

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. Peaceful, attractive, 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.

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

The Vahni Valtupali are -
(buzzing sound -
untranslatable)
Vaughn's people are friendly, and
the Vahni Valtupali welcome Vaughn
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 Vaughn 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.
Vaughn is 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 Ensign ch'Thane 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 at
the obvious question...

TRANSLATOR

The Vahni Valtupali welcome
Vaughn's 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, Vaughn is welcome.

VAUGHN

(taps combadge)

Vaughn to --

BOOM -- a deafening noise and simultaneous earthquake SHAKE
the entire scene. The stone tower shakes, stone CRUMBLES --

-- and Vaughn, Ventu and Brestol are thrown to the floor,
where Vaughn hits his head. Struggling to right himself, he
scrambles to the edge of the tower, looks over the city --

-- and see utter panic as vehicles CRASH, buildings CRUMPLE
and power lines EXPLODE. As the shaking continues, Vaughn
struggles back to his feet, turns to see --

-- Ventu on the floor with its tentacles curled around its
body, swirling WHITE circles all over its flesh. Vaughn
feels his translation system, makes sure it's 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. On the way, Ventu reaches up and touches Vaughn's head gently --

-- and a ripple of colours extend back down its tentacle. Vaughn touches the same place, 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 --

-- and 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

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 have
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

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

The lead Vahni turns a deep indigo blue. From the centre of the circle and spreading out, all the Vahni's bodies turn the same colour. The crew's translators are silent...

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 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.

8 **EXT. SPACE - VAHNI ORBIT**

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

9 **INT. SHUTTLE SAGAN - COCKPIT**

-- and Roness and Dax are thrown out of their seats and HIT
the bulkheads hard. Roness's skull crunches...

VAUGHN (v.o.)
We lost Ensign Gerda Roness.

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

As the Vahni moment of darkness continues, Dax looks on...

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 exposit 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 energy 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, Dax, Shar and the *Defiant* crew watch the remarkable
visual display, tears in their eyes from the sadness, and
amazement at the breathtaking bursts of beauty amid it.

VAUGHN (v.o.)
And I will not allow these
beautiful, remarkable people to
suffer any more.

14 **EXT. SPACE - DEFIANT**

The *Defiant* drops out of warp...

...at a planetary system that is blown to pieces. Only the
STAR and one PLANET remain whole, the rest is rubble.

As the *Defiant* approaches the planet, which appears a dull
uniform grey, a PROBE launches from the ship...

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's got it under control...

16 **INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE**

Dax enters, moves to stand by Vaughn as he gazes daunted at the VIEWSCREEN. It shows a complex of deserted BUILDINGS, basic and industrial. 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 engineering...

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 some 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 that energy. 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.

17 **INT. DEFIANT - SHUTTLEBAY**

Barely big enough to fit the two tiny shuttlecraft. *Sagan* is undergoing repairs by extras. *Chaffee's* hatch is open, and Vaughn stands by it with a padd, talking to Dax...

VAUGHN

If we're not back in eighty hours, get *Defiant* out of here. 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.

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

BASHIR

...I'm concerned about her, 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. 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 Ezri.
I suppose we've even become friends
in a way I never was with Curzon.
But I'm also her commander, 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 role
as first officer of this crew,
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 takes pity...

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...

18 **EXT. CLOUDS**

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

19 INT. SHUTTLE CHAFFEE - COCKPIT

TENMEI is concentrating hard on her piloting. SHAR sits beside her, working on his panels, with Vaughn 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 Tenmei 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...

20 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.

21 INT. SHUTTLE CHAFFEE - COCKPIT

Shar unstraps, heads to the cramped rear section, 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.

22 **EXT. SHUTTLE CHAFFEE**

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

23 **INT. SHUTTLE CHAFFEE - COCKPIT**

Panels and lights go dead. The NOISE increases dramatically
-- 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 --

24 **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...

25 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - DAY

VAUGHN's eyes struggle open, wincing against the light and heat of the flames. He looks down at his own body...

...and realises he is lying prone, bloodied and bruised on the ground, against a broken piece of bulkhead. Around him, the wreckage of the shuttle sits burning and smoking...

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 body, gingerly works his way over to Tenmei...

A large piece of DEBRIS pins her down - he braces himself, HAULS it aside, helps her to struggle out. She has 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.

VAUGHN

We need to find Ensign ch'Thane.

TENMEI

Oh no, Shar!

A big black column of SMOKE billows from the dead shuttle. Tenmei clambers towards it, can't get through the flames...

