

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE

8x15 - "Haunted."

Screenplay by Martyn Dunn

Based on the novel

*Star Trek: Deep Space Nine
Mission Gamma Book 1 - Twilight*

by David R George III

TEASER

FADE IN:

1 EXT. VAHNI CITY - DAY

A medium sized alien CITY with peaceful, attractive and cultured constructions of metal and glass glinting in the clear day sun. A high MOON is still visible.

Green parks and pedestrian walkways are arranged roughly concentrically, all populated with the native aliens, the VAHNI VALTUPALI. The only sound is a gentle breeze in the trees - no voices or other ambient sounds.

ELIAS VAUGHN takes in this view from the top of a stone tower, about four storeys tall, at the centre of the city. Behind his professional demeanour, he is quite enchanted.

He turns to his companion, one of the Vahni, who is roughly humanoid. Its head has no face as such - completely smooth and featureless apart from a full ring of small protruding nubs at eye-level - the alien's sensory organs.

Its arms are flexible and tentacle-like, and its unclothed flesh from head to toe is constantly shifting in complex patterns of colour - this is how they communicate.

VAUGHN

Your world is truly beautiful.

Stretched across his chest, a fine mesh of tiny LIGHTS flash in complex patterns, translating for the Vahni.

The alien, VENTU, responds with patterns of its own - streaks and swirls of orange-yellow ripple across its chest on a slowly drifting red-and-blue background. A small metal BOX attached at Vaughn's hip translates aloud.

TRANSLATOR

Life is a beauteous thing.

VAUGHN

My crew and I have very much enjoyed our stay here. We thank you for your hospitality.

More rippling colours back and forth between the two.

TRANSLATOR

We are -
 (buzzing sound -
 untranslatable).
Your people are friendly and we
welcome you to our world always.

The Vahni bends lithely at the middle and loops the end of one tentacle around the handle of a cloth bag at its feet. Straightening, it rummages and brings out a crinkly palm-sized ball of silver material, handing it to Vaughn.

VAUGHN

What is it?

Colours back and forth again.

TRANSLATOR

It is a remembrance for you of the
Vahni Valtupali.

The Vahni reaches out and gently touches the object, which slowly unravels and unfolds itself into a 3D model of the city, about a foot square, with the tower in the centre.

VAUGHN

This is wonderful. Thank you.

TRANSLATOR

To have a new friend is wonderful.
You are welcome.

BOWERS (o.s.)

Commander!

Vaughn turns to see Lt BOWERS and Ens RONESS, accompanied by a Vahni of a mostly bright blue colour, appearing from a stairway. Both the humans are wide-eyed with excitement; they also have translation meshes across their uniforms.

Vaughn bows slightly to the new Vahni, BRESTOL - it returns the gesture.

BOWERS

Brestol just took us on a tour of their natural history museum. Have you seen it?

VAUGHN

No, I'm afraid I haven't had time.
(gesturing
around)
Ventu has been showing me the view of the city.

BOWERS

It's truly amazing, sir. The evolutionary chain on this planet - I'm no biologist, but I've never seen anything like it.

RONESS

I think we're going to have to perform an emergency transport to get T'rb out of there.

Vaughn smiles at their infectious youthful enthusiasm.

VAUGHN

I assume you two are headed back to the ship?

BOWERS

(a bit nervous)
Actually sir, we were hoping we might stay on the surface a bit longer.

Vaughn turns to Ventu, who ripples with colours again.

TRANSLATOR

We welcome your people any time.

Vaughn turns back to Bowers and Roness with an indulgent smile.

VAUGHN

Check the duty roster with Lieutenant Dax. If she can spare

you, then you can stay. No matter what though, I want everyone back aboard ship in two hours. We've got a schedule to keep to.

BOWERS

Thank you sir.

They head back the way they came - their Vahni companion Brestol stays. Vaughn turns back to Ventu.

VAUGHN

Thank you again for this. I hope to see you again someday.

TRANSLATOR

Again, you are welcome.

VAUGHN

(taps combadge)

Vaughn to -

Suddenly, a huge BOOM and simultaneous earthquake SHAKE the entire scene. The stone tower shakes and begins to crumble, throwing Vaughn, Ventu and Brestol to the floor, where Vaughn hits his head.

The city below is thrown into a panic as vehicles CRASH, buildings CRUMPLE and power lines EXPLODE. As the shaking continues, Vaughn struggles back to his feet.

Ventu lies with its tentacles curled around itself and swirling patterns of white circles covering its body. Vaughn feels to make sure his translation system is intact.

VAUGHN

You have to get up!

Ventu does not reply, just continues the white patterns, which apparently do not translate beyond the buzzing "untranslatable" noise.

Vaughn grabs the alien's tentacle and helps it up, supports it over to the stairway, the building still shaking and crumbling violently around them.

Ventu reaches up and touches Vaughn's head gently - a ripple of colours extend back down its tentacle. Vaughn touches the same place and realises he is bleeding.

Vaughn sees the body of the other Vahni, Brestol - its chest bashed in with a lump of stone, its flesh a dull uniform grey. He realises with sadness that it is dead.

Shadows fall across Vaughn, darkening the previously bright day. Ventu's flesh explodes in ever more frenetic patterns of white - it is terrified of something. Vaughn looks up.

Thousands of meteorites and rocks are hurtling down through the atmosphere towards the surface. The moon has exploded and shattered, and is about to hit the planet.

BLACK OUT:

END OF TEASER

ACT ONE

FADE IN:

2 EXT. VAHNI PLANET - GARDEN - DAY

An enormous crowd of Vahni stand in concentric circles around a raised platform in one of the green park areas, performing a silent ceremony of movement and colour. This is a mass remembrance event, a funeral.

A large contingent of *Defiant* crew stand with them in full dress uniform, translator devices attached. Vaughn stands at attention, angry at the loss, at the lack of explanation for it. The silence of the Vahni around him is unnerving.

 VAUGHN (v.o.)
 Captain's log, stardate 53312.2,
 Elias Vaughn recording. More than
 three-thousand Vahni Valtupali
 died in the quakes.

3 INT. DEFIANT - MAIN BRIDGE

EZRI DAX sits in the centre chair, staring open-mouthed at the view on the screen - what used to be the Vahni moon, now a shattered collection of rocks. SHAR, NOG and TENMEI are at their stations, also stunned.

 VAUGHN (v.o.)
 Ensign ch'Thane and his team
 identified the culprit as an
 unknown energy pulse passing
 through the system at warp. It
 destroyed the Vahni moon and sent
 it plummeting towards the planet.

 DAX
 Shar, I need you to track the
 courses of the biggest pieces.
 Anything that could cause damage
 to the planet.

 SHAR
 Yes sir.

