Contents

The Timeline

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v0.3.0

Chapter 1

Construction notes

Some notes here to help me (Ronie) to write. This section will be removed from the final version. If you are reading that for the first time, it will be good to skip that chapter now and come back later.

The way things are going, two aspects are standing out:

1. Time travellers have a limited lifespan. So *time* is precious (I'm liking that a lot). It could be even some kind of currency.

   That also limits how good someone is at something. I think it's the perfect excuse to contact others and to build teams. Characters can't know everything in a lifespan, so they need to rely on the knowledge and ability of others.

   That also would mean science stop evolving before reach immortality, or even expand lifespan beyond 100

years. Instead the end of the world or human extermination, there is this idea in the back of my head of a *second dark age*. It happened before, right? What prevents it to happen again?

It's promising.

2. The difference between Known and Unknown instead of past and future. That solves a lot of problems about a single timeline vs free will. Also builds importance on information control.

Not sure yet about how it's going to work when someone tells you something. Right now my thinking is to make then create an entry in their Journal and cross some years of Age.

If someone tells you about your future, and that becomes a requirement that you need to spend years of you life to achieve (like "You teached me Kung Fu"), it seems it could be use as a form of attack. Because now you're required to do that. Maybe, for the matter of an attack, the offender should bring something concrete about that event. Even so, it could be fake.

I'm thinking, I'm thinking.

Update: with the new understand of causal loops, that's not a problem anymore, I think.

3. The Journal is *very* useful. However, I'm still not sure how much work it will be. I'd like to keep the "game maintenance" at minimum, but just annotate something is really powerful.

An alternative I'm strongly considering just to keep track of the Age available and let the player narrate that period as a flashback, if that's even necessary.

4. I want to avoid the *Time Cop* theme as much as I can. Why? Because every single time travel movie or book is about change the past and then other trying to prevent it *sight*. Yeah, I don't want *yet-another-fix-the-timeline* fiction.

5. There is no such thing as absolute time. Time is personal.

Chapter 2

Overview

Time travelling

The Timeline is a time travel RPG inspired by Aetherco's C°ntinuum and using the *Powered by The Apocalypse* system.

The system has the following premises:

1. You can travel time and space at will.

2. There is one and only one temporal line.

Those two items need a lot of explanation. But bear with me, we are going through them all.

The first premise:
You can travel time and space at will

If you have a time travel machine and want its best version ever, just go as far as possible in the future and get it. That's what *everyone* is using.

So, what the best machine possible let you do?

Well, the answer is obvious: it allows you to travel to space and time at will, no energy required, no setup time, extremely portable, and so on.

Actually, the best machine possible is not a machine, but a *skill you learn*.

The second premise:
There is one and only one temporal line

There is just one timeline with no multiverses, however, we have loops. The loops are self-consistent and non time travellers can't observe it.

Note: Rewrite this. Should we include "loop erasure"?

Moving beyond three dimensions

Or, "how travel through time looks like?"

Moving through time isn't hard, the problem is to escape your immediate Known in a way you don't need to cross it when moving towards the past. The Jump is exactly that, a move-

ment you learn that avoids your physical body and your conscience to occupy the same place at the same time.

Time, for us, is a dimension as traversable as any other. The tricky is to learn how to *bend* the dimensions in a way that where you are right now is touching somewhere else, then you just move in that direction. That way, we avoid occupy the same place twice when moving. We call it Jump, but it's more like a sidestep.

How does it look like?

To be honest, it's quite unimpressive. There is no sound or special effects, no more air displacement than when you walk. It looks like someone is walking into a corner, but there is nothing obstructing the vision. It's possible to do it even on a busy crowd, it would looks like someone enter in front of the observer. If someone is looking directly at you, then you are going to cause the scariest moment in that person's life, but no more than that.

So, you do that in two easy steps: first you bend the dimensions the same way you would bend a sheet of paper letting different parts to touch. Then you sidestep through the touching part.

Ok, I give you that, it requires more training than I've told you, but the basics are quite simple.

There is **one limitation**, though. If you can't move, you can't travel in time. It can be a small step, or even falling from a chair, but you need to move.

The two paradoxes

When we talk about time travel and a single timeline we also need to talk about paradoxes and how to solve them.

In reality, we don't know if time travel is possible and exactly how those paradoxes could be solved, or even if they would. Also, our very limited 3D minds can't understand manipulating time as just another dimension.

That being said, this is fiction, which mean we are going bend the paradoxes until they suit for the game. Shame on me.

Note: Time is *personal*! Ask Einstein. We are going to expand that to its limits.

Grandfather paradox

You know this paradox. You travel to the past and kill your grandfather when he is just a child, so your father was never born, and you were never born. So, who killed your grandfather?

Let's get this straight: there is *no* paradox here.

