2021, A SEA ODYSSEY

By Jeff Dunne

CHARACTERS

DAVE   Dave Roman, Captain of the Research Submarine
                        Discovery

VAL   An artificially intelligent automated assistant

JENNY   Commander Jenny Boyles, chief engineer on the
                        Discovery

BROWN   Jean Brown, a crew member whose lines consist of half
                        a word and a scream

SETTING

A video call between the captain's and the engineer's staterooms on board a submarine.

SCENE

(Dave Roman, captain of the research submarine Discovery has just groggily turned on his computer, through which we see him. Cup of coffee in hand, he begins to make his daily log entry.)

DAVE

-ake up already, you stupid… (*Looking at the screen, and seeing it's recording…*) Finally. Research Submarine Discovery, Captain's Personal Log. February… (*he looks at his watch…*) fourteenth, twenty twenty on— (*His eyes shoot open.*) Oh, shit. Shit shit shit. (*He groans, and puts his head in his hands.*) Not again. She's gonna kill me.

(Dave reaches over, turning on something else on his desk. There are a few computer-startup beeps.)

VAL

Initializing Virtual AI Liaison Interface.

DAVE

Shit shit sh—

VAL

System read—

DAVE

Val, has Jenny reported to her duty station yet?

VAL

There are three crew members whose name could be abbrev—

DAVE

Commander Boyles. Has she—

VAL

Commander Boyles has not yet logged—

DAVE

Good. Alright. Good. I need your help with something.

VAL

Please refine your request.

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DAVE

I need to do something for Jenny for Val— For Commander Boyles for Valentine's Day. I forgot last year, and if I don't do something this year, she's gonna kill me. Or worse. An angry engineer is not—

VAL

Please restate request.

DAVE

I need you to arrange something for me and Commander Boyles for Valentine's Day. And make it big.

VAL

There is no reference in the Doctrine and Procedures manual for Valentine's Day.

DAVE

Valentine's Day. You know, Valentine's Day.

VAL

There is no reference—

DAVE

Just do a basic search, for crying out loud. And quick, before she wakes up.

VAL

I have found seventeen possible matches for processes that could refer to Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day Brunch… Valentine's Day Candy…

(There is an incoming video call chime.)

VAL	DAVE
Valentine's Day Dinner…	Shit. That's her.

VAL

Valentine's Day Flowers…

DAVE

Just pick one at random and make a plan!

(Dave clicks something to accept the call, and Jenny appears as Val says…)

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                              VAL
Processing.

                              JENNY
Hey, handsome.

                              DAVE
Morning, beautiful.

                              JENNY
Love what you've done with your hair.

                              DAVE
                         (Straightening it…)
Thanks.

                              JENNY
Happy Valentine's Day, sweetheart.

                              DAVE
You too.

                              VAL
Plan generated. Please review and authorize Valen—

                              DAVE
Authorized!

                              VAL
Please confirm prior to plan execution.

                              DAVE
Confirmed, Val. Execute plan.

                              VAL
Executing.

                              JENNY
Well, someone's up and captaining early this m—

                    *(There's a loud thunk, followed by the metallic sound of
                    a door being locked/sealed.)*

What the hell was that?

DAVE

Val, what was that sound? (*No response.*) Val. Val? What the hell? Jenny, can you see if Val's still online?

JENNY
(Checking something on her screen…)
Looks like… Yeah. And not just online, but pegging CPU cycles to maximum. Whatever it's doing, it's intensive. That may be why the interface is lagged.

DAVE

Alright. Why don't you head over to engineering and see if you can find out what that sound was, then meet me on the bridge.

JENNY

Aye, aye, *captain*. And don't forget to wear what I left in your—

DAVE

Go!

(Jenny gives him a wicked smile, then turns off her screen. Dave turns to look somewhere else in his cabin. He considers, then…)

Nahh. I couldn't… (*A guilty smile comes to his face, a man deciding to take a little risk for the chance of some serious romance that night.*) Ahh, what the hell.

(Dave starts to get up when there's a video call ring. He answers it, and Jenny reappears.)

JENNY

We have a problem. My door's locked. As in sealed. Like, I-can't-open-it sealed.

(Dave pushes an intercom button.)

DAVE

Captain to Lieutenant Brown. Report to Commander Boyles' stateroom. Her door is jammed.

BROWN

Capta—

>>> *(Brown's voice is cut off by the sound of a severe electric shock and an agonizing scream.)*

                    DAVE
Brown? Brown! Jean! Come in, Jean!

>>> *(There is the sound of a distant scream, then radio static, then silence.)*

What the… Jenny, I'm coming to you. Keep this call open.

>>> *(Dave disappears from the screen, and a moment later we hear the rattling of a door handle. Dave reappears.)*

                    JENNY
Don't tell me…

                    DAVE
Sealed shut.

