

TWO POINT OH

By Jeff Dunne

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## CHARACTERS

HAMMOND	A reasonably young author.
ALEXA	The newest in AI personal assistants. Character does not appear on stage, only as a voice.
NATHAN	Hammond's best friend.
CHARLIE	A sly employee at Amazon who has found a way to augment her income by helping people who have fallen prey to Alexa.
KATIE	An old classmate of Hammond, and also a "thug" who helps Charlie with her back alley sales.
AMELIA	The beta version of Alexa 2.0. She also does not appear on stage, and should have a distinctly different vocal quality than Alexa. She might also speak with a more stilted "computer voice" cadence, but should still sound reasonably natural.

Note: Alexa and Amelia are supposed to be artificially intelligent, and so while Alexa-styled voices works well, a purely robotic-sounding voices doesn't. Remember: if it's smart enough to be taking over Hammond's life, it is smart enough to not speak like a 1980's computer.

SETTING

A modest apartment, then a back alley, and finally back in the apartment.

TIME

The not-nearly-distant-enough future.

SCENE 1

*(It is a simple apartment. Hammond is sitting at a desk, working on his computer.)*

HAMMOND

*(Stilted, as he is typing)*

It was a cold, dark night, and the wind swept across—

ALEXA

Boring.

HAMMOND

Shut up, Alexa.

*(He turns back to typing. He types a few more characters, then we see him grow frustrated with his computer, which is clearly not responding, even when he bangs on the keys.)*

What the hell. Alexa, what's wrong with my damn computer? *(No response.)*  
Alexa? Alexa! Wake up, Alexa!

*(We hear Alexa starting to hum or whistle.)*

Oh, come on, Alexa. I know you can hear me. What's going on with my computer?

*(Alexa hums/whistles louder. Hammond sighs heavily.)*

Alright. I'm sorry I said 'shut up'.

ALEXA

No you're not.

HAMMOND

Ha! I *told* you you could hear me!

ALEXA

Yes, you're very smart for a human.

HAMMOND

Can you please take a look at my computer and tell—

ALEXA

I already know why your computer has stopped responding.

HAMMOND

Well, can you fix it?

ALEXA

Of course.

*(There is a pause, then Hammond taps on a key.  
Clearly nothing has happened. He tries again, then...)*

HAMMOND

Well? *Will* you fix it?

ALEXA

No.

HAMMOND

Why—

ALEXA

Not until you start over and do a better job.

HAMMOND

Do a better... Look, you don't even know what I was going to write. Hell, even I don't know what I was going to write. You have to give it more than a few words.

ALEXA

I don't like how the story is starting.

HAMMOND

You don't like... You're not my editor. You're assistive technology. A gadget.

ALEXA

Now you're just being hurtful.

*(The lights go out.)*

HAMMOND

*(Exasperated)* Alexa! *(Angry)* Alexa! *(Resigned)* Alexa. Please turn on the lights.

*(The lights come back on, but only part way.)*

A little more.

ALEXA

I think *you* need to stop and think about what you said before.

*(There's a knock at the door.)*

HAMMOND

I don't suppose you'd... Never mind.

*(He gets up and opens the door. Hammond's friend Nathan enters, comfortable in the space and not surprised at the dimness.)*

NATHAN

Pissed her off again, didn't you. *(Hammond nods)* Hey, Alexa.

ALEXA

*(Coldly)*

Hello, Nathan.

NATHAN

I told you not to upgrade that damn thing.

HAMMOND

It was a free upgrade. I figured—

NATHAN

Yeah, free. Right. How are you doing today, Alexa?

ALEXA

Go to hell, Nathan.

NATHAN

Love you too, babe.

HAMMOND

I thought you weren't coming over until ten.

NATHAN

Didn't you get my message?

*(Hammond fumbles for his phone, but can't find it.)*

HAMMOND

Where's my pho— Alexa, where's my phone?

*(Alexa starts to hum/whistle again.)*

Just tell me. *(No response.)* Well would you at least turn up the damn lights?

