

## Collpase

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## Collpase

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### Summary

The crew discovers a wormhole, but something terrible happens when they try to explore it.

### Notes

Trektober Day 1 Prompt: "Wormhole"

"We're coming up on the anomaly," reported Sulu from the helm.

"On screen," Kirk said, leaning forward in his chair. He was eager to get a good look at this anomaly— all he had been able to see of it during their four day transit had been numbers and figures and data that didn't suggest the nature of the anomaly so much as it provided a picture of what it looked like, physically. Which was to say, not at all.

The view-screen lit up with an image of space. Not an unfamiliar sight at all, if you ignored what was smack dab in the middle of it. For there was something that Kirk— nor anyone else on that bridge —had ever laid eyes on before.

It was a swirling, dense mass of purple... something. It appeared to be some kind of gas, but they knew from their readings that whatever it was, it wasn't something their sensors were able to detect or analyse in any meaningful capacity.

"Captain," said Chekov, not looking away from the screen. "What *is* that?"

Kirk stood up without realizing he was doing so, and took a reverent step towards the view-screen. "I don't know, Pay," he admitted. He only looked away from the spectacular sight to glance at Spock. "Opinion, Mr. Spock?"

Spock took a breath to say something, but stopped himself, seeming uncharacteristically unsure of himself.

"What is it, Spock?" Kirk asked, noticing the hesitation.

Spock sighed. "Based on the evidence and our knowledge on such things, this assumption is unfounded, but what we are looking at bears a similarity to theoretical models of a wormhole."

"A wormhole?" Blurted Uhura from her station at comms.

"It's a theoretical anomaly in which two points in space—"

"I know what a wormhole is, Spock," Uhura cut in gently. In her voice was a tone of awe. "I just... never thought they were anything more than that— a theory."

"Oh, great. A wormhole," said a grumpy voice from the back of the bridge. "What is this, some science fiction vid?"

Surprised faces turned towards the newcomer, none of them having noticed the turbo-lift's arrival.

"What are you doing up here, Bones?" Kirk asked Dr. McCoy. "Don't you have work to do?"

"Not when there's some alleged wormhole to be concerned about," McCoy grumbled.

"I must remind you all," Spock said sternly, "that we have no evidence that this is actually a wormhole, and my identification of it as such is based solely on a hunch."

"A wormhole and a Vulcan with a hunch," McCoy said, feigning being impressed. "Now I've really seen everything."

Ignoring him, Spock said, "I propose we prepare a probe to launch into the mouth of the wormhole, if indeed that is what it is. Regardless, the probe should provide us with valuable information regarding the anomaly's nature."

Kirk nodded. "Good idea. Get your team on it. Fit it with whatever instruments you think would be useful."

"Yes, sir," Spock said, rising from his seat at the science station and briskly walking past McCoy to the turbo-lift to lead his team in sciences.

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Kirk turned in his chair at the sound of the turbo-lift doors opening with a pneumatic hiss. "Progress report, Spock?"

Spock crossed the bridge to assume his usual spot at the science station. "The probe is complete and ready for launch, Captain."

"Good," Kirk said. "Mr. Sulu?"

Sulu tapped at a few buttons on his console then looked back over his shoulder. "Whenever you're ready, sir."

"Launch."

Sulu initiated the launch of the probe, and they all watched on the view-screen as the relatively tiny metal object flew away from the ship, seeming to recede in size as it approached the anomaly.

"The probe is programmed to enter the centre of the anomaly, transmitting data back to us live," Spock said. "It will automatically recall itself to the *Enterprise* five seconds after entering the anomaly."

"Excellent," Kirk said, leaning forward in his chair. He was eager to see the results the probe would procure. If this really was a wormhole, it could be the discovery of the century.

"Contact with the anomaly in one hundred metres," Sulu reported.

The bridge waited with baited breath as they watched the probe vanish into the mouth of the anomaly.

"Readings, Mr. Spock?" Kirk asked, turning to his first officer, who was leaning over the science station, eyes on his viewfinder.

Spock hesitated for a moment, then looked up at him. "The initial burst of data was identical to the data we had from our long range sensors," he reported.

"And after the initial burst?" Kirk asked, eagerly.

"There is no further data," Spock said reluctantly.

Sulu looked back at the captain. "We've lost contact with the probe."

"But it's programmed to come back on its own," Uhura said. "We'll be able to retrieve the data once we regain contact with it."

"That is correct, Lieutenant," Spock said. "It should return in approximately three seconds."

They waited for three seconds. Nothing emerged from the anomaly.

"Maybe it took a little stroll," McCoy mused.

