

CORPS

Time Lords

begin the adventure into forever.

 **BTRC**

Greg Porter

CORPS[™] **TimeLords**[™]

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 P.O. Box 1121
 Collinsville VA 24078

email : **btrc@btrc.net**
web: **<http://www.btrc.net/index.html>**

Design: Greg Porter
Cover art: **Brad Beattie**
Interior art: **Joel Keener, Darrell Midgette, Dan Smith, Robert Smith**

Playtesters: Dave Allison, Roger Campbell, Catherine DeMott, Bret Jones, John Kennedy, John Kolb, Jasper Merendino, Eric Smith, Craig Taylor and Tricia Weaver.

Other kudos: Eric Baker (Faust), Ramon Guerrero, John Kolb, Phil McGregor, Jasper Merendino, Darrell Midgette, Clint Warlick (Domino Society), James Weston, Tom Wilson

Dedicated to: Cathy

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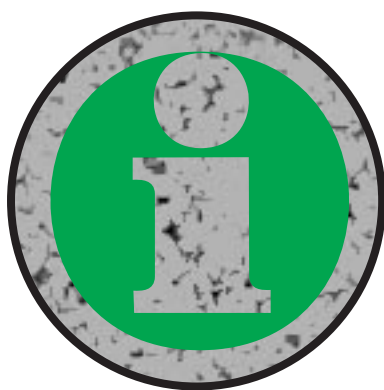
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What is this?

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_{mult}

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..."

Zhancken (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. Still, 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.

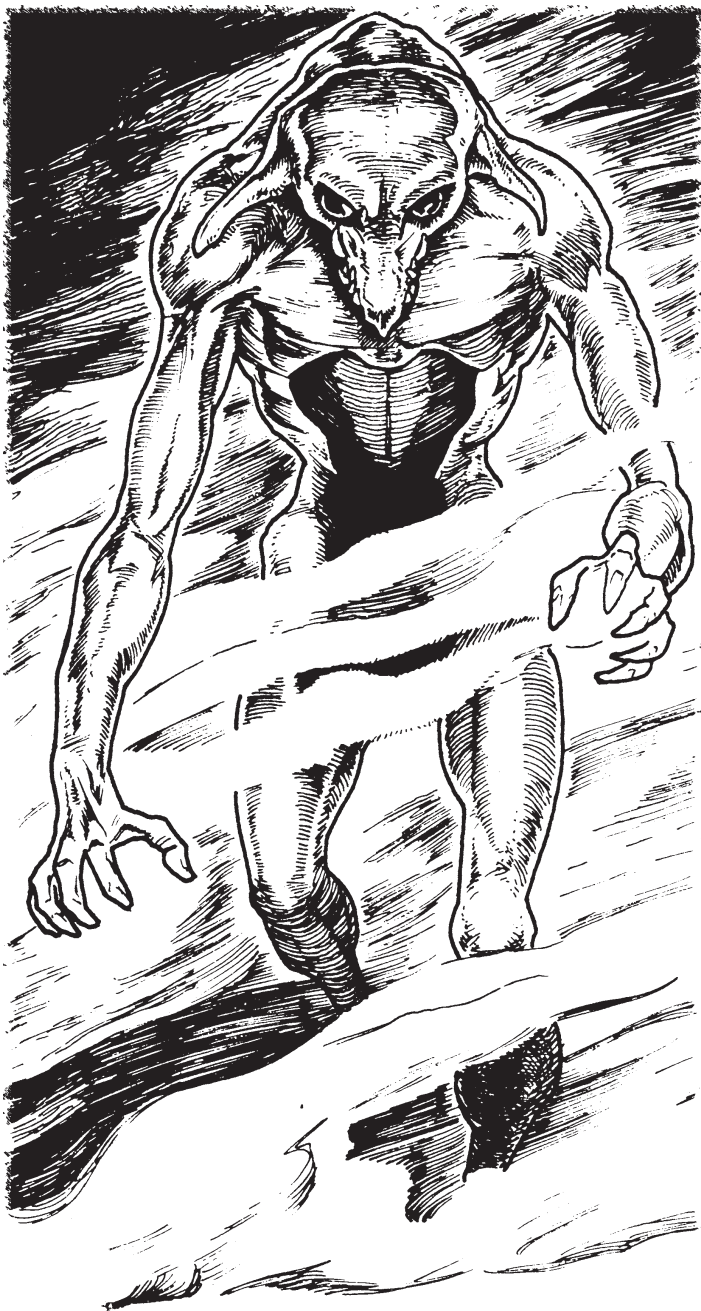
This confidence was apparently well deserved. As far as we can tell, the operation was accomplished without a hitch. The Designer's sun and homeworld phased into the Milky Way galaxy around 10,000BCE by human reckoning.

