

Starship: Excelsior

"Listen"

(Season 5, Episode 14)

by Colin Hayman

Transcribed by Peter Stine

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

SCENE 5M-01**LOCATION: DOVAN'S READY ROOM**

DOVAN: Captain's Log, Stardate six two oh six nine point five. Two years of exploration, wonder, and awe in the Delta Quadrant are ending with a mission we hope involves none of those things. Admiral Parker has ordered us to divert from our homeward journey to take discreet, long-range reconnaissance scans of Borg space. My own concerns [have been repeatedly overruled.]

(The door chimes.)

DOVAN: Pause. Come!

(Dr. Sharp enters.)

SHARP: Got you at a bad time, Alcar?

DOVAN: No, of course not. (pause) Well, a little. What's up?

SHARP: I just thought, since you couldn't make it for breakfast, I'd bring us some lunch.

DOVAN: Great! Thanks. And sorry again about this morning. I've just been...

SHARP: Been what?

DOVAN: I was going to say busy, but no, not really. To be honest, I guess I've been brooding.

SHARP: You're not the only one. This mission has the whole crew on edge.

(Pause.)

SHARP: Remember when *Voyager* got home?

DOVAN: (sigh) We all felt better about the Borg for a while. That was nice.

SHARP: They got all the way across Borg space in one piece! They destroyed a transwarp hub, killed a Queen... it looked like the Borg might not be so unbeatable after all. But now...

DOVAN: Now we know. Every time we've ever hurt the Borg, they've hardly felt it. We're only alive because they've been too busy fighting their war with the bluegills.

SHARP: It's funny that we can think about anything else, isn't it?

(The ansible starts beeping quietly.)

DOVAN: Right? We had a birthday party for Yubari on Tuesday. A birthday party! She's doomed, we're doomed, and here we are celebrating a bit more doomedness.

SHARP: (chuckles) Doomedness?

DOVAN: See? This is how easy we get distracted. I guess it's what keeps us sane.

SHARP: Speaking of distractions, what's going on with that?

DOVAN: Hm? Oh, you mean the ansible? Yeah, I've been keeping it here when Science isn't taking a run at it. It may be Scion technology; capable of communicating across infinite distances; retrieved at a terrible price; but it's one of the only proofs we have that, once in a while, we can win.

SHARP: Win?

DOVAN: Also makes a good paperweight.

SHARP: Fine, but I meant the beeping sound.

DOVAN: The what?

SHARP: You don't hear that? It started beeping a minute ago.

DOVAN: You're messing with me, right?

SHARP: Maybe it's outside your hearing range. Humans have slightly wider [auditory response zones.]

(The ansible starts beeping loud and fast.)

SHARP: Okay, tell me you're hearing that!

DOVAN: Oh yeah. Let's take it to the sci[ence people.]

(Red Alert klaxon!)

LORHROK: *Red alert! All hands to battle stations!*

SHARP: So much for lunch.

DOVAN: Hey, you gotta eat.

(Dovan takes a big bite out of a space apple. They both exit.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR BRIDGE

DOVAN: What've we got?

LORHROK: A Borg transwarp conduit just opened ten thousand kilometers to port!

DOVAN: On screen!

(The viewscreen activates. We can hear the vortex swirling away outside.)

DOVAN: Helm! Maximum warp! HIT IT!

SYLVESTE: Aye, sir, plotting a course!

LORHROK: Sir, we'll lose sensor contact at warp. Admiral Parker did want us monitoring Borg [activity out here.]

DOVAN: Admiral Parker's free to come out here and monitor them hims[elf. We are getting home alive.]

(The Vortex closes. The noise stops. At the same time, the ansible's noise returns, muffled.)

DOVAN: What the...?

NEEVA: The conduit has closed. No ships detected.

DOVAN: Helm, belay warp speed. Full scan.

SYLVESTE: The Borg don't just casually open transwarp conduits.

YUBARI: Something's going on here.

LORHROK: Does anyone else hear an alarm?

YUBARI: Captain, it's coming from your ready [room!]

DOVAN: Yeah, yeah, I know. It's the ansible. I guess Trills are on the better-hearing-than-Bolians list too.

LORHROK: The ansible? Why?

SHARP: We're not sure. It started just before the red alert.

But Neeva's been audibly running some scans, and...

NEEVA: I think I know why. Look at this.

(She turns on the viewscreen.)

(We hear another ansible on the screen.)

NEEVA: It's floating in space exactly where the conduit was.

LORHROK: That... that can't be what it looks like.

DOVAN: Only one way to find out. We need to beam it aboard. But we'll need a way to get it off the ship fast if there's trouble...

YUBARI: We could use the shuttlebay. Set up force fields front and back, then open the doors, and we'll have a makeshift airlock that can be vented instantly.

DOVAN: Good thinking. Do it.

(Yubari pushes some buttons.)

YUBARI: Ready.

DOVAN: Energize.

(Yubari presses some more buttons, and, on screen we hear the transporter beam up the ansible in space.)

(Immediately, all beeping stops.)

DOVAN: Which shuttlebay, Yubari?

YUBARI: Two.

DOVAN: Okay. You've got conn. Alecz, get a team and let's take a look at this thing.

LORHROK: (tapping comm badge) J'Naya, Adow, report to Shuttlebay Two immediately.

YUBARI: Be careful, sir.

DOVAN: Always!

(They head for the turbolift.)

SCENE 5M-02**LOCATION: SHUTTLEBAY**

J'NAYA: ...and turn those discriminators down until we know what we're dealing with!

(The big cargo bay doors open and Dovan & Co. enter.)

DOVAN: I see you beat us here, Commander.

J'NAYA: Captain! This, this is... what is this?

LORHROK: We're not sure yet, but it certainly looked like --

ADOW: A Borgified ansible.

J'NAYA: Ansibles! I've seen ours and I still can't believe they really exist. They're the stuff of legend!

DOVAN: What are the scans showing?

J'NAYA: Almost nothing. You hear those beeps?

DOVAN: No.

J'NAYA: That's literally all I have for you. It's beeping. Otherwise, it's completely opaque to our sensors.

ADOW: Even more than the other ansible was. The Borg parts may be shielding it further.

LORHROK: They assimilated an ansible. Spast! We've always known the Borg were beyond us, but this far?

(The ansible starts beeping much faster.)

DOVAN: We need to get a closer look at this thing.

J'NAYA: Give me a few minutes. We'll bring some more equipment. And EVA suits, so we can get close to it and not be at risk if the bay has to be vented.

(J'naya and Adow start moving.)

ADOW: Always fun wearing those things.

(Lorhrok follows.)

LORHROK: I'll give them a hand, sir. We'll be right back. Kestra, we should get the Mark Twenty discriminator. It's still under the pool table, right?

J'NAYA: No, I moved it to Storage Two.

LORHROK: What? But that's so much [less convenient!]

(The ansible suddenly starts making a NEW, LOUD, WEIRD NOISE.)

DOVAN: I think somebody wants attention!

LORHROK: Uh oh.

J'NAYA: It's drawing in some ambient matter! Converting it into... nadions?

DOVAN: Yes, ansible! We know! "Beep-boop-beep-boop-beep-boop"! Now could you maybe be more specific about [what you want from us?]

(The ansible activates, releasing a spherical energy pulse! It fritzes as it touches the force field.)

DOVAN: Jeho[sephath!]

(We hear a Borg-ish transporter, henceforth the Transible sound.)

ADOW: What — what just -

LORHROK: Spast!

J'NAYA: He's gone! It — it beamed him somewhere!

(Red alert!)

LORHROK: (taps his combadge) Lorhrok to bridge! The captain was just beamed away! Start scanning for him, now!

Bridge noises come through the comm — noises of battle!

YUBARI: *Helm, maximum warp! Any course! Go!*

LORHROK: Yubari? What's going [on up there?]

(Explosion!)

YUBARI: Sir, you need to get up here! The Borg just showed up, and they are not happy!

THEME SONG

SCENE 5M-03**LOCATION: WHEAT FIELD, GAULT**

(Dovan materializes into this as the "transible" effect releases him.)

DOVAN: Jehosephat! (pause) Lorhrok? J'Naya? ...Adow? Where am I? Is this wheat?

ADEN: Alcar? Where did you come from? (pause) Hey! Alcar!

DOVAN: I-- Aden?!

ADEN: (laughs) Really? You're the surprised one?

DOVAN: But how can you be here? Or... or how can I be... Aden, is this Gault?

ADEN: Of course.

DOVAN: That's impossible! I was just in the Delta Quadrant!

ADEN: What... you mean now, this minute?

DOVAN: Yes! I touched a B-- --er, an alien artifact, and suddenly I was here!

ADEN: I did hear a noise like a transporter. I figured you'd just beamed down from your ship.

DOVAN: No! I mean, yes, I was on the ship, but we were across the galaxy! And it was a fancy communicator, not an intergalactic transporter!

ADEN: Huh.

(Dovan flips a tricorder open and starts scanning.)

DOVAN: Which means... ..this can't really be Gault. It's some kind of simulation. Either in a holodeck or just in my head.

ADEN: Excuse me?

DOVAN: No sign of holo-tech so far, but that may just mean it's too sophisti[cated for my tricorder to detect.]

ADEN: I am not a simulation, Alcar!

DOVAN: That's just what a simulation would say.