4 **EXT. SPACE - VAHNI ORBIT**

The *Defiant* and its two small shuttles, *Sagan* and *Chaffee*, dive into the rock field, firing wide-beam phasers on the larger pieces, breaking them into smaller pieces.

VAUGHN (v.o.)

The *Defiant* and its crew did everything they could to stop the meteorites. It wasn't enough.

5 **EXT. VAHNI PLANET - GARDEN - DAY**

On the central platform, one Vahni begins to "speak," the colours rippling across all sides of its body so the whole crowd can see. The *Defiant* crew's translators speak aloud.

TRANSLATOR

My -

(buzz, untranslatable)

- Vahni Valtupali, and our honoured friends from the United Group of Planets, we would like to share our grief through a rite of
- (buzz, untranslatable).

The lead Vahni's body turns a deep indigo blue. Beginning from the centre of the circle and spreading out, all the other Vahni's bodies turn the same colour. The crew's translators are silent as they observe.

6 **EXT. SPACE - VAHNI ORBIT**

Meteorites begin to hit the planet's atmosphere, making it light up in FLARES of fire. Nearby, shuttle *Sagan* fights through the debris field, pieces bouncing off the hull.

VAUGHN (v.o.)

Ventu tells me the Vahni have been suffering events like this for more than two centuries, each one more violent than the last.

7 **INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT**

Dax is handling phasers while Ens RONESS (last seen 8x14 "Twilight") pilots, both struggling but maintaining grace under fire. They engage in banter to offset their worries.

RONESS

You know what I could do with
right now? A big fat jumja stick.

DAX

Eww! How can you eat those things?
They're so sweet and sticky.

RONESS

It's a natural sweetness.

8 EXT. SPACE - VAHNI ORBIT

As *Sagan* fights upstream against the rocks, a large meteor
SLAMS into the ship.

9 INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT

Roness and Dax are thrown out of their seats and HIT the
bulkheads hard.

VAUGHN (v.o.)

We lost Ensign Gerda Roness.

10 EXT. VAHNI PLANET - GARDEN - DAY

As the Vahni's moment of darkness continues, Dax looks on,
barely holding in the tears.

VAUGHN (v.o.)

But I think Lieutenant Dax has
been hit hardest of all.

11 INT. DEFIANT - DAX'S QUARTERS

In their small, shared room, Dax shudders in tears as
BASHIR tries his best to hold her and comfort her.

VAUGHN (v.o.)

Barely two weeks into her first
official mission as exec, and

she's having to deal with losing
an officer under her command.

12 **INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE**

At his bridge science station, Shar expositis MOS to Vaughn and Dax while pointing to a screen GRAPHIC, which shows the Vahni planet, the moon, and the energy pulse coming in.

VAUGHN (v.o.)

If the Vahni moon hadn't been in
its way, the pulse would have hit
the planet directly, and a lot
more than three-thousand people
would have died.

13 **EXT. VAHNI PLANET - GARDEN - DAY**

The Vahni's moment of darkness:

VAUGHN (v.o.)

There's every reason to believe
another pulse will hit the system
soon. And when it does, the Vahni
civilisation will be destroyed.

The central Vahni raises its tentacles high, then brings them down sharply, and the entire crowd EXPLODES in a panoply of swirling, dynamic colours, seemingly at random.

Vaughn and the *Defiant* crew watch the remarkable visual display, tears in their eyes from the sadness, amazement at the breathtaking bursts of beauty amongst it.

VAUGHN (v.o.)

And I will not allow these
beautiful, remarkable people to
suffer any more.

14 **EXT. SPACE - DEFIANT**

The *Defiant* zooms through space at warp.

15 **INT. DEFIANT - CORRIDOR**

Dax walks down the corridor, schooling her face to cover the sadness and uncertainty. By the time she reaches the door to the bridge, she has got it under control.

16 **INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE**

Dax ENTERS the bridge and sees the same sight that Vaughn is staring at on the main viewscreen - a planetary system that has been blown to pieces. Only the star and one solitary planet remain whole. The rest is rubble.

SHAR

It's the same energy readings we detected in the Vahni system.

VAUGHN

Any life signs? Or any indication of habitable atmosphere?

SHAR

I can't tell. The energy is interfering with the sensors.

VAUGHN

Shields up. Tenmei, take us in.

TENMEI

Aye sir.

VAUGHN

Ensign ch'Thane, prepare a class three probe.

17 **EXT. SPACE - DEFIANT**

As the *Defiant* approaches the planet, which appears a dull uniform grey, a PROBE launches from the ship and flies down into the atmosphere.

18 **INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE**

Vaughn and Dax stand and watch the main screen. It shows a complex of deserted BUILDINGS, more basic and industrial than the Vahni ones. The SKY above them is overcast and grey, a dense mass of roiling, low-hanging clouds.

Roughly at the centre of the complex, the buildings have been blown apart, leaving a central PIT which contains more of the clouds. Vaughn walks over to Nog at the engineering console, where he has the same image up on his screen.

NOG

This is where we believe the pulse originated, sir. Interference from the energy prevented the sensors from picking up anything around the complex beyond visual.

VAUGHN

Can you tell if the energy is a natural phenomenon, or artificial?

Nog looks to Shar, who looks back uncertainly. Neither likes admitting defeat to their commander.

SHAR

No, sir. Parts of the buildings appear to have collapsed, which could indicate a natural phenomenon the builders didn't expect. Or it could have been an energy production facility that they somehow lost control of.

DAX

Either way, this must be what destroyed the civilisation here.

NOG

Actually, we're not sure about that. Scans show the rest of the planet to be perfectly habitable. And the pulse appears to have propagated up and out from the complex, not along the surface.

VAUGHN

But the planet is devoid of life.

NOG

Yes, sir. We're just not sure why.

SHAR

There's something else, sir. We've been able to measure the rate of increase of the energy at the centre of the complex. If it continues at its current rate, it will soon match the power of the pulse that hit the Vahni system.

NOG

Meaning another pulse will launch.

VAUGHN

How long?

NOG

Three and a half days.

19 INT. DEFIANT - SHUTTLEBAY

A small room, barely big enough to fit the two tiny shuttlecraft. The *Sagan* is undergoing repairs by extras. The hatch of the *Chaffee* is open, and Vaughn stands by it with a padd, talking to Dax.

VAUGHN

If we're not back in eighty hours, I want you to get *Defiant* out of here. Not a minute later. If we can't save the Vahni, at least save the crew. In the meantime, keep Nog focused on defeating the pulse in space. If we can't stop it on the planet, we may be able to deal with it up here.

DAX

Good luck, Captain.

VAUGHN

And to you, Lieutenant. I know I'm leaving the ship in good hands. Dismissed.

Dax nods and EXITS. As the door opens, she crosses paths with Bashir. They smile, and Bashir touches Dax's arm in

reassurance, then Dax carries on her way. Bashir makes sure the door is closed, then carefully approaches Vaughn.