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.

After a few short journeys into the now-recent past, the ruling entities of the Designers determined that any further time travel would be unnecessary, wasteful, possibly dangerous. So they ruled that henceforth the Matrices would only be used for space travel or other similar functions. They did not provide for any enforcement of this edict. They knew that enforcement was unnecessary. In fact, they made the ruling, as they made all their rulings, without fear of contradiction or argument. Millennia of living with the conformist mindset required for survival on their crowded, resource-poor world had long ago weeded out any trace of societal deviance from the race.

So, it was the sort of thing they were not at all prepared for...



A not so happy ending

The Designer civilization flourished in its new environment. Some things changed, some things didn't. They remained frugal, industrious, responsible, and obedient. But the limitless horizons now before them had *some* effect. Slowly, little by little, they began to become less cautious. A new generation was born and matured, in a world of limitless energy and boundless possibilities, something their elders could never have imagined in their own desolate youth.

Long before their trip through time, the Designers had particularly excelled at cybotics, the design of technology built by a biological host. This science fit in well with their frugal mentality, as the central philosophy was economy of effort: Why design a machine from scratch, when you can let nature do half the job for you? Living things, after all, are self-motivating, self-replicating, and self-repairing. By the time of their great temporal exodus, they had come to rely on cybiots a great deal. But the future of the science, like the future of the race, seemed in doubt, as, over the millennia, they had exhausted the potentialities of their planet's biosphere. Generations of researchers produced no improvements. The cybiots they had worked fine enough, but there seemed to be nothing left to do in the field.

After the Exodus, that view changed quickly. Their new galaxy was *crawling* with life. Exploration and colonization missions catalogued billions of new species, including a handful of tool users ranging from starfaring societies ("almost" intelligent) to extremely primitive (Stone Age humans). The possibilities were limitless! Cybotics was reborn. Soon a flood of useful new critters, from the microscopic to the gargantuan, came pouring out of the labs.

Some centuries after the Exodus, the Designer subgrouping known as the Family of Reconstructive Evolutionists came up with a peculiar idea. It was not the sort of idea that members of their species usually entertained, for it was grandiose, and involved the expenditure of a great deal of effort to create something for which there was no demonstrated need. In earlier times, the concept would have been dismissed without a second thought. But times had changed.

Put simply, their plan was to use every trick of Designer science to create the ultimate being possible, a sort of demonstration model of their technology. It would not be just another god-like computer: They already had plenty of those. Instead, their creation would be a creature that would, at least at first glance, appear to be mere flesh and blood. It would be a being one could touch, embrace, shake appendages with, but it would be as brilliant, wise, potent, and indestructible as they could make, a supreme and enduring monument to their technology. It would be used as an emissary to the "lesser races", so that Designers did not have to trouble themselves dealing with what they considered sub-intelligent beings.

Their recipe went something like this: Start with a large tool user of modest brainpower. Discard and replace those simpler parts of the brain whose functions could be easily replaced by technology. Augment the higher centers with a fully interfaced computer, the biggest that would fit in the space available. Then rip out various organs, one by one, replacing each with much smaller micromachinery or custom-designed organs performing the same functions. Use the space saved to install nifty hardware. Armored skin, that could seal airtight against hostile environments, backed by thermal insulation and energy-absorbing pocket universes. Electromagnetic sensor arrays. A closed metabolic cycle, allowing near total self-sufficiency, at least when operating at low power. Organically replaced metal bones, to withstand high gravity. And while they were at it, an internal gravity drive. Perhaps a hyperdrive, laid along the spine...No! A Matrix! Right at the base of the skull, next to the FTL communicator...etc. The resulting construct would be able to toss aside pesky asteroids with induced gravity warps, beat mountains flat with internally mounted probability cannon, instantly access every computer on the homeworld, maintain simultaneous mental contact with thousands of Designers, and travel through interstellar space without recourse to any external device.