(Aden starts walking away in a rush.)

(Dovan's tricorder stops and closes.)

ADEN: I don't have time for this. I'm out in the fields all day and find out on my way back from Jarso that Azabeth and Mitena are fighting again, Mitena's saying Azabeth sabotaged her replicator, although I can't even tell from the texts if that's what started it, Groff and his quad got locked out last night because Mitena hid the keys, but they were the wrong keys, so now they've, I mean Groff and Vadne and Orsa, Hars wanted nothing to do with it, got Aunt Lye to complain to Ma Lye who's now [giving the lot of them a piece of her mind, only Jarso doesn't want Ma Lye anywhere near Azabeth.]

DOVAN: Okay! Okay! You're real! I believe you! You're real! Please stop!

ADEN: Huh? What convinced you?

DOVAN: That all sounds completely true but not even my deepest subconscious would generate a story that boring for a simulation.

ADEN: Alcar!

DOVAN: Hey, you know it's why I left. Partly. Twice.

ADEN: Is that why you never write? Afraid I'll bore you to death?

DOVAN: Sure I write! I, uh...

ADEN: Congratulations on your fifth purple heart, by the way. Of course, we only heard about it on the fleet news.

DOVAN: Fifth? That was two hearts and two years a...go. Yeah, okay, I hear it now. I'm sorry. And I'm sorry for this, too, but I need to figure out what's going on.

(Dovan pulls his tricorder out again for more scanning.)

ADEN: (sigh) Well, it wasn't anything on our end.

DOVAN: (snorts) No, something exciting happening on Gault? That was gonna be my first guess after every other possibility. (the tricorder slams shut) No good! No funny particles, no technobabble alerts, and I think my cholesterol's down. Nothing's weird here!

ADEN: Except you.

DOVAN: Heh, right.

ADEN: So what's the next step?

DOVAN: I'd better get in touch with Starfleet. Aden, are you growing a hairline?

ADEN: We're both getting older, Alcar.

DOVAN: Well, it looks terri[ble.]

(The "transible" dematerialization effect begins.)

ADEN: (chuckles) Love you too, brother.

SCENE 5M-04**LOCATION: U.S.S. VOLTAIRE - COMMANDER UNDERWOOD'S OFFICE**

(Dovan materializes.)

UNDERWOOD: [Under absolutely no circumstances] will we even consider giving you full access to the Westlake Archive. Your disgraceful conduct on -- GOOD LORD!

DOVAN: Uh... hi, Underwood.

UNDERWOOD: Dovan! What in God's name are you doing here?

DOVAN: Nice to see you too.

HANAS: *Excuse me, Commander? This call is classified.*

UNDERWOOD: General Hanas, I'll call you back.

(He deactivates his comm terminal instantly)

DOVAN: Hey, why'd the *Voltaire* get the new commbadges before the *Excelsior*?

UNDERWOOD: Jealous, Dovan?

DOVAN: I'm not saying it doesn't look good on you, Underwood. I'm just saying we were told we'd get them before Captain Kel.

UNDERWOOD: That was before the *Voltaire* accepted this assignment to the Beta Desolation. I told Admiral Parker we needed some incentive...

DOVAN: Boy, I thought the *Excelsior* had the worst assignment. He sent you into the Desolate Systems?

UNDERWOOD: Yes, obviously, it's not like we'd come out here just [for sport.] Wait, you're serious. Do van, how the devil did you get here without even knowing where "here" is?

DOVAN: Yeah, I'm working on that one. First the ansible zapped me, and then...

UNDERWOOD: An ansible? From the Scions?

DOVAN: From the Borg, actually.

UNDERWOOD: And it beamed you halfway across the galaxy?!

(Pause.)

DOVAN: ...maybe?

UNDERWOOD: Oh, for half a chance to... there's no evidence of the Scions ever using an ansible this way! How is it possible? Shouldn't they need a receiving ansible at the other end?

DOVAN: Huh. That one hadn't even occurred to me.

UNDERWOOD: Blimey, I need to call the Committee...

DOVAN: Oh, no. I'll get you the report after, but I am not beaming halfway across the galaxy just to sit in some meeting with [some pinhead committee of yours!]

(The "transible" dematerialization effect begins.)

SCENE 5M-05**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR ENGINEERING**

(Red alert. There's a battle going on. Steam's leaking. Consoles are sparking. The warp core is going faster than usual.)

(Dovan materializes.)

DOVAN: I'm back! Finally! Uh oh. Commander J'Naya! What's going on here?

J'NAYA: Captain! You're back! How?!

DOVAN: Are we under attack?

J'NAYA: It's the Borg! They arrived right after you vanished!

DOVAN: They must want their ansible back!

J'NAYA: Commander Lorhrok has a plan, but we have to push the engi[nes right up to the red line.]

(An explosion and a hissing/whoosing sound!)

ADOW: Coolant leak!

J'NAYA: No! Sir, a [coolant leak is REALLY bad.]

DOVAN: Go! We'll talk later!

(Dovan exits engineering at a run.)

LOCATION: EXCELSIOR CORRIDOR

DOVAN: Dovan to bridge! I'm back on the ship! On my way up!

LORHROK: *Captain! Great Prophet, that's a relief! What happened to you?*

DOVAN: I was in the Alpha Quadrant!

LORHROK: *What?!*

DOVAN: You tell me; you're the engineer. The ansible zaps me and then I'm in the middle of a wheatfield on Gault and then -- 'scuse me --

CREWMAN #1: Sorry sir!

DOVAN: -- in Underwood's quarters on the *Starship Voltaire*! And he's in the Beta Quadrant!

LORHROK: *That doesn't make any sense! Gault's across the galaxy! Ansbles transmit data, not matter!*

DOVAN: First things first! Sitrep!

LORHROK: *A Borg cube in hot pursuit! There's a Class Five nebula nearby that we can lose them in, and we have just enough of a head start to reach it -- (The ship shudders from Borg weapon impact) -- but they're not making it easy!*

DOVAN: Hang in there! I'm almost at the turbo[lift!]

(The "transible" dematerialization effect begins.)

DOVAN: No! NOO!!

SCENE 5M-06**LOCATION: STARSHIP KINDRED - MAIN CABIN**

(Dovan materializes.)

DOVAN: No! NO! (sigh) Okay, where am I this time?

MINA: (gasp) (she drops something, it breaks) BLUE!

DOVAN: What the [heck?] Oof!

(Mina throws her arms around Dovan in a big hug, tackling him to the ground.)

MINA: You came to visit like you said! But how'd you get on board?

DOVAN: Mina. Uh, hi. Good to see you again. How've you been?

MINA: Oh, y'know. You've seen one bustling interstellar trading port, you've seen 'em all.

DOVAN: Oh, I know that look. Already plotting a candy floss heist at your next port-of-call, are you?

MINA: You know it.

DOVAN: Can I get up now?

MINA: Oh, sorry.

This is Kami's ship from Scene 4A-35.

(They get up.)

MINA: But Kami's really gonna want to know how you got on board. We're hiding, the shields are up, and I don't see your ship out the window.

DOVAN: Yeah, I'm just, uh... I'm on a kind of transporter... ride.

MINA: Ride?

DOVAN: Yeah. It's a new thing. It beams you all over the place to visit your friends. (pause) Wait. Friends. That's right! These transports aren't totally random. I keep showing up near people I know!

MINA: Where have you been so far?

DOVAN: Uh, let's see... I've seen one of my brothers, and a guy I used to work with, and... [I guess Kestra was the last target, wasn't she?]

MINA: You have brothers?

DOVAN: Yeah. Sisters, too. Last time I counted there were... forty-eight of us? No, forty-nine.

MINA: Wooow! How did that happen?

DOVAN: On my planet, making a baby involves a bunch of people, not just a mom and a dad. We end up with really big families.

MINA: It must be so hard to keep track!

DOVAN: No kidding. They say the Bank of Bolias was paid for by genealogists.

MINA: Huh?

DOVAN: Never mind. I just mean you're right, it's hard to remember. I've got 'em all written down somewhere.

MINA: You should write down the people you visit today. It sounds like you're already forgetting.

DOVAN: Yes. I should be doing that. You're full of good ideas today, aren't you?

MINA: Want some paper?

DOVAN: No, there's an easier way. I'll just use my comm badge. (taps comm badge) Activate passive recording mode.

(The commbadge beeps.)

MINA: It can do that?

DOVAN: Yeah, it usually draws on my ship's computer, but it can do some basic stuff without. Now I can keep a record just by saying where I am.

MINA: I'll do this one! (she presses the combadge) I'm Mina and this is *Spaceship Kindred* orbiting Zosiframtollycutonian Nine.

DOVAN: I'm... really glad you pronounced that. And it's jump number four. (he presses the combadge again) Boy, I hope that number doesn't get too high.

MINA: Don't worry. I'm sure you'll fix the problem soon.

DOVAN: Yeah, my crew's working on it, but they're busy with... Hey, I told you this is a ride.

MINA: I'm seventeen, Dovan.

DOVAN: Heh, now that is a bold lie. Glad you took my advice to heart.

(The Transible beams Dovan away.)

MINA: Good luck!

SCENE 5M-07**LOCATION: THE INSIDE OF A VOLCANO**

(Dovan starts to materialize into this as the "transible" effect releases him... but something gets weird, and it never actually does quite release him.)

