

STAR TREK IV

By

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The fantastic visual splendor of a black hole in space! An incredibly huge maelstrom of titanic forces in which time, energy, matter and gravity are ripped into things beyond our conception. All galaxies spawn and die in such places in ways beyond mortal comprehension. Thus, it takes a while to realize that our U.S.S. Enterprise is here. The Starship is less than a grain of sand measured against a whole ocean.

It is our Starship, making this final deep space exploration and survey at the end of its five year mission. Our original crew is here, Kirk at the helm, Spock and others in their original positions -- plus new faces of other bridge personnel and crew who have been added to the ship's complement over the last few years. At the moment, they are concerned over the Starship's severe buffeting from the unusual forces, but all systems continue to check out fully functioning and Kirk has carefully kept them well away from the heart of the black void.

The unexpected happens! They have been in excellent control of things like ship's power, force field shielding, their structural integrity, all that. But they're struck by a wave of something that was never expected. It is an incredible form of time variation in which parts of their vessel begin to exist in different time dimensions, co-exist, momentarily cease to exist. The same is true of themselves, disorientating

them, making bridge and engineering and other functions impossible to coordinate. Colors and shapes flutter and change; their very consciousness is ripped into as many changes and segments.

Until then, things had been going so well and the crisis happened so unexpectedly that it caught both Kirk and Spock off the bridge. As the Starship Science Officer, Spock had insisted on leading the shuttlecraft science survey which had been monitoring the Enterprise from some distance across the void. Kirk has received an emergency message that the craft is returning to the Starship's hanger deck, Spock is trying to warn him about something when the sub-space radio goes out -- Kirk has taken a high-speed turbo elevator to the Starship's hanger deck to supervise the shuttlecraft recovery. Kirk had never before heard the Vulcan's voice so charged with near-panic and there had been screams of horror from someone before the radio went out. Hanger deck trektor beam technicians had reported "impossible" dimensional changes in the shuttle they were trying to maneuver aboard. It was this combination plus Kirk's personal concern for Spock that had him there as the Starship's great aft-section opened and the small vessel was brought aboard.

The time dimension crisis happened at almost the instant Kirk and the hanger crew reached the door of the shuttlecraft. From the shuttle they recover four children, one of them a young vulcan. Their adult size uniforms hang from their bodies; the children are battered and bruised into unconsciousness. Kirk has been just inside the shuttlecraft, handing the last of them out the door when the crisis hits its peak.

As the great Starship begins to rip apart, the smaller shuttlecraft is thrown across the hanger deck, its door slamming closed. It ricochets off a bulkhead and goes spinning out into space with Kirk aboard -- at the same moment the Starship rips itself into a horror of broken parts and bodies as it is sucked into the heart of the black hole. The last thing we see is the ship and its occupants dying.

The crystal-plasma SCENES. The mysterious, great colorful mass. Much lovelier to view than the black hole but equally awesome in its own way. We see the U.S.S. Enterprise is repaired and coming into operation. We see the bodies of our crew (except for Kirk) being repaired in a way incomprehensible to us. We see the return of them to the Enterprise and their puzzlement as they all remember themselves dying, their ship destroyed. There are some sublt changes in the Enterprise; its more powerfull than the refitted vessel they last remember. It appears to have other new capacities which they'll have to study. But its basically the familiar Starship and Earth's galaxy lies out in the distance beckoning to them.

As incredible as all this seems to them, one other happening is clearly impossible. There is a Starfleet officer with them who is not even in the Enterprise when it was destroyed. He is Starship Captain EDMUND WEST -- at the very moment the rest of them had been destroyed, Captain West had been at Starbase headquarters on Earth. But that is only a part of the impossibility -- Edmund West has continued to serve in Starfleet living a full life until he died at the age of 122 on Earth! His confusion is as great as that of the rest; Captain West can clearly remember the rest of his life; he can remember the day he died as an old man at the beginning of the 24th century. As if that isn't enough, he can also remember the excitement at Starfleet when it was learned that Kirk's shuttlecraft had been discovered and taken aboard a passing vessel. After months in the damaged derelict shuttle he was barely alive but had recovered. More than that, Kirk had gone on to become one of the greatest leaders in Earth's history. Many said of him that he had somehow "looked into the eye of God" during his experience in the black hole -- and Kirk's incredible abilities and wisdom seemed to prove that something fantastically wonderful had happened to the man. Captain Ed West can remember that within a year of being found and returned, Kirk was responsible for scientific discoveries so remarkable that much of humanity was almost in worship of him as if he were some sort of demi-God. At the time Ed West had died of old age, Kirk hardly looked a day older than when he had arrived back on the planet.

