

THE WEB OF TIME

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Season 36 • Story 10V

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Now it's the time to finish it. A rather strange thing to say about the first story of a season, however, after the momentous events of the final story of Season 35, Journey's End, the journey is not ended and the Doctor is sent via Timescoop to Gallifrey to confront...what?

This is what Robert Mammone's *The Web of Time* takes head on and runs you through a psychic and then physical war. Of course the Doctor wins and it is how he gets there that is intriguing and fascinating.

First, some background.

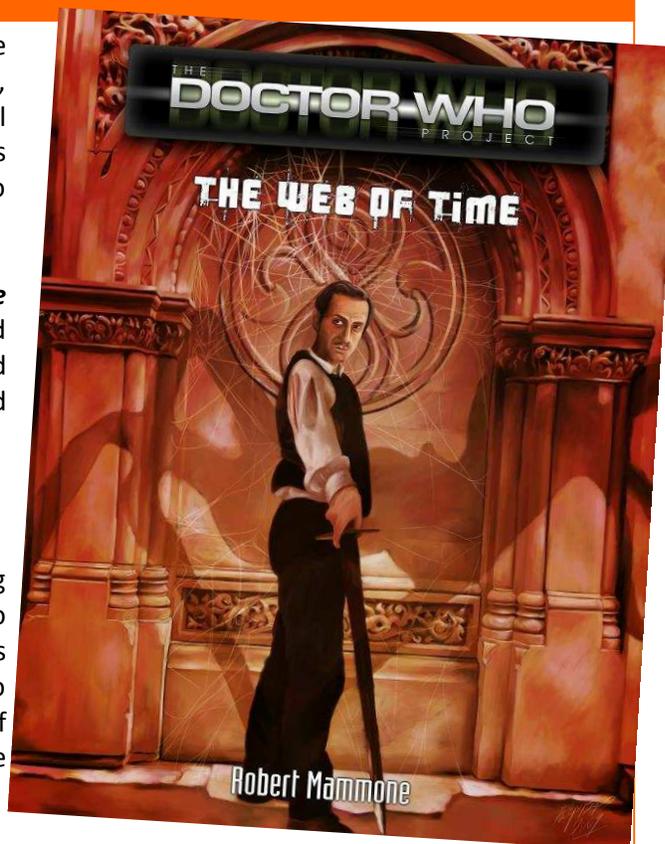
Due to a 'Null Event', the Doctor, after saving Earth's future in 1963, makes the decision to return to Gallifrey, abandoning his companions Silver and Mortimer, to confront what he thinks to be the normally stolid and interfering Council of Gallifrey. He vaguely knows that there is some problem that he must deal with for them. Again.

Mammone has carefully crafted *The Web of Time* into two parts, vastly different in their execution, but solidly linked in a narrative that keeps us guessing.

The first part deals with the Doctor's arrival on Gallifrey and the strange interplay of forces centered on him. Then the Doctor plunges headlong to perform the necessary tasks, only to find things vastly different than what he expected.

The Doctor has spent the trip to Gallifrey distraught over leaving Silver behind. She was the help he needed during his last regeneration and now, because of the Time Lords, he's left her behind in a time twenty years before her time.

In the first part of the story we are treated to a



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look inside the Doctor's mind. This is a mind that is at war with itself and external influences which it does not recognize. Both the internal and external influences on his mind surge and fade making the reader wonder if what he sees and feels is real or imaginary.

For example, when the timescoop lands the Doctor in a pile of leaves outside the Citadel, there is no acknowledgement on the part of the Doctor that this is unusual. It's only as he begins his

journey that we are really sure this was real.

He has bouts of depression, filled with visions of Silver, from which he has to drag himself. His hate of the Time Lord council is somewhat of a rock in keeping him to the job. But his journey to the Capital has other dangers too. He narrowly escapes a 'transcendental trap'.

The next trap is more subtle as he picks up a companion, Alienka. The Doctor does not question her appearance after he wishes, out loud, for a companion. He accepts her as a companion to protect. His mind, in its muddled state, does not, cannot, move further than that.

It is here that we meet the Teteo-Colotl. Although not yet named, their existence is revealed. There are thirteen of them and they are insectoid. These are both frequent attributes in the Doctor's adventures.

