

**The Web of Time**  
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# Chapter 1

## The Web of Time

### A Doctor Who Short Story

It was the middle of nowhere and yet someone had created it as a place. A rough undefined place, but a place nonetheless. It had wall and floor, it had air and moisture. But even so it wasn't quite a place. It had no past and it had no future. It was merely a gateway. It was the edge of the cliff from which the traveler must jump before he could soar.

Sam shone the bright beam of her torch around about her. The light reflected back off twisting walls: A kaleidoscope of colours leaping out at her from the darkness; flashes of brilliant red and the iridescent sheen of peacock blue, forest greens and traces of gold like a seam of precious metal, intertwined. It was like staring into an oily whirlpool, only writ large so that only the smallest glimpses of it were revealed in the light of her torch at any one moment. To Sam it was a wonder, not knowing that this was the colour and shape of unformed stuff. Not knowing that it would appear to some like gravel and shale, loose rocks and mud, the stuff of which things are made, but not a thing of itself except that it had been grafted into a structure to serve a purpose but no more.

Perhaps, though, she sensed this quality of unfinished clay that some would perceive in the place, for Sam resolved to be unimpressed. "Tunnels," she said, "again."

The Doctor took the torch from her. If he had made note of her words and tone he showed no outward sign of it. He, too, swung the torch across the vista before them, watching the splashes of colour leap out and then fade away into the darkness. "Quite incredible," he murmured. Once again the torch light danced, his head following the motion of the beam to catch the display as it happened. The Doctor might like to think that he was more in tune with the nature of the

universe than those who traveled with him but in this he was often wrong. He was too interested in the new, too ready to be impressed, too oblivious sometimes to the reality over the form. He forgot that what seemed beautiful to him was as nothing to others.

And Sam, her sarcasm forgotten now her point had been made, forgot also any intuition that might have driven that sarcasm and asked, "what sort of rock is it?"

Unseen by her the Doctor smiled. "I've no idea," he confessed cheerfully, bending closer to examine the substance. He brushed his hand over the surface, letting the long elegant fingers trace the turning contours. "It's quite smooth," he said. "It could be artificial."

Sam looked at the contorted twists and turns. At first sight it looked completely random, like a natural formation, but the overall effect was pleasing. An almost spiral of colour and light leading on into the darkness. She felt as if she stood at the lip of a vortex poised to plunge in or hang back. But no sense of giddiness or nausea overcame her, more a sort of exhilaration, like standing in the winds at the top of a high cliff or tall building.

"Where are we?" she asked.

"No idea," said the Doctor again. He turned to her shining the torch on his face so she could see his expression. He grinned. Even with the long shadows cast over his face she saw the excitement and pleasure in that grin. The shadows gave it an edge, or perhaps it was experience that gave it an edge. Whichever or whatever, there was an edge of danger in that grin.

"What do you mean, no idea? what did the instruments say?"

He turned the the torch away again and his expression was once more plunged into darkness. "We're in the middle of an empty region of space."

The edginess increased, Sam felt it and knew they were at the beginning of something, but still she held back, "So it's some sort of asteroid, uncharted space junk."

"No, there's nothing here at all, I checked twice."

He had checked twice. They were nowhere. There was nothing here, except the tunnel and the cliff edge and the vortex of colour. "So what's this then?" Sam gestured around them, flinging her arms wide, encompassing the colours and the contours.

"I haven't a clue," admitted the Doctor happily. He handed her back the torch, "left or right?" he asked.

For the Doctor, this was like the toss of the coin. A random element. Adventure happens when you bow to madam chance, when you let the tide of fortune take you in its grip and carry you where it will. His companions were chance

and fortune and, always, his guides and his strength. Sam more so than others. She flashed the torch up and down the tunnel, past the incongruous shape of the TARDIS, which stood solid and square in the tunnel, rejecting the fancy of the place. The tunnel sloped slightly. She indicated the upward slope.

“This way,” she said, “at least we’ll be running down hill when we have to escape.”

“Excellent,” the Doctor thrust his hands in his pockets and set off ahead of her. She watched his shadow against the curved walls. A black Doctor shaped silhouette in a field of swirling colours.