The way we told the story is actually incomplete, it's half of it. What follows is it as a whole.

You travel to the past, kill your grandfather, your father was never born, you were never born. *Then* there is no one to kill your grandfather, who lived, had you father, and you're born. The story repeats, you kill your grandfather and so on.

Why that's not a paradox? Because there is no contradiction there. Everything follows their logical conclusions and se-

quence of events. What happened is that the same time happened with different events twice, but it happened sequentially from the point of view of the time traveller.

Does that means the universe diverged and we had two different realities at the same time? Well, no. That means **both** things happened in the same timeline. Similar to the Schrödinger's cat experiment, those events were undetermined until someone experimented them, at that point, they become concrete for the point of reference of who observed them, which happens to experience them sequentially. Everyone else observed it just once.

Without traveling through time that seems illogical, but just because we can only observe the events once, so we are used to the notion that only one thing can happen at a given time. But, from the strictly logical point of view, there is no paradox.

Note: Add prevent Second World War example.

Bootstrap paradox

The bootstrap paradox happen when you travel to the past with a copy of *Les Miserables* from Victor Hugo and give it to him. So he actually copies it from your version which become famous, so you could buy the book to give it to him. But then, who created the book? From where that idea comes from?

Another version is when you travel in time and give you a beautiful pocket watch. Then you use it for a few years, travel back in time and give exactly the same clock to the younger version of yourself. So who built that clock? It was never built, does that means it comes out of nowhere?

Again, there is no paradox here for the same reason. There is no logical contradiction. What happens is that we are used to associate an event to something that happens previously in time, meaning something in the past *caused* an event in the future.

However, that notion creates another paradox itself. If every event has a previous event that caused it, then there is an infinite line of events. If not, we are admitting there is an exception to the rule we just state. Meaning that there *is* an event without cause.

Our notion of time being responsible for cause and effect is actually a paradox. Nothing logically prevents you of giving your past self something you received from yourself.

Do that mean you can give yourself the secret of the immortality, or and atomic bomb? Well, yes. However, things are not that simple, of course.

Imagine you give you back an atomic bomb, then you use it. You can't give it back to you now, you need to find another one. Anything you receive from an older version of yourself can't be consumed, otherwise you need to replace it.

What about knowledge? Any sufficient advanced knowledge needs a lot of time to be understood and applied. It's not just a matter of follow instructions, because they are going to be complex and need other things you don't have yet. Taking the "secret of immortality" as an example, just to understand the whole theory and process to create it would take years, and even so, you probably going to need processes that were not invented yet.

Could I give to myself a simpler version of it? Well, there is no simpler version, otherwise it would be already available by

now.

There is no shortcut for sufficient advanced knowledge.

The causal loop

The supposed paradoxes above are the two examples of causal loops. The first one is a bit more complex because it needs two passes on the same time to become self-consistent. The second is called a *closed loop* and it's self-consistent by itself. Both seems to cause infinite loops, but they happen just once. Why? Because that temporal loop was always there, it doesn't repeat. Repetition is something we created to understand the same event happening at different times, but when we understand that time *is*, there is no such thing as an infinite loop.

A small dictionary of time travel terms

- **Jump** - To move through time and space.

- **Jump Up** - To move in the direction of the future.

- **Jump Down** - To move in the direction of the past.

- **Plain Jump** - Teleport. You move in space, but not Up or Down in time.

- **Jump Out** - To move in time or space away, no matter if Up, Down, or Plain.

- **Fall** - To instinctively Jump Out, without controlling the destination. That happens when you create a time paradox or push yourself too hard.

- **Mule** - Someone that Jumps with tons of stuff.

- **Timeline** - You personal past and future. Everything that happened and will happen to you. The more blanks you have, more free will you have.

- **Age** - How old is your body. That has nothing to do with your birth date, but how long have you lived.

- **Known** - What you lived, your personal past. All the time behind your current Age.

- **Unknown** - What you still have not lived, your personal future. All the time ahead your current Age.

- **Site** - A place in time. The same place in different times are different sites.

Chapter 3

Mechanics

The timeline

The Timeline is a sheet of paper where everyone is going to mark when and where they are. It's used to keep track of the game and avoid creating obvious paradoxes.

It starts with a blank sheet of paper with just one point stating where and when all the characters are meeting at the beginning of the game session.

Every time someone Jumps, add another point and write where and when it represents. Draw a line from the previous point to the new one and add the name of the players that did the Jump.

[Ronie: That definitely need and extended example and a lot of playtest to check how effective it is.]

The journal

The Journal are the annotations of where your character were at each point in time. You are going to fill it as result of some moves.

When you want to retire your character, the journal will have it's whole life.