Vaughn catches up, carrying a FIRE EXTINGUISHER he grabbed from the wreckage. Through the flames, Vaughn spots --

-- a flash of BLUE SKIN, Shar's unconscious body. Clear of the flames but injured, left arm bent, right leg bleeding.

Vaughn rushes to him, crouches by his side, feels for a pulse. Tenmei approaches, a bit dazed, shock setting in...

TENMEI

What is it? Is he alright?

VAUGHN

Stop.

She stops dead, confused by his firm tone...

VAUGHN

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 - she turns and runs back the other way. He strips off his uniform jacket, TEARS a strip off, gently lifting Shar's broken leg, slips the strip of fabric underneath, ties it in a tourniquet...

VAUGHN

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

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

TENMEI

He's the same. Sorry...

She wipes away tears. Seeing this, Vaughn deliberately goes back to business. She happily accepts the distraction...

VAUGHN

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

TENMEI

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 over-charged the anti-gravs. It's a split-second timing thing.

VAUGHN

You really are an exceptional pilot, Ensign. But we need to discuss what we're going to do.

TENMEI

I might be able to scrounge enough components to fix the transporter.

VAUGHN

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

TENMEI

It must be two-hundred kilometres. You'll never make it in time.

VAUGHN

If you can transport yourself closer 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 provisions and then I'll be off.

He reaches down, starts picking up things, putting them in a Starfleet emergency backpack. Tenmei stays blank.

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.

Tenmei watches him go, not showing any emotion...

CROSS-FADE INTO...

27 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - DUSK

Vaughn walks alone, with his backpack, through a deserted but intact settlement - a ghost town. 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 carries on walking...

28 EXT. SPACE - DEFIANT

In orbit of the grey planet...

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

29 INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE

One screen shows lines of data, another a GRAPHIC of the planet, *Defiant* in orbit and the pulse leaving the surface.

Dax stands by the engineering console as Nog demonstrates. They both look exhausted, sporting dark circles...

NOG

That's because 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 better. But make sure you get to bed soon. You'll never solve anything if you're falling asleep on the job.

NOG

Only if you join me, Lieutenant.
(realises
with horror)
Oh... no... I meant --

DAX

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

The ship ROCKS slightly. Everyone is 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...

30 **INT. DEFIANT - JEFFRIES TUBE**

BASHIR crawls along, carrying a tricorder and medical kit.

Turning a corner, he finds Dax and Nog at an open panel...

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
Vahni 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
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 out on the floor
of the Jeffries tube, half-covering Dax's hand.

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

BASHIR

Ezri! Ezri!

31 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

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, Tenmei 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, 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.

Jaw still tight, he lifts up his broken arm a little --

-- and SLAMS the fist down hard into the ground. Tenmei 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)

It will kill Thriss to lose me.

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

TENMEI

Shar!

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

TENMEI

Shar...

BLACK OUT:

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

32 INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE

TENMEI crashes to the deck in a shower of SPARKS from her exploding helm. Eyes closed, midsection horribly burned.

VAUGHN looks down with horror. PULL BACK to reveal...

33 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 "Tenmei" 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...

34 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's 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, Julian. 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

(pointed)

Thank you, Lieutenant.

(back to Bashir)

DAX (cont)

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, Julian. But I believe that I'll be able to 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.

Off Bashir's worry...

35 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, Vaughn is 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...

36 **EXT. CLOUDS**

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

CROSS-FADE into:

37 **INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY**

Dax lies unconscious on a biobed, 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.

38 **EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT**

Vaughn walks again through the deserted landscape, sadness hanging on him. Ahead, a wisp of cloud cover reaches down, touches the ground, solidifies 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. Finally, he drags himself away and back on his path...

VAUGHN

Vaughn, you have a mission.

TENMEI (v.o.)

Well, that's it then.

39 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

Tenmei sits on the ground within the shelter area, 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

Well, 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.

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

SHAR

I wonder how Commander Vaughn is doing...

TENMEI

I don't know.

SHAR

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

Tenmei 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. Tenmei considers it for a moment. Staring up at the cloud cover again...

CROSS-FADE into:

40 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? You mean 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.

As Bashir and Bowers try to grasp what she's saying...

41 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,
well, they 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.

42 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, this stuff here... 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...

43 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.

44 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.

45 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.

BLACK OUT:

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

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

46 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

Vaughn lies asleep on the ground. The flames are a small crackling CAMPFIRE, nearby. Gradually he comes awake...

