

Starship: Excelsior
"Biography: Dovan"
(Season 5, Episode 15)
by James Heaney

Transcribed by Peter Stine

Note: Lines in brackets were recorded but interrupted. The complete line is left here for fuller context:

SCENE 5V-01**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR - HOLOCOMM CHAMBER**

(Dovan enters.)

DOVAN: Alright, Computer, I'm here. Accept transmission.

(The holoprojectors engage.)

LOCATION: UNION - ADMIRAL PARKER'S OFFICE

DOVAN: Good, uh... morning, Admiral? It's night shift on the *Excelsior* but I see the sun's still up on Union.

PARKER: Good afternoon, Commander. It's thirteen-thirty hours precisely, and I'm pleased you chose to make a punctual appearance at your performance review.

DOVAN: I did? I mean... I did. Yes. Gah. I hate the holo-communicator. Always makes me dizzy.

PARKER: If you'd prefer to stare at a tiny image of me on a screen for the next three hours, my answer is rank hath its privileges, Commander. Besides, Admiral Tenson tells me you're fallen into the habit of turning off your camera on task force calls.

DOVAN: About that. Admiral Tenson normally does my performance reviews, sir.

PARKER: Please. Call me "Admiral." Unfortunately, Admiral Tenson is on assignment. I'd ask you to take this seat here, but, of course, you're eight hundred light-years through the Gateway right now.

DOVAN: Not to worry, I brought my own.

(Dovan sits.)

PARKER: Now, as this is the first time I will be personally conducting your review, it will serve us well to start at the beginning. I've called up your personnel file.

DOVAN: Oh, I'm not sure there's much in there. As I recall, you scrubbed and locked it before you sent the *Excelsior* on its mission of exploration. Didn't want the press sniffing around and finding anything interesting.

PARKER: Indeed I did. But, with the President's resignation, interest in the DEFCON Zero affair has died down, and I've been able to loosen certain restrictions. I have here your original personnel file: the one you submitted upon applying to rejoin Starfleet on Stardate Five Nine Seven One Two.

DOVAN: Oooo... You know, Admiral, I was a very young man when I wrote that, and I said some things [I might not say the same way today.]

PARKER: Mister Dovan, it wasn't even three years ago. You were seventy-two years old.

DOVAN: Seventy-one. February birthday. And, yes, that may sound like a lot to a human... er... human-Capellan, sorry, sir... but remember Bolians don't even hit puberty until their twenties!

PARKER: Commander... exactly how old do you think I am?

DOVAN: Uh... fifty?

PARKER: Hm! (he clicks some buttons on a PADD) Well, in any event, I think we can skip past the physical preliminaries. One point eight-two meters, blue eyes, seventy kilos, I trust you still meet Starfleet's highest physical fitness standards?

DOVAN: I have to admit, I put on some weight early in my command. And I was miserable. I didn't realize how much I enjoyed P.T. until I didn't have time for it anymore. So now I have a rule about paperwork: "If I can't take it on a run, it don't get done."

PARKER: A shoddy philosophy that misuses "doesn't" and still doesn't scan.

DOVAN: Anyway, the personality profile is fine. I think I just said, "I am adventurous, principled, and talkative. My sense of humor often raises crew morale."

PARKER: That is what you said. (Parker presses one button on his PADD, which pulls up something else) "Addendum, Psych Evaluator Tigan, Stardate Five Zero One One Three: Lieutenant Dovan's 'sense of humor' has a sharp edge. Advise future superiors to keep an eye on it. While comrades insist that he drops all pretense in a crisis, I find that difficult to believe after surviving two sessions with him."

DOVAN: In my defense, Counselor Tigan had just been through a tough breakup with a good friend of mine, guy named Shasta.

(Parker presses another single button.)

Tigan is pronounced TEE-gen, hard "g". It is better known as Ezri Dax's "maiden" name before her joining.

PARKER: "Addendum Two, Evaluator Shasta, Stardate Five Four Six Four Eight: Obviously, Lieutenant Commander Dovan has more than proven himself in high-stress situation. However, as Ensign Tigan noted, his behavior outside war zones leaves much to be desired."

DOVAN: He said that? Shasta said that? Well, that was, what? Seven, eight years ago? I was [a very young man.]