THE BRINGER: (from all around Dovan) *Well, well. Is it already that time? I've been looking forward to this.*

DOVAN: Aaaaahhh!

(The Transible start dematerializing Dovan again.)

THE BRINGER: *It's not Alcar Dovan's last sunset yet. But it will be hundreds of times more satisfying for me.*

SCENE 5M-08**LOCATION: FIGHTER CRAFT *SOJOURN* - COCKPIT**

(Dovan materializes.)

DOVAN: Aaaaahhhh!

THE MAJOR: Captain, sir!

DOVAN: Not friends! They are not all friends!

THE MAJOR: Uh...

DOVAN: That was the Bringer! He was hanging out in a volcano! How did I not melt?

THE MAJOR: Sir, I'm sorry to interrupt, but...

DOVAN: Huh? Major? Where is-- Oh! Geez. I landed practically in your lap.

THE MAJOR: Sorry. There's not much room in these fighters, sir. If you could just...

DOVAN: Yeah, I'll just squeeze, uh...

(Dovan rustles and smushes himself into a corner.)

DOVAN: There. Much better. (pause) Okay, you're probably pretty confused about [where I came from...]

THE MAJOR: No need to explain, sir. Leftenant Lorhrok made a ship-wide announcement about your situation.

DOVAN: Ah, good. I'd better talk to him.

THE MAJOR: Opening hailing frequencies. (he opens hailing frequencies) (he unholsters his phaser sidearm) And here, take my phaser.

DOVAN: You think I need one?

THE MAJOR: I believe you just said you were inside a volcano with the Bringer? And it may be some time before you can get to the Bridge and grab the one under your chair.

DOVAN: You know about that? Who told you?

THE MAJOR: Why, I believe you did, sir, a few days before you crashed on Tulia.

DOVAN: Well, at least I didn't tell you about the one on the battle bridge. You have a good point, Major. Thanks.

(Dovan takes and holsters the phaser.)

LORHROK: *Excelsior here.*

THE MAJOR: Sir, I have Captain Dovan aboard.

LORHROK: *Finally. Welcome back, sir.*

DOVAN: For however long it lasts. What's our status?

LORHROK: *We made it to the nebula. Our sensors are useless. The Borg's...*

DOVAN: Alec.

LORHROK: *We think it's slowing their scans down. We've also gone to silent running, and Sylveste sent Vesant out with a dozen fighters spoofing our readings.*

DOVAN: How long?

LORHROK: *For anyone else, months. For the Borg? Days? Hours? Minutes?*

DOVAN: Listen, Alec. They want their ansible back. Give it to them.

LORHROK: *We can't do that, sir.*

DOVAN: That's an order. Don't worry about saving me, just [get our people out of there alive.]

LORHROK: *Sir, I meant that literally. We can't return it.*

DOVAN: What?

LORHROK: *There's a force field stronger than anything we've ever seen around the ansible. We can't touch or move it. Phasers, tractor beams, transporters... we even vented the bay. It won't budge.*

DOVAN: And that's the kind of technology the Borg are bringing to bear on us.

LORHROK: *But for the record, if I could return it, I still wouldn't until you were safe.*

DOVAN: You would do as ordered, Number One. But thanks. Okay, beam me back to the ship. We probably don't have long, but at least we can get me scanned.

LORHROK: Sorry, sir. We've been trying to get a transporter lock since you hailed us. Whatever's shielding the ansible is shielding you too.

DOVAN: Great. I wonder if there's time to [bring the *Sojourn* aboard.]

THE MAJOR: EVASIVE! (the fighter does a crazy maneuver) Can't dodge! BRACE FOR [IMPACT!]

(A HUGE Borg weapon hits the fighter. Damage is severe. By the time it ends, engines are down.)

LORHROK: *Sojourn! Report! Sojourn!*

THE MAJOR: *Sojourn* here, sir! We're alright! But the bird's dead, sir.

DOVAN: (coughing) What was that?

LORHROK: *The Borg have been firing randomly at intervals. If they hit something our size, the explosion will be easy to track. And they can keep it up a thousand times longer than we could. Major, Ajax is breaking off to tow you in.*

THE MAJOR: Sir, it's too risky! The Borg [might detect our flight path!]

LORHROK: *You have the captain on board, Major!*

DOVAN: Dammit! Lorhrok, forget me, put everyone to work on that ansible. The second you find a way to [return it to them, get rid of it!]

(Dovan is beamed away by the Transible.)

SCENE 5M-09**LOCATION: MEGASHIP TRIASSA ONE - THE PARK**

(Dovan materializes.)

DOVAN: Okay, here goes. (taps comm badge) Jump number seven. Looks like I'm on a planet again... in the middle of a huge field of grass. There are trees in the distance. Kinda nice, really.

BRAHMS: Captain Alcar Dovan. It's been a while.

DOVAN: Brahms! Where's my phaser?

BRAHMS: The last thing we expected from you was a house call, Dovan.

DOVAN: House call? So this is... wow, it's not what I pictured.

BRAHMS: What were you picturing?

DOVAN: I dunno. Machines. Weapons. King Arthur maybe.

BRAHMS: Why would you...?

DOVAN: You know. Avalon. I read mission reports.

BRAHMS: Our Scions don't actually live at Avalon, Dovan.

DOVAN: Of course not. Couldn't be that easy, could it? Okay, so what's this place?

BRAHMS: This is Triassa One, leader of the Scions in this galaxy. Scion ships have a... generous amount of internal space.

DOVAN: Well, at least there's lots of room for your ego.

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: I was about to say the same about yours, Bolian.

DOVAN: Really? He's still here?

BRAHMS: Let's not get distracted. You shouldn't have picked up that ansible, Dovan.

DOVAN: So you know what's happening to me!

BRAHMS: Of course. The ansibles belong to the Scions. They monitor all ansible activity across the galaxy. Right now, that activity is mostly... you.

DOVAN: Yeah? So where's my phaser?

BRAHMS: Anything you gain in one place is erased in your... transition to the next.

DOVAN: Fine, whatever. If the Scions can track me, can they stop me?

BRAHMS: Possibly. They're looking into it now.

DOVAN: Looking into it?!

BRAHMS: The Scions are cosmic powers, but they're not gods, Dovan. They have limits, and they also have rules.

DOVAN: You are the last person who can talk about rules!

BRAHMS: Am I? But don't worry, the Scions are very busy with this problem -- that's why Triassa isn't speaking through me right now. Whatever the Borg have done to this ansible is difficult for even them to understand, much less interfere with.

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: Those robots are a waste of life, a plague on the universe... but without question a worthy foe.

BRAHMS: In the meantime, I've been permitted to give you this. (A small gizmo materializes in Brahms's hand.) Wear it on your ear. It emits a psychic dampening field that suppresses extreme emotions.

DOVAN: Sounds like the hot new accessory for Vulcans, but how does it help me?

BRAHMS: This one is set to reduce surprise in particular. The people around you will find it natural that you're there, even if you've just appeared out of nowhere.

DOVAN: Oh! Yeah, that does sound handy. If nothing else, it'll save me a lot of long explanations. Or it would, if I could take it with me.

BRAHMS: You can.

DOVAN: But you just said anything I gain gets erased.

BRAHMS: It's Scion technology, Dovan. (pause) Now, then. The effect should linger for a while. With a little luck, your "visits" will be a dreamlike experience that fades from memory.

DOVAN: Based on the amount of hedging you did there, I have a feeling I'll still be answering a lot of letters when this is over.

BRAHMS: Perhaps.

DOVAN: At least now if I pop up behind Yubari, she won't break my spine on reflex.

BRAHMS: Were you worried about that?

DOVAN: We had a surprise party for her three days ago. Dr. Sharp is still treating two crewmen for concussion.

PSEUDO: How is the good doctor these days? Do tell her I said hello.

DOVAN: You son of a...

(Dovan is beamed away by the Transible.)

SCENE 5M-10**LOCATION: STARFLEET MEDICAL - HOSPITAL ROOM**

(Dovan materializes.)

(Dovan taps his commbadge a few times again.)

DOVAN: Jump eight. A hospital room.

AMASOV: Cadet, is that you? It's the middle of the damn [night!]

DOVAN: Is that...?

AMASOV: Turn around! Let me get a good look at you! (Dovan does so) Ensign Alcar Dovan! You know, another minute and I was going to put you on report!

DOVAN: Captain Amasov! My first C.O. out of the Academy!

AMASOV: Yes, and I'll be your last if you're late to night shift again. Take your station, Ensign. The *Endeavor* needs a good pilot at the helm.

9A wooden door opens and an Andorian CADET enters.)

CADET: Of course he starts hallucinating just when I'm- — [about to take my break] Oh, (he snaps to attention) excuse me, sir, Commander, sir!

DOVAN: Cadet. At ease, Cadet.

AMASOV: Get this infernal nuisance off my bridge, Ensign.

DOVAN: Why are we in a hospital?

CADET: Starfleet Medical, sir. Captain Amasov's Irumodic Syndrome is in the final stages, sir. Is this a test, sir?

DOVAN: He'd only just been diagnosed when I rejoined Starfleet. We need a few minutes, Cadet...

CADET: Cadet Ch'Rain, sir. It's after hours, but... I have some discretion, sir. Will five minutes be enough?