After considerable meditation on the subject, the ruling entities approved the project. Their predecessors would have been turning in their graves, but the ever-conserving Designers would have considered burial to be a waste.

We do know something about what the finished product looked like. The basic outline was nothing startling, being similar to the human pattern: It was a four limbed, upright biped. Its head, however, did not look remotely human. A narrow, toothy snout projected from the front of the enlarged brain case. From the end of the snout, where nostrils would be on a mammal, hung a short, flexible trunk, like a tapir's. Above the snout were two eyes, very wide, and pitch black. Loose flaps of skin, like the ears of some dog, hung on either side of the head. It was a large creature, standing over two meters tall. The closest human pronunciation of its species was the "Qual'n", and its primitive homeworld lay several thousand parsecs closer to the galactic core than Earth.

Somewhere in the creation process, an error was made. Some safety check was overlooked, or perhaps some shortcut was taken. Perhaps before the brain was reconnected to the sensory apparatus, it became aware, and spent too long in sensory deprivation. Or perhaps the brain they chose was defective to start with, in some way they overlooked. Xenopsychology was a relatively new field for them. Whatever the case, the finished product still lived up to all their stated expectations. It was brilliant. It was wise. It was patient. It was powerful.

It was also a murderous, xenophobic paranoid.

Psychologically speaking, the Designers were one big happy family. Peaceful and reasonable, they imagined that intelligence and pacifism went hand in hand, and that only sub-intelligent primitives embraced violence. Their culture did not prepare them for a genius capable of genocide.

At first, though, all seemed well. Their creation concealed its madness, patiently making its plans, gathering or subverting Designer power sources and preparing itself, all the while appearing to be the gentle, enlightened demigod they wanted it to be. Only after all its systems were fully operational did it strike. Like most high-tech civilizations, the Designers relied heavily on their version of computers. Imagine the effect when, in one moment, every significant computer on their homeworld shut down. All backup systems failed simultaneously. The paralysis was total. Amid the chaos, the malignant angel they had brought forth struck again.

Within seconds, every Designer within a thousand kilometers died in agony.

Not Enough.

Rising swiftly into the atmosphere, he sensed, calculated, and chose.

Beneath him the planet twitched. The greatest architecture multernity ever knew crumbled to dust before a planet-wide seismic convulsion of a magnitude that any human geologist would declare impossible.

Still, Not Enough.

The bringer of the Apocalypse sped higher. Again he sensed, calculated, and chose.

Folding space around himself as protection from his own handiwork, he gathered his power for a supreme effort, and concentrated. It is not easy to destabilize a small red star. Indeed, it is very, very hard.

But it is *not* impossible.

Leaving a dead planet circling a dying star, The Great Destroyer set out to obliterate the colony worlds.

Vengeance is mine!

Shortly before their destruction, the Designers had discovered humanity. Our species got relatively little attention. We were one of many tool-using species, and specimens were collected and stored in stasis as a matter of course. Sheer chance chose a handful of humans to be taken out of storage for behavior studies. A few were taken to a nearby asteroid for a series of experiments. This family of neolithic humans was placed in a simulated steppe environment and observed for some years. Not quite lab rats, not quite pets, the humans were aware of their limited environment, but powerless to do anything about it. Through the guidance of a limited AI based on a deconstructed tribal elder (an "ancestor spirit"), they learned and were taught, as well as could be expected for superstitious illiterates. To them, the Designers were not gods, but still held in awe and fear. Designer emotions and motivations were alien to the captives, and while the AI shaman had the best understanding of the Designer psyche, human language did not have the concepts necessary to express them to his companions.