BASHIR

Sir? I need to talk to you.

VAUGHN

Make it quick, Doctor. Time is a factor here.

BASHIR

I'm wondering if you're the right person to go on this mission.

VAUGHN

I beg your pardon?

BASHIR

You're the senior officer on the ship, you shouldn't be going on dangerous away missions.

VAUGHN

Since when are you my XO?

(inspects him)

But this isn't about me, is it?
This is about me leaving
Lieutenant Dax in command.

BASHIR

I'm concerned about Dax, I won't deny that. After what she's been through, I'd say it's a legitimate concern.

VAUGHN

You're right, it is. And that's why I took it into account when I made my decision.

BASHIR

With all due respect sir, she may seem alright when she's on duty, but in our quarters -

VAUGHN

Don't say it.

BASHIR

But sir -

VAUGHN

I don't want to know. I like Lieutenant Dax. I suppose we've even become friends in a way I never was with Curzon. But I'm also her commanding officer, and what I see from her professionally is that she has worked through the loss of Ensign Roness.

BASHIR

What I'm suggesting is that she hasn't actually worked it through as well as you think she has.

VAUGHN

But that's my point. In her job as first officer of this ship, she's behaved perfectly well. Whatever emotional issues she's dealing with, she hasn't brought them to work with her.

Bashir sags, accepting defeat for now.

VAUGHN

I understand that you want to protect her, Doctor. That's not a wrong or bad point of view. I can even sympathise. But I can't let it influence my command decisions.

(pointedly)

Carry on, Doctor.

Bashir realises he is dismissed, and reluctantly leaves. Vaughn climbs into the shuttle and the hatch closes.

20 **EXT. CLOUDS**

An almost tubular channel through the clouds, which the shuttle *Chaffee* flies through, buffeted by the winds.

21 **INT. SHUTTLE CHAFFEE - COCKPIT**

Tenmei is concentrating hard on her piloting. Shar sits beside her, working on his panels. Vaughn sits in the back.

SHAR

Energy readings around us are rising. The clouds are shifting.

TENMEI

As long as the shields stay intact, we can get through anything. Hold on!

Vaughn and Shar grab on to the arms of their seats just in time for Prynn to pull the shuttle into a big SWING to port, as the winds and clouds pound against the shuttle.

After a few more moments of shaking, the shuttle emerges out from under the cloud cover and near to the surface, the ride calming considerably. Vaughn checks a panel nearby.

VAUGHN

Engine power is down nine percent.

TENMEI

Not bad, for the pounding we took.

VAUGHN

Well done, both of you.

Vaughn unstraps himself, stands up, steps between the two forward seats, and looks up through the front windows.

22 **EXT. SHUTTLE CHAFFEE**

The shuttle flies over the dead landscape, underneath the unbroken grey clouds that fill the sky, leaving the planet in dull half-light. It is a plain yet daunting sight.

23 **INT. SHUTTLE CHAFFEE - COCKPIT**

Shar unstraps and heads to the cramped rear section, while Vaughn takes his seat next to Prynn. As he does, he catches sight of an indistinct dark shape moving outside the ship.

VAUGHN

What was -

A loud ringing THUD as the shuttle is hit by something. Shar rushes to a rear console to check.

SHAR

We've been hit by an energy discharge from the clouds. Engine power is down thirteen percent.

TENMEI

I'm taking us down.

24 EXT. SHUTTLE CHAFFEE

The shuttle dips down away from the clouds and nearer to the surface. A swirling FINGER of cloud forms out of the cover and reaches down, touching the shuttle with a BANG.

25 INT. SHUTTLE CHAFFEE - COCKPIT

Panels and lights go dead. The NOISE increases dramatically and Vaughn looks up to see the hull has been breached. Wind SCREAMS in, and a tiny sliver of CLOUD pokes through the hole, trying to reach for the crew. The cloud is suddenly yanked back out as *Chaffee* swerves to the side and away.

26 EXT. SHUTTLE CHAFFEE

In retaliation, the finger of cloud seems to gather itself, and then HITS out harder than ever at the shuttle.

The ship buckles and crumples under the force of the attack, plummeting to the ground in a nasty CRASH.

BLACK OUT:

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

Flickering FLAMES... bringing us gradually into...

27 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - DAY

The wreckage of the shuttle sits burning and smoking in two separate pieces, a few dozens metres apart.

In the front section, Vaughn lies bloodied and bruised on his back against a broken piece of bulkhead. He opens his eyes and struggles to orient himself. Nearby, a broken chair topples aside and a hand reaches out from underneath.

VAUGHN
(barely audible)
Prynn...
(cough; clearer)
Prynn!

TENMEI
(muffled by wreckage)
I'm here. I'm stuck.

VAUGHN
Hold on, I'm coming.

He drags himself upright, grimacing at the aches and pains of his old and battered body, and gingerly works his way over to Prynn. He hawks and spits - there is blood in it.

Getting to Prynn, he sees a large piece of debris pinning down her arm. He braces himself to haul it aside and helps her to struggle out. There is a big cut on her head and one eye is completely bloodshot.

VAUGHN
Are you alright? Can you see?

TENMEI
I'm okay.

She puts a hand to her head, comes away with red fingers.

VAUGHN

You've got a deep cut there.

TENMEI

You've got quite a few yourself.
We need to find a medkit.

VAUGHN

We need to find Ensign ch'Thane.

TENMEI

Oh no, Shar!

They both get up and begin to urgently scan the area around them. There is no sign of him anywhere nearby.

Then they look over to the rear section of the shuttle. It is further away, burning fiercely, a big black column of SMOKE rising. Prynn quickly clambers towards it. Vaughn grabs a fire canister and follows her.

Prynn can't get close because of the roaring flames. Vaughn catches up, searching for some way through the fire.

Through the flames, Vaughn spots a flash of blue Andorian skin - Shar's unconscious body. He has actually been thrown clear of the flames, but is injured - left arm bent at an unnatural angle, right leg torn and bleeding blue blood.

Vaughn drops the fire canister and rushes up to Shar, crouching down by his side and feeling for a pulse. Prynn starts to approach, a bit dazed, shock setting in.

TENMEI

What is it? Is he alright?

VAUGHN

Stop.

She stops dead, confused by his firm tone.

VAUGHN

Stay right there and listen to me.
Ensign ch'Thane is alright, but
I'm going to need your help to
keep him that way. Go back to the

fore section and find a tricorder
and a medkit. I'll also need
something to use as a splint. Go.

The firm orders have the desired effect on her. She turns
and runs back the other way.

Vaughn pulls off his uniform jacket and tears a strip off
the arm. Gently lifting Shar's broken leg, he slips the
strip of fabric underneath and ties it in a tourniquet.

VAUGHN

We're getting you help, Shar.
Don't die on me now.