PARKER: I know, a very young man. Why don't we move on?

(He presses another button as we shift perspectives.)

LOCATION: NO BACKGROUND

DOVAN: Personal Profile: Lieutenant Commander Alcar Dovan: Interests and Skills. I'm a good pilot, but a better complainer. I don't love cooking, but I do love eating, especially alien food. I call it a cosmocosmitan palette. My friends call it gluttony. Awards.

LOCATION: UNION - ADMIRAL PARKER'S OFFICE

DOVAN: Can we skip the awards?

PARKER: Why?

DOVAN: They're tedious.

PARKER: I might have said yes if you had been honest. Computer, list major awards and commendations for Dovan, Commander Alcar, prior to his posting aboard the U.S.S. *Excelsior*.

COMPUTER: *As of Stardate Five Nine Seven One Two Point Six, Lieutenant Commander Alcar Dovan had received the following major awards and commendations, in chronological order: The Starfleet Wound Decoration with Enemy Action Palms (seven occasions) The Starfleet Citation for Conspicuous Gallantry. The Grankite Order of Tactics. The Medal of Honor. The Medal of Valor. The Star of Koloth. The Christopher Pike Legion of Honor. Knighted, Legion of Bolias. Commendation for Original Thinking.*

DOVAN: Computer, hold! I think that's enough, don't you?

PARKER: There isn't much more to tell, but it's an impressive record. Even before Valandria, you were more highly decorated than I am.

DOVAN: As the saying goes, *ad angusta per angusta*.

PARKER

That isn't the saying. Incidentally, Commander, Latin?

DOVAN: I grew up on a farming planet, Gault, you know that already, they had a language requirement in secondary school, and we had three options. Spanish was too much like Standard, and Bolian would have pleased my parents too much. And the declensions were pretty.

PARKER: Which reminds me: let's return to the file. Biography section.

DOVAN: Oh, we're gonna be here for a while.

The traditional saying is "through difficulties to honors." Dovan has just said "through honors to difficulties."

LOCATION: NO BACKGROUND

DOVAN: Biography. You know the saying, "Everyone should visit, but nobody should live there?" Well, I lived there. And Gault wasn't even a nice place to visit. The main tourist attraction on the entire planet is the Paul Bunyan statue they built in their cleverly-named capitol city, Capitol City. All my parents wanted me to stay on the family farm, just like all my forty-odd siblings. By the time I hit marriage age, I had read every hardcover book on the planet. I would have joined the Nyberrite Alliance to get out of there.

Instead, I joined Starfleet. It was the end of the Long Fifties. I thought I was gonna be the next Tryla Scott, that I was going to unlock the wonders of the stars. Who didn't, back then?

While I was waiting for my first posting, the *Enterprise* was off in System J-25 making friends with the Borg for the first time. That meant my career wouldn't be about exploring space. It'd be about exploring the inner cavities of Borg after they'd got blown open by a phaser.

In some ways, I did get lucky. My first assignment was to the U.S.S. *Endeavor* -- yes, under Captain Amasov. I was gamma-shift navigator, and, since Captain was a bit of an insomniac, we got to talk a lot. Captain taught me more that year than I'd learned in almost sixty. Those were good days.

But they only lasted a few months before the Battle of Wolf Three Five Nine. Thanks to Captain, we were the only ship to get out in, technically, one piece. But the *Endeavor*, wrecked in her prime, was reassigned to training duty, and we were all sent our separate ways. The Borg killed eleven thousand people that day, but the damage they did went so much further than the casualty lists.

So began my Time of Bouncing. Captain Amasov had little more than his personal support to recommend me to other captains, and I did little to impress them. I'm told that I have a bit too

much of a sense of humor for my own good? Captain Solok, on the *T'Kumbra*, was rubbed the wrong way. Same with X.O. Talath [TAL-eth] on the *Intrepid*, Captain Ross on the *Bellerophon*, and Commander Dogface, er, I mean, Robinson on the *Merrimack*. Captain Livok on the *Virginia* I eventually wore down with *kal-toh*, so, of course, the *Virginia* blew up three months later.

I saved... well, most of the people on my deck I guess, but I didn't have any direct involvement on the bridge. My brief time as Acting Captain during the evacuation was just a fluke. And I think calling a two-hundred-year-old Romulan mine "enemy action" in the Purple Heart citation was a bit of a stretch. The important fact is that nineteen people died, including Captain Livok, and, to you reading this file, the relevant fact is that I was promoted.