They walked for a short way, the tunnels unchanging in their variety. Then, before them opened a cavern. It was no vast cathedral such as bedazzles the eye and awes the mind, for this was not that sort of place. Instead it was an ante-room. A small bay where the coloured walls gave way to a tangle of glittering threads. These threads spread out into the distance leading the eye into the heights and depths of some vast expanse. The threads twisted and knotted, looped and flowed across each other, some as thick as a human wrist and some fine as gossamer. Caught in the threads were shapes, like the decorations on a Christmas tree, small rotating orbs, figures like people, buildings, continents, suns. A multitude of worlds caught in a web and held. Sam reached out towards it.

The Doctor caught her hand, “don’t touch!” he said.

“Why not, it’s beautiful,” she whispered.

“There’s some sort of interface there. You probably can’t see it, but it’s a kind of temporal shift, I can see its tendrils reaching out like mist.” There was wonder in his voice for he could see whirls and eddies of time like another dimension to the threaded web that drifted in and around the tangled skiens reaching into the void between them and curling out into the room where they stood. A tunnel of colours and contours formed from time rather than rock. The Doctor nearly made the connection then, but not quite yet, he hung back and didn’t make the leap of intuition. One thread meandered towards them reaching out lazily to curl about their bodies. The Doctor took a sharp step backwards, dragging Sam with him, “best not to get too close,” he smiled apologetically.

“What is it?” asked Sam.

“Something to do with time,” mused the Doctor.

Sam giggled, “the web of time!”

And the Doctor made the connection. He saw how the colours and the contours in time and in space and on the screen blended into one, “you know it could be! The mathematics needed to create a representation like this would be incredible, but it could be!”

“You mean this is like the TARDIS scanner?” asked Sam. “It lets you look into the vortex?”

“More than that, it’s a gateway to the Vortex, if you stepped out into it you would be in temporal free fall, at the mercy of the time winds.” The cliff edge.

There was a sound of footsteps in the corridors ahead of them. Instinctively Sam and the Doctor ducked back the way they had come. There was nothing really to hide behind, Sam was heading up the corridor, but the Doctor caught her hand and motioned her to remain. They stayed there, crouched in the gloom and the shadows watching the web of time.

Three silver figures approached the room, they were humanoid, but small and delicate. To a casual observer they were completely silver, their clothes, hands, and features but if you looked harder you would see they were covered with some sort of silver cloth that clung to their bodies. The first one entered, she was more forward thinking and eager than many of her kind, her mind embraced possibilities that their’s did not. To her own, had they been human, there was a shiftiness in her eye and her demeanour that discomfited. But they would have rejected conclusions drawn from demeanour. It was her reputation both for brilliance and for the unexpected that unnerved. She was unpredictable, that caused them to shun her. She glanced round the cavern and because she was wider thinking and wider ranging than her companions she also looked up the corridor and in looking up the corridor she looked right into Sam’s eyes.

The reader will, no doubt, know already what she saw. The reader will have traveled far with the Doctor and Sam from the wastes of Hirath to the wonders of Hyperso from the dramas of the birth and death of suns to the peace and tranquility of the Eye of Orion. But even so perhaps an introduction is in order. Our silver woman who was, for her race, both tall and devious stared into the face of a woman who was still part girl but these days mostly woman. A certain maturity had entered her features so that while they were mostly unchanged from her sixteenth year she now impressed the viewer with a certain self-assurance, the knowledge that she was resourceful, able and independent. But it was not in our observer’s ability to see these things for she was not human, what she saw was woman taller and therefore more devious than herself. A woman with a smooth wide face and close cropped blonde hair. A lithe woman with muscles honed through use more for agility more than for strength. And behind this woman was another. A man with long curling locks of brown hair that among Sam’s kind had elicited the words romantic and Edwardian. The Doctor projected presence such that even one of the swimmers was given pause. This swimmer looked at the Doctor and recognised him as a powerful variable, a factor unknown by and unsuspected by

her fellows, a force of time. She looked into the Doctor's eyes and wove him into her plans, slotted him into the many contingencies she had considered. If only he was curious but, she reasoned, he would not be here if he was not curious. She turned her back on them and walked to the far side of the room, so that to see her, her companions would have to turn their backs on this new thing.

But there was little point in the move. Her companions cared not for the tunnel beyond. It was an artefactual irrelevance beyond their calculations. As she took their hands and helped them over the web into the currents and into freefall they might have looked into her face and seen the strange and exhilarated expression there and having seen it they might have wondered what caused it. But this is unlikely, such things were beyond the remarking of the swimmers. The hands parted and the swimmers fell over the edge and fell into the tracery. Once more the first, the tallest and most devious gazed up the corridor once more she looked into the eyes of these new beings and with one of those strange coincidences of nature that bind the universe together she made a gesture that was to both her and to them a salute. The she too stepped over the edge, off the cliff and into the web. And in that moment, though they did not know it, the Doctor and Sam were dragged also over the edge and into to web of the swimmers.