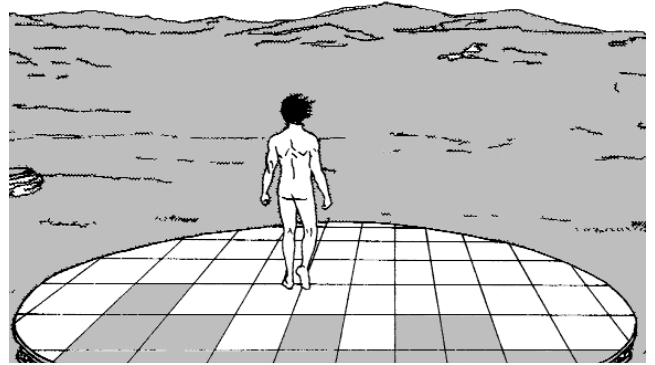
As word spread of the creation of the Emissary, the Family of Designers studying the humans decided to modify the adult male, whose self-designation was Bright-spear, to test if this manipulation of lower life forms was an ultimately profitable exercise. The human was very lightly augmented, stronger, faster, tougher, but nothing so drastic as had been done to the Qual'n. To allow him to interface to their interstellar computer network, they used a surplus Matrix. It was available, and an efficient use of existing resources. An inhibiting system would prevent any other uses. Final tests were about to get underway when the renegade Qual'n, calling himself the Destroyer, arrived at the asteroid colony. No coherent warning had gone out during the homeworld's destruction, so the outpost was unprepared. There was nothing here that could stand in his way, and he knew it, so this time his method was more brazen, more leisurely, and more cruel. He planned to spend a few days killing off the hundred thousand or so inhabitants, a few at a time, by slowly burning out their brains, so that he might fully savor the slaughter. Using the Designers' distinctive mental signature to find his prey, he did not notice the humans.

In an incredible display of hubris, The Destroyer announced his presence and intentions to every soul on the planet. He did this via broadcast over their network, the content of which was, more or less, "I'm going to kill you all, and there's nothing you can do about it". Then, an invisible rain of madness and destruction began to fall upon the colony, intensifying by the minute. Amid the shambles, trapped and forgotten inside the habitat dome, an altered human blindly ran towards his lifemate and infant son, only to see a rift in the habitat suck them into the vacuum of space. Seeing the hungry ground open up and swallow all he loved, his mind filled with thoughts of escape. As he too was sucked towards oblivion, a Designer tech's dying convulsions deactivated the inhibiting system on the Matrix in his brain.

The human's wishes were granted. He was gone.

The Destroyer sensed the Jump and recognized the phenomenon immediately, but had no means of determining its destination. Furious at the escape, he cut short the torment of his victims by vaporizing the colony site, and he then departed to search for other prey.

The human, meanwhile, suddenly found himself elsewhere. He did not know it yet, but he was also *elsewhen*. The experiment had been successful: The Matrix had sensed his distress, and taken him to more congenial surroundings.



This human was *not* a helpless castaway. He was stronger and tougher than any natural human could hope to be. And he carried the crystal skull that was the embodiment of the tribal shaman Far-walker. It was limited in scope and ability, and no longer had access to the vast Designer databases, but it still held secrets that would take millennia for humans to finally grasp.

Even so, what sort of life did Bright-spear have left? He was alone, bereft of family, filled with rage and grief, stranded in a place so far removed from his true home that his language had no words to express it.

There seemed no point in carrying on. At the brink of despair, he remembered something from his childhood. His tribe had been hunters. He knew from the elders' tales that, if a hunter was wise, clever, and brave, he might bring down the mightiest creatures in the world with nothing more than a stone-tipped spear.

At the brink of self-destruction, this idea saved him. It suggested a purpose, a reason to survive, a Cause. He should not die uselessly on this barren world. Somewhere out there lurked the thing that had destroyed everything he cared about. Whatever it was, it had to be destroyed. As far as he knew, there was no one left to do it. He would have to be the hero, the Champion of Goodness and Light, opposing what must surely be the embodiment of Darkness and Evil. He would repay his debts to his friends and family the only way now possible.

"I'm going to get that bastard!"

His ancestor spirit was only able with some difficulty to convince Bright-spear that the Destroyer was far too powerful to challenge, even with the strength of ten men and skin tough enough to turn the sharpest flint. Bright-spear had to find a way to make the tools to make the tools to make weapons capable of defeating the Destroyer. Far-walker did not tell Bright-spear how many thousands of years this would ultimately take. Bright-spear had the time. The Designers had taken away the death-of-winters from he and his family as a routine procedure. He would never grow old so long as the Designer implants in him continued to function.

