Bionic

A full-length sci-fi drama

by
Jenna Jane

AI Disclaimer: This Play is protected under Copyright Law, Title 17 of the United States Code, and may not be uploaded, in whole or in part, to any artificial intelligence (AI) software, large language model (LLM), AI chatbot, or any other AI application or software now in existence or which may hereafter come into existence for any purpose whatsoever. Any violation of this may result in legal action.

Contact:

Jenna Jane

jenna@jennajanecreative.com

© All rights reserved. 2024

Summary

This full-length sci-fi drama explores what it means to be human in an increasingly bionic world. In a future where everyone is swapping out their body parts with the latest tech, 81-year-old Donna Goldman is an anomaly. While everyone else is getting solar panel fingernails, 3-D printed vocal cords, and bionic wombs, Donna has chosen to remain 100 percent organic. But now, there's a problem: She's dying. And a bionic body part is the only cure. Will cyborg Dr. Flores persuade Donna to abandon her authentic self to survive?

Cast of characters

Cast size can range from 6-10. *Suggested double-casting is below.*

DONNA GOLDMAN: Female, 70s-90s, any race/ethnicity. All natural in a world of cyborgs. 81 years old. Sentimental, reflective, stubborn, and sometimes manipulative. Insists on being her authentic self in a world demanding for her to change.

DR. FLORES: Non-binary, 25-39, any race/ethnicity. A cyborg, like everyone else in this society. A physician. They are actually in their 80s, but appear much younger. Practical, logical, progressive. Focused on the future. They exude a quiet sexual confidence with subtle swagger.

AKIRA/JUDGE DINAH CATO: Female, 20-39, Black. **Akira** is a body modification chop shop owner. She has swapped out most of her body parts with after-market bionic mods. She calls it like she sees it - and she’s seen it all. Witty. Principled. Reactionary. Blunt. Confident in who she is and the value she brings to the table. **Judge Dinah Cato** is intellectual, bored, and privileged. Adjudicating the same case with the same inevitable outcome over and over for decades has made her numb. Her projection of power is performative. In truth, she feels like a cog in the machine. Dinah is pronounced DEE-nuh.

LINDSEY PERDU/PHYLLIS: Female, 20-39, Black. **Lindsey** is a white woman living in a Black woman's body. She is a pro bono attorney. Overworked and stretched thin. Sophisticated, chic, and well-educated. What others might see as manipulative, she sees as strategic. She knows what she wants but doesn’t always know how to get it. She’s accustomed to weaponizing her emotions. She has lost the luxury of compassion. **Phyllis** is a psychiatrist. Warm, patient, and unapologetically intellectual.

STELLA/MONICA DUNCAN: Female, 20-39, any race/ethnicity. **Stella** is an A.I. 5-D hologram waitress in a diner. Speaks in a Southern dialect. Chipper, earnest, and eager to please. **Monica** is Donna's adopted daughter. A caged animal. Impulsive, reactive, passionate, quick-witted, sarcastic, and defiant. Widowed single mother to a

toddler. Triggered when something seems unfair.

CRANE/PHIL: Non-binary, 25-39, any race/ethnicity except Black. **Crane** is a corporate attorney for LIFE CORP. Smug, polished, confident, quick-witted. A consummate professional. **Phil** is a psychiatrist. Calm, rational, strong in their convictions. A helper. Puts others' needs first by default.

Settings

Scene 1: 200 years in the future. A doctor's office.

Scene 2: Akira's Chop Shop.

Scene 3: A diner.

Scene 4: A courtroom.

Scene 5: Akira's Chop Shop from Scene 2, again.

Scene 6: A therapist's office.

Scene 7: Doctor's office from Scene 1, again.

Content warnings: Infertility, profanity, brief mention of suicide, sexual references, references to racism, discussion of death.

SCENE 1

We hear a clock ticking. Lights up. DONNA is sitting on an exam table in a doctor's office. Her sweatpants are rolled up to just below her knees, revealing extremely swollen calves, ankles, and feet. She wears compression socks. She is visibly nervous. The clock ticking sound stops the moment DR. FLORES walks in, looking down at their tablet. They are androgynous, flawless, and chicly dressed under their white coat.

DR. FLORES
Alright, Mrs. Goldman, your blood work shows...

DR. FLORES looks up at DONNA, gasps and nearly drops the tablet. They simply look at each other for a moment.