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 mixed confusion and joy. He answers automatically...

VAUGHN

Twelve.

WOMAN

That's right, twelve.

She smiles, and he smiles back, relaxing. In the sky, a big patch of STARS, blending back to GREY CLOUD 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. Not tonight.

WOMAN

Elias --

VAUGHN

No. Tell me tomorrow.

47 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

The crash site camp. Tenmei 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 Tenmei 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.

Tenmei shrugs. Maybe it is.

TENMEI

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

48 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

Vaughn sits with his mother round the campfire...

WOMAN

I have Burkhardt's disease.

VAUGHN

Ma, please don't. I just want to look at the stars with you.

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...

49 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT

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

SHAR
Was it the wrong decision?

Tenmei is astonished - she has honestly never asked that...

50 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 Tenmei and the shuttle crash site,
without looking back. Tenmei watches him go...

BACK TO SCENE

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

VAUGHN

No wonder Prynn hates me.

51 **EXT. PLANET SURFACE - NIGHT**

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

BASHIR (v.o.)

I'm proud of you.

52 **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 life-times 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.

53 **EXT. SPACE - DEFIANT**

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

54 **EXT. CLOUDS**

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

55 **EXT. PLANET SURFACE - MORNING**

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

SHAR

Look!

Tenmei does, and sees the PROBE flying towards them...

56 **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.

Tenmei 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 this probe back in the air. It was set to home in on any human and Andorian life signs. I'll just reprogram it to ignore us and find Commander Vaughn.

Tenmei reaches down to touch the computer panel...

...but the power 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. Tenmei 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.

57 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.
(more)

DAX (comm, cont)
And even though the Prentara did
invade its realm, I think 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. Make sure you 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, trying to figure it out. Finally
he takes the padd, reads the instructions, picks up the
explosives, starts walking around the edge of the pool.

While he places and sets explosives at periodic intervals,
he gazes into the pool of clouds, thinking out loud...

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 in a
way, so did I.

QUICK FLASHES

- Vaughn crying at Tenmei'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 Tenmei 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...

58 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - MORNING

Shar lies, Tenmei sits, both still in their enviro-suits without helmets. The makeshift transporter is disassembled nearby. Nothing 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
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.

59 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.

60 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...

61 INT. PULSE COMPLEX

Vaughn stands calmly, decision made. His tricorder shows rising 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, almost like a diving board. 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.

62 EXT. PLANET SURFACE - MORNING

Shar and Tenmei, 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.

63 INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE

Nog's display shows 5 seconds. Dax closes her eyes...

64 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...

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...

BLACK OUT:

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

65 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, gradually covering the globe.

PULL BACK to reveal:

66 INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE

Dax stands watching this on the main viewscreen, 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

Any sign of the shuttle?

Bowers turns back, check again. Dax expects the worst...

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 into:

67 INT. DEFIANT - BRIDGE

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

BOWERS

Something's happening on the planet... I'm reading a break in the shell. No, 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's surface...

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...

68 INT. DEFIANT - SICKBAY

Tenmei opens her eyes onto a dimly lit sickbay - and GASPS. She sits up, makes out the shape of Shar in the bed next to her, relieved. Looking to the other side, she sees --

-- an empty bed. She begins to cry. Bashir rushes in...

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 Tenmei 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.

69 **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...

70 **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 Tenmei has gone...

NOG

See you on the bridge, Captain.

BASHIR

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

VAUGHN

I trust your judgement, Doctor.

DAX (o.s.)

Well, I guess somebody has to.

They turn to see DAX entering, 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.

Vaughn smiles at the smooth banter. Dax turns to him...

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 Prynn 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...
(more)

VAUGHN (cont)

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 it want to come through more, to know where the Prentara went. It was 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, I couldn't just lock the thoughtscape back up in its prison to keep being lonely. 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.

71 **EXT. SPACE - DEFIANT**

The *Defiant* zooms through space at warp...

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

Vaughn sits slumped in a chair. His padd shows his 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 Tenmei. The door signal chimes, and he answers automatically...

VAUGHN

Come in.

The doors open -- and Tenmei is there. He stands, stunned to see her...

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.
For everything.

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. Tenmei's bloodshot eye has been healed...

TENMEI

Sorry I didn't come to see you in
sickbay. I just didn't - I knew
this would happen.

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, so I thought it
would be easier for you if I was
not around. 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 into a tight hug, and she goes gratefully...

FADE OUT:

THE END