His thirst for vengeance gave Bright-spear the will to survive, and surviving, he learned. He learned to use his Matrix. Gradually, he learned to influence the destinations of his Jumps, and found that the path of days to come could branch like an endless river. He found that without goading, humanity would never develop the tools he needed. Worse, some side effect of temporal translation made moving advanced items from one time to another virtually impossible. He could move things from place to place, but not from time to time. Fuels and explosives ignited, electrical arcs corroded and pitted delicate machinery, unknown quantum effects ruined transistors and integrated circuits. It was not a deliberate limit built-in by the Designers. *Their* technology wasn't affected, and they just didn't care about anyone else's. He was unable to jump-start his own past with equipment from a possible future.

So he goaded humanity from the rear. From the development of metalworking to writing and mathematics, he Jumped across continents and centuries, finding advances, spreading ideas, pushing tribes, then nations into conflict to spur a need for research and better tools with which to do violence. Sometime during an extended sojourn among the peoples of the eastern Mediterranean, he took the name Lucifer.

At the same time, he also began creating allies. Some millennia after the fall of the Designers, Bright-spear made a tentative visit to a world that had been occupied by Designers, *and* was not instantly lethal to humans. There he uncovered dormant Matrices from the wreckage, and learned that his own Matrix obeyed him only because it considered him a subset of the Family that augmented him. Using this authority, he reactivated the Matrices he found. For anyone else to use them, the Matrix would have to recognize them as a subset of *his* Family, and by extension, of the Designer Family. He spread his seed across the centuries, and tracked his children down when they reached adulthood.

These became the first TimeLords. Some of them he had rescued from almost certain death, others were lured by the promise of adventure, wealth, power or immortality, while others were simply 'converts'. Now he had extra sets of hands to do what he called The Work. He scouted out useful futures from the many useless ones, ruthlessly culling and pruning dead-end possibilities, while his children steered the bulk of humanity's potential existence down the highest-tech roads they could find or make.

While Lucifer and the TimeLords could travel through time, they did not have an endless supply of it. Because of the unique nature of the Matrices, the places they visited once they could not visit again. Worse, a threat from without the solar system cut short all human histories in the distant future. Unless humanity could develop the power to counter what was later called the Machine Invasion, there would be no humanity left to build weapons to fight the Destroyer.

Many were the setbacks, the dead ends, the unfruitful timelines abandoned to eventual doom so that more promising ones could be nurtured. Global plagues almost destroyed the Work on several occasions, dropping population and industry, causing uncontrollable social change, and setting efforts back decades if not centuries in some cases.

Eventually, one last useful timeline remained, barely viable, surviving by a thread after a plague called the Red Death. From here, the TimeLords began the final phase of their preparations. New TimeLords were recruited and trained. For equipment, an arsenal of the very best military hardware that could be created was collected, including scavenged, salvaged and jury-rigged Designer hardware. Using multiple-Matrix quadrangulation, a method was devised to locate and track their enemy through space (the Great Destroyer's own Matrix, built into his brain, made this possible). This was done very cautiously, to avoid being detected themselves. Lucifer concentrated his efforts on researching the nature of his enemy.

Finally, all was in readiness. There was no excuse for further delay. From an orbiting base around Mars, they manned their squadron of fighters, and Jumped through space to the Destroyer's distant homeworld. The year was 2278CE. It had been over ten thousand years since Lucifer had arrived back on Earth, spear in his hand and vengeance in his heart.

Meanwhile, the Great Destroyer had not been idle. In the thousands of years since Lucifer's chance escape, he had left a trail of havoc through our arm of the galaxy. After satisfying himself that the Designers had been utterly wiped out, he used his sensor arrays to search out and deal similarly with any other species that might conceivably (given time) be able to challenge his dominance or try to lay a yoke on the Qual'n. When these became scarce, he would satisfy himself with sterilizing any biosphere he chanced across. Fortunately for us, he never did find Earth. No one is really sure why. Perhaps the knowledge was in memory banks that were destroyed with the Designer homeworld. Maybe Earth was a *long* way off and he just hadn't gotten around to it. Or perhaps he did find *an* Earth, but one on a little-known timeline. Why humanity survived past the Stone Age is one of the Great Mysteries.

