# RPG Blog Carnival: Time Marches On

**by loottheroom - Monday, February 12, 2018**

http://loottheroom.uk/rpg-blog-carnival-time-marches-on/

 It's RPG Blog Carnival time again, and this month we're tackling a theme set by Daemons and Deathrays. And what is that theme? *Time Marches On*.

This seems like a good opportunity for me to talk about one of my favourite books from AD&D, something that I don't see mentioned very often. That book is a little thing from 1995 called *Chronomancer*, written by Loren Coleman. The history of the book is quite interesting in its own right, but since that's covered pretty concisely in the blurb over on DMs Guild (which you can read if you click on that handy link I just gave you) it seems redundant for me to spend a few hundred words talking about it.

Instead I want to look at some of the things that I really liked about that book, pulling out some things that would be fun to drop into our games and, maybe, taking a stab at converting some material to 5e.

## A Guidebook To The Past

One of the first Kits (the things that eventually because Archetypes and Backgrounds) for the Chronomancer presented in the book is that of the Guide. These are described as meddlesome characters who believe they are the only people wise enough to second-guess history, and they task themselves with meddling in the past to rewrite the future. They aren't my favourite thing about this book, but they do *contain* one of my favourite things from *Chronomancy*.

One of the features of the timestream as presented in *Chronomancy* is that those traveling in the timestream - and their belongings - are immune to any changes to the timestream. When Guides travel

back in time they do a lot of preparation, including acquiring histories covering the time that they are traveling to. They take these books with them on their travels, so that once their task is complete and they return they can buy new copies of the same books (but copies that *have* been altered by the change to the timestream) and compare the two, giving the Chronomancer a better idea of what their actions have accomplished. My favourite part of this whole thing is this one sentence of flavour, from page 8 of *Chronomancer*:

> *"A Guide ... eventually owns one of the largest, most inaccurate libraries in existence."*

Personally, I think that would make for a really interesting and memorable location for an adventure - a library filled with two copies of each book it contains. In some cases the contents of those books would be wildly different; in others, the differences might be buried in the footnotes, a small wrinkle in time that nobody would notice.

## Raiders of the Lost Timeline

I don't know whether it's accurate to say that I *like* the Temporal Raider subclass; I'm pretty sure I would never have allowed one in my game. But the concept is still a fun one. Temporal Raiders are described as being somewhere between Doctor Who and Indiana Jones, jumping from timeline to timeline to be near important people, witness - and be involved in - world-changing events, and lifting lost treasures straight out of history (and, very possibly, becoming the reason those treasures are considered lost in the first place).

Reading this subclass again, I couldn't help picturing the carnage that would ensue if you let loose on the world a wizard who treats time in the same way that Indiana Jones treats an ancient ruin. Many GMs - myself included - often struggle to come up with fun, interesting challenges for higher level characters without arbitrarily shutting down abilities like teleportation effects and divination magics. Having to hunt down a time-hopping tourist wreaking havoc on the world at multiple points in history seems like it would make for a really fun campaign arc, as the party try to figure out where and when their foe will appear next, and attempt to apprehend her without doing even more damage to the timestream.

## Temporal Prime

Temporal Prime is, at its essence, the plane of existence where time is represented physically - though the book complicates this description later, describing Temporal Prime not as a plane but as a state of mind. Whatever it is, Temporal Prime touches all other planes of existence. It is described as an infinite black void containing infinite lifelines, seen as silver cords of various brightness and thickness that all flow in the same directions. These represent the timestreams of everything that exists and influences time in any way, from the ghostlike silver wisps of plants and rocks to the broad, silver rivers left by queens and emperors. The brighter and thicker a lifeline is, the more important and influential it is; this is how Chronomancers navigate to important moments in the timestream.

In the lore of the book, Chronomancers entering the timestream can only perceive the stream relating to the plane of existence that they entered from; that is, a Chronomancer entering the timestream from the Ethereal Plane can not see or interact with the timestream of, say, the Feywild. Time flows at different

rates on different planes, and opening the timestream of another plane might be dangerous.

Well, danger is where the fun lies, isn't it? What happens when the timestream of the Elemental Plane of Fire begins to mix with the timestream of the Prime Material Plane? How does it manifest itself in Material reality? Maybe people start seeing spectral reenactments of wars between the Efreet, or maybe some of the city streets of Neverwinter begin to lead the bazaars of the City of Brass for a few hours a day, always dropping travellers at exactly the same position in time so that hundreds of people appear in the city simultaneously despite walking the street alone back in their home timestream.

## Prime Time

Characters on Temporal Prime still experience the passage of time, but it is slowed for them. In game terms, one round on the Material Plane is equivalent to four rounds on Temporal Prime. This opens up some interesting uses of the plane for adventurers, and some potentially interesting spells effects. *Chronomancer* gives the example of a wizard stepping out of time during combat, spending a few rounds healing and preparing spells, before stepping back into her normal time. This is the least potentially problematic use of the timestream; what happens if a character steps out of time, moves a minute or two on their own lifeline, and then steps back in (known in the book as *doubling your timeline*)? How would this play out at the table?