DOVAN: Should be fine, Cadet. Dismissed.

AMASOV: Your station, Ensign!

DOVAN: Aye, sir.

AMASOV: Ah, that's better. So what brings you up to the bridge in the middle of the night, Ensign Dovan?

DOVAN: As I recall, captain, wasn't that what I asked you when you'd come upstairs at oh-three-hundred?

AMASOV: But tonight, I was here first. So I get to ask.

DOVAN: You got me there, captain. It's a funny thing, actually. I'm being beamed around the galaxy. A few minutes ago, I was in the Delta Quadrant.

AMASOV: You're not getting away with one of your tall tales tonight, Bolian. What's on your mind?

DOVAN: No, really, captain. We discovered a piece of Borg technology and [it scanned me and shot me and I've been unstuck in space ever since.]

AMASOV: Borg! Borg technology! You're telling me a member of my crew has solved the Borg Transport Enigma?

DOVAN: The Borg Transport Enigma?

(Amasov pounds the desk next to him.)

AMASOV: The Borg Transport Enigma! Borg Queen's Cube blows up at Wolf Three Five Nine. She shows up again a few years later... and so do some poor souls who should've died on that cube. How?

DOVAN: They're Borg. Probably a wormhole, like an Iconian gate. Or one of those Sikarian portal thingies.

AMASOV: Pah! "Sikarian Trajectors!" That's what that idiot Gilhouly (gil-HOO-lee) kept telling me, too! Let me save you twenty-six hour-long meetings, Ensign: There were no Borg relays in range, no neutrino residue, and the Borg didn't even find Sikaris until ten years after the battle! Today? Maybe! Then? Not a chance! That was always Gil's problem: he thinks in three-dimensional terms. The Borg do not! And the Enigma remains. Try again!

DOVAN: Um, okay. Then maybe they just used a big transporter, beamed across the galaxy?

AMASOV: How you gonna beam across the galaxy? Data, sure, we can beam information at warp speed, maybe transwarp, far as you like. But what about the matter?

DOVAN: Right. The matter stream can't go faster than light. And you can't beam at all if you don't take the body apart and send it along with the pattern.

AMASOV: Unless you fancy getting killed everytime you step into a transporter so some clone can pop out the other end. Then we wouldn't need starships, we could just beam from planet to planet, using fresh matter at the destination to build a new body. If you ever want to make captain, Mister Dovan, you need to remember why things work.

DOVAN: So the Enigma is how can the Borg send a matter stream -- a person's body -- halfway across the galaxy without a wormhole? But if they figured out how to pipe matter into an ansible, [they could make it work.]

AMASOV: Eh? What are you talking about, Ensign? That Brentari dreadnought is still inbound!

DOVAN: I remember that mission.

AMASOV: Red alert! Shields up!

DOVAN: Captain? That's not what you did.

AMASOV: Ensign, you're relieved! Mister Tye! Shields! They're nearly in range!

DOVAN: Uh... raising shields. Phasers and quant--er, photon torpedoes. Range three hundred thousand kilometers. (pause) Awaiting your orders, captain.

AMASOV: Huh? You. I'm hungry. Get me some of that bloodworm garbage that passes for cuisine on this rock.

DOVAN: I'll see what I can do. I've always tried to be like you, Captain. You taught me what the soul of an explorer looked like. And, even like this, apparently you still know the Borg better than anyone.

AMASOV: Naturally, I studied up on the Borg after Wolf Three Five Nine. With the *Endeavor* all but destroyed, I had... wait. The *Endeavor* is gone. I made you leave for the *T'Kumbra*, Ensign. Then... where am I?

DOVAN: Starfleet Medical, Captain.

AMASOV: Ah. Then I'm no doubt feeling the aftereffects of some fantastic adventure on the final frontier?

DOVAN: Something like that, Captain.

(The door opens again and the Cadet returns.)

CADET: Excuse me, Commander?

AMASOV: Ah, this tyrant.

CADET: The captain really needs to get some sleep, sir.

AMASOV: He tasks me, Ensign! You task me, Cadet, and I won't stand for it!

DOVAN: It's alright, Captain. I'll see you... I'll see you next time.

(Dovan and the Cadet exit to the corridor, walking toward the exit.)

DOVAN: Is he usually that bad?

CADET: That was the best Captain Amasov has been in weeks, sir. Usually he's just raving and raging -- mostly at me.

DOVAN: How much time left on your rotation?

CADET: (sigh) Too long.

DOVAN: The Academy only requires three months here, Cadet.

CADET: Sir, of course, sir. It's just...

DOVAN: Speak freely, Cadet.

CADET: *Yes, sir. I'm glad Starfleet honors its veterans, sir, but that's not Captain Amasov anymore. It's a bag of flesh with a paranoid, rotting brain. There's so much I need to learn in four years, sir. Astrophysics, xenobiology, warp theory. Is Starfleet wise to make me spend three months of that time caring for him?*

(Dovan chuckles.)

CADET: Sir?

DOVAN: I think I gave my C.O. that exact speech twenty-three years ago. Probably didn't word it as well.

CADET: So you see my point, sir.

DOVAN: You know, the Klingon Academy teaches what they call "the way of the warrior." Warp theory, too, but their job is to make warriors, and it shows. The Bamarren Institute on Cardassia has a warp theory class, which they have to squeeze in between all the stuff about submitting to the State. Tholian warp theorists graduate with a big side order of xenophobia. And Starfleet Academy has this. They give you someone who's decaying. Probably hates you. Who has no utility whatsoever to you or anybody else. And they say, "Help him." I'd have been a better captain if they'd made me stay a year.

(Dovan is beamed away by the Transible.)

SCENE 5M-11**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR - NEEVA'S QUARTERS**

(Dovan materializes.)

DOVAN: Finally got to finish a sentence! (taps his commbadge) Jump nine. It's dark here... a cave?

NEEVA: Nnggh... who's there?

DOVAN: Oh! Neeva! Geez, sorry to wake you.

NEEVA: Not your fault. Computer, lights.

(Lights come on.)

DOVAN: (sigh) The Borg haven't caught you.

NEEVA: Not yet.

DOVAN: What's the plan when they penetrate the nebula?

NEEVA: The nebula? No, they found us in the nebula hours ago.

DOVAN: You escaped?

NEEVA: The, um... (pause) Not really.

DOVAN: What happened?

NEEVA: Renegade Squadron was... They were trying to... The Renegades bought us time.
(pause) We're in an asteroid. Sylveste found one big enough to hide us for a little while until we have a better plan.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: How many fighters made it back?

NEEVA: We... we think *Ajax* might have gotten out. She was out of position after dropping off *Sojourn*. That might have saved her.

DOVAN: Commander, there were a dozen fighters out there. (pause) Not even a distress call?

NEEVA: I'm not sure Alec would wake me if we got one. Sometimes he's too protective. You men just don't communicate.

DOVAN: Uh...

NEEVA: Sorry. I just want to be... But regulations say I need to sleep. So I sleep. Even if I keep dreaming of machines in the dark.

DOVAN: Sorry about waking you up. I'll go. I need... I need to end this. Now.

(He turns to go.)

NEEVA: Sir. (Dovan stops) I know Zat Vesant just asked you to officiate her marriage. We all know, if you could've taken her place, you would have. You would have for any of them.

DOVAN: But I couldn't. She still died. Jon Sylveste is still a widower before the wedding. My good intentions didn't make the slightest difference.

NEEVA: No, you're wrong.

DOVAN: I don't see how.

(Dovan is beamed away by the Transible.)

SCENE 5M-12**LOCATION: WARDROBE / CLOSET**

(Dovan materializes.)

DOVAN: Oh, great, where I am now? Some kind of... closet? Is that a dress? Where's the door control?

(He presses a button and the closet slides open.)

LOCATION: PRIVATE DINING ROOM

GUARD 5M-01: What the...

GUARD 5M-02: Halt! This a restricted area!

(Both Guards pull and power up their guns.)

GUARD 5M-01: In the name of the Yellow King! State your identity and purpose in the Royal Dining Room!

DOVAN: So I guess the gizmo explains away my appearing in a closet, but not my lack of security clearance? Where are we, anyway?

COX: Oh, guards, don't mind Gareoff. He's drunk again.

GUARD 5M-02: Gareoff? Councilor Gareoff?

COX: Of course! You haven't seen his new host body? Rather hideous, I admit, but even a Zero of Gareoff's influence could only hope for so much after how quickly he burned through the last one. But I can't recall, Gareoff, was it was the syphilis or the cirrhosis that killed her?

DOVAN: Uh... Skipper?

COX: See? Completely blotto. Leave us, guards. Gareoff and I have intrigues to discuss. I have quite enough food to share; no need to bother Steward about this.

GUARD 5M-02: Yes, my lady.

(Both guards click their heels together, salute, pivot, and walk out another door into a corridor.)

COX: Well, now you've done it, Captain. It's lucky for you this island's going to explode in an hour. I don't think your cover as "Councillor Gareoff" will hold up much longer than that. And then they're bound to start wondering whether I'm really the Yellow King.

DOVAN: Skipper, I thought you were in New Zealand.

COX: You knew I wasn't ready for paradise just yet. What about you? This is pretty deep into Zero space for somebody without Beetlejuice.