Each entry in your Journal has 2 things:

1. Where and when.

2. What happened there.

Sometimes a single entry can cover years of a character's life. If that happens, also take note of how long they spend there and dedicate a small paragraph describing life during that period.

Entries in your Journal consumes Age sometimes, but not always. If you run out of Age, the history is complete and you can't play with that character anymore.

Don't fill your Journal on every Jump. The moves will tell you when to fill it.

Retirement or Death

We start at the end. You already know how your character is going to end.

As you age, your body become too fragile to support time travel. You are still able to Jump, but you need to stay closer

and closer to when medicine is advanced enough. If you are old enough, in a bad situation you can lose conscience and die in the far past.

When you build your character, you decide their fate upfront.

If you want it to retire, choose an Age of Retirement. From that point on, your character is no longer playable. Add to you Timeline where and when he or she is going to retire and doing what. Younger versions of you can visit your older version at any time.

If you see you character as someone who's not going to stop until they drop dead, choose an Age of Death. If you ever play him or her beyond that Age, they will die in game. You can play the dying character at any game session of your choice, just let the Game Master know your intention.

Don't worry about playing the last game of you character. You always can play their younger versions as far as your timeline has blank spaces.

Ages for death and retirement are anything close to 100 years old.

Age

You can play with several versions of your character, even multiple versions at same time. However, the versions are different not only in attributes, but in physical appearance.

Divide your character in 4 Ages between your Recruitment and your Retirement (or Death), they can have different sizes, but each one follows the other. The first time you play with a ver-

sion of your character at that Age, fill the blanks.

Scars

When you create your character, describe 5 scars and how they look like.

Scars are physical or mental. They are never too severe as the character can jump Up until the medicine is advanced enough to cure anything.

Scars are big enough to be noticed, but small enough to not be worth the time to fix them. Things like physical scars, mannerisms, or small phobias are perfect. They are marks of experience from your character.

Examples:

- A great scar in you chest, from the shoulder to you hip.

- A mark around your left arm as if it was severed and sewed back.

- A scar over your face, crossing your eye.

- Your left leg is mechanical.

Even if you choose to be one-eyed or have a mechanical leg, you are as capable as ever. Scars are for the fiction, they do not affect game mechanics.

Attributes

[Ronie: Still thinking about Luck, seems appropriate on the "Call Double" move and the scars. But still...]

You have a total pool of 5 points, These attributes change every 20 years or so. When you first play the character at that Age, distribute any amount of points from the pool to that version of you character. The limits for each attribute are +3 and -2.

The GM may ask how your character increased or decreased that attributes from a younger version. Create something interesting.

Body - The state of your body. That includes strength, agility, and stamina.

Mind - The state of your mind. That includes logic, perception, and knowledge.

Luck - How much Lady Luck likes you. Bad luck means more scars, being hit first, and a general grumpy and unpleasant mood. Good luck means less scars, and a shiny and happy personality.

Moves

Time travel moves

Plain Jump

When you want to **teleport without move in time**. You're there. Don't roll nor mark anything in The Timeline or your Journal.

You can't jump if you are not able to move.

Jump Out

You disappear from the current time and appear at any time or locale you want. Don't roll:

- **When jumping to somewhere already in The Timeline**: draw a line from where you are to where you are going and add your name on it.

- **When jumping to a new site**: create it in The Timeline and do as above.

Important: If you jump without knowing where and when you are, you can't draw a line, so you Fall (see the next move).

Fall

When you are **about to create Paradox**, but before it happens, you instinctively Jump Out randomly. *Roll + Mind*:

- **On 10+**: You Fall close to where you were. The Fall was a Plain Jump just enough for you to avoid the Paradox.

- **On 7-9**: You Fall a bit Up or Down from where you were, you know where but not when you are. The GM secretly records when you are.

- **On -6**: You Fall somewhere Up or Down, and possible Plain far, you don't know where or when. You are obviously a strange in this place. The GM secretly records where and when you are.

Mule

When you **Jump bringing more people or something large with you**, you overexert yourself. *Roll + Body*:

- **On 10+**: You *Jump Out*. Take that move instead.

- **On 7-9**: You *Jump Out*, but you mark a Scar (preferentially a mental one). Narrate how you got that Scar.

- **On -6**: You *Fall*.

Call a Double

You call a Double from your past of your future. You play both. They will be around you as long as you wish.

- To invoke an **younger** version of yourself: you Jump Down and back Up with your younger.

- To invoke an **older** version of yourself: Your older version just appear.

- Roll + Luck: On -6 choose one of your versions. Before you depart from each other, narrate how you obtained a scar. You can choose any other -6 roll as an excuse for that, if you want.

In any case, mark a small entry in your Journal telling where and when your Double were when they Jump to help you. If it's the first time you're getting a Double from an Age you never played before, also execute the move *New You*.