The book actually deals with this, but in a way that says the writers didn't want to address it because of how messy it can get. The solution in *Chronomaner* is a simple one; characters simply can't exist in multiple locations at the same moment on their own lifeline, due to *reasons*. There's still some trace of an adversarial form of GMing in this book, and a large chunk of it is dedicated to ways to make sure that a character's actions in the past don't actually have any lasting effect, or else impact on the character themself in negative ways. I don't particularly like this, though I understand the reasons for it; time travel is tricky to pull off in fiction where you as the writer have full control over the narrative, let alone in a game where there are five other people co-writing the story with you.

## Skills For Chronomancers

*Chronomancer* presents several new Non-Weapon Proficiencies for chronomancer characters. Given the way skills are presented in 5e it's very easy to make these work in your current games. Here, then, are a small selection of new skills that you could use if you decide to start playing with time in your adventures. The first two are converted from *Chronomancer*. The latter two are my own creations.

### Intelligence (Future History)

Your Intelligence (Future History) check measures your ability to recall knowledge about events, people, kingdoms, wars, disputes, and civilisations applicable to a specific future time and place. This covers both the present day within that time and place, as well as its legends and lore.

Future knowledge can be learned through studying under another chronomancer who is an expect in that specific time and place, obtaining a written history of that time and place, or by travelling there directly.

### Intelligence (Prophecy)

Your Intelligence (Prophecy) check measures you ability to analyze prophecies for hidden meanings and accuracy, or to construct an accurate prophecy of a time and place that you are familiar with.

### Intelligence (Impact)

When you are planning a task that might have an effect on the timestream, you can make an Intelligence (Impact) check to deduce the impact your actions might have. You might identify the transformations the timestream is already undergoing to accommodate your actions, notice the turbulence of an event upstream that might interfere with your task, or sense the beginnings of a timestorm that will result from you accidentally doubling your timeline.

### Intelligence (Stream Reading)

When you attempt to identify the person to whom a lifeline belongs, you make an Intelligence (Stream Reading) check. Your GM may modify the DC of this check based on any research or preparation you have done, and your familiarity with the person whose lifeline you are examining. You may also make an Intelligence (Stream Reading) check when attempting to pinpoint a particular moment along a lifeline.

## Spells

I've only converted a couple of spells from *Chronomancy* here - namely, the ones that are least likely to completely screw up your game. I might make it a job for Future Me to convert the rest of the spells in the book to 5e, but that's a little beyond the scope of this post. For now, though, you're welcome to use these.

### Preserve

*2nd-level chronomancy*

**Casting Time:** 1 minute

**Range:** 30 feet

**Components:** V, S, M (a small vial of salt sealed with wax, and a sealable box or container worth at least 20 gp)

**Duration:** 30 days

You halt the decay (including ripening) of any nonliving matter placed inside the container. The effect ends on any matter removed from the container, at which point the removed item becomes susceptible to the normal passage of time.

*At Higher Levels.* When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, its duration increases by 30 days for each slot level above 2nd. If cast at 7th level or higher, the effect does not end on matter that is removed from the container.

## Timeslip

*4th-level chronomancy*

**Casting Time:** 1 action

**Range:** Self

**Components:** V, S, M (a square of fine silk and a small piece of basalt)

**Duration:** Concentration, up to 1 minute

The barrier between reality and the Temporal Plane thins and you instantly slip through it, appearing in the Temporal Plane next to the moment in your lifeline when you cast the spell.

While on the Temporal Plane, time moves differently for you. Each 4 rounds you spend on the Temporal Plane is equivalent to 1 round in reality. You return to reality in the same physical position that you were in when you cast the spell unless you attempt to interact with another creature's lifeline (see blow). If you return from the Temporal Plane before 4 rounds have passed, you return 1 round after you cast the spell.

The caster may attempt to use another creature's lifeline that is visible on the Temporal Plane as an anchor for their return to reality. To do so, make an Intelligence saving throw. The DC for this roll is 20 minus the spell slot level used to cast *timeslip*. On a success, you return to your plane of origin within a mile of the creature whose lifeline you used as an anchor. On a failure, you suffer 1d12 psychic damage and are returned your your original position in reality.

*At Higher Levels.* You may transport one additional willing creature along with yourself when casting this spell at 5th, 7th, and 9th levels.

And that's it for now! If you enjoyed this, I recommend checking out *[Chronomancer](#)* for AD&D. There are a lot of fun spells in that book, and I'll definitely be converting some more of them in future (especially if that's something people actually want to see).

As always with the RPG Blog Carnival, make sure you go and check out [this month's host](#) and read the other entries linked in the comments there.

Thanks for reading!

_____

Support Loot The Room on Patreon!