life. Was he in an alternate reality? The place he came from had a land bridge between England and the European mainland. It's called Doggerland. Roy is in denial, and he wants help. Siggie is not a real psychiatrist, though. He's a friend of mine. He's been an actor his whole life, but he knows a ton about psychology and abnormal personalities. How would you respond to this?

Neil: Me? I would say this is part of the process. I believe you're getting us into character. By the way,

per my bio, I am from San Francisco and I am a history major. I am taking this English lit class to fulfill a capstone. And if I had to guess, you're creating a biopic about Roy Thurman. You are tossing out these crazy ideas so we could toy with the idea that he didn't die. I would like to talk to Siggy myself! I have issues! I think he could he could help me with my OCD and my procrastination!

[There was laughter in the class.]

Preston: I like your answer! I like your humor! Yes, it's true we need to collectively transform our mentalities to accept that dimension doors are real! Time travel is real! Parallel universes exist! Magic happens! If you're part of the next movie we produce, we need to read it in your face! Movie goers have to be convinced! There can't be a microsecond where they think you're faking it! If I send you to talk to Merlin the Magician, they have to believe you accept magic as a reality! Do you understand?

Neil: Yes sir! It's a form of hypnosis! I believe that! I'm okay with that! I am Neil! I am a history major, and my voyage has just begun!

[Anna re-entered the class through the rear door. She looked as white as a ghost. The class turned around to see her.]

Anna: HOLY FUCKIN' SHIT!

Preston: Anna? What is it? What did you see?

Anna: HOLY FUCKIN' SHIT! There are flying cars outside! The streets are as busy as Los Angeles, but there's a lot of neon! It looks like a futuristic city! I don't know how you did this, but there is ZERO TRACE that we're in a desolate city in the middle of nowhere! How did you fucking do this?

[Slow clap from Brock.]

Brock: I like this! Teach? I mean, uh, Doctor Einstein? Professor Einstein! I *loooooove* this! I like what you did here! Not all of us are from Central Casting, right? You hired a few professionals from a reputable agency to make it all feel real! I love this *soooooo* much! I love this, I love this, I love this! Do me, now! Let me go out there! I want to tell you about the dinosaurs I see! That sort of thing! I'm ready! I can pull this off!

Anna: Hey fucking dickhead! I'm not joking!

[Anna returned to her seat.]

Brock: Doctor Einstein? She's *gooooood*! Please send me! I want to do this!

Present: Brock, you'll get your turn. Anna? While you were gone, we were talking about portals and alternate dimensions. Would you say it's possible you traveled through one?

Anna: I feel confused. I don't know what to say.

Preston: Okay, class. Here's where we draw from pop culture. Everybody knows about the Matrix. We all know about the blue pill/ red pill choice. We will all have a similar decision. Do you like what you experienced here today? If you do, come with me. We will go as a group through that rear door together. This is your red pill moment. We will all advance to another level. If you don't like this? If this is not for you? Go through the door on my left. You can go back to Central Casting and ask for a new assignment. You will get paid for a full day's work no matter what choice you make.