When you Call a Double, the oldest of both versions knows exactly what happened because that event is in their Known. That means you can ask what you remember and the GM will tell you trustfully, you don't need to follow the previous events.

You may think that creates two temporal lines as both things happened. Actually, for your character, it's like two different events at different Ages.

[Ronie: Still thinking about that, maybe that doesn't make sense in reality, but it works for the game. The Fall would prevent you to change the world in crazy ways, like killing your grand father, but as you are never going to reenact the same event twice in the roleplay, there is no need to artificially prevent that. An alternative would be to erase the memory of the older version until the event finishes, but I'm not sure which of the approaches is worse...]

Serious Combat

When you **fight without concealing your time travel**, mark Serious Combat with date and locale in your Journal and *Roll + Body*:

- **On 10+**: Several Doubles appear and disappear hitting all targets and protecting each other. The targets are all knocked out or dead.

- **On 7-9**: Same as before, but the enemies hit some of you. Choose one:
    - Mark a scar. You can't choose this if all your scars are already marked.
    - Increase your age by 7 days as you jump Out, heal, and get back.
    - Don't jump Out, but -1 to your Body for the next scene as you are still injured.

- **On -6**: Same as above, but something wrong happened, like you've been seen, non-combatants were hurt, someone used that as a distraction, or something else happened. The GM will *not* tell you what it was, effects will be noticed later.

Instant Skill

When you **need a new skill you don't have,** Jump Out and choose a level for that skill:

- *at Master level*: Spent 10 years on your Journal. No matter how difficult it is, you can do it.

- *at Professional level*: Spent 5 years on your Journal. Everything a competent professional can do, you can do.

- *at Novice level*: Spent 2 years on your Journal. You can do the job, but it will have consequences or it's not going to last for long.

Training is hard work, so you can't stop without losing ability. From now on you cannot play or Call a Double from that period. You also need and uninterrupted open in your Journal to fit the whole period of training.

Instant Ally

When you **need something astronomically difficult to do,** Jump Out and call for someone you know:

- *you find a Grand Master*: Add an entry to your Journal where and when you found her or him. After the job done, you own a favor.

The GM will ask how you met the Grand Master.

Instant Stuff

. . .

Infinite Money

. . .

Plain moves

The moves below doesn't involve time travel. They never affect your Timeline.

Investigate

. . .

Non-serious combat

. . .

Grand Mastery

. . .

Special moves

New You

When you play a version of yourself for the first time:

- Choose an Age slot.
- Fill when that Age starts and ends, if they are not already filled.
- Fill that Age attributes with points from the attribute pool. They can range from -2 to +3.

- Choose which new Scars you have at that age.

- Describe how you look like to everyone.

The Scars you choose will be also present in all future version of you. This move is also triggered when you Call a Double.

Chapter 4

The opening game

Time travel RPGs are quite hard to grasp because we don't think in four dimensions. Our first reflex is to *jump into the past and change it*, but as the universe **is**, therefore that's not going to work and the player will just get frustrated.

If that's the first time you are game mastering or playing this game, don't start creating your a plot or characters. Instead, start with a completely blank character sheet and run the *opening game*.

It's a game about your training as a time-traveller, we are going to introduce new mechanics and fill a little bit of the character sheet at each scene. By the end of the game, you'll have a full understanding of everything and a character ready to play future games.

Think about that *tutorial level* on video-games. It's exactly that.

Preparation

The Game Master should have read the Overview chapter and this chapter as a whole.

We are going to need:

- At least a pair of six-sided dice. Ideally one for each player.

- A blank sheet of paper in the middle of the table. It will be The Timeline, and will tracks where the characters are.

- A character playbook printed for each player.

The Game Master should not explain the three premises to the players. They are going to be introduced during the Opening Game.

Then, start at the *First move* below and do each move as a scene.

First move:
Jump Out and the First Premise

Note: The goal is to show how The Timeline in the table works, also that you can travel at will. Also fill the basics: who you are and from where did you come from.

Second move:
Fall and the Second Premise

Note: The goal is to show how the paradox is avoided in the game. I expect the players to feel quite limited as they can't change the past at first, but we also need to demonstrate how they *can* change the any past as far as they haven't experienced it first hand. Probably we need to do that in two subsections.

Idea: the task is to kill Hitler. That's going to show how it's not possible. Idea: a second task to help

Third move:
Call Double and the Third Premise

Third move:
Infinite Money

Chapter 5

Appendix

Videos

Yet unnordered:

- VSauce3 ft Neil deGrasse Tyson - `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AORsw8NpN4E`

- PBS Spacetime - `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YycAzdtUIko` (time doesn't implies causality, but the other way around)

- VSauce3 causal loops - `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpB3kan4BHQ`

- MinutePhysics - `https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XayNKY9441Y` (elegant solution to paradoxes)