DOVAN: A Borgified ansible zapped me and now it's like I'm... unstuck in space. The Borg are after my crew and I can't help them. I just keep getting beamed to different people I know for a few minutes at a time.

COX: So you're bouncing pillar to post. You know, I should be surprised to see you here. I'm guessing I'm not because of that Scion gizmo 'round your ear?

DOVAN: How'd you know about that?

COX: Zarem was always trying different ways to make me be more, quote, "serene" in meetings.

DOVAN: Okay, and, just to be clear, did you say this island's going to explode?

COX: Yeah, but not for like an hour. I've gotta go in about twenty minutes.

DOVAN: Hopefully I'll be out of your hair long before that.

COX: Been anywhere interesting? Besides here, I mean.

DOVAN: At this point, I really don't give a pebble.

COX: What? Really?

DOVAN: Not while my crew's in danger.

COX: Oh.

DOVAN: What?

COX: It's just... aren't you the one always telling me about how much you love exploring and "seizing wonder from the stars" or something?

DOVAN: Sure, that's why I joined Starfleet.

COX: But every time you go exploring, you end up complaining to me about it the next day. You didn't love Mantua.

DOVAN: Doctor Sharp was almost executed.

COX: You spent an hour telling me what a rough time Leino was.

DOVAN: They were gonna blow up the moon!

COX: You were too grim to talk to for a week after The Bringer!

DOVAN: Of course I was grim! He was the literal Grim Reaper!

COX: All I'm saying is, you're doing something nobody's ever done before. Beaming across the galaxy in the blink of an eye. I thought you'd be happier now you're in your element. But, hey, I don't pretend to get it. All I ever wanted to do was get out of the stars and get home to Earth.

DOVAN: And I can see how much you loved getting there, Skipper.

COX: Ha! Yeah, (chuckles) damn straight. (exhale) I guess it turned out I couldn't just decide to be the person I wanted myself to be. Maybe someday I will. I hope so. (pause) What'd the Scions tell you?

DOVAN: They're working on it.

COX: You want my advice? Don't wait for them.

DOVAN: You don't think they'll come through?

COX: Oh, they'll come through. They always do. The question is how many of your people will be left by the time they do.

DOVAN: This gets better and better.

COX: Do me two favors, Dovan?

DOVAN: Two?

COX: First: stop whining.

DOVAN: What's the second?

COX: If the whiz kids on your ship figure out how to control this super-transporter of yours, I bet Starfleet's gonna whisk it away from you. If that happens, come see me first.

DOVAN: How come?

COX: Because just once... I'd really like to meet my grandchildren.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: (sigh) Sorry, Skipper.

COX

You wanted to get out among the stars, Captain? So get going.

(Dovan is beamed away by the Transible.)

COX: Not all of us can.

SCENE 5M-13**LOCATION: BORG CUBE**

(Dovan materializes.)

DOVAN: Jump number... oh. Oh no. (pause). Okay, the Borg only care if you're a threat. So I'll just keep my head down, find an unused alcove, and I'll be off this Borg Cube - Jehosephat - as soon as the [next beamout happens.]

BORG COLLECTIVE: *ALCAR DOVAN. CAPTAIN OF THE STARSHIP EXCELSIOR. REGISTRY NCC-2000-C.*

(Pause.)

DOVAN: ...Present?

BORG COLLECTIVE: *YOU WILL RETURN THE PANTOGRAPHIC TRANSLOCATION DEVICE.*

DOVAN: We will! We will. You just need to give us time.

BORG COLLECTIVE: *UNACCEPTABLE.*

DOVAN: We're shutting it down so we can get it off our ship. It's just taking [a while!]

BORG COLLECTIVE: *YOU WILL RETURN THE DEVICE IMMEDIATELY.*

DOVAN: Hey, don't take this out on us! You should've been more careful with the thing! Why chuck it across the quadrant if it's so important?

BORG COLLECTIVE: *THE LOSS OF THE DEVICE WAS INADVERTENT. THE VESSEL CARRYING IT DISINTEGRATED IN TRANSIT.*

DOVAN: Huh. Were you in a fight or does that just happen to you guys sometimes?

BORG COLLECTIVE: *YOU WILL RETURN THE DEVICE.*

DOVAN: We're working on it! Please be patient just a little while!

BORG COLLECTIVE: *UNNECESSARY.*

(A Borg scan up and down Dovan.)

BORG COLLECTIVE: *NADION TRACES DETECTED ON GARMENT.*

DOVAN: What? My garment?

BORG COLLECTIVE: *ANALYZING ASTEROID BELT.*

DOVAN: No!

(Dovan rushes to the window in time to see/hear a larger, exterior version of that scanner beam.)

DOVAN: They're not in this belt! It's a trick! Don't waste your time!

(The Borg computers beep.)

BORG COLLECTIVE: *NADION SOURCE IDENTIFIED. VESSEL LOCATED.*

(Dovan taps his commbadge)

DOVAN: Dovan to *Excelsior*! Run! Get out of there!

BORG COLLECTIVE: *RETREAT IS IRRELEVANT.*

(The Borg fire something and it instantly causes the entire asteroid to go up in a huge explosion.)

DOVAN: No! Nooooo!

BORG COLLECTIVE: *DEBRIS NOT DETECTED.*

DOVAN: There's... there's no debris?

BORG COLLECTIVE: *DEVICE NOT LOCATED. (pause) STARSHIP EXCELSIOR WILL BE APPREHENDED.*

DOVAN: Please! This isn't their fault! Just [give us time!]

(Dovan is beamed away by the Transible.)

BORG COLLECTIVE: *RESISTANCE IS FUTILE.*

SCENE 5M-14**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR - READY ROOM**

(Dovan materializes.)

DOVAN: Jump number thirty-five. Looks like [a ship, but who blacked out the windows?]

LORHROK: Captain! Finally!

DOVAN: X.O.! And somehow you kept the ready room in one piece.

LORHROK: For now.

DOVAN: I know. I've been trying to will myself back here, but I think instead I've seen everyone I've ever met who isn't on the *Excelsior*. Would you believe President Uhura still sings?

LORHROK: We've been worried about you. The Borg found us by scanning for the nadian signature from when you got beamed out... which they could only have gotten from you.

DOVAN: Yeah, sorry about that. What did you do to the asteroid?

LORHROK: Remember the skyfires on Tulia? The asteroid interior was packed with tetrazine, so we did the same thing. We took heavy damage, but [as you'll recall, the tetrazine explosions obscured our warp trail.]

DOVAN: --but the skyfires also hid our warp trail! That's why the Borg haven't caught up to us! Brilliant!

LORHROK: ...No, it only gave us a ten-minute head start. That ran out an hour ago.

DOVAN: Oh. Okay, so where are we now?

LORHROK: We're inside a star. That's why we blacked out the windows. We're using metaphasic shields to protect ourselves.

DOVAN: Why haven't the Borg followed us in?

LORHROK: Metaphasics is pretty tricky stuff, and its consumption curve scales geometrically with larger ships. Mounting it on a standard Borg Cube would be inefficient.

DOVAN: So their cubes don't have the technology. They can't follow us into the sun. (pause) Right, Number One...?

LORHROK: No, they can't.... But they're adapting. Their projection matrix is already taking shape.

DOVAN: How long?

LORHROK: Maybe an hour.

(Pause)

DOVAN: I don't suppose you have a phaser?

LORHROK: In the ready room? Why?

DOVAN: Never mind. Look, you need to evacuate. Separate the saucer section. If we can't get the ansible off the ship, we can get everyone else off.

LORHROK: (sigh) I'll give the order. When we make a run for it, we'll just have to hope all the cubes follow.

DOVAN: Wait. "All" the cubes?

LORHROK: There are five of them, Captain.

DOVAN: Five?!

LORHROK: Two of them are tactical cubes. Starfleet has never seen more than one in the same place.

(Dovan, exhaling, sits down, heavily.)

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Okay. There's still an hour. The Scions are working on [a solution.]

LORHROK: (punching the table) Dammit!

DOVAN: Whoa!

LORHROK: After all we've been through, is that what our survival comes down to? Hoping a higher power sees fit to step in and save us?

DOVAN: Calm down, Alecz. First of all, that's my table. Second... (pause) I really thought something would come to me when I started this sentence.

LORHROK: Sorry, sir.

DOVAN: Alecz, honestly, if you hadn't started shouting, I would have. Look, there's... there's something I've needed to do for a while now.

LORHROK: We should focus on the ans[ible, Alcar.]

DOVAN: It's an engineering problem. Either they'll figure it out in the time I have left or they won't, but I won't be any help. And I really don't have much time. I just... Here.

(We hear him quietly take a pip off his collar and hand it to Lorchrok.)

LORHROK: Sir, this pip belongs to you.

DOVAN: Not anymore. I've been waiting months for the paperwork to go through, brass keeps pushing it back on me because of "time-in-rank" or some idiot preoccupation, but their time just ran out. You're in acting command of the *Excelsior*, Alecz Lorchrok -- and you're doing exactly what Captain Cortez asked us to do. About time your rank reflected that... Lieutenant Commander.

LORHROK: Sir, this... you know I don't care about this. It's just metal.

DOVAN: That's how you earned it, kid. Your crew cares, though, whether they realize it or not. So use it, just like you use every other tool in your kit to get the job done. Get 'em out of here. You leave the ansible to the Borg and you run. The Renegades already gave their lives. Nobody else. Not today.