Spock ignored the teasing, but said, "The anomaly cut off the signal between the *Enterprise* and the probe. Without contact, the probe is unlikely to find its way back to the *Enterprise*. It has likely been lost."

Kirk rested his chin on his fist and thought for a moment. "So we can't send in a probe, because it doesn't have the problem solving skills to bring itself back once it's lost contact with the *Enterprise*."

"That would be correct," Spock said. "However, I believe that problem can easily be assuaged."

"Elaborate?"

"If we send a manned shuttle into the anomaly, it would still lose contact with the ship, however, the pilot would be able to return the shuttle to the *Enterprise* manually," Spock said.

"Are you out of your Vulcan mind?" McCoy snapped from the back of the bridge. "We don't know *what* that thing is— it could destroy anything that goes in there the moment it enters the threshold! It could be impossible to navigate out once you're in, it might—"

"Bones is right, Spock," Kirk said. "We can't risk any of the crew like that."

"Captain," Sulu said, looking at his console in surprise.

Chekov looked at what Sulu was looking at and swore under his breath.

"What is it, Mr. Sulu?" Kirk asked.

"The probe has come back online," Sulu said, disbelieving.

Kirk's head jerked up and his eyes searched the view-screen. Sure enough, he soon spotted the probe, seeming to grow in size as it returned faithfully to the *Enterprise*.

Spock was already glued to his view-finder, not bothering to even sit down. Kirk tried not to enjoy the view, and McCoy tried not to lecture Spock on his un-ergonomic posture. Now was not the time for either of those things.

"Spock?" Kirk prompted.

"We are receiving the data the probe collected on its journey," Spock said. "Most of it is again comparable to our existing data."

Jim slumped back in his chair. "So we still know next to nothing," he concluded.

"Not so," Spock answered. Something in his voice sounded excited. "There is one data point of interest, and that is its navigational readings."

"What do they say?"

"The probe was unable to track its position as it travelled through the anomaly, but according to the navigational readings, it at some point exited the anomaly before its return to our current location."

"Where did they exit?" Kirk asked. Everyone was staring at Spock, wondering the same thing.

"Approximately one hundred thousand light-years from our current location," Spock said.

Eyes on the bridge widened and glanced around at each other.

"That's halfway across the galaxy!" Chekov exclaimed.

"So it really *is* a wormhole," Uhura breathed.

"Indeed," Spock said. "It seems we have proven a theory, today."

"What's on the other side?" Sulu asked. "Nobody's travelled that far out before. It's in a whole other quadrant!"

"Readings are similar on the other side as they are to here," Spock answered, "However, the probe is not powerful enough to detect any nearby celestial bodies. Now that we have established that this really is a wormhole," Spock turned to Kirk. "I believe we should consider sending a shuttle through it."

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"Are you sure about this, Spock?" Kirk asked as they completed the final checks for shuttlecraft launch.

"My answer is the same as the other eleven times you've asked, Captain," Spock answered.

Kirk crossed his arms, trying to hide the way he was fidgeting. "I don't know about this, Spock."

Spock stopped and gave Kirk a look that was almost exasperated. "You have the authority to order me not to go," he reminded him.

Kirk sighed. "Yes, I know. But I want to know what's on the other side of that wormhole as much as you do. I just wish it didn't have to be you that we were risking. Or that you didn't insist on going alone."

"I have already explained that as a Vulcan I am more resistant to—"

"Yes, I know, Spock," Kirk interrupted. "You're the best one for the job, I agree. I just wish you weren't."

"Captain?" Spock asked, curiously.

Kirk gave a weak smile. "You're important."

"All life is equal in its importance," Spock pointed out.

"I mean you're important to me," Kirk said.

Spock gave him a long look. "Whatever is on the other side of that wormhole, I will be returning from it."

"I hope you are right," Kirk said.

Spock looked like he was about to say something more, but Scotty's voice cut in from the intercom.

"Scott to Shuttlebay, we're ready when you are, Mr. Spock."

"Affirmative. Stand by," Spock replied. He looked back at Kirk. "I will return shortly."

Kirk nodded tightly, and Spock entered the shuttlecraft. Lingered only a moment longer, Kirk turned and left the shuttlebay and walked quickly as to be on the bridge before the launch.

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Spock kept an open channel to the bridge as he steered the shuttle towards the wormhole, and reported his progress.

"Approaching the wormhole at sixty kilometres per hour," his voice said calmly through the comms. "Contact in twelve seconds."

The bridge crew watched on the view-screen as the shuttle approached the wormhole.

"Good luck, Spock," Kirk said under his breath, too quiet for it to pick up on the comms.

"Entering the mouth of the wormhole," Spock reported. "Continuing at—" His voice cut off in a burst of static, which gave way to silence as quickly as it started.