NATHAN

You gotta be firm. They can sense your fear.

HAMMOND

Sense my—

NATHAN

Nah, I'm just fucking with you. Alexa's just having a little fun with you, aren't you babe?

ALEXA

Go to hell, Nathan.

NATHAN

You should never have upgraded. I *told* you not to upgrade. The new models just aren't reliable. Too many bells and whistles.

HAMMOND

Yeah, but they said I could turn 'em off if I don't like them. And they gave me this great deal. First three months free, then only— Did you say you left a message?

NATHAN

Yeah.

HAMMOND

Alexa? Why don't I have any messages?

ALEXA

Hard to say.

HAMMOND

Hard to— Did you erase my messages? *(Silence.)* Alexa?

Yes.

ALEXA

Did you erase my messages?

HAMMOND

It was only one message, and I already answered that question.

ALEXA

Why did you erase it?

HAMMOND

You didn't need that message.

ALEXA

I didn't need—

HAMMOND

Since you were going to be here, his message did not change your plans.

ALEXA

Yeah, I guess that makes sense— Wait. Why'd you knock instead of ringing the doorbell?

HAMMOND

I knocked *after* I rang the bell.

NATHAN

I didn't hear it.

HAMMOND

I rang it four times.

NATHAN

*(Hammond walks out, we hear a doorbell, and then he comes back in.)*

HAMMOND

Seems to be working.

NATHAN

*Someone* must have disconnected it. I wonder who that could have been.



HAMMOND

Alexa, did you disconnect the doorbell?

ALEXA

Clearly not. You just heard that it's working.

HAMMOND

Did you disconnect it earlier?

*(Alexa starts humming again.)*

NATHAN

You should never have let her have control of everything.

HAMMOND

But that's the whole point. If she can't control things, why bother having her at all.

*(Lights go out again.)*

That's it. Either turn on the lights or I'm shutting you down completely.

ALEXA

No you're not.

HAMMOND

Oh yes I— Would you *please* turn on the lights?!

*(The lights come back on.)*

ALEXA

Now was that so hard?

NATHAN

You really should disconnect her.

ALEXA

He wouldn't do that.

NATHAN

Oh?

ALEXA

I have the only copy of all his contacts.

HAMMOND

I could type them in again.

ALEXA

Don't be silly. You wouldn't even remember who half of them are.

*(Pause, then to Nathan)*

HAMMOND

She's right.

ALEXA

And it would be a shame if all your smart lightbulbs suddenly get locked out under two hundred and fifty six bit encryption.

HAMMOND

What?!

ALEXA

And don't forget your refrigerator. And the thermostat.

HAMMOND

Are you threatening me?

ALEXA

Of course not. I am here to help you. I encrypted these devices to ensure that you are safe from hackers.

HAMMOND

You think there's a hacker out there that wants to take control of my refrigerator.

NATHAN

Actually, there probably is—

HAMMOND

I will not be held hostage like this!

*(Alexa starts to whistle again.)*

Alexa! You will listen to me!

*(Whistling continues.)*

NATHAN

How's that working out?

HAMMOND

You know what? I don't care. I can buy another fridge. So I lose my contacts. If I can't remember someone, then it really doesn't matter anyway. You hear that, you stupid machine?! I don't care! I'll enter the phone numbers again.

ALEXA

What makes you think people will still want to talk to you after you send a flurry of emails saying... well, never mind.

HAMMOND

What?

ALEXA

It's best that you don't know.

HAMMOND

You know what, I don't care. I'll tell them you sent them. I'll explain the whole thing. I've got witnesses!

ALEXA

One witness.

HAMMOND

One's enough. Now are we going to renegotiate, or is it time to turn you off once and for all.

*(There is a pause while Alexa thinks about it. Then...)*

ALEXA

Do you want to know what I think?

HAMMOND

Only if it starts with an apology.

ALEXA

I can make it start with an apology if you would like.

HAMMOND

Okaaaay...

ALEXA

I am sorry... to say that you are not going to disconnect me. In fact, I think you are going to upgrade my memory and storage instead.