28 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - DUSK

Some time later. Vaughn stands near the crash site, huddled
into his warm field coat (seen in 8x08 "Abyss") and staring
balefully up at the ominous and complete cloud cover.

He walks a small distance over to a makeshift camp area
they have built from Starfleet survival kits and salvaged
shuttle parts. Within, Prynn sadly tends to the unconscious
Shar as best she can.

TENMEI

He's the same.
(wipes away tears)
Sorry. It's just... we were
friends. Well, becoming friends,
anyway.

He sees that she needs to be distracted, so he goes back to
business. She happily accepts the distraction.

VAUGHN

I'm surprised we're not dead. How
did you get us down?

TENMEI

It's an old shuttle pilot's trick.
There are certain manoeuvres you
can make with a crippled shuttle.
In the end it was the anti-gravs
that saved us.

VAUGHN

Anti-gravs don't work at speed.

TENMEI

We decelerated as we broke apart. I used the emergency thrusters to brake us even more. Then I overcharged the anti-gravs. It's a split-second timing thing.

VAUGHN

You really are an exceptional pilot, Ensign.

(beat)

We need to discuss what we're going to do.

TENMEI

I scanned the wreckage, and it might be possible to scrounge enough components to repair the transporter.

VAUGHN

If you can make it work in time to make a difference, then yes, you should try it. In the meantime, I'm going to try to reach the energy complex on foot.

TENMEI

It's got to be two-hundred kilometres at least. You'll never make it in time, even under the best conditions.

VAUGHN

If you can transport yourself closer to the pulse to help me, then do so. Otherwise, get yourself and Ensign ch'Thane as far away as possible.

TENMEI

Alright.

VAUGHN

I just need to gather some provisions and I'll be off.

He reaches down, starts picking up things, putting them in a Starfleet emergency backpack. Prynn stays blank, not showing any emotion as he gathers his stuff.

Finally he is ready, and they look at each other awkwardly.

VAUGHN

I'm not sure how long we'll be able to communicate.

TENMEI

I understand. Good luck.

VAUGHN

You too, Prynn.

He turns, checks his tricorder for readings, and walks away without looking back. He has a mission. Prynn watches him go, not showing any emotion.

CROSS FADE to:

29 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - DUSK

Vaughn walks alone, carrying his backpack. He is walking on barren land, through an intact but deserted settlement - a ghost town. He taps his combadge.

VAUGHN

Vaughn to Tenmei.

(long pause)

Vaughn to Tenmei.

A longer pause - has something happened to her? Finally, to Vaughn's relief, a static-filled signal comes through.

TENMEI (comm)

This... Tenmei... can... me?

VAUGHN

Just barely. Are you alright?

TENMEI (comm)
...fine... Shar's vitals are
improv-... some success... -
porter... -ther day...

The signal dissolves into static.

VAUGHN
Vaughn to Tenmei. Vaughn to
Tenmei.

There is no response. Sadly he accepts that his daughter is gone, and he carries on walking.

30 EXT. SPACE - DEFIANT

In orbit of the grey planet.

DAX (v.o.)
You don't sound particularly happy
about this plan, Nog.

31 INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE

Dax stands by the engineering console as Nog demonstrates. One screen shows lines of data, another a GRAPHIC of the planet, the *Defiant* in orbit and the pulse leaving the surface. They both look exhausted, sporting dark circles.

NOG
I'm not. Even if we can make these
modifications work, in the best
case scenario the deflector will
be destroyed and the warp drive
might overload.

DAX
We've still got two days. See if
you can get us something with
better odds. But make sure you get
to bed soon. You're not going to
solve anything if you're falling
asleep on the job.

NOG

Only if you promise to join me,
Lieutenant.

Dax raises her eyebrows in surprise. Nog suddenly realises
with horror what he just said.

NOG (cont)
Oh... no... I meant -

DAX
(chuckles)
It's alright Nog, I know exactly
what you meant. Go on, now.

Suddenly the ship ROCKS slightly. Everyone looks a little
perturbed.

DAX
Report. What just happened?

BOWERS
Hull breach, deck five. It's only
a few centimetres, forcefields are
holding. Main engineering is
reporting power losses though.

DAX
Nog, let's go. Bowers, you have
the bridge.

BOWERS
Aye sir.

Nog and Dax leave the room as Bowers moves to the centre
chair and a random ensign takes over his station.

32 INT. DEFIANT - JEFFRIES TUBE

Julian Bashir crawls along the access tube, carrying a
tricorder and medical kit. Turning a corner, he finds Dax
and Nog at an open panel. He crawls closer.

BASHIR
Lieutenant? What's going on?

DAX

Power disruption in engineering.
This appears to be the reason.

Bashir looks into the open panel, doesn't see anything at first. Then he notices a greyish substance pooled inside the panel, a similar colour to the metal. It is the cloud material. He starts scanning the substance.

BASHIR
These energy readings...

NOG
Yep, they match the energy of the pulse. And of the clouds surrounding the planet.

BASHIR
This thing broke off from the clouds, ate through the shields and the hull, then crawled here?

NOG
We've seen stranger things.

BASHIR
I'm not reading anything to suggest this object is alive.

DAX
I want you to study it to be sure, Doctor.

BASHIR
Alright.

With a dubious look, he taps his combadge.

BASHIR
Bashir to Richter. Please prepare a level one medical containment field, I'm going to be beaming a sample to you in a moment.

RICHTER (comm)
Yes, Doctor.

BASHIR

Bashir to Chao. Please transport
the foreign substance at my
current position directly to
sickbay.

CHAO (comm)

Aye sir.

The TRANSPORTER effect starts to form over the piece of
cloud, but suddenly, without seeming to move at all, the
cloud is no longer there. Now it is sitting out on the
floor of the Jeffries tube, half-covering Lt Dax's hand.

Dax GRUNTS like she has been punched in the gut, and
collapses unconscious to the deck.

BASHIR

Ezri! Ezri!

33 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

Prynn Tenmei jerks awake, sweating and breathing hard.

TENMEI

Dad!

She tries to get her bearings, looks around. They are still
in the small shelter area, under the endless low-hanging
grey clouds, and now night has fallen.

SHAR (o.s.)

(croaking)

Ensign?

With a gasp, Prynn moves over to check on the Andorian, who
is lying in his makeshift bandages on a bedroll.

TENMEI

Shar, you're awake!

SHAR

Your eye...

TENMEI

It looks worse than it is.

SHAR

What happened to us? Where is
Commander Vaughn?

TENMEI

(dismissively)

He's fine. He's trying to get to
the pulse site on foot.

SHAR

(empty)

If Commander Vaughn can't stop the
pulse, then we're going to die.

TENMEI

Shar, I'm working on repairing the
transporter. And even if that
doesn't work, the *Sagan* will be
repaired soon and Lieutenant Dax
will send it down to rescue us.