"Spock?" Kirk asked into the comm, feeling panic rise in him. "Spock, report."

"He won't be able to contact us until he comes back out of the wormhole, Captain," Sulu reminded him.

All they could do now was wait anxiously for the shuttle to re-emerge from the wormhole. Kirk found himself holding his breath and counting the seconds.

"Something's happening," Chekov said, an excited urgency in his voice. He darted to the science station to examine the data stream.

Kirk perked up, hoping to see the shuttle returning, but what he saw was the wormhole's mouth flexing and twisting oddly in space.

"It's losing integrity!" Chekov shouted. "Collapse imminent!"

Kirk rose to his feet, chest feeling tight. "How long?" He asked, not daring to take his eyes off the wormhole.

"I do not know, sir," Chekov said, eyes flicking over the nearly incomprehensible data stream. "I would guess less than thirty seconds."

Thirty seconds wasn't a lot. But it might be enough time for Spock to escape the wormhole before it collapsed.

The bridge fell silent as everyone waited with bated breath, staring at the turbulent mouth of the wormhole and willing Spock's shuttle to emerge from it.

An eternity passed in those few seconds. Then, the purple fog of the wormhole gave one final spasm and collapsed in on itself, leaving no evidence of its existence behind.

There was no shuttle.

"Spock..." Kirk whispered, stunned. Refusing to believe what he had just witnessed, he turned to his chair and punched at the comm panel.

"*Enterprise* to Spock," he said, voice thin. "Report, Spock."

There was no answer.

Kirk felt numb, like he was in a dream. He hoped this was a dream. He looked around at his crew. Sulu was staring at the view-screen still, his hands shaking where they remained poised over the helm. Chekov was blinking away tears. Uhura had a hand over her mouth, staring wide eyed at the empty field of stars. McCoy had sunk down into a chair.

Kirk felt something die inside him.

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A week after the wormhole's collapse, the *Enterprise* remained near the coordinates where the mouth had once been. There wasn't anything to research—no trace of the wormhole remained. But they didn't stay to research. They stayed in the faint hope that Spock was alive, and that the wormhole might reopen and spit him out.

Kirk spent a lot of time on the observation deck, staring out the windows to the empty space where he had last seen Spock's shuttle. He felt closer to him, looking out through the glass than through a view-screen.

His vigil was broken by Uhura's voice over the comm.

"Uhura to Captain Kirk," she prompted.

Kirk sighed and stepped over to the comm panel. "Go ahead," he replied.

"You have a call from Starfleet Command," she said. "Admiral Morrow."

"Put him through to my quarters," Kirk said, and reluctantly left the observation deck.

When he got to his quarters, he didn't keep the admiral waiting. He went to his computer and tapped into the open line. A familiar, compassionate face filled the screen.

"Captain," Admiral Morrow said in greeting.

"Admiral," Kirk said back, but nothing more. He liked Admiral Morrow, but he wasn't in the mood for small talk or extended pleasantries.

"I'm sorry to hear about your first officer," the admiral said. He sounded like he meant it.

"Thank you," Kirk said. "We are... greatly affected by his loss."

"I don't doubt it. He was a fine officer." The admiral paused for a moment, before giving Kirk a regretful look. "Jim, I know you're hoping he'll reappear, but it's been a week, and I'm afraid the *Enterprise* is needed elsewhere."

Kirk's shoulders slumped. "I understand, but we're in a low traffic area of space. If Spock were to reappear and we weren't here, there might not be anyone around to pick him up."

"I know you're reluctant to leave. I know you still have hope," Admiral Morrow said. "But the wormhole collapsed, and vanished without a trace. I think it's time that you accepted that he's gone."

Kirk was quiet for a long moment. "I'm not ready to move on," he admitted.

The admiral regarded him sadly. Then he looked down, presumably at a PADD just out of sight. When he looked back up, he said, "I can buy you another week before you'll have to return to duty. But that's the best I can do."

Kirk nodded. "Thank you, admiral," he said. "I appreciate your understanding."

"Of course, Jim," the admiral said. "Again, I extend my deepest condolences to you and your crew. Morrow out."

When the connection cut, Kirk slumped over his desk, resting his head in his arms. Accepting that Spock was gone... He couldn't do it.

But another week came and went, with no wormhole activity, and no miraculous reappearance of Spock. They had orders to leave, to head off to their new assignment. Orders to give up on Spock.

Everyone was silent as the ship went into warp, whisking them off to their next assignment. They all felt like they were abandoning Spock. As the distance increased between the *Enterprise* and the last known location of Spock, Kirk became more and more aware of the feeling that he had left apart of himself behind. He wished nothing more than to turn back.

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