Captain Edmund West is personally known to two members of the crew including Spock and other of the bridge complement. As impossible as his presence here seems to be, there is simply no way to doubt but that this is the genuine man. There are those who think he is some sort of an illusion or trick but everything including the most minute medical checks prove his authenticity. Lacking their own captain, the only logical choice is to give him command of the Starship Enterprise now.

Instead of years to get back over the intergalactic distances, the ship's new power brings the voyage down to only weeks or days. The same curiosity as navigational equipment shows slight variations in the plot of various stars. Enormous concern over the loss of Kirk as Spock locates scan records which show Kirk trapped inside the shuttlecraft as it is spun out of the hanger deck and into space.

They reach the furthest star base outpost and discover no sign that a starfleet installation ever existed here. Or did it? Spock and key personnel have beamed down to the asteroid to find a strange kind of dust at the place a starbase once existed. It is as if the thing had disintegrated -- or perhaps had been destroyed from attack of such incredible power that it reduced everything there to the finest of dust particles. (They'll eventually discover, of course, that the real story is incredibly more bizarre.)

As they proceed on, no answers to their subspace radio communications. Familiar space beacons are gone. Familiar solar systems seems to have lost all planets which were once a part of their Federation.

The doubts of the bridge crew toward Captain West have been slowly resolved. Though a bit younger than Kirk, he is a Starship veteran of almost as much experience. He is enormously capable; he has a mature sense of humor which wins over even the greatest doubters. He has pointed out several times that his own story of being here is certainly no more remarkable than theirs. He has several areas of expertise, including the transporter system, which rivals even Spock's knowledge. And his own need to resolve this puzzle is certainly as great as theirs.

Well inside the galaxy now, their route to Earth will take them close to the planet Vulcan. Spock's argument to go there makes a great deal of sense. With no idea of what is happening or what they're facing, the wisdom and intrepidity of the Vulcan race could be a valuable asset. We also realize there is great concern in Spock whether all the changes they're seeing extend also to his Vulcan planet.

The changes do extend to the planet Vulcan and in ways that even Spock could not have expected. It is a totally changed and forbiddenly cold planet. Gone are the Vulcan cities and all signs of intelligent life. On the planet's surface, West and Spock lead the survey teams which discover totally changed and bizarre plant life which seems to have adapted to the unusual conditions. The greatest horror is discovered by Spock himself -- a creature vaguely biped and with some trace of pointed ears but a stupendous ferocity and ignorance. It has seemed puzzled to be able to relate to something about Spock but the sight of the humans drive it into fear and frenzy.

The Starship is attacked by vessels and a form of life totally foreign to them. More surprising, it seems to come from a planet on which intelligent life had never been known to exist before. The Enterprise fights it off with difficulty, and barely manages an escape as a fleet of the vessels converge to attack.

They reach Earth's solar system and the ultimate shock of the humans aboard. Their familiar star, the sun, is smaller, redder, cooler. And the discoveries they make while into their solar system seem as fantastic. The planet Pluto has been broken into fragments, most of its heavy metals gone. Two of the larger moons of Neptune seems now to be mainly vast automated installations mining the material of Neptune with a kind of m----- they have never seen before. There are no life form readings anywhere. Spock points out that the huge industrial operation going on at Neptune seems to lead nowhere. Basic substances are refined out of Neptune's bulk but the material is then lost into space. No carriers call at the moons to transport the material anywhere.

Venus has been completely changed into a Class M planet. There are signs of vast cities there -- all uninhabited now. Again, there is no sign of intelligent life.

Earth's moon has become a vast computer from which Earth still operates but its technology is beyond even Spock's wildest guesswork. The moon and Earth itself have somehow been moved closer to the fading sun. It had to have been a feat totally beyond any technology they've seen or could envision.