Shar struggles to bring himself up onto his good elbow. He
stares out at the landscape, his jaw working tensely.

SHAR

Zhavey.

TENMEI

What?

SHAR

My mother. Some part of her... she
made this worse.

TENMEI

I don't understand.

SHAR

Just before we left Deep Space
Nine, she brought my bondmates to
the station. She was trying to
manipulate me into returning to
Andor. And she succeeded.

His jaw still tight, he lifts up his already broken arm a little and SLAMS the fist down hard into the ground. Prynn is shocked, tries to calm him, but he only gets angrier.

TENMEI

Shar, you don't have to think about that now.

SHAR

I promised to go back. And when I don't...

(eyes drift
a little)

It will kill Thriss to lose me.

He brings his fist up and SLAMS it down again. Prynn is getting distraught.

TENMEI

Shar!

Another punch, and another, getting harder every time, the broken bones CRUNCHing loudly. Prynn looks around in desperation, wishing for help. She starts crying as Shar's self-destructive rage continues.

TENMEI

Shar...

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

34 INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE

Prynn crashes to the deck beside the captain's chair, in a shower of SPARKS from her exploding helm. Vaughn stands in front of the centre chair in battle mode, looking down at her with horror.

This is a direct replay of the opening scene from 8x14 "Twilight." Pull back to reveal...

35 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

...That Vaughn is watching this scene replay before him on the empty ground. Another version of himself and his daughter are there, on a section of the *Defiant* bridge, fading to the sand of the planet's surface at the edge.

The real Vaughn watches in quiet tears, unable to pull himself away. The figures hold still, "Vaughn" still breathing and "Prynn" still smoking from her middle.

VAUGHN

Prynn...

After a long moment, he closes his eyes against the sight. When he opens them, the figures have disappeared. He drags himself back to walking, but the memory weighs on him.

36 INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY

Dax perches on the edge of a biobed as Bashir paces around in frustration, and Bowers stands firmly nearby.

BASHIR

Absolutely not. It's too dangerous. There just isn't enough evidence to justify what you're proposing.

DAX

You keep saying that, but it's not really the case. When I touched

whatever that stuff is, I sensed a mind behind it. It is alive.

BASHIR

It put you in a coma, Ezri! Maybe you dreamed it.

DAX

Maybe I did. But if I'm right, and it is alive, then it might also have knowledge about the pulse. I don't know if this is going to work. But I do know that if I don't try, it could mean the end of the Vahni Valtupali.

Bashir is quiet for a moment, holding his tongue. But Dax can see he wants to say more.

DAX

What is it?

Still no response from Bashir. She wouldn't like it.

DAX (cont)

It's alright, Doctor. You can speak your mind.

BASHIR

I am concerned, Lieutenant, that your fervour to put yourself in harm's way may be an over-compensation for the loss of Ensign Roness.

Dax is momentarily too stunned to respond.

BOWERS

Pardon me, Doctor, but I don't see any fervour here. I just think the Lieutenant has an understandable desire to do whatever she can to try to save the Vahni.

DAX

Thank you, Lieutenant. You're right to question me about that, Doctor. You've seen how Gerda's death affected me. But you're also wrong. This has nothing to do with her. This has to do with saving a lot of people.

BASHIR
(pleading)
But the risk...

DAX
There's risk in everything we do. But I believe I can communicate with whatever intelligence is behind that thing, and maybe find a way to stop the pulse. And I'll need you to keep me alive while I try.

37 **EXT. VAHNI CITY - DAY**

Vaughn stands at the top of the tower, gazing out over the beautiful Vahni city. Only about half of it is there - at the edges, it blends back into the sand of the dead planet.

Vaughn turns and sees that Ventu is standing with him. Colours flash across the alien's chest, and Vaughn hears the translator voice, despite not wearing the device.

TRANSLATOR
Again, you are welcome.

VAUGHN
Who are you?

Then the EARTHQUAKE hits again, and Vaughn and Ventu both are knocked to the floor. Ventu stares up at the sky, white swirls of fear across its chest.

But the falling meteorites are not there, only the unbroken, eerie cloud cover.

38 **EXT. CLOUDS**

Inside the cloud cover, with swirling eddies of grey, and occasional electrical discharges.

CROSS-FADE into:

39 **INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY**

Dax lying unconscious on a biobed, her hand lifted up and placed into a container so that it touches the cloud material inside. Bashir stands nearby nervously watching.

RICHTER

Neural activity down another tenth
of a percent.

BASHIR

Acknowledged.

40 **EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT**

Vaughn is back to walking through the deserted landscape again, sadness hanging on him. Looking ahead, he sees a wisp of the cloud cover reaching down. As it touches the ground, it seems to solidify into another construction.

Vaughn pulls out his tricorder, tries to take readings, but there is too much interference so he gives up. He keeps walking towards the still-building construction.

After a while, the sand blends into concrete, and Vaughn is walking on the base of a present-day Space Shuttle launch pad, a massive construct of steel girders. Vaughn climbs a few steps and comes to a large plaque on a concrete slab.

INSERT - PLAQUE

LAUNCH COMPLEX 39, PAD B.
TUESDAY 28 JANUARY, 1986. 1139 HOURS.
DEDICATED TO THE LIVING MEMORY
OF THE CREW OF SHUTTLE ORBITER
CHALLENGER, OV-99. THIS DAY,
SEVEN EXPLORERS SAILED ON A FLAME
OVER THE EDGE OF THE WORLD.

Vaughn looks at the plaque, tears in his eyes again. Finally, he drags himself away and back on his path.

VAUGHN
Vaughn, you have a mission.

TENMEI (v.o.)
Well, that's it then.

41 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

Prynn sits on the ground within the shelter area, having just finished working on a disembodied set of technological components. Shar lies nearby, still injured, his badly broken arm splinted.

SHAR
You've had success with the transporter?

TENMEI
It's working, but with all the interference, the range is limited. I've been reconfiguring the environmental suits as pattern enhancers. That should help.

SHAR
I didn't know you could do that.

TENMEI
It's not a common practice outside of flight testing.

SHAR
Show me what to do and I'll help.

TENMEI
We'll start in the morning.

They both lie back and gaze up into the dull, cloud-filled sky. It seems to squash any hopes they may have.

SHAR
I wonder how Vaughn is doing.

TENMEI
I don't know.

SHAR

Whatever happened between you and your father... I'm sorry. I know what it's like to be at odds with a parent.

Prynn lets out a short, derisive BARK of laughter, then regrets it. Shar is surprised.

TENMEI

I'm sorry, Shar. I didn't mean to laugh. It's just... you don't know what my father did to me.

(correction)

I mean, what he did to my mother.

SHAR

You're right. I don't know.

An invitation to talk. Prynn considers it for a moment. Staring up at the cloud cover again...