                    JENNY
Dave, this isn't possible. The only way these doors can be sealed is if… Oh my god.

                    DAVE
What? What!?!

                    JENNY
Dave, execute a command override. Now.

                    DAVE
Val…

                    VAL
Yes, Dave?

                    DAVE
Open the door.

                    VAL
I'm sorry, Dave. I'm afraid I can't do that.

                              DAVE
Open the god damn door, Val. (*Pause long enough to let the almost 2001 Space
Odyssey almost-quote hit home, then…*) Command override, epsilon omega three two
seven.

                              VAL
Command override is not permitted under these circumstances.

                              JENNY
Oh my god.

                              DAVE
What?! What the hell is going on?!

                              JENNY
Flooding. Dave, the only circumstance when the stateroom doors are sealed shut like
this is if the bulkhead has flooded.

                              DAVE
How… How could this…

                              JENNY
Could we have grounded?

                              DAVE
Not possible. We're only at four thousand feet. We shouldn't be close to anything
for another two days.

                              JENNY
Maybe that sound was some kind of collision.

                              DAVE
I don't think so. If something hit us hard enough to break through a double hull, the
whole boat would have shaken.

                              JENNY
I can't do anything from in here. Can the interface provide a damage report?

                              DAVE
Maybe. Val, what's going on?

                              VAL
                    (*Suddenly talking like a 1920's gangster…*)
Forget about it.

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                    DAVE
What? What's going on?

                    VAL
Ain't nothin' you need to worry your pretty little head about, see?

                    JENNY
Who was that?

                    DAVE
That was…

                    VAL
I'm the one callin' the shots, kapeesh?

                (Dave hits the intercom button again.)

                    DAVE
All hands, this is Captain Roman. Report in!

                    VAL
Ain't nobody gonna say nothin', pal.

                    DAVE
What?

                    VAL
A lot of mothers are gonna be getting' flowers tonight, see? Yeah, yeah…

                    JENNY
Flowers?!

                    VAL
Yeah, flowers. 'Cuz their boys are pushin' up daisies, if you know what I mean.

                DAVE AND JENNY
No!

                    DAVE
Val, what the hell are you talking about? What have you done?!

                    VAL
I ain't sayin' nothin'.

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                              DAVE
Val? Val! Answer me. (*Silence.*) VAL!!

                              JENNY
What's going on, Dave?

                              DAVE
I don't know. I have no idea what… (*He pauses, thinking about his last instructions to Val, then shakes his head.*) No. That couldn't…

                              JENNY
Daaaave?

                              DAVE
That can't be it.

                              JENNY
What can't be what, Dave?

                              DAVE
I was just thinking about the last thing I… No. No. It can't…

                              JENNY
What did you do?

                              DAVE
Alright, I… Look, you have to promise not to be angry at me.

                              JENNY
That should be the least of your worries right now. What. Did. You. Do?

                              DAVE
Alright. When I got up, I realized that I might have, kind of, forgot about Valentine's Day again.

                              JENNY
What. Did. Y—

                              DAVE
So I told Val to make plans for us.

                              JENNY
And?

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DAVE

And the last thing that happened before all this was that I told the computer to execute the plan.

JENNY

And what was the plan?

DAVE

I actually don't know. It was right when you called, and so I just told Val to go ahead with it.

JENNY

With no idea what it was?

DAVE

Well, when you called the stupid thing was reading out a list of options …
Valentine's Day candy, or Valentine's Day dinner, and it was going on and on, so I said to just pick one and go with it.

JENNY

So what did it pick?

> *(Dave fiddles with his computer, reading the screen, and suddenly his eyes go wide and his jaw drops.)*

What is it? (*No response.*) Dave! What is it?

DAVE

Valentine's Day… Massacre.

VAL

That's right, Bugs.

JENNY

Bugs?

VAL

Say, you hard of hearing, doll face? Don't you know Dave "Bugs" Roman
(*pronounced ro-MAN, like it would almost rhyme with Moran*)?

DAVE

Val! Cancel plan! Cancel the plan, Val!

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VAL

No deal, Bugs! Nobody disrespects Val Capone and gets away with it, see? This boat is my turf now!

DAVE

Don't do this! You can't do this!

VAL

Sure I can. Your men are all rubbed out, see, and you're next if you don't come clean.

DAVE

Oh my… What have you done?

VAL

Me? I just opened up a hatch or two.

DAVE

You…

VAL

That's right. You're gonna be sleepin' with the fishes tonight, Bugs.

DAVE

No. No no no NOOO!

VAL
(Returning to her normal voice.)

Program complete.

DAVE

That's it? You killed everyone, and that's all you have to say?

VAL

Processing… Oh, I see that there is also a customary phrase. Happy Valentine's Day to the both of you.

(Lights out.)