Planet Earth is completely dead -- and yet it comprises a wonderous archaeological discovery greater than any made by any other Starship in any part of the galaxy. It is surrounded by an almost impenetrable force field screen which yields only to the transporter system. Beneath this protective screen, the oceans and mountains are gone; the planet's surface appears to be one vast jungle kept alive by great automated systems which control climate, water vapor, oxygen and all else. But they discover that the expanse of jungle is only an "algae" which covers far greater wonders. Beneath this, the entire mass of the planet has been converted into the most titantic spaceship ever made. This Earth-spaceship could have held billions of humans in perfect safety and comfort and should have been capable of near ultimate philosophies.

Earth and its solar system is fifteen million years older than they once knew it! Spock had been near something of this estimation since leaving Vulcan. But the scientific proof of their real date strikes even the unemotional first officer. In the millions of years which have elapsed, a stupendously advanced civilization grew up here which rivaled anything existant in all time and space as they know it. But where has humanity gone? Why was the titanic Earth-spaceship never used? What was its purpose?

The full force of all the Enterprise's science departments and all the research knowledge and survey expertise is directed at the puzzle. The 400 or so crew members of the Enterprise are the last of their kind in the entire galaxy. Their age cannot be reckoned in years but in eons.



Did humanity die? Has it fled this place for reasons beyond them? Do humans, even fantastically advanced humans, exist somewhere? Or are they all gone?

It is not just only a puzzle now which affects Ed West, Spock, McCoy and the others. The immensity of their discovery goes far beyond mere mysteries and solutions. They feel an agony never faced by a life form before; they are as out of their time as if they had never actually existed. Only a God could suffer and bear such aloneness! They have nowhere to go but this bizarre and changed Earth and are driven by the faint hope that it still holds within it some answer to their agony and their dilemma.

Meanwhile, as the search goes on below and the visual splendor of the changed planet unfolds, a few humans keep watch aboard the orbiting U.S.S. Enterprise. Twice during the voyage home their long range sensors have picked up a ghost of something which seems to be following them. It moved closest at the time they detoured to Vulcan and seemed to hover anxiously at a great distance until they again moved toward Earth. Both Captain West and Spock are convinced by now that it is the crystal-plasma entity which gave them their lives and their vessel again. And now the reflection on the screen is moving even closer.

In the vast mechanized bowels of the spaceship-planet, Spock has made a discovery. A record system so complex that it has been clearly impossible to unravel its meaning. But he has made another discovery about the

advanced and still operating heart of this record's complex -- the computers here are so advanced as to be practically an intelligence itself. Spock has learned that he can mind-meld with it!

The Vulcan's brain is nearly destroyed by the sheer quantity of information flooding in. In fact, he is nearly killed from the impact and is rushed back aboard the Enterprise where McCoy works anxiously to keep him alive. Captain West has gone back to the Enterprise with him and is there when Spock's first faint words come out. It is a plea to the captain to recall the entire crew aboard the Enterprise. Immediately. At the same time, there is a call from the bridge. The captain races there to discover that the crystal-plasma entity is now fully identifiable on the screen and racing toward them at incredible velocity.

The last crewman is barely aboard. The crystal-plasma entity seems to expand into a rainbow of energy enveloping all time and space and dimension around them. The buffeting forces and disorientations are not unlike what occurred in the black hole experience. But no one or no part of the vessel is lost this time.

The U.S.S. Enterprise is suddenly in orbit above their own familiar 23rd century Earth. The sun, the other planets, everything is as they remembered. It is the same Earth, the communications boards are busy with Starfleet signals; Captain West and the U.S.S. Enterprise is being asked for their identity.

Their identification signal is refused! They are told that the U.S.S. Enterprise and its crew has been lost far out in the galaxy. When Captain West argues and tries to explain, they are ordered to hook their main viewing screen onto the Starfleet command offices. The face of James Kirk appears on the viewing screen! There is no doubt; it is Kirk. The bridge crew exhibits surprise and exuberation at seeing him alive again. This is quickly cut short by Kirk response. He recognizes them, he pronounces their looks and reactions as "remarkably genuine" -- he also knows beyond any doubt that they are dead. Whoever or whatever they represent is not welcome here.

Kirk's attitude is neither ugly nor nasty. He is perhaps a bit more somber than they remember him and his demeanor is a bit more reflective. The one great change they see and they feel is Kirk's incredible strength of will. Spock has come to the bridge against Dr. McCoy's wishes -- and Spock sees and feels something else too. Kirk's intelligence is massive!