LORHROK: Sir...

DOVAN: Commander... have we lost anyone else? (pause) How many?

LORHROK: I'm not going to abandon you, Captain. We're going to [get you out of there alive.]

DOVAN: How many, Comman[der?!]

(Dovan is beamed away by the Transible.)

SCENE 5M-15**LOCATION: VALANDRIA - THRONE ROOM**

(Premier Beta-Na is in a vicious sword fight.)

(Dovan materializes.)

DOVAN: What the — ?

BETRA-NA: Dovan! Excellent timing!

DOVAN: Premier Beta-Na?

ASSASSIN #5M-01: You will die, Premier! In the name of all Clan Sssa! Yah!

BETRA-NA: Assist me, Dovan! These -- yaah! -- these assassins have come for my head! Take that sword!

DOVAN: The one on the wall?

ASSASSIN #5M-02: Kill the blue one! I've got the slithering Na!

BETRA-NA: Preferably before they behead you, Dovan!

DOVAN: Right! (he grabs the sword just in time to meet his opponent's blade) Hi-ya!

(They fight.)

ASSASSIN #5M-02: You will never win!

DOVAN: Hey, friend, how about we settle this with a nice game of Strategema instead?

ASSASSIN #5M-01: For honor's sake, blue-skin, I will let you live until you are backed into that corner.

DOVAN: Premier! I don't actually know how to use [this thing!]

(Betra-Na kills Assassin #2 who yells.)

BETRA-NA: Do not worry, Dovan. I only needed the distraction.

ASSASSIN #5M-01: The Sa will never rest 'til you are dead, Premier. You may have captured me, but I will tell you noth--

(Assassin #1 gets stabbed through the guts, gasps, whimpers, and dies)

BETRA-NA: Then I have no need of capturing you, Assassin.

(Dovan sighs.)

BETRA-NA: Such cowardice! Two assassins! Not at all a fair fight!

DOVAN: Wait, so one assassin would've been okay?

BETRA-NA: Is it not, in the Federation? Your leaders go unchallenged?

DOVAN: I mean, that's not the description I would choose...

(Betra-Na sheathes her sword.)

BETRA-NA: Good. Perhaps your assassins can teach ours something. Since the gods fell silent, Valandria has turned into a planet of pacifists and vegetarians!

DOVAN: Uh, pacifists, Premier?

BETRA-NA: Can you believe it's been over a year since the last challenge I faced? And they couldn't even fight with honor. Pacifism!

DOVAN: I guess that's a... relative term here.

BETRA-NA: No matter. You have come to my aid once again, Dovan, and wielding one of our great blades.

(Dovan swipes the sword around in the air.)

DOVAN: What I really need is the Major's phaser, not this ancient thing.

BETRA-NA: That "ancient thing" is the seal of my office, passed down through one dynasty after another. No male has ever held it. It is the Sword of Duh-MOCK-less.

DOVAN: Excuse me?

BETRA-NA: The Sword of Duh-MOCK-less.

(Pause)

DOVAN: So... I have an idea. Why not celebrate your conquest of your foes by, oh... smashing this thing into a million pieces?

(Pause.)

BETRA-NA: Did the assassin strike your skull, Dovan?

DOVAN: Really, I'd be happy to smash this Sword of Damocles for you. Into a million tiny. little. PIECES.

BETRA-NA: Return the sword. Now.

DOVAN: ...(sigh) yeah, okay.

(He puts the sword back on the wall.)

BETRA-NA: Strange. I am only now beginning to wonder how came you here. Did your lust for destroying artifacts bring you all this way?

DOVAN: It's a very long story, Premier. I'll tell you the whole thing later, when I can be sure I won't disappear halfway through it.

BETRA-NA: I do not enjoy being in your debt - or anyone's. Allow me to assist you.

DOVAN: Thanks, but I need to get back to my crew. They're in terrible danger.

BETA-NA: Oh, well, then, there is nothing to fear. You are in your element.

DOVAN: Excuse me?

BETRA-NA: Element. Do you not know that word? It is Eastern dialect [and fairly obscure.]

DOVAN: I know the word my translator turned it into. Go on.

BETRA-NA: Like any warrior, you thrive upon danger. You left no doubt of that mere moments ago.

DOVAN: I parried, like, two stabs! Barely! I'm just lucky it didn't take any longer for you to skewer the guy! I am not a warrior, Premier!

BETRA-NA: Nonsense. Was it not you who stood with me against the traitor Sorid-Gee? Did we not slay the very gods?

DOVAN: What I am is a Starfleet officer! Sometimes that means fighting, but most of the time it means exploring!

BETRA-NA: Hm.

DOVAN: Agh, this is what the Skipper was trying to tell me, too, isn't it? I guess you both think I really belong in a war zone killing bad guys!

BETRA-NA: This "Skipper" sounds insightful.

DOVAN: She's a pain and so are you!

BETRA-NA: Why this show of humility, Do van? You once spoke to me eloquently of the need to kill the Jemmadeer.

DOVAN: Jem'Hadar!

BETRA-NA: Yes, them. Would you call those the words of an explorer? Or of a warrior, called to defeat those who would bring chaos and suffering?

(Pause.)

DOVAN: ...I did say that, didn't I?

BETRA-NA: At some length.

DOVAN: I made things pretty easy for myself. Just kill the Jem'Hadar, as many as it takes. A solar system? Why not?

BETRA-NA: I do not know how to ease your troubles, Dovan. Your captain, Rachel Cortez, was a warrior. Naturally, you are a warrior as well. If you will not be one for yourself, be one for her.

DOVAN: Captain Cortez never tried to turn me into a warrior. Even if she'd wanted to, she didn't have time before we lost her.

BETRA-NA: It would be a poor general indeed who selected a first officer without already knowing who he was... and who he would become.

(Long silence.)

DOVAN: I'm not sure I understand what you're saying, Premier.

BETRA-NA: Rachel Cortez was not a fool. Indeed, I found her to be a very good judge of... character, Commander.

(Pause)

DOVAN: No. NO. That is NOT what she meant! That is NOT why she chose me!

BETRA-NA: Indeed? And what did she mean, then?

DOVAN: She-- I-- We weren't--!

(Dovan is beamed away by the Transible.)

SCENE 5M-16**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR - DOCTOR'S OFFICE**

(Dovan materializes.)

SHARP: Alcar!

DOVAN: Hi, Melissa.

SHARP: I'll get you some food. Alecz didn't think to ask if you'd had dinner.

DOVAN: No. Not until this is over.

SHARP: Oh, very noble. Also stupid. Starving yourself doesn't bring back the Renegade pilots; it just puts the rest of us in danger.

DOVAN: Are we still in the star?

SHARP: Alecz made his break ten minutes ago. The rest of us are waiting to make sure all the Borg cubes follow.

DOVAN: I take it he wasn't smart enough to send the damn thing out on autopilot?

SHARP: He said he knew you'd say that, and he said to tell you he's not giving up.

DOVAN: Figures. (sigh) I didn't want him sacrificing himself. Why wouldn't he listen?

SHARP: You realize that's exactly how he feels about your plan, right?

DOVAN: Yeah, but this is the captain's job.

SHARP: Even if that were true, which it's not, the ship needs the captain more than anyone else.

DOVAN: Yeah, Underwood told me the same thing once.

SHARP: Well, you should listen! You do this all the time.

DOVAN: I've tried to see it your way -- I really have. I just keep coming back to Captain Cortez. She died for this crew without hesitation. How can I expect less of myself?

SHARP: You've always glorified Rachel's death, but it wasn't some noble sacrifice, Alcar. She was collateral damage in an alien civil war.

DOVAN: No, that's not what I mean. I think she could've made it if she'd let herself heal. But she fought back -- gave us the information we needed before it was too late. She gave the Federation a chance... but it was just too much for her body.

SHARP: You're mythologizing it again. Rachel Cortez died of internal hemorrhaging and a shortage of t-negative blood. That's it.

DOVAN: (bitter laugh) Maybe you're right. Maybe this is just how a warrior like me sees things. (pause) You win. I'll have what you're having.

SHARP: TFK sandwich. Here. (she hands him a plate) Warrior?

DOVAN: Beta-Na thinks that's what I am. Sam Cox too. They say my real talent is for war, not peace. I'm starting to think I've been kidding myself.

(Pause.)

SHARP: And... are you?

DOVAN: Uh, Melissa, this is where you're supposed to reassure me I am a talented explorer who hates war.

SHARP: I don't doubt you hate it, Alcar, but aren't you pretty damn good at it? Even I'm impressed watching you in combat. Horrified, but... of course you won a hundred medals in the War! It's peace you don't know what to do with. You as The Great Explorer, it's like... ..it's like watching a dolphin try to play baseball.

DOVAN: I can change that!

SHARP: Isn't that what you've been trying to do for two years? How's that going for you? We are who we are, Alcar.

DOVAN: Only what my times made me. The Borg attacks, the... the Dominion War!

SHARP: My stomach was spilled open by a Jem'Hadar kar'takin on Starfleet Medical's front lawn. You weren't the only person who lived through the War. But look at me and then look in a mirror, Alcar. We didn't come through it the same. The things you've done... your legacy was never going to be a big treaty or voyage... or even some third-class nebula named after you.