During the lulls in his stellar wanderings, the Destroyer was worshiped on his homeworld as the Angry God, whom all made obeisance to. While the Destroyer protected his homeworld from all threats, he also stifled its technological development. No one, not even his own kind, would be allowed to develop tools to challenge his dominance. No one *loved* the Angry God, but all *feared* him. Over the long centuries a cult of resistance fighters called the Dead made slow technological advances, and made several futile attempts on the Destroyer's life. They recorded his comings and goings to the distant stars, and harassed the priests of the Angry God when they could

The Destroyer's simple pleasures were rudely interrupted by the arrival of the TimeLords' battle fleet. *Even a paranoid can be surprised.* Though taken totally by surprise, his instinctive reactions allowed him to survive the initial onslaught, and destroy two of the six TimeLords' ships. He was damaged, however, and realized quickly that the fleet was a very real danger to his continued existence. *Escape was imperative.* He could ponder the nature of the threat later, from a safe distance. *He Jumped.*

And so did the fleet. The Destroyer's hyperspatial jump had been a short one, and so it took them only a few seconds to lock onto his new coordinates. They had only discharged half their Matrices in the initial ambush. The Destroyer could Jump multiple times, but at a great toll on his energy reserves. His anger overcame prudence, and he stayed to fight. Battle royal was joined.

Details of the combat are sketchy, for few who fought that day remain alive, and they don't like to talk about it. Suffice it to say that destructive energies were released that day in quantities that would have made the Destroyer proud, if only he'd had the time to appreciate them. Despite this, the engagement was inconclusive. The Destroyer, crippled, escaped with a final Jump through time.

The human fleet could not follow; their mundane technology would be ruined by a temporal jump. Of the TimeLords, the Destroyer had taken a grievous toll; a third of their number dead, and the remainder could not Jump through time to pursue. They retired to lick their wounds.

Morale was at low ebb. After all the centuries of painstaking preparation, bringing to bear the mightiest armaments available, they had failed. Further, the carnage in their ranks was a grim reminder of the risks of a rematch. Death has a special poignancy to TimeLords, because anyone with access to a Matrix is potentially immortal, and so they have more to lose than most. This was the first time in their careers that many of them had bet their lives...and lost. But Lucifer survived, and would not give up. To him, his quest was his whole reason for existence. Most of the other survivors could not see it his way, and there were many desertions. They simply took their Matrices and left.

Meanwhile, the Destroyer was having a crisis of his own. The battle had demonstrated for the first time in his existence that he was vulnerable, in the sense that a surprise attack by the most powerful weaponry in the galaxy could *hurt* him. And he didn't know where the TimeLords had come from. He sensed the Designer technology, and thought perhaps his attackers were their servants. The prospect of losing immortality was as disconcerting to him as it was to his opponents. He decided that what he needed was a fortress, a place of refuge where he could rest, heal, and make plans in safety. But what place can be safe from a Matrix?

To find an answer to this problem, he began an exhaustive search of his own computer augments, which were far more complete than Lucifer's, containing nearly the sum total of Designer knowledge. Every theory, every physical law, every principle of nature had been included in his memory banks. Somewhere within that vast repository of knowledge, he found an answer. He found that it was possible to generate regions of (for lack of a better word) non-space, where certain otherwise universal laws did not apply.

The most important thing was that no Matrix could precipitate into or be detected in such a zone, and no Matrix-related technology would work there. He went to work.

It turned out to be a simple task (at least for a mind of his caliber), though time consuming. Blueprints were unnecessary, he could do the plans in his head. All he needed was parts. Most of the technology he got from ruined Designer bases, which he thoroughly destroyed afterwards to prevent his attackers from recovering any more for themselves. The rest, he stole. He would Jump until he found a suitable high-tech civilization, locate any desirable equipment or hardware, and simply Jump out with it.

If he was not feeling pressed for time, he might stay for a little while and have some "fun". Those few parts which he could not find, he was forced to build himself.

The TimeLords did not intervene during the years it took to complete this work. They couldn't. Much of their fleet, which had taken over a century of human industrial output to assemble, had been destroyed in a matter of minutes, and over half the TimeLords had died or deserted. And there remained a strong morale problem. Only Lucifer and a few of his innermost circle remained undaunted. To top it off, the time of the Machine Invasion was fast approaching. The ships that were to be Earth's defenses were in poor shape for another battle. It would require most of the decades remaining simply to repair them. The Destroyer could wait. A new threat had to be stopped before *those* hostile aliens scoured the life off of Earth. A planet's concerns suddenly became more pressing than one man's vengeance on the distant Destroyer.