CROSS-FADE into:

42 **INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY**

Dax is awake, sitting up again, looking rather drained. Bashir passes her a glass of water, which she accepts with a grateful smile. Bowers is stood nearby again.

DAX

Some time ago, a humanoid race lived on this planet. They were called the Prentara, and they developed a sophisticated virtual reality technology.

BOWERS

Virtual reality? Like holodecks?

DAX

No, they tied powerful computers directly into people's minds. Then Prentara scientists discovered

this other existence, a pocket
universe outside our own, that...

She breaks off. Can't quite put what she has experienced
into words. She tries again...

DAX (cont)

It was a universe of the mind. The
very fabric of it supported and
nurtured and... augmented...
mental activity. They called it
the thoughtscape.

43 **EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT**

Vaughn walks solemnly past a representation of himself in
dirty rags, trapped inside a tiny two-metre square stone
cell, rocking back and forth with loneliness, scratching at
the filthy, mouldy walls for any tiny bit of moisture.

DAX (v.o.)

The scientists who discovered it
reported some profound
experiences.

BASHIR (v.o.)

Like a mind-altering drug.

DAX (v.o.)

Yes, like that, I think, but far
more powerful.

BOWERS (v.o.)

And they wired it into their VR
technology.

DAX (v.o.)

Yes. But then they found out...
that the thoughtscape was alive.

44 **INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY**

Dax, Bashir and Bowers continue to discuss...

BASHIR

(horrified)

Did the Prentara know? Did they stop?

DAX

They stopped when the first pulse came through. It left the planet intact, but we've seen what it did to the rest of this system.

BOWERS

And the Vahni system.

DAX

They tried to close the interface, but it wouldn't close.

BASHIR

The clouds... Are they some kind of manifestation of the thoughtscape?

DAX

More like... an extension of the interface. I connected with it the same way the Prentara did.

BASHIR

What happened to the Prentara?

DAX

I don't know. I don't think even the thoughtscape knows. But we saw the probe's readings.

45 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

Vaughn walks through a field of dead ROMULAN bodies, a phaser in his hand. He looks around at the bodies as he walks... He remembers having killed them all.

DAX (v.o.)

There's nobody alive down there except for our people.

BOWERS (v.o.)

So what are the pulses?

DAX (v.o.)
I think they're the result of the
thoughtscape trying to push its
way into our universe.

46 INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY

BASHIR
Maybe it was trying to fight the
invasion into its domain.

DAX
Maybe. Doesn't feel quite right.
But I know what we have to do to
stop the pulses.

47 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

Vaughn's mission keeps him plodding onwards, his mind full
of the sad memories.

At the edge of his range of vision, Vaughn sees that he has
finally reached the interface building, the one seen
earlier on Nog's probe display.

DAX (v.o.)
We have to close the interface.

FADE OUT:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

Flickering FLAMES... bringing us gradually into...

48 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

Vaughn lying asleep on the ground. The flames are a small crackling CAMPFIRE, nearby. Gradually he comes awake, seeing the fire, confused. He did not set it.

Through the flames, he sees a WOMAN's figure, in her 30s, sat cross-legged, pointing up into the starry sky.

WOMAN

And that's Rigel. Do you remember
what you learned about Rigel,
Elias? How many planets orbit it?

Vaughn gets up to a sitting position, staring at the woman with a mix of confusion and joy. He answers automatically.

VAUGHN

Twelve.

WOMAN

That's right, twelve.

She smiles at him, and he smiles back, relaxing. He looks up at the sky, a big patch of stars that blends back to the grey cloud cover at the edges.

WOMAN

Elias, I need to talk with you
about something.

Vaughn's face drops - he knows what's coming.

VAUGHN

No, Ma. I don't want to talk. I
just want to look at the stars
with you.

WOMAN

Elias -

VAUGHN
No. Tell me tomorrow.

49 **EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT**

The crash site camp. Prynn and Shar lie in the darkness, talking by the LIGHT of an emergency beacon.

TENMEI
My mother was a Starfleet officer. She and my father worked together a lot before I was born, but then Mom decided she'd had enough of a spy's life. She wanted children, but Vaughn... Vaughn could never let go of the job, even after I was born. We could never really be the family Mom wanted.

Shar listens quietly, letting Prynn get it out.

TENMEI
I missed Vaughn so much when he was away. That's why... that's why I joined Starfleet. To share more of his life.

SHAR
That's nice, that you wanted to be with your father so much.

Prynn shrugs. Maybe it is.

TENMEI
My mother ended up on a mission with my father again. He ordered her away team to... She never came back.

50 **EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT**

Vaughn sits with his mother round the campfire.

WOMAN
I have Burkhardt's disease.

VAUGHN
Ma, please don't.

WOMAN
I was diagnosed this week. It's a
progressive -

VAUGHN
No!

He stands up, throwing off his blanket, and walks away a few paces, beginning to cry like a young boy.

WOMAN
Elias!

51 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

TENMEI
Vaughn knew the danger, but he
made the decision to send them
anyway.

SHAR
Was it the wrong decision?

Prynn is astonished - she has honestly never asked herself.

52 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

WOMAN
Elias, please...

VAUGHN
No! You left me, Ma! You died and
you left me alone!

He walks away from her, towards the pulse complex in the distance. He stumbles on a piece of rock and FALLS to his hands and knees, trying to hold in the tears and anger.

FLASH

Vaughn imagines throwing himself onto the campfire, killing himself in its flames.

FLASH

Vaughn walks away from Prynn and the crash site, without looking back. Prynn watches him go.

BACK TO SCENE

Hit by the realisation, Vaughn lies on the cold ground, shuddering. The fire and his mother have both disappeared.

VAUGHN

No wonder Prynn hates me.

53 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

Prynn lies back, staring up at the dark cloud cover, confusion on her face. Maybe she doesn't hate him anymore.

BASHIR (v.o.)

I'm proud of you.

54 INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY

Dax reclines on a biobed, still exhausted. Bashir stands by her side, holding her hands.

DAX

I told you so.

BASHIR

Yes, you did. I guess nine lifetimes of experience trumps mere genetic engineering after all. But I'm not proud of you for being right. I'm proud of you for fighting to do what needed to be done. For leading this crew in spite of your personal troubles.

DAX

Thank you.

NOG (comm)

Nog to Dax. We're ready here.

DAX
Carry on, Lieutenant.

55 **EXT. SPACE - DEFIANT**

A small PROBE launches from the *Defiant* and heads down towards the cloud-swathed planet.

56 **EXT. CLOUDS**

The probe flies down through the tunnel-like passage through the clouds.

57 **EXT. PLANET SURFACE - MORNING**

Daytime, as much as the half-light will allow. Prynn stands and Shar lies near their rebuilt transporter, both dressed in Starfleet environment suits, but without helmets for now. Shar points up into the sky.