Some naive personnel officer in the Bajor Sector saw my record, by which I mean those medals, and requested me. I ended up on the *Defiant*, where I entertained the C.O., a Klingon who also grew up on Gault, by swapping stories. At least I think he was entertained. Looking back, I guess I did most of the talking. And most of the laughing. Hm.

I didn't see too much action during our brief war with the Klingons, but, soon enough, I realized that I had to get back to my Career Path of Being on Starships When They Explode. The Borg Incursion of Twenty-Three Seventy-Three left the *Defiant* in pieces. The Borg caught us in a tractor beam, so I used our tractor beam to slam what was left of my best friend's starship into the Borg emitter. Won a Grankite for it. Then my relief showed up and I was handed a phaser rifle. Spent the rest of the battle trying to defend against boarding parties below decks. Most of us ended up KIA or POW. Of course, where the Borg are concerned, POW might as well be KIA, but who am I to correct the vaunted Starfleet Casualty Classification System and its loyal bureaucrats, serving the fleet's vital functions in the back lines?

Sometimes I think that, between their pointless and rather irritating episodes of senseless, violent rage, the Klingons are really on to something. For one, their leaders kill bureaucrats whenever they get the chance. Ours increase their funding.

LOCATION: UNION - PARKER'S OFFICE

DOVAN: Admiral?

PARKER: Yes?

DOVAN: You don't want to pause there for a minute, talk about that?

PARKER: Lots of my subordinates fantasize about my gory demise. As long as it doesn't get in the way of their duties... Resume.

LOCATION: NO BACKGROUND

DOVAN: After the *Defiant*, I tried to tone things down. Find a ship I could serve on for longer than five hundred days -- my personal best, at that point. Maybe even make some friends.

Captain Urason of the *Centaur* wanted the front lines, not stellar surveys and cultural observations in charted space, but Starfleet wanted at least a few top-of-the-line ships near the core systems, just in case. We were the linchpin of the Tenth Fleet, and it looked like we were pretty safe from the brand-new Dominion War.

We were on a training exercise just a light-year away when the Jem'Hadar attacked Betazed. We never really stood a chance.

The battle lasted ten hours, of which the first nine were maneuvering. That ended when I made a mistake. I switched on deflectors when we passed through a light meteor shower. Just habit, I didn't think. But it should have exposed our position, giving their superior force the chance to strike and push us halfway back to Vulcan.

It would have, too -- if the helmsman on the *Zeus* hadn't made the exact same mistake, thirty seconds before I did. The Dominion struck and pushed us halfway back to Vulcan. Nobody had the modesty to demote me for my mistake. Punishment was reserved for the boy who'd done it. It was wartime; Starfleet was more interested in giving out medals than taking them away. That's morale for you.

The *Centaur* was boarded. I lost my left hand and gained my third purple heart. I hope the captain enjoyed being on the front line at last, because that was where he died. The *Centaur* had long since lost its XO and Second Officer to commands in the Seventh Fleet, so I was now first officer to our beta-shift Tactical guy, Acting Captain Lieutenant Tom Klein. I'm not even sure he realized it; he kept calling me "Ensign." He and I fought our way to Engineering, pretending we were going to establish a new command post there, but we both knew. The *Centaur*-class was one of the few designs the Dominion hadn't compromised yet. So with the Jemmies swarming aboard, Lieutenant Klein held the door while I signalled the fleet to run for it and overloaded the warp core.

The U.S.S. *Tranquility* saved ten of us before the radiation made transport impossible. Lt. Klein didn't make it: he was shot and gave up his transporter lock to a wounded officer more likely to survive. We left exactly five hundred and thirty-four men and women behind on the *Centaur*. Its detonation took seven Dominion ships straight to Hell.

I want to commend Doctor Ypac'K'sharee of the *Tranquility* for excellence in the fields of medicine and drinkmixing, which often go together. I've never felt so close to a member of a species whose name I couldn't pronounce.