When the Destroyer had completed his lair, he wasted no time in activating it. His subsequent disappearance from their passive scans caused great consternation among the remaining TimeLords. Had he died? if so, their cause was moot. Had he developed some sort of invisibility to their sensors? That had especially frightening implication, for how could they fight what they could not see? Perhaps he had encountered some race that was stronger than he thought. Did that mean he was no longer a threat? Still, Lucifer would not give up, and more desertions seemed imminent.

It was Zhanken (later called the Snake), cleverest of the TimeLords, who came up with the answer. He pointed out that their sensors had not recorded a Jump prior to the disappearance, and it seemed unlikely that their enemy would conveniently keel over just now. "Since we can't tell where he is, let's look where he *was*." Needless to say, there were few volunteers. So, Azazelo and Lucifer undertook the task by themselves. They jumped into the cometary halo of the Destroyer's solar system during a time when he was invisible to their scans. Still, they were hesitant to get closer. It looked safe. *But then again, traps always do.*

They Jumped closer, made a quick orbital reconnaissance, and Jumped home via a circuitous route.

Returning to their base, they found that the sensors there confirmed their observations of the Destroyer's disappearance from the known universe. Scraps of information from Far-walker's database hinted at a possible answer. Painstaking analysis of the sensor recordings, and several years of experimental research confirmed the hunch. Their enemy had created a dimensional hole, where Matrices could not reach. After considerable effort, they duplicated this feat, and created their own area of non-space. When they began investigating its properties, they discovered the Destroyer's plan...and its weakness.

No Matrix-related phenomenon functioned in such a zone. The potential implications of this were profound. If as they suspected, most of the Destroyer's powers stemmed from his ability to manipulate spacetime through his Matrix, then he would be nearly powerless if he could be caught in such a zone. His place of refuge would become his tomb. Unfortunately, the boundary to such a zone was in a sense a temporal boundary, and the side effects of transiting it were identical. The Destroyer could not ravage planets while in his refuge, but neither could the TimeLords use their high-tech armada on him.

Armed with this information, Lucifer was able to re-enlist the aid of a few of the older TimeLords. He also recruited, conned or hired a considerable quantity of new talent, mostly soldiers from low-tech societies, which he planned to use as cannon fodder in the assault. Well-equipped, but cannon fodder nonetheless. The plan was straightforward. As many as possible would Jump to points near where their sensors indicated the "door" to the Destroyer's non-space region was, and assault it. Needless to say, they knew this threshold would be well-defended, but they were counting on their skills, numbers and surprise to insure that *someone* made it through. They waited until he disappeared again. They Jumped. The Jumps were accurate, and they achieved total surprise on the Qual'n army that guarded the Temple of the Angry God. *Still, losses were heavy.* Most of the cannon fodder did not even make it to the door.

Once inside, the *real* battle began. By the time the first group had blocked the exits, the Destroyer had had time to arm himself in a more conventional manner. While his god-like Matrix-based powers were unavailable to him, he was still *incredibly* strong. This alone was sufficient to kill or incapacitate any of the non-TimeLord troops that made it within melee range. The TimeLords, in heavy armor, fared better, and continued the assault themselves.

The final confrontation was between Lucifer and the Destroyer. Armed with massive melee weapons, Lucifer and the Destroyer hammered each other, battering down each others vastly weakened Designer defenses until Lucifer was able to ram his spear up through the Destroyer's jaw and into his brain. The Destroyer, the murderer of billions, slowly slumped to the ground.

But he did not die. The resistance group known as the Dead had painstakingly manufactured tons of gunpowder in a mine under the ziggurat the Destroyer had built around his refuge. During the battle, they saw an opportunity and set it off. As the TimeLords fled for their lives, the ziggurat slowly collapsed in on itself, burying the Destroyer under a million tons of rock, inside a pocket universe where his powers could not function.

The TimeLord survivors picked up their wounded and dead, and left him there.