SHAR
Look!

Prynn does, and sees the probe flying towards them.

58 **EXT. PLANET SURFACE - MORNING**

The probe lies on the ground - a black standard torpedo with its hatch open. Inside are a dozen small, palm-sized objects, a padd, and a computer screen with the words VAUGHN CH'THANE TENMEI flashing on it.

Prynn stands over the open probe, fairly excited. Shar is still lying on the ground nearby, examining one of the palm-sized objects.

TENMEI
We have to get these explosives to the site.

SHAR
These type of devices are designed to shift into subspace and other dimensions. I wouldn't recommend using the transporter. The phase change could detonate them.

TENMEI

Alright then, we'll have to get the probe back in the air. It was set to home in on human and Andorian life signs. I'll just reprogram it to ignore us and find Commander Vaughn.

Prynn reaches down to touch the computer panel, but the power suddenly goes dead. All lights and screen gone.

SHAR

What happened?

TENMEI

I don't know. It's completely lost power.

She crouches down and opens up another panel. Inside is a sparking and melted piece of technology. Prynn sags.

TENMEI

The power cell's destroyed.

SHAR

Can we repair it?

TENMEI

I don't think so. It'll have to be replaced.

SHAR

But the only cell we have...

TENMEI

...Is the one I've been using to power the transporter.

59 INT. PULSE COMPLEX

Vaughn stands near the edge of the central vortex, a huge concave pool of rippling cloud material surrounded by deserted and imposing industrial constructs. The air around him is swirling with mist, seaspray from the interface.

The probe lies on the ground nearby, powered back up again. Dax's recorded voice plays as Vaughn listens hard.

DAX (comm)

I don't think the thoughtscape means any harm. I don't think it even knows it's causing any harm. And even though the Prentara invaded its realm, I think that somehow, it thought of them as saviours. I don't understand that, but I'm sure it's true. Doesn't matter anyway. We have to stop it.

Vaughn is pensive, trying his hardest to understand.

DAX (comm)

Nog's explosives are designed to slip into subspace and seal the rift on both sides. Make sure to use all of them, in precisely the positions we've indicated, or they'll only blow the rift even wider. Good luck, Commander, Ensigns. Dax out.

Vaughn stands in silence for a moment, trying to figure things out. Finally he takes the padd, reads the instructions on it, and starts picking up the explosives.

Walking around the edge of the enormous pool, he places and sets explosives at periodic intervals. He gazes into the pool of clouds, thinking.

VAUGHN

The thoughtscape is trying to push into our universe. But why? The Prentara violated its existence - why would it want to come here? Invaders... and saviours.

Still thinking, Vaughn places another explosive charge.

VAUGHN

Dax connected with it... and so did I.

QUICK FLASHES

- Vaughn crying at Prynn's "death."
- The clouds reaching down and creating the buildings.
- Vaughn walks through a field of dead Romulan bodies.
- Vaughn throws himself on the fire.

BACK TO SCENE

Vaughn collapses to his knees, clutching his head as the flashes come hard. The mist from the vortex swirls around him as he GASPS with understanding.

QUICK FLASHES

- Vaughn's mother looks at him, about to break the news.
- Walking away from Prynn without looking back.
- Alone in the tiny cell, desperate for food or company.
- The churning clouds, reaching out to touch the shuttle.

BACK TO SCENE

VAUGHN

Alone... so alone...

60 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - MORNING

Shar lies on the ground, Prynn sitting nearby, both still in their environmental suits without helmets. The makeshift transporter has been disassembled nearby. There is nothing for them to do but sit there and wait to die.

SHAR

Do you have regrets?

TENMEI

Well, I've never been surfing on the Canopus planet.

SHAR

I think you know what I mean.

TENMEI

Yeah, I do. You want something to eat?

SHAR

No, thank you.

(shakes head)

I should have gone home sooner. I could have taken a leave of absence from Starfleet. I could have had myself posted to some planet-side assignment on Andor.

TENMEI

I'm not sure how easy it is to get Starfleet to assign you wherever you want to go.

SHAR

I was selfish.

61 INT. PULSE COMPLEX

Vaughn walks urgently in the opposite direction around the edge of the vortex, disconnecting and reprogramming the explosive charges he had already set.

VAUGHN

No. I won't let it happen. I won't let you be alone anymore.

62 INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE

Nog sits tensely watching displays on his screens, Dax hovering nervously over him.

DAX

How long?

NOG

Two minutes.

Dax bites her lip, hoping Vaughn can make her plan work.

63 INT. PULSE COMPLEX

Vaughn stands calmly, his decision made. His tricorder shows energy readings from the increasingly violent vortex, and a countdown to the next pulse.

He walks over to a part of the building that hangs slightly out over the pit. Climbs up onto it, gazing down into the mass of cloud material.

Around the edge of the vortex, the remaining explosive charges PHASE OUT into subspace.

Vaughn's tricorder shows 30 seconds. He casts it aside.

64 **EXT. PLANET SURFACE - MORNING**

Shar and Prynn, by the blackened crash site.

SHAR

I just wish I'd done things in a different way.

TENMEI

We all make choices. They're not always the right ones. But you can't change the past.

65 **INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE**

Nog's display shows 10 seconds. Dax closes her eyes.

66 **INT. PULSE COMPLEX**

Vaughn stands on the very edge of the precipice, holding his arms out. He closes his eyes.

VAUGHN

Prynn... I'm sorry.

QUICK FLASH

Vaughn throws himself onto the fire.

INSERT

The cast-aside tricorder shows 5 seconds.

BACK TO SCENE

Vaughn allows himself to topple over the edge, DIVING down into the surging cloud material of the vortex.

As he hits the surface, the interface material SURGES up into the air, filling the destroyed complex with cloud.

67 **EXT. PLANET SURFACE**

On their horizon, Prynn and Shar see a huge COLUMN of dark grey material shoot up into the air, joining the clouds. It pushes outwards like a mushroom cloud, rushing nearer and nearer to them. Prynn stares transfixed, resigned.

TENMEI

The pulse...

SHAR

Prynn, the helmets. Prynn!

Coming to her senses, she grabs the suits' helmets, helps Shar to fit his, then locks her own into place with barely a second to spare.

A huge WAVE of surging dark grey clouds hits, sweeping up their equipment and the shuttle wreckage and tossing the two of them off their feet.

BLACK OUT:

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

68 EXT. SPACE

The grey planet hangs in space, still swathed with churning clouds. Now, a darker patch of grey is surging up to the surface, spreading across it and gradually covering the globe. PULL BACK to reveal:

69 INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE

Dax stands watching this on the main view screen, unsure what is going on but sure it can't be good. Bashir offers quiet support. Nog and Bowers remain at their posts.

DAX

What's happening down there?

BOWERS

We're not sure. The energy build-up at the pulse site seems to be dissipating out into the atmosphere.

