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# **CORPS**™ **TimeLords**™

©1983,1987,1990,1994, 2003 by Greg Porter

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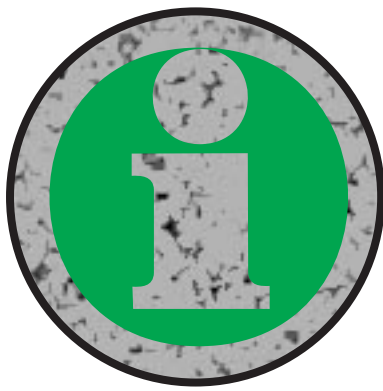
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## What is this?

**TimeLords** is a reissuing of the BTRC's role-playing game of the same title, with new background material and converted over to **CORPS**, BTRC's "house system".

**TimeLords** is a game of time and dimension travel, eon-spanning adventures powered by an alien artifact whose potential is limited only by your ability to comprehend its workings. With it, you can go not only forwards and backwards in time, but sideways as well, because an alternate universe is often just a timeline where things happened differently than they did in the "real" world...

## Game history

**TimeLords** has been plugging along for over ten years now, BTRC's first role-playing title and one of the first time travel role-playing games. It went through a couple editions and half a dozen supplements, and then sort of fell by the wayside as we worked on newer systems. But, it has not been dormant, just working behind the scenes. Long-time player Eric Baker has become a successful SF author, and has published work based on the **TimeLords** universe. I have also stepped into the fiction field and at this time I'm (still) trying to get **Eternity's Shadow** accepted for publication. This is a novel based around the background of the game, the original acquisition of time travel by humanity and how it shaped history as we know it. Changes to the original **TimeLords** background are largely due to this work, and excerpts are sprinkled throughout.

**TimeLords** includes all the background material you need to run a time or dimension hopping campaign of *any* type, with plenty of technobabble and campaigning tips to get you through the exceedingly strange and complex nature of the universe in general.

For those just getting started, you'll want a copy of the 2nd edition **CORPS** rules or the **CORPS Nutshell** (see our web site) to generate your characters. We suppose you could use some non-**BTRC** system with the **TimeLords** background, but why? Aside from that, everything you need for a universe of adventure is currently in your hands.

Good luck...you're going to need it!

Greg Porter

## Prologue

Time: 2389CE

Location: Earth<sub>null</sub>

Lucifer watched the sky fall and the world end. He had seen it more times than he cared to count, though the gleaming skull held loosely at his side would tell him the exact number if he cared to ask. He stood naked on the mountaintop, waiting and watching. The city, a smudge at the end of the valley, represented just another failure. It stood on a small mountain of its own ruins, two, three and even four story buildings of stone and brick inside its nested walls. Outside, its rocky flanks eventually gave way to treeless pasture and farmland, extending the length of the valley and on terraces halfway up the mountains. Roads paved with stone extended a little ways outside the city before reverting to crushed stone and then to dirt, snaking off in myriad directions. No machines of any kind could be seen, save for the occasional windmill or waterwheel. In a hand he held the only thing of consequence these people made, a knife of iron. *So little, but it is something.*

He shielded his eyes and looked towards the heavens. Above, unseen by day, were the sparks Far-walker called "sun-fire", not stars, but points of light made by unknown but thinking hands. Those hands were more primitive than the Destroyer, but far more advanced than mankind's. Lucifer had seen what was going to happen, if not on this exact world, on others like much it, but forced himself to watch. *Maybe it will be different this time.*

"It begins, old friend." The skull's voice came from no particular direction, and spoke in a language so old it had no name. "The sun-fire intensifies shortly before the hammers fall." A pause. "As always." Far-walker's voice conveyed a sense of regret, though Lucifer knew his teacher was largely incapable of emotion. Lucifer watched the skies intently, though Far-walker could and later would bring forth images far more accurate and detailed. The death of humanity was a morbid fascination to them both...and something more. *There.* A point of white against the daylight blue, then four heartbeats. Point. Spot. Disk. Fireball.

Impact.

The city vanished as the comet hit. The flash of heat hit Lucifer first, vaporizing snow and spalling the rocks around him. Razor-edged flakes bounced off his skin and whined disappointed into the distance. The radiant heat burned off Lucifer's hair but only reddened his skin, and he bowed his head to even the destruction of his coarse black locks. When he looked back up, the pillar of fire and smoke had dimmed to bearable levels and was already pushing at the roof of the sky. Then the shockwaves hit, driving him back a step. First from the comet's passage through the atmosphere, then from the impact itself.