DOVAN: Uh-huh. So what is my legacy, Melissa? The Battle of Betazed? Second Chin'toka?

SHARP: I'm sorry, Alcar.

DOVAN: What's my legacy?

SHARP: Gevinon.

DOVAN: No... No...

SHARP: What else, Alcar? There were six billion people down there, and you "saved" us from every one of them.

DOVAN: It was three billion.

SHARP: It was six. Three billion bluegills you assumed were all enemy combatants... and three billion hosts you assumed couldn't be helped.

DOVAN: Melissa, it was war. More than war: it was everything. It was the survival of all free peoples in the galaxy!

SHARP: A just society must go to any lengths? Is that it?

(Pause.)

DOVAN: There was no other way!

SHARP: You hate Brahms so much, but, when the time came, you piled up a higher body count than he ever dreamed of. And made the same tired excuses to justify it.

DOVAN: Brahms killed innocents!

SHARP: Exactly, Alcar.

DOVAN: No. No. No, Melissa. I did what I had to do, but those bluegill slavers and the walking corpses they lived in? That's not my "body count"! I'll tell you my body count! Cortez! Amara! Westlake! Rol! All the people on this crew who have died for Starfleet's mission! Died believing there are things in this life worth dying for! I know all their names, Melissa! Every one! And if I could, I would give my life for any of theirs! The captain's duty is to [do exactly that, every time, without a doubt in his mind!]

(Dovan is beamed away by the Transible.)

SCENE 5M-17**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR - BATTLE BRIDGE**

YUBARI: Sir, Engineering reports we're well past the red line, and the Borg are still gaining on us.

LORHROK: We just need to buy Kestra enough time to fix the ansible, Commander.

(Dovan materializes.)

YUBARI: She'd better be quick, then! The lead cube will intercept us in-- Captain!

DOVAN: The battle bridge. Finally.

LORHROK: Captain, you're [back!]

DOVAN: Number One, we're out of options, aren't we?

LORHROK: Engineering's trying a new theory, and the Scions [might still come through.]

DOVAN: Are too late. Hail the Borg.

LORHROK: What?

DOVAN: Hail them! Now!

YUBARI: Hailing frequencies open.

(Hailing frequencies beep)

DOVAN: This is Dovan. You get your shot at the ansible in ten seconds! Don't waste it! End hail!

(The channel closes.)

LORHROK: Sir, what are you planning?

DOVAN: I need my chair.

LORHROK: Of course, you're the captain.

DOVAN: Not to sit in it. I just need... this.

(He pulls something out from under the cushion.)

SYLVESTE: A phaser!

YUBARI: Captain, what are you doing?!

(He adjusts the power level on the phaser.)

DOVAN: The ansible, the forcefield, everything that's happening - it's all tied to my signature, isn't it? To my body? So if my body is vaporized...

(He charges it up.)

LORHROK: Alcar, put it down!

DOVAN: Sorry, Commander. You don't get to die for me today. Just this once... (exhale) ...it's finally my turn.

LORHROK: NO!

YUBARI: NO!

(Dovan fires! At the same time, the "transible" dematerialization effect starts. But it sounds different.)

(Dovan screams. Dovan's voice becomes distorted and slowed! The ansible effect, too, is repeating, trying to lock on and not quite getting him.)

LORHROK: Sir, you're... you're disintegrating!

YUBARI: Real slowly!

J'NAYA: *Bridge! The ansible shield dropped! The Borg beamed it out!*

(Sensor alerts at helm.)

SYLVESTE: The cubes are breaking off!

LORHROK: It worked! Captain, are you [okay?]

(All sound stops abruptly.)

SCENE 5M-18**LOCATION: A VOID**

(NB: These lines are all happening nearly simultaneously.)

DOVAN: (from 104-08) *You're in worse shape, sir! I'm getting you out of here first!*

DOVAN: (from 301) *Hit it. (302) Hit it! (303) Hit it! (305) Hit it. (309) Hit it. (405) Hit it! (4E) Hit it!*

DOVAN: (from 100-06) *Lieutenant Lorhrok, you'd better quick get on the Smile Shuttle.*

DOVAN: (from 104-08) *The only thing that matters is that your people stop dying. And the only way to do that... is to kill the Jem'Hadar.*

DOVAN: (from 203-04) *Captain... I'm sorry.*

DOVAN: (from 309-25) *I'm fine, Doctor. Killing a planet isn't the soul-destroying horror it's cracked up to be.*

DOVAN: (from 401-12) *You know full well I really did it for two bottles of Saurian Brandy.*

DOVAN: *My crew would follow me to Hell, but I'll be damned before I lead them there.*

DOVAN: *I need you back, Alecz. The galaxy needs you back. Not hiding in this million-watt construction simulator.*

DOVAN: *I just want something like a kind of peace.*

DOVAN: (whispering, repeatedly in background)

You are Captain Alcar Dovan of the Starship Excelsior.

You are Captain Alcar Dovan of the Starship Excelsior.

You are Captain Alcar Dovan of the Starship Excelsior.

You are Captain Alcar Dovan of the Starship Excelsior.

You are Captain Alcar Dovan of the Starship Excelsior!

SCENE 5M-19**LOCATION: VULCAN - LEO CORTEZ'S HOUSE**

(Dovan materializes.)

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Hello? Is the ship safe?

LEO: Alcar Dovan?

DOVAN: That's me. This... isn't what I was expecting.

LEO: Neither was I. You should have asked if I wanted to see you again.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: Leonardo Cortez. You're the captain's brother.

LEO: What brings you here... Captain?

DOVAN: I'm, uh... I'm traveling. Visiting some friends.

LEO: Friends. On Vulcan. And you consider me a member of that group.

(Pause.)

DOVAN: You know what? Yeah. Yeah, I'd like to talk a bit, if you have time.

(Pause.)

LEO: I suppose. Have a seat.

(They sit down.)

DOVAN: When I gave you the news, I kept things pretty short. I'm sorry about that. I found it very hard to talk about your sister and that mission.

LEO: Clearly. You hardly told me anything about it.

DOVAN: Well, unfortunately, most of the important parts are classified so high they don't have level numbers. But there's one thing I wasn't ready to tell you, because I wasn't sure of it myself yet. Her death mattered, Leonardo. It meant something. To me, to my crew, and believe it or not, to the whole galaxy.

LEO: ...I suppose that's good to know.

DOVAN: You know, she even has admirers on that lizard planet. I talked to one today.

LEO: Valandria, you mean.

DOVAN: Valandria. She told you she was going there?

LEO: She was sorry I couldn't come. I was always the reptile lover in the family. She was much more interested in birds.

DOVAN: Oh yeah? Too bad she missed out on the Tulians. We made contact with them under some pretty interesting circumstances a few months ago...

Dovan's line fades out, and the grandfather clock in the background fades up.)

(Time Passes.)

(The clock fades down and Leo fades up.)

LEO: She always had more trouble remembering names than she let on. She used to say she wished her Vulcan half would carry its weight a little more.

DOVAN: (laughs) You're right, she didn't let on. I never noticed.

LEO: Rachel wasn't perfect, but she was very good at making it look that way.

DOVAN: (sigh) I want you to know I've tried -- I've really tried to be the kind of captain she could be proud of.

LEO: I can tell... And I think... she would be.

DOVAN: I'm not so sure. I've done some things she definitely never would have.

LEO: She saw something in you, Captain. She gave you the "Character, Commander" speech?

DOVAN: How did you know?

LEO: (chuckling) Let's just say you weren't her first protégé to hear it. She meant what she said, though: she knew you were ready to become great, and she wanted to meet that best version of you. Not a clone of herself.

DOVAN: Tell me something. Beta-Na, the premier of Valandria, calls Captain Cortez a warrior. How would she feel about that?

(Pause.)

LEO: Hmm. She wouldn't love it. But coming from a warrior culture, I think she'd take it in the spirit it was meant.

DOVAN: But she'd rather be remembered as an explorer, right?

LEO: Hmm. Isn't a good captain both of those things? Is it necessary to choose?

DOVAN: Huh. Hadn't really thought of it that way before.

(Dovan is beamed away by the Transible.)

SCENE 5M-20**LOCATION: THE HARKLESS HOME - PACIFICA**

(We hear waves, seagulls, etc.)

(Dovan materializes.)

MRS. ROBERTA HARKLESS: Captain Dovan?

DOVAN: Yes? Sorry to intrude, it's usually someone I know. I'll just [be on my way.]

MRS. HARKLESS: I'm not sure whether to pour you a drink or kill you.

DOVAN: You could poison the drink. Do both.

MRS. HARKLESS: Come, sit down, it won't do for you to stand in the hall. I have a question I have needed to ask you for two years, and I never quite get up the nerve to write.

DOVAN: Sure, okay. This is a very nice house. Incredible view. The ocean on all five sides?

MRS. HARKLESS: Why didn't you save them both?

DOVAN: Both...

MRS. HARKLESS: You saved Timura. You saved him that day over Betazed, even though the radiation should have killed you. But Allan...

DOVAN: Allan.

MRS. HARKLESS: (openly crying) You were there! You were right there! I don't know what happened, they won't tell me, but they said you saw it happen. You saw his console explode. And.. they couldn't even bring a body home to me! You could have saved him, too!