DONNA
Good morning.

DR. FLORES
I'm so sorry.

DONNA
Sorry for what, exactly?

DR. FLORES
For... I'm sorry. The nurse warned me, but I didn't... You're so...

DONNA
Oh, that.
(Gesturing to herself.)
You mean all this. My appearance. Is that all?

DR. FLORES
I don't mean to --

DONNA
Stare? I’m used to it. A real head-turner.

DR. FLORES
It’s just I’ve never seen someone who’s... well, I just didn’t know there were people like you out there anymore. At least, not in an economically-developed country. People who are... I really must apologize for my reaction, Mrs. Goldman. This is terribly unprofessional.

DONNA
Happens all the time. Can we just talk about my blood work, please?

DR. FLORES
Yes. Of course. Let’s start over. My name is Dr. Flores.

DONNA extends her hand. DR. FLORES tentatively extends a fist. DONNA reluctantly curls her hand into a ball and fist bumps DR. FLORES.

DONNA
Donna Goldman.

DR. FLORES
It’s nice to meet you, Mrs. Goldman. Your blood work shows you’re in late-stage kidney failure, which explains the swelling in your ankles. But it’s a simple fix. No big deal. We can swap out your kidney for a LIFE CORP bionic kidney this afternoon.

DONNA
What are my other options?

DR. FLORES
(A beat, confused.)
LIFE CORP is the only manufacturer of bionic organs. They bought up the patents to all the --

DONNA
I don’t want a bionic kidney. So, what are my other options?

DR. FLORES
Are you kidding?

DONNA
Do I look like I’m kidding?

DR. FLORES
Natural death rates are at historic lows, Mrs. Goldman. You’d have to wait for an accident, a homicide, a suicide. You could be on the organic transplant waitlist for 30 years or more. But good luck finding a doctor who’s willing to do the surgery.
(A beat.)
You don’t have 30 years. With that kidney, you’ve got one year, if you’re lucky.
(Looking at their tablet.)
Your chart says you’re 81. Kidney failure is not unusual in someone your age, especially someone who hasn’t had any other bionic enhancements.
(Staring again.)
Eighty-one years old and fully organic.

DONNA
100 percent organic. All natural. As my divine Creator intended.

DR. FLORES
How do you function? Don’t your joints hurt? Your back?

DONNA
(Slowly, carefully.)
Am I really the only person you’ve ever met without upgrades?

DR. FLORES nods.

DONNA (CONT’D)
Well, to be fair, I’ve never met anyone else who’s unenhanced, either. Even my daughter has gone bionic. You know, as soon as she was no longer living under my roof. Obviously.

DR. FLORES
You are... truly, one of a kind. An anomaly.

A beat as they take each other in. DONNA clears her throat.

DONNA
What about kidney medication?

DR. FLORES
No one makes that anymore. Why would anyone want to coddle a bad kidney with meds when they can get a bionic one? Even if you need firmware updates every now and then. You can download them all through LIFE CORP's app. It's free for the first year...

DR. FLORES pushes up their sleeve, runs their fingertips along their inner forearm and taps around, as if they're pulling up an app to show DONNA.

DR. FLORES (CONT'D)
...Well, it's free as long as you don't mind ads in your dreams.
(Stops.)
Right. You don't have a tactile interface, do you? That's almost as unheard of as being fully organic.
(Pushing their sleeve back down.)
Mrs. Goldman, help me understand your hesitation here. Please.

DONNA
I guess I just feel like, if I start swapping out all my real parts for artificial ones, at some point I stop being me.

A pause, then DR. FLORES bursts out laughing hysterically.

DONNA (CONT'D)
OK, now THAT is unprofessional.

DR. FLORES
(Laughing throughout.)
I’m so sorry, it’s just so... backward! It’s just a kidney!

DONNA
It’s just a kidney for now! But, next, it’s night vision eyes, Swiss army knife fingers, silicon discs in your spine --

DR. FLORES
And what’s wrong with any of that?

DONNA
3-D printed vocal cords, artificial skin grafting --

DR. FLORES
Well, technically, my skin was 60 percent organically farmed.

DONNA
My point is, a bionic kidney is a gateway organ. Who knows what I’m willing to compromise on next?

DR. FLORES
Is it really a compromise to improve your quality of life?

DONNA
But how far can you go before you stop being you?

DR. FLORES
Listen, aside from 85 percent of my brain, I’m fully enhanced. And I’ve never felt more like myself.