The Doctor hurried up once more, peering into the strands. Sam, beside him. The three swimmers were tangled in the skiens each moving apart, navigating through intersections.

“Surely they should be torn apart?” whispered Sam.

“Those suits are some sort of time suit. I have something similar in the TARDIS for effecting outside repairs in the vortex. I've never used it.”

“Who were they?” asked Sam, “Where is this? What are they doing?”

“They're traveling in time without any machinery, a bit like swimming, I suppose, instead of taking a ship. They will end up wherever the time winds take them.”

Freefall in the time vortex.

“But why?” asked the Doctor, “they could end up anywhere, they can have no control over their paths, unless,” he stopped, looking at Sam, “the maths would be incredible, but the maths for this,” he gestured at the web, “is breathtaking. A time lord could do it though.”

“Do what?” asked Sam, “were they time lords?”

“No, I don't think so. No. But a time lord could navigate the web by incantation. If they were quick enough could work out the equations for where they needed to go as the time winds shifted. The TARDIS does something similar, but she has a lot of processing power and is more robust, less likely to get blown off

course,” he shook his head, “but it is theoretically possible.”

Freefall still, but freefall with direction and purpose.

The stayed a while, watching as the swimmers receded and vanished into the web, about their mysterious purposes. A small breeze came down the tunnel, blowing the Doctor’s curls across his face. He looked up.

“That’s not right,” he said.

“What isn’t?”

“Most of my cells have just lost five minutes.”

The reader will know, as did Sam, that the Doctor, while he existed mostly fixed in time was yet a being of many times and many possibilities. The nature of time was woven into the fabric of his being and the details of his biodata. All his race could see the distortion of time and all his race could feel the pull of the time winds. But experience and necessity and the tangled plots and hopes, reasons and fears of a myriad of beings and forces had forged the Doctor into an instrument of power and sensitivity. The Doctor was a man of peace but he was forged as a weapon of war. To the Doctor the slightest stirring of the time winds pulled at his consciousness and alerted him as a faint call on the wind alerts a dog.

“The time winds?” hazarded Sam, “from that web thing? you said not to get too close.”

“No, it wasn’t the edge,” said the Doctor. “Unless...” he looked worried. And at last he recognised the rock from which the place was built for what it was. The raw unfinished, unsculptured stuff of time. It held, but only weakly, as a mud hut in a rising gale.

“Quickly!” he cried and began to run back down the corridor towards the TARDIS. Sam followed, understanding from his tone that this was no time for questions. Habituated to the sudden crises that beset their lives.

It was an, airlock, mused the Doctor later when he had time to think and the need to explain the situation to Sam. It was mathematical projection of the vortex as had been the web, following a gentle air current which caused the slope of the corridor. One end connected to the place of the swimmers. A stable realization of the vortex, just large enough to get them away from their space and time so the raw power of the time winds couldn’t damage it when they crossed over. But a temporary structure as must anything be that opened into the time winds, as the currants shifted it would strain and finally break. It remained a stable structure just long enough to serve as a bridge into the vortex.

Following behind him, knowing none of this as yet, Sam felt a breeze stirring the hairs at the back of her neck and knew in her heart that the wind was a dangerous thing.

“10 Minutes that time,” shouted the Doctor, “except my right arm, that just gained an hour.”

Sam didn't bother to reply. The TARDIS was in sight. The Doctor reached the door and struggled with the key in the lock. Sam felt the wind tugging at her clothes and as she and the Doctor fell into the TARDIS she felt the crumbling of the ground beneath her feet. The doors slammed shut behind them before they reached the console. The central column moved. The TARDIS was in flight. Silently, they watched on the scanner as the corridor outside began twisting, fell apart and merged into the familiar image of the vortex.

“What about the other travellers?” asked Sam.

“I don't know. There is no way I can trace them from here. Unless we meet them again by chance, sometime in the future, there is no way of knowing who or what they were.”

Falling in the vortex, Kelsa smiled as she moved through the ever changing pasts, futures and possibilities. They had been unexpected but not unplanned for. Humming the incantations Kelsa hoped that the predications would be correct.