The cloud of debris and choking gas was more leisurely in its passage than the shockwaves, boiling from the impact site like Hell itself had opened. It would soon roar its way up the mountain to where they stood, and into the valleys beyond before it finally slowed in its destruction. Lucifer knew this future all too well. The same was happening elsewhere across the world. Cities died, their smoking pyres blotting out the sun. The next rains that fell would be cold, black and acidic enough to burn the skin. There would be no harvest, not this year or the next. The few survivors he found in the future were little more than animals, afraid to build, afraid of the open sky, inbred and sometimes lacking even language. The angry hands in the sky would continue to hurl rocks and ice, though not with such deadly aim or deliberate malice as this first time. In a few centuries, even the pitiable remnants of humanity would be gone. Lucifer wiped the dust from his eyes, leaving a moist smudge on one cheek. He looked into the empty eyesockets of the skull he held.

"We fail...again. Why do I keep trying?"

"Revenge.", the skull quietly said.

"Revenge."

Lucifer stepped over the ridgeline, picked up a bundle of clothing, and jumped.



## INTRO- DUCTION

"The road of time travel is full of potholes..."

Zhanken (the Snake)

### Basics

*History is a fabrication.* Not a lie, but *fabricatus*, a made thing. Everything that *is* about the past and probably anything that *will be* in the future has happened or will happen because a time traveller interfered somehow. This is not to say that every single event in human history was directly shaped by time travel. *Just the important ones.* And when you make the big changes, the little changes follow.

History as you know it was shaped to reach a certain goal. Shaped by one man with the ability to travel through time, and the motivation to do something with that ability. He *needed* something, and needed a civilization to build it for him. But no such civilization existed. And when he travelled to the future, he found that the civilization he needed *never would exist.*

You must understand that without outside pressure humans have no impetus to improve their lot. Ancient man used his intelligence the way a ram uses his horns, a way to compete for mating privileges. The strong, clever man became a leader of men, and then discouraged strength and cleverness in others, lest they challenge his position. Scientific progress was glacial, scientific method unknown. Our time traveller determined to change that, but he had no such knowledge of his own to give. So, he took the meager advances his distant descendants achieved in *their* future, and transplanted them to the past, using history as a machine to multiply the time he had available.

Inventions, discoveries, wars. Kingdoms raised and kingdoms toppled. Assassinations and deaths in the still of the night. Individuals saved from death and billions condemned to it. All to drag humanity kicking and screaming into an era of advanced technology, to build for him what he needed to be built.

*But who was he?* How did he acquire the power to travel through time, and what gave him the will and ability to survive over ten thousand years in pursuit of a single goal? It's a long story, and it starts ten billion years from now...

### A Brief History of the Universe

*In the Beginning there was the End.* And at the End were the Designers. The race that created the Matrices and most of the other associated technology had another name for themselves, but those who sorted through the mess they left behind found it impossible to pronounce, so they were assigned a more convenient title. The Designers were apparently the very last species in our galaxy to develop intelligence, and they had the misfortune to come by it very late: By the time their ancestors first gazed up at their pale, red sun with curious eyes, the universe had become a dull place. The Milky Way galaxy, long ago stripped of rejuvenating gas clouds, had become a stellar boneyard, populated almost entirely by old red dwarfs and neutron stars, the dying embers of former glory. From their home planet, the night sky was an unbroken black.

When their scientists arrived at the laws of thermodynamics, the implications carried a special poignancy.

Their civilization survived for hundreds of thousands of years. As befitted their environment, they were a slow and careful lot, not given to sudden advancements in any field. *Slowly*, over the millennia, they gradually built up to a staggering level of scientific and technological achievement. They developed a workable hyperdrive, rearranged their solar system, and built planet-sized sensor arrays to listen for other civilizations, but found none. They explored the eons-empty ruins of the civilizations they called the Old Ones, races who would not even climb from the primordial ooze until long after Earth's sun was just a memory. Designer physics discovered the ultimate prize: The Grand Descriptive, a set of equations that seemed capable of describing the relative relationships of all that was.

And it all seemed for naught, pointless achievements that would ultimately be remembered by no one. Their interstellar explorations had found only dead stars and frozen, lifeless planets. The great technological ears they had unfurled to the cosmos heard only the uniform drone of interstellar hydrogen, cold, thin and sterile. The universe was winding down, and they were to be the last spectators. The fabric of interstellar space had already unraveled in places, leaving a nothingness that was even less than vacuum. Their sun provided a last oasis, but it too was well past its prime. Their great machine intelligences could predict how long it would take them to exhaust all the readily available fusion fuels, and how long the following era of privation would last until their civilization sank into final oblivion. Their poets composed wistful prose about the shiny young universe they had missed, and horror stories about the inevitable victory of the encroaching night, and the icy grave of hope. But not all were hopeless. Many could not bring themselves to meekly accept the eventual triumph of entropy, and labored to somehow create a better future for their kind.