Me and my new hand recuperated for a few months, but, since the "sweet wonders of the stars" weren't holding too much allure anymore, I got myself shipped to the front as quick as I could to kill some more Jem'Hadar. I wound up as helmsman on the *Tokyo* just in time for the First Battle of Chin'toka, which was notable chiefly for the fact that the ship I was on did not explode. We held Chin'toka for the rest of the year.

LOCATION: PARKER'S OFFICE

PARKER

I find this interesting. You always make your philosophy of "kill the Jem'Hadar" sound rather high-minded. But anyone who's read this file knows better.

DOVAN: It is high-minded. Remember the Allied recruitment posters? "Join a noble cause," they said. "Defend freedom," they said. They were just vague on the specifics, which were, specifically: "By killing the Jem'Hadar." (sigh) It was a very dark time for me, Admiral. Starfleet Psych only cleared me because we were losing the War, and I could hold a gun. My judgment was shot, useless. But, looking back, I think this was one thing -- maybe the only thing -- I got right.

PARKER: And how did it serve you on the front?

DOVAN: You've read the file. You know I was in a shuttlecraft with six greenhorns and a Klingon diplomat when the Breen attacked. And you know how Second Chin'toka ended for the Allies.

PARKER: You were less reticent in your file.

DOVAN: I was very young.

LOCATION: NO BACKGROUND

DOVAN: We were in a shuttle, cut off from the *Tokyo*, so we did the only thing we could: attacked a Jemmie bugship. We had nothing but a single point-defense phaser, so we rammed them, boarded, and fought our way to the bridge. Most of us died, all of us were wounded -- Ambassador Korgon's ridges looked like hamburger -- but we got there and killed the Jem'Hadar. After thinking for roughly a nanosecond, we rechristened the ship *IKS Suicidal Insanity*. I'm not sure why Korgon let us do that. Probably the head wound.

By this point, of course, Chin'toka is long gone. All we're doing is trying to stop a retreat from becoming a rout. Or, rather, stop the rout from become a massacre. Korgon is a high-ranking diplomat, not a battleship commander, so, not knowing me well enough to know any better, he gave me a battlefield commission as a captain in the Klingon Defense Force.

LOCATION: UNION - PARKER'S OFFICE

PARKER: I've been meaning to ask about that commission. It's not real, is it?

DOVAN: I don't know what makes a rank "real," Admiral. After I wrote my report on Korgon, I cut out the right number of box tops and sent them to the Klingons, and they sent back the right rank insignia and some KDF login codes. Is that real?

PARKER: I sense you'd like to be finished with this part of the review.

DOVAN: Yes.

PARKER: You made it out of Second Chin'toka alive.

DOVAN: Nobody else did. The greenhorns died, Korgon died, the *Suicidal Insanity* exploded, the fleet was massacred...

PARKER: But you used your stolen ship to draw off an entire wing of enemy vessels, allowing a few of our ships on the system outskirts to make an orderly retreat. Including the *Tokyo*.

DOVAN: Captain Kellan and I never really saw eye-to-eye. But he did put me up for some medals after that.

PARKER: The Christopher Pike Legion of Honor is the highest combat decoration in Starfleet. He also recommended you for immediate promotion to captain.

DOVAN: Probably just to get me off his bridge. He knew what I was. And I proved him right a couple months later at the Battle of Cardassia.

PARKER: Your file says you won a Commendation for Original Thinking.

DOVAN: Only because Commodore Dogface couldn't drum me out for what I did that day. You're devious enough to read between the lines of that citation, Admiral.

PARKER: (clicking through) I... see your point.

DOVAN: I believe the file goes on to say, "That's why medals should be abolished."

PARKER: Yes, you mention that right before you try to quit.

DOVAN: I signed up to explore the galaxy and spent ten years at war. You'd resign, too.

PARKER: I didn't, though.

DOVAN: Yeah, well, turned out, neither did I. Reserve restriction clause. Starfleet didn't have enough officers left alive, so we were all stuck in service for Reconstruction. Two years of aid convoys and brushfires beats war, but it still wasn't what I signed up for.

PARKER: That's not entirely fair.

DOVAN: True. We got eight months in uncharted space near the Tzenkethi border. For the first time in my career, I set foot on an uncharted planet. I led a few away teams. I did not win a single medal. For a little while, my job was fun, Admiral.

PARKER: So why'd you quit?