DOVAN: Crewman Allan Harkless, Engineering Diagnostician First Class. (pause) I get it, ansible. I still don't know what you were up to before, but I know what you're up to now.

MRS. HARKLESS: What does that mean?

DOVAN: It means Harkless was a damn good kid. Do you have a few minutes?

MRS. HARKLESS: Why?

DOVAN: Because I want to tell you every single thing I remember about Crewman Harkless. About Allan. You deserve that. And, more importantly, (He sits) so does he.

SCENE 5M-21**LOCATION: VALERI HOUSE**

MRS. VALERI: Amerigo was so excited to be posted on a Sovereign-class ship. The top of the fleet!

DOVAN: Yeah, I caught him once just kinda staring googly-eyed at the map of the ship in Engineering. It's hard to get your head around that size.

MRS. VALERI: (laughs) That's him all over!

LOCATION: SOMEWHERE ELSE

BROTHER OF CPL. SHANNON EARNEST: I'm not saying Shannon didn't like you. She just didn't like your command style.

DOVAN: Eh. That's fair.

LOCATION: HUNTER HOUSE

WIFE OF RICK HUNTER: He died for nothing! It was supposed to be a routine diplomatic mission, and now he'll never see the face of his baby boy! There is nothing you can say to make that better!

DOVAN: No, there's not. Too many good people died that day, including Rick.

WIFE OF RICK HUNTER: ONE is too many!

DOVAN: Yeah. Yeah, you're right.

LOCATION: ANOTHER FAMILY HOUSE

FATHER OF FIGHTER PILOT: She had done a lot of station duty, but the *Excelsior* was her first starship. Her going out in one of those little fighters... we were always so nervous, always. But you know what? She never was.

DOVAN: Yeah, not that I ever saw.

FATHER OF FIGHTER PILOT: She was doing her part, she said. We... well, we chose that for her epitaph. I'm sorry, I probably shouldn't get into those things...

DOVAN: It's okay. You can tell me whatever comes to mind. I'm just here to listen.

SCENE 5M-22**LOCATION: MEGASHIP TRIASSA ONE - THE PARK**

(Dovan materializes.)

BRAHMS: Welcome back.

DOVAN: I didn't think I'd see you again.

BRAHMS: We should both be so lucky.

TRIASSA: The delay in solving this dilemma is regretted.

DOVAN: Triassa. So it was you. What did you do, exactly?

BRAHMS: The Scions had been trying for hours to modify their own ansible to lock on to you. When you vaporized yourself, it weakened the Borg ansible's lock on you enough for the Scions to finally break through.

DOVAN: So why did I keep traveling after that? You could have sent me straight back here... or to the *Excelsior*.

TRIASSA: It must be realized that the ansible modifications made by the Borg are not well-understood. It was not the Scions who had primary control.

DOVAN: Oh yeah? So why do I feel like they had their thumb on the scale for this last portion of my "travels"?

TRASSA: It is accepted that independent life forms will draw their own conclusions. But perhaps the reason for this final meeting is merely continuation, rather than explanation?

BRAHMS: Triassa, I told you, I don't want to talk about it. Not with him.

DOVAN: Huh?

BRAHMS: Ignore him. He's being deliberately obscure.

PSEUDO-ERMEZ: So don't be deliberately obtuse, Isaac. They're talking about Alex Rol, Captain.

DOVAN: Kestra told me she gave you the news....

BRAHMS: Then you also know I can hardly remember his face. His voice. Bad enough to lose my only friend's future; how much worse to lose his past as well. (pause) I just hope I said goodbye.

DOVAN: Brahms... (pause) I hope so, too.

TRASSA: And you, Dovan? Do you feel better, having said goodbye?

DOVAN: To Rol? I didn't get [the chance to say goodbye.]

BRAHMS: No, not to him.

DOVAN: Then what do you [mean?]

(Dovan is beamed away by the Transible.)

SCENE 5M-23**LOCATION: SHUTTLEBAY**

(Dovan materializes.)

DOVAN: Great. One last mystery.

J'NAYA: Captain! You're back!

(She hugs him.)

DOVAN: Whoa! Easy there!

J'NAYA: Kestra to Lorhrok! The captain's back on board!

LORHROK: *Thank the Maker! We weren't sure you were still alive, sir.*

DOVAN: For a few seconds there, Alecz, I was pretty sure I wasn't.

LORHROK: *This time we have to find a way to keep you [from transporting out again.]*

DOVAN: I don't think that'll be necessary. My gizmo's gone, which means the Scions don't think I need it anymore. Try to get a transporter lock on me. I'll hold still.

(Pause. Yubari works controls on the bridge.)

YUBARI: *It's working! I've got a lock!*

DOVAN: (long sigh) It's over, people. I'm home.

SCENE 5M-24**LOCATION: EXCELSIOR - READY ROOM**

SHARP: So what did the total number of jumps turn out to be?

DOVAN: Two hundred and ninety-one. And boy are my arms tired. (silence) That was a joke.

SHARP: Do you have any idea what Brahms meant? About saying goodbye?

DOVAN: Yeah, I think so. The thing is, I lost all these people, but I never mourned them. For a while, it was just because there were bigger things to worry about. But... did you know today makes two years since Gevinon?

SHARP: Alcar.

DOVAN: You're right, of course you knew, we've just been trying not to talk about it for two years. Gevinon was the first thing I thought about when I woke up. Then I spent all morning trying to push it away. It's a reflex, now. I'd had plenty of time, and I still hadn't done what I'd needed to do.

SHARP: Which is what, exactly?

DOVAN: I dunno, just... come to terms. Spend a little time with their memories... They deserve that, don't they? To be remembered for who they were, and not just for what I did to them?

SHARP: So what's your answer to Brahms's question? Do you feel better?

DOVAN: ...I do. And that's funny. Because I shouldn't.

SHARP: Why not?

DOVAN: Because when I got back, I took a look at the list of casualties we've suffered since Valandria.

SHARP: And?

DOVAN: I missed three.

(Sharp takes a deep breath)

DOVAN: What?

(Pause.)

SHARP: What I'm supposed to say is, "Nobody's perfect. You try. Harder than anyone could ask." And that would even be true.

DOVAN: But what are you actually gonna say?

SHARP: That you forgot six billion!

DOVAN: I don't know what I'm supposed to say to that.

SHARP: Then maybe you should listen! (pause) What if they'd surrendered, Alcar? What would you have done then?

DOVAN: They were never going to do that.

SHARP: Maybe not, but that's not the point. In that one universe in a million where Gevinon did surrender, you would have been up a creek. Because, for your plan to work, they all had to die! That's not war, it's only murder! You're a war captain because you made choices in war that you can't take back in peace. And you'll be waiting a lonnnnng time for another chance to fix that.

DOVAN: How long do you have in mind?

SHARP: Well, Odysseus spent twenty years getting home.

DOVAN: Who?

SHARP: For God's sake, Alcar! Your life revolves around the Sword of Damocles, and you never bothered to read any other Greek myths? Try it sometime, you'll learn something: Odysseus's sin was the same as yours, and the same as Brahms'.

DOVAN: From context, I'm guessing murder?

SHARP: No, hubris.

(Silence.)

SHARP: So... What now?

DOVAN: (deep breath) How about breakfast? Tomorrow morning, marine mess so we can use their deep fryer.

SHARP: And we pretend this never happened?

DOVAN: No... this was uh... Hm... I mean, I think we um... (pause) I thought... (pause) I thought I would hate you. When you finally told me that, I mean. I thought I'd hate you. It's why I never let you.

SHARP: I thought you'd hate me, too.

DOVAN: I don't.

SHARP: Then, we... Maybe we should let one hard truth sink in before we face the next one?

DOVAN: Bingo. That's what I was trying to say.

SHARP: You don't know Homer but you know bingo?

DOVAN: Fiorella's Pizzeria didn't have Homer Nights.

(She heads for the door.)

SHARP: See you tomorrow.

(She exits.)

SCENE 5M-25**LOCATION: SPACE**

SHARP: Chief Medical Officer's Log, supplemental. Mark medically privileged and encrypt, command lockout, authorization Sharp two four one ten. He hasn't guessed. Amasov practically told him -- would have, if he'd been more lucid that day -- but Alcar didn't get it. As God is my witness, I hope he never does. Ansibles transmit data, not matter. First thing Alecz said when he heard. So how could an ansible send a matter stream across the galaxy? Turns out... it can't. When it was over, we checked internal sensors. Whenever Alcar appeared, the overall mass in the room didn't increase, like a real transporter. The mass stayed the same. Alcar wasn't being transported. He was being vaporized... then rebuilt somewhere else from a blueprint. New matter, new body... new Alcar. That's why the Borg are able to do it -- they don't have some miraculous technological insight, they just don't give a damn. I don't know if Alcar would give a damn, either. He doesn't believe in anything as esoteric as a soul, so it could mean nothing to him... or it could mean everything. I don't want to find out. Physically, Alcar is exactly who he was before, right down to the DNA. He remembers all his jumps, so his consciousness must have made the journey -- unless he just remembers it that way. So does it make a difference? We have no evidence and can draw no conclusions. We can only hope. All I can say for sure is this: Alcar Dovan would have given his life for everyone who died on his watch. And maybe now he has.

END CREDITS