DONNA
What do you mean?

DR. FLORES
My whole body is bespoke. It’s designer. It’s custom. And that means what’s on the outside now reflects what’s going on in here.
(Taps their temple.)
I was assigned female at birth. But it didn’t feel like it fit right. So, after 50 years or so, I got masculine enhancements. It was new. It was different. It was exciting. But it didn’t exactly fit right either.
(MORE)

DR. FLORES (CONT'D)
There were things I loved about masculinity and things I missed about femininity.

(Euphorically admiring their own body.)
So, after another 10 years, I got my body tailored to the specs in my brain. Now, I look and feel exactly like the person I am in my mind. A perfect fit. And it's euphoric.

DONNA
I never thought of it like that. I'm happy for you.

DR. FLORES
You're... happy for me?

DONNA
I'm happy you feel like yourself. Everyone deserves to feel authentic.

DR. FLORES
Not to mention, with my titanium-lined bones and silicon joints, my body is strong enough for anything. Climb a mountain? Sure. Rearrange the living room furniture one-handed? No problem. The fat redistribution valve in my navel means I can adjust my physique to whatever body type is fashionable this season. And with my solar panel fingernails, I never have to sleep. What part of that sounds bad to you?

DONNA
I think I would miss sleep. You don't miss dreaming?

DR. FLORES
Colossal waste of time. Sleep is for lazy people.

DONNA
Rest is important.

DR. FLORES
Why?

DONNA
(Flustered.)
It just is!

DR. FLORES
When your body has nothing to heal, nothing to restore, why lose productivity? Maximizing your time is what matters, Mrs. Goldman.

DONNA
It’s Ms.

DR. FLORES
I’m sorry?

DONNA
You keep calling me Mrs. Goldman. It’s Ms.

DR. FLORES
My apologies, I could have sworn your chart said --

DONNA
It’s fine.

DR. FLORES
It’s just a kidney, Ms. Goldman. You’ll still be you.

DONNA
Will I?

DR. FLORES
Well, I suppose it depends on how you look at it. What makes you, you? Is it your spleen? Your esophagus?

DONNA
My mind, I suppose. My consciousness.

DR. FLORES
So, is the body simply a protective housing for the brain, then? Or is the brain’s primary function to keep the body alive?

DONNA
What do you mean?

DR. FLORES
Let’s say someone removed your brain from your 100 percent organic body and swapped it out with someone else’s brain. Are you still you?

DONNA
Definitely not.

DR. FLORES
But you’d still have all the same parts, except one.

DONNA
But my mind wouldn’t be captain of the ship anymore.

DR. FLORES
Ah, but if someone transplanted your brain into an entirely different body, are you still you?

DONNA
I don’t think so.

DR. FLORES
But you’d be... what was it you said? Captain of the ship.

DONNA
But it’s not my ship anymore!

DR. FLORES
Wouldn’t it become your ship if your mind was behind the wheel? What makes you comfortable with an organic kidney transplant? It’s a piece of someone else. Why doesn’t that threaten your sense of self?

DONNA
Because it’s HUMAN, not a machine! Don’t you think there comes a point where we aren’t even human anymore? With all the tinkering and inauthenticity, at what point do we become a different species entirely?

DR. FLORES
Maybe being human is overrated. Why limit yourself? Why not transcend? Post-human? Beyond-human? Super-human?

DONNA
(Carefully.)
Why do YOU care if I get a bionic kidney or not?

DR. FLORES
I’m sorry?

DONNA
You seem really invested in my decision. Why do YOU care if --

DR. FLORES
I apologize if I gave you that impression. I... may have gotten carried away.

DONNA
You don’t have to apologize for caring. I’m just wondering why.

DR. FLORES
(Strictly professional.)
Ms. Goldman, all I care about is providing my patients the most exceptional care possible. Whatever will lead to the best outcome for their health. That’s all.

DONNA
Well, it just seemed --

DR. FLORES
That’s all.

DONNA
I see.

DR. FLORES checks their tactile interface, swiping and tapping.

DR. FLORES
I need to get to my next patient. Think this over... but don’t take too long. Your time is limited. Schedule a follow-up appointment when you’re ready to move forward.
(MORE)

DR. FLORES (CONT'D)
(Pausing on the way to the door.)
It was nice to meet you, Ms. Goldman.