As the journey on foot continues, the suspense is heightened by small signs that there is much amiss. The Doctor is frequently disturbed by barely seen entities just out of vision. He thinks he sees something in the woods when he meets Alienka. He thinks he sees something just behind the open door of the Capitol. But these are transient—just enough to alert his attention but not enough to claim reality. We are left to wonder whether these are real or just in the Doctor's mind.

The transduction barrier is down and the Rassilon gates are partially open. All the Doctor and Alienka encounter are deserted hallways and dust.

As the Doctor is beginning to recover his mental equilibrium, he is assaulted by another mind effect: a static or buzzing within his skull that attempts to scramble his thoughts. By the mere fact that this does not affect Alienka gives us our first clue as to her identity.

Another clue appears as they briefly encounter a very old man out to make his will. He speaks

strangely of dreams and insect bites. It's obvious he recognizes something wrong with Alienka as he shuffles off with the ominous "*The Teteo-Colotl will have us all.*"

In a brief period of lucidness, the Doctor determines to reach the Council Chambers via the Panopticon. Alienka smiles ominously.

They are halfway across the immense Panopticon when the pressure on the Doctor's mind increases and Alienka darts away. In a very visual moment we see the reason. An immense spider-like creature is weaving a temporal web in the ceiling. The mental attack of this being finally triggers the Doctor to erect defenses and finally think clearly. Foiled in its attempt the creature begins a physical attack, descending after the Doctor. He grabs Alienka and runs for the far side. The girl runs ahead as the Doctor barely dodges the creature. When they reach the other side, they see that the creature as long since retreated.

Now that they are in the Council chambers, the Doctor storms in only to be greeted by a construct of the Matrix wearing Silver's face. What ensues is part verbal bout (showing the Doctor now has full use of his wits again) and part explanation. The Doctor now becomes informed about the Teteo-Colotl and how they have infiltrated this universe due to the null event released by the Council. The Teteo-Colotl, expecting the arrival of the Doctor, consumed the member of the Council so that they could manifest here and began the creation of the Great Web. Once the web is complete, all time and space will break down under the assault of the Teteo-Colotl.

The Doctor is also shocked by the revelation of Alienka as an agent of the Teteo-Colotl. The creation of the Matrix reveals her true insectoid form, then brutally disintegrates her.

The Doctor, however, agrees to stop the Teteo-Colotl by physically entering the Matrix to activate the reset switch. This, at least, is what he is told as he is handed a special key. The reality is much

different as we enter the second and more violent part of the story.

The Doctor enters the portal and walks right into a firefight. Into what he believes is the Matrix's reconstruction of the assault of the Teteo-Colotl upon the Capitol. He sees a Gallifreyan, infected, begin to turn into an insectoid being, before being shot with stasers. He sees the vile opponents that they are fighting. There are some gruesome, but excellent descriptions here.

His name inspires the defenders and assures their assistance. The Doctor, helps them obtain weapons from the armory and sets a plan into action to reach the Matrix in the underground of the city while the loyal Gallifreyans stage a raid as a diversion.

At this point the Doctor still believes he is in a recreation of the Matrix. However, realization is not far away. When one of his new companions is brutally killed in the raid on the armory, the Doctor screams out his defiance of the Matrix. "I deny this reality!"

It doesn't work. The Doctor now realizes that he was misled. Instead of the Matrix he was transported back in time. But he is the Doctor and

now eyes the key he was given with new knowledge. He unlocks a chamber of artifacts and dons the sash and circlet within.

Thus imbued, the Doctor struggles, then succeeds in mastering tremendous power. He is visited again by the construct of the Matrix, who, still with Silver's face, grants him a vision of Silver's future on Earth. A future filled with joy and laughter.

Fortified, the Doctor confronts the time-spider. True to his nature, he shrinks it to insignificance and it scuttles off, frightened.

The arrogance of the Teteo-Colotl requires a different fate. Total destruction.

Then, true to his nature, the Doctor then discards the artifacts and escapes Gallifrey as the TARDIS arrives.

This story is to be highly recommended. Moving from plot to device, the action flows without any plot holes, running the gamut from fear and confusion to triumph.

And a thoroughly satisfying end.