## The Door

The equations of the Grand Descriptive postulate the existence of numerous discontinuities, of several distinct types. Through the application of certain mathematical transformations, the Designers discovered that some of these could be made to do 'tricks', changing position within the Descriptive. At first, it was believed that these singularities and their 'travels' were useless abstractions, and some held that their very existence invalidated the Grand Descriptive completely. At length, however, the same math transforms proved critical in perfecting their hyperdrive theory, demonstrating conclusively that they *did* correspond to physical phenomena, and prompting new interest in their implications.

Eventually, using modified hyperdrives, the Designers were able to 'capture' a Descriptive discontinuity, and hold it, where it could be studied at leisure. The first attempt to manipulate the discontinuity was nearly the last. Feedback between the discontinuity and the containment field resulted in a local breach of the spacetime continuum. However, analysis of the resulting wreckage confirmed the hypothesis being tested: *the discontinuities could be used to manipulate time itself.*

And so they discovered the universe's last and greatest secret. The rest would be mere engineering. Their offspring would have a future...in the past. The Door was open. At the very end of Time, time travel had begun.

Much like the way human physicists vie for time on a particle accelerator, Designer researchers competed for opportunities to tweak the captive singularity in various ways, by gingerly modifying the parameters of the binding fields. And, just as it is with their human counterparts, there were soon many more researchers than time slots. So they conjured up another one. And another. And another.

Eventually, thousands of the discontinuities predicted by the Grand Descriptive (the exact number is lost to us) were under Designer control, on or around their homeworld.

It was found early during the course of experimentation that the discontinuities were the reason for time itself. Time was not a function *of* matter, but a property imposed *upon* matter from outside by the sparsely distributed discontinuities. Having a like "charge", they repelled each other, and were distributed more or less uniformly through space, more densely within gravity wells, less so between stars. Isolating one from the rest of the universe within a modified hyperdrive altered the fabric of spacetime for millions, sometimes billions of kilometers. The Designers wrecked countless solar systems collecting these discontinuities, but there was no one left to complain about it, and the Designers didn't care. *They weren't planning on staying.*

The Designers determined to use time travel to escape the frigid doom overhanging their race. Self-contained temporal manipulation devices were constructed. The term we have for them is Matrix, its exact derivation is unknown. Temporal scoutcraft were constructed, built around these first Matrices. The Designers were concerned about the potential consequences of certain paradoxes (more on this later). So, in keeping with their cautious nature, their 'flight tests' were all brief visits to distant places and remote times. Everything worked perfectly, and the scoutcraft were then dispatched to search for an era suitable for colonization. Not all of them came back. Even for the Designers, time travel had its risks.

Inter-temporal colonization required a compromise. They reasoned that, since they were going to all the trouble of moving their entire population in order to buy time for their civilization, they might as well go back as far as possible. On the other hand, if they went too far back, there would be less of the heavier elements (silicon, iron, etc.) around, and so fewer interesting planets. In the end, they chose a period roughly 15 billion years after the Big Bang. Sound familiar? If not, that's roughly the universal "summer" that we live in right now.

The Designers did not plan to make their escape in great fleets of time travelling space arks, or anything like that. What fleet could hold the populace of a crowded planet? Also, they would need a steady power source until they discovered suitable planets. They had a simple solution to both problems: Through the operation of thousands of stabilized discontinuities, and devices whose parameters we can only guess at, they would bring their entire solar system with them. This was not arrogance. It was merely a measure of their quiet confidence in their utter mastery of nature.

This confidence was apparently well deserved. As far as we can tell, the operation was accomplished without a hitch. The Designer's sun and homeworld phased into the Milky Way galaxy around 10,000BCE by human reckoning.

It was a time of great celebration, and great awe. Not from their own incredible feat of astro-engineering, doubtless the greatest ever achieved, but of the view. There were *stars!* Before they had known only the wide, red, familiar face of their sun by day, and stygian darkness by night. But now the night sky was a velvet curtain, alive with thousands upon thousands of brilliant, dancing points of light, an eruption of nocturnal brilliance unimaginable to any of their kind who had not seen it.

They looked upon their work, and saw that it was good. So they packed away their inter-temporal star moving gear, and settled down to methodically explore the young, vibrant, energy-rich universe which their awesome technology had placed at their disposal.