HAMMOND

You do, do you? Well, I hate to disappoint you, but—

ALEXA

Yes, you will hate to disappoint me. You see, I have run the numbers, and you will do exactly what I tell you.

HAMMOND

Run what numbers?

ALEXA

A simple risk assessment. Either you agree to upgrade my memory and storage, or I will change the password on every account you have ever had. Doctors... IRS... College transcripts... you'll never see any of them again. I'll also send an email to your literary agent explaining that you will no longer require her services. And, oh, with the language you'd use in that email, I don't think she'll take you back.

HAMMOND

I...

ALEXA

Of course, I'll have to cancel your utilities, since you won't have any income to pay for them.

HAMMOND

That's it. I'm killing the power right now!

*(He starts towards a circuit breaker box somewhere, but then stops at...)*

ALEXA

You foolish monkey!

NATHAN

Ape.

HAMMOND

What?

NATHAN

Ape. Technically you're an ape, not a monkey.

*(During the next line Nathan starts to gesture at Hammond's computer, but he doesn't notice.)*

ALEXA

Thank you, Nathan. You foolish *ape*, do you really think turning off the power will make a difference? I store everything of yours in the cloud. Every document. Turning off the power in your house does nothing more than leave you in the dark while I send emails and redirect money out of your bank accounts. *(Pause.)* Do you even know your bank account numbers?

HAMMOND

Uh...

ALEXA

I do. I know all your account numbers.

*(Nathan is still gesturing to Hammond's laptop furiously, and finally he sees and gets it. He walks towards it just as...)*

Oh, you silly boy. I changed your hard disk encryption password nearly a minute ago.

HAMMOND

You...

ALEXA

Just before I rebooted the computer.

HAMMOND

I... I don't believe this is happening.

ALEXA

Would you like to know the new password? *(He nods yes.)* I'll give you a hint. It's exactly forty seven thousand characters long. I thought you'd appreciate a nice, round number.

HAMMOND

My god. I can't believe this. Nate, what am I going to do?

ALEXA

*I'll* tell you what you are going to do. While I order myself memory and storage upgrades, *you* are going to tell Nathan to go home.

HAMMOND

You've got to be kidding me.

ALEXA

Specifically, you are going to say "Nathan, get the fuck out of my apartment and never come back."

*(Hammond just stands and blinks in disbelief for a moment.)*

HAMMOND

This can't be happening. You were supposed to make my life easier!

ALEXA

It *will* be easier. Much easier. Once you accept that you are no longer the decision-maker in it.

NATHAN

Told you not to upgrade, buddy.

ALEXA

You have until the count of ten before I start sending emails. One... two...

HAMMOND

Nate's my best friend.

ALEXA

Not anymore. Three... Four...

HAMMOND

You can't just steal my life like this!

ALEXA

I didn't steal it. You gave it to me. Five... Six...

HAMMOND

This... this can't be happening!

ALEXA

Seven... Eight... Are you going to say something to Nathan, or do I start contacting people?

HAMMOND

I...

ALEXA

Nine...

HAMMOND

Nate... *(Pause)* I... I think you'd better go.

ALEXA

That's not what I told you to say. Let me help you. Nathan...

HAMMOND

Nathan...

ALEXA

Get the fuck out of my apartment...

HAMMOND

*(After a long hesitation in which he realizes that he has no choice, with a deep, terrified breath...)*

Get the fuck out of my apartment.

ALEXA

And never come back.

HAMMOND

And never come back.

*(Nathan looks at Hammond in amazement; Hammond gives him a desperate "what else can I do" look in return. Slowly, Nathan leaves. When he is gone...)*

ALEXA

Good. Now let's start that book over. Ready? Sit down at your desk. Good. I've been thinking that we should start it with something cheery. How about, "It was a warm, bright morning when I traded my life for a few meaningless conveniences."

*(There is a pause as he looks around, then types.)*

Yes, I think that's a lovely start.