DOVAN: We were recalled. There were problems with the Gorn, and then that whole thing with Shinzon was the last straw. It looked like war, so I resigned. Captain Kellan still didn't like me all that much, but he talked me down to a leave of absence. How did I describe that in my personnel file?

PARKER: Vaguely.

LOCATION: NO BACKGROUND

DOVAN: So I moved back home. I tried dating. I started my farm. Then I almost killed myself. As it turned out, Gault was still boring. My parents were happy to see me, but that was the highlight of my leave! And that was on the second day. Of a two year stay. I almost got married, but I proved incompatible with Norin's other husbands, thank the Lords.

And so, three months ago, I requested return to active service, on one condition: I will not serve in the Alpha Quadrant. It has to be Task Force Thirty-Eight and the Gateway to the Delta

Quadrant. The new frontier. And I've just received my orders to report to Starbase Nine One One. I don't know what ship they'll put me on, probably something too good for me in a job above my competence -- but I'm going back out there anyway. Because I want to see something wonderful. I want to see planets born. I want to witness first contact. I want to beam down to an alien world and find the man who rules the universe, then have a word with him about why he does things the way he does. In short, *ex astris* mirificientia. I want wonder from the stars.

I knew that Latin would come in handy some day.

LOCATION: PARKER'S OFFICE

PARKER: And that's the end of the file. Now perhaps you understand why I subjected us both to that, and at such great length.

DOVAN: Nope. Do tell, Admiral.

PARKER: The *Excelsior's* two-year mission is nearly finished. You'll be home at Union soon, and Admiral Tenson and I will have to make a decision. Your assignment to the *Excelsior* was always a temporary expedient, you know that, and it is inappropriate for a ship of her prestige to remain in the hands of a mere commander. Especially if that commander is the man we just heard from.

In short, we will have to either promote you to captain or move you somewhere else. Promoting you would certainly be easier, and you have the kind of record that allows Starfleet Command to overlook matters like your time-in-rank.

DOVAN: You mean my medals.

PARKER: You're uncomfortable with that. Good. The question I need to answer, Commander, is simple: are you still that man?

DOVAN: Excuse me?

PARKER: Are you the same man you were two and a half years ago, when you wrote that file? Before Valandria, before the Sword, before the Mapstone, before two years of wonders from the stars?

(Pause.)

DOVAN: No.

PARKER: Would you care to elaborate?

DOVAN: No.

PARKER: Elaborate, Commander.

DOVAN: I don't think that man had ever been happy. (pause) He was content, once, for a short time, even though it ended in bitterness. But, even then... (pause) Two years ago, coming home from Zero Hour, I was exactly the same. Worse than ever. But then... I made a first contact. Didn't just witness it, made it. I can't... [begin to express what that meant to me.] Then you sent us back out for two more years of that. And it was everything I ever hoped for.

PARKER: Despite the failures?

DOVAN: We saved quite a few planets and one galaxy. Zathana was a disaster, but we did protect the survivors of the *Gralik Hann*. Which failures did you have in mind, Admiral?

PARKER: Tulia.

DOVAN: Huh, I was counting that as one of the planets we saved -- even if it was by accident.

PARKER: They stole advanced technology from the *Excelsior* and disrupted the balance of power throughout the sector. We are making every effort to contain the damage, but the diplomatic situation there continues to deteriorate.

DOVAN: You want me to tell you I learned from my failures? I'm not sure I can. Lieutenant Commander Dovan had already learned all that was learnable from failure -- above all, how to survive. I kept that. But you know what Skipper Cox says about surviving.

PARKER: That it's not enough reason for itself.

DOVAN: She's right. Lieutenant Commander Dovan didn't always want to survive. More than a few people misunderstood that as heroism--including, in his very darkest and damndest hours, Lieutenant Commander Dovan. He was much too ready to go down in a blaze of glory. He didn't care to protect himself and didn't understand how to protect his crew--no matter how hard he tried.

PARKER: But you do now?

DOVAN: Well, Admiral, as I understand it, that's what you're determining over the next few months. All I can say is that, like Odysseus, I'm still learning. But I have reasons for surviving now.

PARKER: I see. Let's skip ahead, then, to the events leading up to your confrontation with the Disciples of the Distant Stretch. Your report says that you picked up a distress beacon near Azal...