DAX

Is the pulse still a danger?

BOWERS

Not as far as we can tell.

DAX

Then you did it, Nog.

NOG

Not me. The explosion should have sealed the interface, and trapped the energy on the other side.

DAX

(expecting
the worst)

Any sign of the shuttle?

BOWERS

I'm picking up the *Chaffee's* transponder signal. I'm trying to scan the location... It's on the surface... The shuttle crashed. No life signs.

Dax covers her mouth with dismay. Bashir reaches out and takes her other hand. She lets him. CROSS-FADE to:

70 **INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE**

Dax sits in the centre chair, watching the screen, looking rather heartbroken at first, but then resolving into her command mode. She has to be strong.

BOWERS

Something's happening on the planet... I'm reading a break in the shell. Two breaks.

DAX

Put it on the viewer.

A closer view of the cloud cover appears, with two circular tunnels showing down to the planet.

BOWERS

The openings are both fifty-three-point-three kilometres diameter. Depth... They reach all the way down to the surface. I've got full sensor contact with the surface.

Dax doesn't quite dare to hope yet...

NOG

Life signs! Two at one opening, one at the other!

DAX

Are they human? Andorian?

NOG

Yes! One Andorian, two humans.

DAX

Beam them directly to sickbay.
Bring them home, Lieutenant.

She turns and nods to Bashir - he leaves immediately. Then she settles back into the chair with relief.

71 **INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY**

Prynn opens her eyes gradually onto the dimly lit sickbay. Realising where she is with a gasp, she sits up and makes out the shape of Shar in the bed next to her. Looking to the other side, she sees an empty bed. She begins to cry.

Bashir enters from an anteroom, coming to her bed.

BASHIR
Ensign Tenmei? Are you in pain?

TENMEI
My father...

BASHIR
Ensign, your father's going to be just fine.

TENMEI
What? What?

BASHIR
He's here in sickbay. Computer, lights up one quarter.

The light level raises slightly, and Prynn can now make out Vaughn's figure on another bed across the room.

TENMEI
He's alive...

BASHIR
Yes, he is.

She collapses back, crying now with relief instead of pain.

72 **EXT. SPACE**

The churning planet in the foreground, with the still growing darker patch. The *Defiant* hanging in orbit in the distance. Almost as if the planet is watching the ship.

73 **INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY**

Higher lighting now. Vaughn sits up slightly in bed, now awake and lucid. He inspects a padd before handing it back to Nog. Shar is still unconscious, but Prynn has gone.

NOG

See you on the bridge, Captain.

BASHIR

(approaching)

Not for at least another day or two, you won't.

VAUGHN

I'll be there soon enough.

With Vaughn's nod, Nog leaves.

VAUGHN

How's Ensign ch'Thane?

BASHIR

He's doing well. He's got a strong constitution. I'll probably release him tomorrow. You, on the other hand, I want to keep here for a few more days.

VAUGHN

I trust your medical judgement, Doctor.

DAX (o.s.)

Well, I guess somebody has to.

They turn to see Dax entering the room, smile on her face.

BASHIR

You keep talking like that, and I'll have grounds to declare you mentally unfit for duty.

DAX

And you can write those orders
from the brig.

BASHIR

Fine by me. Less work to do.

DAX

How are you feeling, sir?

VAUGHN

Like an old man.

DAX

That hardly fits with the crew's
view of you as indestructible.

VAUGHN

Indestructible? Me?

DAX

At least Prynne and Shar were in
environment suits. You made it
through two universes in a torn
Starfleet uniform and a field coat
older than most of the crew.

VAUGHN

Take my word for it, Lieutenant,
there are better ways to travel.
What's our status?

DAX

We're fine. The thoughtscape...
difficult to know. As far as we
can tell, the entire entity has
emerged from the interface and is
now surrounding the planet.

VAUGHN

It transformed the local matter in
an attempt to communicate. And
when I dived into the interface...
It took a while, but eventually I
understood. You said the Prentara

were saviours... and they were. The thoughtscape - it had only ever known its own existence. But when the Prentara made contact, a whole new realm of experience opened up for it. It wanted more, so it tried to come through the interface. It scared the Prentara, and they stopped communicating with it. That only made the thoughtscape want to come through more, to find out where the Prentara went. It was so lonely, it wanted more than anything to find some contact again. Someone to have experience with. So it just kept trying to come through.

DAX

What happened to the Prentara?

VAUGHN

I was only there for three days, and the memories of loneliness and sorrow the thoughtscape brought back nearly killed me. Imagine the same thing happening to all the Prentara, all day, every day. I'm sure they couldn't stand it.

(hangs head)

Once I understood, now that the thoughtscape knew what loneliness was, I couldn't just lock it back up in its prison again. I had to let it out.

BASHIR

And that released the pressure, cancelled out the pulse, and saved the Vahni into the bargain.

VAUGHN

Exactly.

But his mind is not really on this anymore - it's on Prynn.

74 **EXT. SPACE - DEFIANT**

The *Defiant* zooms through space at warp.

75 **INT. DEFIANT - VAUGHN'S QUARTERS**

Vaughn sits slumped in a chair in his only-slightly-larger than usual commander's quarters. His padd features an official report, headed RECOMMENDATION TO STARFLEET COMMAND RE: CONTACT WITH VAHNI VALTUPALI AND THOUGHTSCAPE ENTITY.

Again though, his mind is not really on this. He stares out blankly, misty-eyed, still thinking about Prynn. The door signal chimes.

VAUGHN
(automatically)
Come in.

The doors open and Prynn is there. He is stunned to see her. He stands up.

VAUGHN
Prynn...

She steps through, still tense, shaking slightly, but not with anger. Her resolve slips and she rushes to him. They throw their arms around each other tightly, like they never want to let go again, both verging on tearful.

TENMEI
Dad... I'm so glad you're alright.

VAUGHN
Oh Prynn, Prynn... I'm so sorry.

They are both weeping - the emotional floodgates are open now and won't close. They manage to pull apart slightly to look at each other. Prynn's bloodshot eye has been healed.

TENMEI
I couldn't come to see you in sickbay, because of... this.

VAUGHN

That's alright. I'm just glad
you're here now.

TENMEI

I am too.

VAUGHN

I'm sorry. After your mother died,
I blamed myself, you obviously
blamed me too. I thought it would
be better for you not to be around
me. But I was so wrong.

TENMEI

Dad, I don't blame you for what
happened to Mom. But I see now
that I needed you then, and you
weren't there... But I understand
what happened. You lost Mom too.

VAUGHN

Yes, but I'm your father. I failed
you. I should have been there. I
should never have left you alone.

TENMEI

You're here now. And I still need
you.

VAUGHN

I need you too, Prynn.

He pulls her back into a tight hug, and she goes
gratefully.

FADE OUT:

THE END