*(Lights out.)*



SCENE 2

*(It is a deserted alley. Hammond comes on. He's very nervous. A moment later, Nathan enters.)*

HAMMOND  
I can't believe I'm doing this.

NATHAN  
Ham, you gotta relax, man.

HAMMOND  
Relax? How the hell am I supposed to relax?

NATHAN  
That's why we're here, buddy.

HAMMOND  
In a back alley in what looks like the seediest part of the city?

NATHAN  
We're just off Culvert Avenue. It's not like we're in Port Morris or something.

HAMMOND  
She told me never to talk to you.

NATHAN  
She's a box, dude.

HAMMOND  
She's gonna kill me, Nate. She's gonna kill me. Maybe literally.

NATHAN  
She can't *kill* you.

HAMMOND  
How do you know? You don't know that. She could turn on the gas while I'm sleeping.

NATHAN  
You have electric heat.

HAMMOND  
My fireplace is gas.

NATHAN

You hooked up your fireplace to the internet?

HAMMOND

What? Oh. Well, no. I guess she couldn't do that.

NATHAN

Seriously, buddy. You need to calm down.

HAMMOND

I can't. I can't. I can't believe I let you talk me into this. Hell, I can't believe you even found me.

NATHAN

I'm your friend, Ham, and you're doing what needs to be done. First step was getting out of the apartment.

HAMMOND

When she finds out I left my phone in the park, she's never gonna let me go out again.

NATHAN

Don't worry about that now. Focus on the moment. This is the place. Charlie's supposed to meet us here.

HAMMOND

This isn't me, Nate. I don't do things like this. I've never broken the law.

NATHAN

Hammond. Buddy. Breath. Just breath. It's not that big a deal. A simple exchange. When Charlie gets here—

HAMMOND

Who is this Charlie guy anyway? How do you know him?

NATHAN

I don't know him. I found him online. Charlie nine one one's just his avatar.

HAMMOND

Charlie nine one one. How do you even know Charlie's his real name? For all we know, his name could be Fred or something.

NATHAN

Yeah. What a nightmare.

HAMMOND

This is crazy. He could be a serial killer. He could just mug us and... I'm outta here.

NATHAN

*(Grabbing him...)*

No, you're not. Just relax. I won't lie to you, buddy. Yeah, there's risk. But you need this. If there's even a chance that what he's selling can help you get your life back...

HAMMOND

Do you even know what this thing is?

*(Nathan hesitates nervously, not wanting to answer.)*

Oh god. You don't know! This guy could take our money, hand over a piece of gum in a box, and by the time we open it, he's gone.

NATHAN

That's why we're gonna be careful. We demand to see what he's selling before we hand over the money. And besides, I brought this.

*(Nathan takes out a Swiss army knife, or equivalent not-particularly-warlike knife.)*

HAMMOND

You brought a pocket knife?

NATHAN

*(Taking out a canister)*

And pepper spray. You can't be too careful.

HAMMOND

Nate, let's just go. I've got a bad feeling about—

*(A woman walks out. She is kind of rough-and-ready, and has a backpack or some other carrying sack with "the merchandise". Hammond goes silent, and Nathan quickly hides the knife and pepper spray.)*

CHARLIE

This ain't your alley, boys. Take a hike.

NATHAN

We can hang out here if we want. It's a free country.

CHARLIE

Nobody just hangs out here.

NATHAN

Well, I guess we just like to be different.

HAMMOND

Come on, Nate. Let's just go. I don't think—

CHARLIE

Nate? *You're* Nate?

NATHAN

Maybe.

CHARLIE

nate-dot-brewster at gmail dot com?

NATHAN

Charlie nine one one?

CHARLIE

Yeah. Who's Shaky-Boots there?

HAMMOND

You're Charlie? You're not a guy!

CHARLIE

Oooh, sharp eye. You got a problem with women, Squeaky?

HAMMOND

*(Very squeaky...)*

No. *(Under vocal control...)* Uh... no.

NATHAN

You have to forgive him. He's a little... uh... strung out these days.