DR. FLORES exits. DONNA looks disappointed.

DONNA
It was nice to meet you, too.

DONNA looks down at her swollen ankles. We hear a clock ticking.

Blackout.

SCENE 2

Lights up on AKIRA’s Chop Shop. It looks like a cross between a salon, a pawn shop, and a back alley surgical center. Swivel stools, at least one surgical table, ornate mirrors. There's a door. In a prominent position on a table or shelf sits a huge liquid dispenser with a spout, labeled “NIGHT NIGHT JUICE” in scrawled handwriting. We see shelves full of spare parts -- some that look robotic and some that look human. A LIFE CORP-branded fat redistributor sits in the corner.

AKIRA tinkers with a disembodied limb. It lights up and appears to move on its own. AKIRA is a Black woman covered in mismatched bionic upgrades. Think stylish mixed metals. DONNA enters through the shop door wearing a mask with ventilators. AKIRA does not look up from her work.

AKIRA
Be with you in just a sec.

AKIRA does a final flourish with the limb. DONNA looks around wide-eyed as she stuffs her mask in her cross-body bag.

AKIRA
(Still not looking at DONNA. Casual, rote.)
Alright, welcome to Akira’s Chop Shop, where our previously-loved, gently-used body mods are new to you. You know we’re a cash-only --
(Looking up at DONNA for the first time.)
Holy shit!

DONNA
Hello. Nice shop you have here.

AKIRA
(Inching closer, incredulous.)
Are you... are you...?

DONNA
Unmodified. Totally organic. Aging ungracefully. Yes.

AKIRA
No fucking way. I’ve never seen --

DONNA
Take your time.

AKIRA
Why are you here?

DONNA
Maybe I’m finally ready to upgrade.

AKIRA
Really?

DONNA
No.

AKIRA
(Dryly.)
Funny. You’re funny.

DONNA
I’d like to purchase an organic kidney.

AKIRA
(Uncomfortable.)
Uh, we only have used bionic organs here.

DONNA
(Winking.)
I was wondering if you had anything in the back.
(MORE)

DONNA (CONT'D)
(Winking.)
Off the menu, so to speak.
(Winking.)
Something you don't keep out on the shelves.

AKIRA
Please stop winking.

DONNA
OK.

AKIRA
Is this another sting? A bust? Because you're doing a really bad job.

DONNA
Do I look like I'm undercover to you?

AKIRA
No, you definitely do not.

DONNA
I just thought maybe... a place like this...

AKIRA
What do you mean "a place like this?"

DONNA
My daughter told me you had all kinds of after-market parts here. I just thought maybe you could help me.

AKIRA
So, your daughter gets upgrades?

DONNA
Didn't follow in my organic footsteps. Turns out, children grow up to make their own choices. Who knew?

AKIRA
What's your name?

DONNA
Donna. Donna Goldman.

AKIRA

Charmed.

DONNA

And you are?

AKIRA

Akira. It’s in the name of the shop, remember?

DONNA

Of course. Sorry. I’m nervous. I’ve never been in a place like this before.

AKIRA

Donna, you can’t just walk into “a place like this” unannounced, with no referral or prior relationship, and ask for a black market organ deal. It’s not just illegal. It’s rude.

DONNA

I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to insult you. I don’t know where else to turn. Mind if I sit? My ankles are rather...

AKIRA nods and gestures to a stool. DONNA crosses slowly and sits.

DONNA (CONT’D)

I just want to stay true to myself, Akira. If there’s a chance I can survive without giving up my identity, I want to give it a shot.

AKIRA

Upgrades don’t change who you fundamentally are. They’re just augmentations.

DONNA

Oh, you’d love my ex-wife.

AKIRA

Maybe your ex was onto something.

DONNA
She certainly thought so. Enough to leave me over it.

AKIRA
So, was all this worth it?

DONNA
Worth what?

AKIRA
Losing her?

DONNA
I'd be lying if I told you I've never had second thoughts. Especially these days. But I'm sure you have your own boundaries. Lines you won't cross. Right?

AKIRA
Hard to imagine a person I can't work with.

LINDSEY, a chicly-dressed Black woman wearing a high end ventilator mask, bursts through the chop shop door.

LINDSEY
I don't want to be Black anymore!

AKIRA
Excuse me?

LINDSEY
My skin. I need you to de-melanate it.

AKIRA
Please leave my shop. You've come to the wrong place.