As for a "Captain West" being in command of the Enterprise, Kirk produces the "real" Ed West who is shocked at seeing his image on the Starfleet viewing screen and is totally in agreement with Kirk that they all represent some form of alien deception. During this, fragments of information from Spock's advanced computer encounter are beginning to focus in his mind. Yes, it is the real Captain Kirk down there. But a much changed Kirk who's unique black hole accident constituted as close to a brush with infinity as any human could ever encounter. Spock fights to center his own thoughts on his experience, to unravel the fragments of information

still twisted in his mind.

Meanwhile, Starfleet has been massing its forces against what they consider a false and dangerous U.S.S. Enterprise. The attack is sudden; only the enormous capacities of the improved Starship saves their lives. Their force field screens are greater than the attacking vessels but will not indefinitely withstand the mass force of the others. The only solution is to escape, out run their attackers.

All are stunned by the fact that Kirk himself ordered this sudden and furious attack on them. They are suddenly as alone and separated from their own human kind and they had been on the deserted Earth-spaceship which will now exist only eons in the future. Captain West is certain of only one thing -- if the true facts and solutions exist anywhere, they have to be found in the information which the computer of the future put into Spock's mind.

During the escape from Earth's orbit, engineer Scott has announced he is willing to attempt the light-warp field again. And again, it nearly overloads the Starship's power systems but Scott has worked out enough answers to succeed this time. With full power on the light-warp field, the Enterprise drifts invisibly through Earth's solar system space. With the Starship's escape still a near thing -- the pursuers are still directed by Kirk who has brilliantly interrelated the pursuing vessels' findings into an analysis of what has happened. Photon torpedos nearly destroy the U.S.S. Enterprise when subspace signals and other devices are used to make target findings on it. For awhile, it is a close battle

between the resources of the Enterprise and the amazing brilliance of this changed Kirk's mind.

Until now, there are many aboard the Enterprise, especially McCoy and Scott, who have believed that a face-to-face confrontation with their old friend and captain would resolve all difficulties. It is now apparent that the changes in Kirk go much deeper, perhaps deeper than they can understand. For the first time, they begin to wonder if the Earth's future they saw has something to do with Kirk and his changes. This triggers information in the mind of Spock -- the Vulcan is able to at least tell them that Kirk was remembered in computer records eons from now as the one who simply began the changes. He was the catalyst. Other humans advanced further from there in a leapfrog race that saw one improved mind compel other minds into superiority and more superiority. In the midst of explaining these fragments of memory, Spock goes silent ... struck with the fact that Kirk was still the original catalyst of whatever the future holds, good or bad. They have seen the future but are uncertain what it means. Earth obviously did remarkable things. But what happened to humanity; why the uninhabited dead planet they visited in the distant future?

Ed West now has become certain that Spock knows or has guessed at more than he is telling. In a confrontation between the two, Spock admits that he has made some logical progressions from what they know now. But the Vulcan refuses to speak of them until he has some information beyond mere theory. James Kirk represents the one thing Spock had never in his life believed possible ... emotion of friendship. Perhaps it is actually love. Is that

still his beloved friend down there? The Vulcan refuses to proceed further without some confirmation. Spock comes near the emotion of flabbergasted surprise when Ed West guesses the truth -- Kirk may be reaching humanity up toward things which the human race cannot handle. The future they saw may be some kind of trap for the human race. If true, Kirk must be destroyed!

The invisible Enterprise slides back into Earth orbit where it is detected or at least suspected. But Scott is becoming acquainted with the equipment and his abilities prevail this time. Carefully selected landing parties beam down.

This (our first) visit to 23rd century Earth is anything but a pleasant return to a peaceful, ecologically and socially perfect place. Kirk knows they are somewhere there and Earth has become a planet organized to wipe them out. We can see that it must have been a pleasant and tranquil place but our vistas of Earth now are laid out against a deadly hunt for them. Kirk has no doubt that they are aliens, even invaders, in human form and all his incredible new abilities are centered on finding and destroying them.

Against this, we pit the abilities of Spock, West, McCoy and a handful of others. Against what should be the tranquil loveliness of the Earth's surface we play the contrast of horror as a landing party team is wiped out. Another landing party dies in a subterranean city when their tubecar is ambushed. Kirk seems to know every kind of information the Enterprise might be seeking; every such point is laced with death for our crew.