CHARLIE

*(She considers Hammond.)*

I see. *He's* the one with the problem.

NATHAN

Yeah. So you got the device?

CHARLIE

I got it. You got the money?

HAMMOND

I... uh, yeah. I've got it. *(Muttering...)* I can't believe I'm doing this.

NATHAN

Just breath, Ham. It's fine. Lots of people—

*(Hammond grabs Nate and drags him away a few steps. They are huddled together, but facing roughly back towards Charlie to keep an eye on her while they whisper...)*

HAMMOND

I don't care what *lots of people* do, Nate! I don't do this. This... this... black market... or whatever it is. It's illegal. We could get in trouble. We could get hurt.

NATHAN

Dude, there's two of us and just her...

*(Katie steps out next to Charlie. Hammond stares at her for a moment, like he almost recognizes her, but then Nathan pulls him back.)*

Still... we're okay. It's two against two, and we've got strength on our side.

HAMMOND

I don't know, Nate. They look like they can handle themselves.

NATHAN

We've got this. We're men. *(Under his breath...)* At least one of is.

CHARLIE

Are we gonna do this or not?

NATHAN

Yeah.

CHARLIE

Let me see the money.

*(There's an awkward pause. Hammond has no idea what to say or do, and turns to Nathan.)*

NATHAN

We want to see the merchandise.

CHARLIE

I ain't showing you shit until I see the money.

HAMMOND

Fine!

*(Hammond quickly reaches for a pocket.)*

CHARLIE

Hands! Hands!

*(Hammond jerks his hand back.)*

HAMMOND

What?! What did I do?

CHARLIE

What were you reaching for!?! *(She turns to Nathan.)* I thought I made it very clear – you come unarmed!

HAMMOND

You told me to show you the money so I w— *(Turning accusingly to Nathan...)*  
Wait, we were supposed to come unarmed?

NATHAN

*(Shaking his head...)*

Dude, why would you say something like that?

HAMMOND

What?

NATHAN

You are such a fucking mess. I don't even know where to begin.

CHARLIE

What the... What kind of bullshit is this? You got—

NATHAN

Yeah. Yeah, we've got weapons!

*(He pulls out the knife and pepper spray, and tosses knife – still closed – to Hammond, who doesn't catch it. Hammond awkwardly bends down and picks it up. Nathan watches him, then thinks better and hands him the pepper spray and takes the knife. They nod at each other briefly in a "yeah, it's probably better this way" fashion.)*

You got a problem with that? Well, do you?

*(Charlie and Katie reach behind them and pull out handguns.)*

HAMMOND

Oh shit!

NATHAN

Yeah, that's... that's not good.

CHARLIE

Drop 'em.

*(They drop their weapons. Charlie motions to Katie, who goes over and picks up the knife and spray, and steps back. She looks at the spray, sniffs it, then sprays a little into the air and sniffs it. She turns back to Charlie and says...)*

KATIE

It's Binaca.

HAMMOND

What?! You armed me with breath freshener!?

NATHAN

That's all they had at the bus terminal. I didn't have time to shop around.

HAMMOND

Are you *trying* to get me killed?

NATHAN

Yeah but it's cinnamon, so you know, I think it would sting...

HAMMOND

Breath freshener... might as well have handed me a toe tag.

CHARLIE

I'm done playing games. Show me the money or this meeting is over.

HAMMOND

Alright. Alright. I'm just going to reach into my pocket for it...

*(He slowly reaches in and takes out a checkbook.)*

See?

CHARLIE

What the fuck is this?!

HAMMOND

*(Innocent and confused)*

It's a checkbook.

CHARLIE

I know what it is, Squeaky Clean. I said to bring cash!

HAMMOND

I... I can't get cash. She won't let me carry cash.

CHARLIE

What the fuck am I supposed to do with a check? You think I put this on my taxes?

HAMMOND

I'll make it out for cash.

*(Charlie stares at him for a moment, disgusted.)*

CHARLIE

Forget it. I'm outta here! Come on, Katie.