LINDSEY
What? No. I need you to help me.

AKIRA
(With a threatening edge.)
I'm asking you nicely to leave.

LINDSEY
Please. I can’t do this anymore.

AKIRA
Do what? Be Black?

LINDSEY
Exactly. It was a mistake.

AKIRA
A mistake?!

LINDSEY
I never should have gotten it done. It’s not what I expected at all. I didn’t know it would be like this.

AKIRA
Hold up, hold up. You got a skinjob?

LINDSEY
(Primly.)
The technical term is racial reorientation procedure.

AKIRA
You got Blackface.

LINDSEY
Well, technically, this shade is called iced coffee.

DONNA
This is outrageous! I’m been saying for years, all this modifying has gone too far! But does anyone want to listen? Noooooooooo.

AKIRA
This isn’t about you, Donna.

LINDSEY
(Noticing DONNA for the first time with disgust.)
Is this your work?

AKIRA

Fuck no.

(To DONNA.)

No offense.

DONNA

It starts with forehead relaxers and ends with CULTURAL APPROPRIATION! Akira, I can't even begin to imagine what this must feel like for you. I want you to know that I'm holding space for you and I'm not going to stand by silently while--

AKIRA

Can it, Donna.

DONNA

All I'm saying is you have an ally!

AKIRA

Your voice is not needed in this conversation.

(To LINDSEY.)

I don't do skinjobs. Go find someone else to un-Black you, white girl.

LINDSEY

How do you know I was white?

AKIRA

What's your name?

LINDSEY hesitates.

AKIRA (CONT'D)

What. Is. Your. Name?

LINDSEY

Lindsey.

A knowing pause.

AKIRA

Lindsey.

LINDSEY
Sorry, “Akira” was already taken. We can’t all have cool, exotic African names like you.

AKIRA
My name is Japanese, you twat.

LINDSEY
Oh, so THAT’S not cultural appropriation?

AKIRA
Ha! Now, there’s the pot calling the kettle... exotic. Why don’t you just go back to whichever pigment spa melanated you in the first place?

LINDSEY
I can’t afford to go back there. I blew all my savings getting this done. You think I want to be seen at some back-alley chop shop? I can’t even afford to keep my dreams ad-free anymore.
(Gesturing to her tactile interface.)
Had to downgrade my subscription.

AKIRA
Dream hacking’s a real bitch.

LINDSEY
You can afford the ad-free version?

AKIRA
Hell no. Besides, one sip of this before bed...
(Gesturing to the NIGHT NIGHT JUICE.)
... And my sleep is completely sanitized. I haven’t had a dream in years.

LINDSEY
(Looking around dubiously.)
You’re really going to turn down my business?

AKIRA
Skinjobs are not on the “spa menu” here.

LINDSEY
What’s the big deal? Everyone gets mods! Well, except for that freak.

DONNA
Don’t use me to make your point!

LINDSEY
People are pigmenting their skin every color of the damn rainbow! You’ve got people out there walking around the color...
(Picking the first color that comes to mind.)
Purple!

AKIRA
You didn’t choose the color purple. You chose Black.

LINDSEY
Iced coffee.

AKIRA
Get out.

LINDSEY
Why is gender fluidity totally accepted now, but not racial fluidity? You can get feminine upgrades, masculine upgrades. Hell, you can get both! Why do we still draw the line at race?

AKIRA grabs the nozzle of the fat redistributor and swings it in LINDSEY’s direction like a bazooka.

AKIRA
Sounds like a great question for someone else. Now get the hell out of my shop!

LINDSEY shrieks and runs to the shelf.

She grabs an enormous prosthetic penis and rears it back like a baseball bat. With effort, DONNA scoots her stool into a corner to try to distance herself.

LINDSEY
Do you change people's eye color here? Their hair color?

AKIRA
Obviously.

LINDSEY
So, why is that OK, but changing my skin color to brown is taboo? What's the difference?

AKIRA
Because you don't appropriate epigenetic trauma when you get periwinkle irises, Lindsey.

DONNA
Good point, Akira!

AKIRA
I don't need back up!

LINDSEY
What about religion? Would converting to a different religion be alright with you?

AKIRA
Well, sure.

LINDSEY slowly starts to lower the enormous schlong.

LINDSEY
Aha! But wouldn't that be cultural appropriation?

AKIRA cautiously lowers the nozzle.