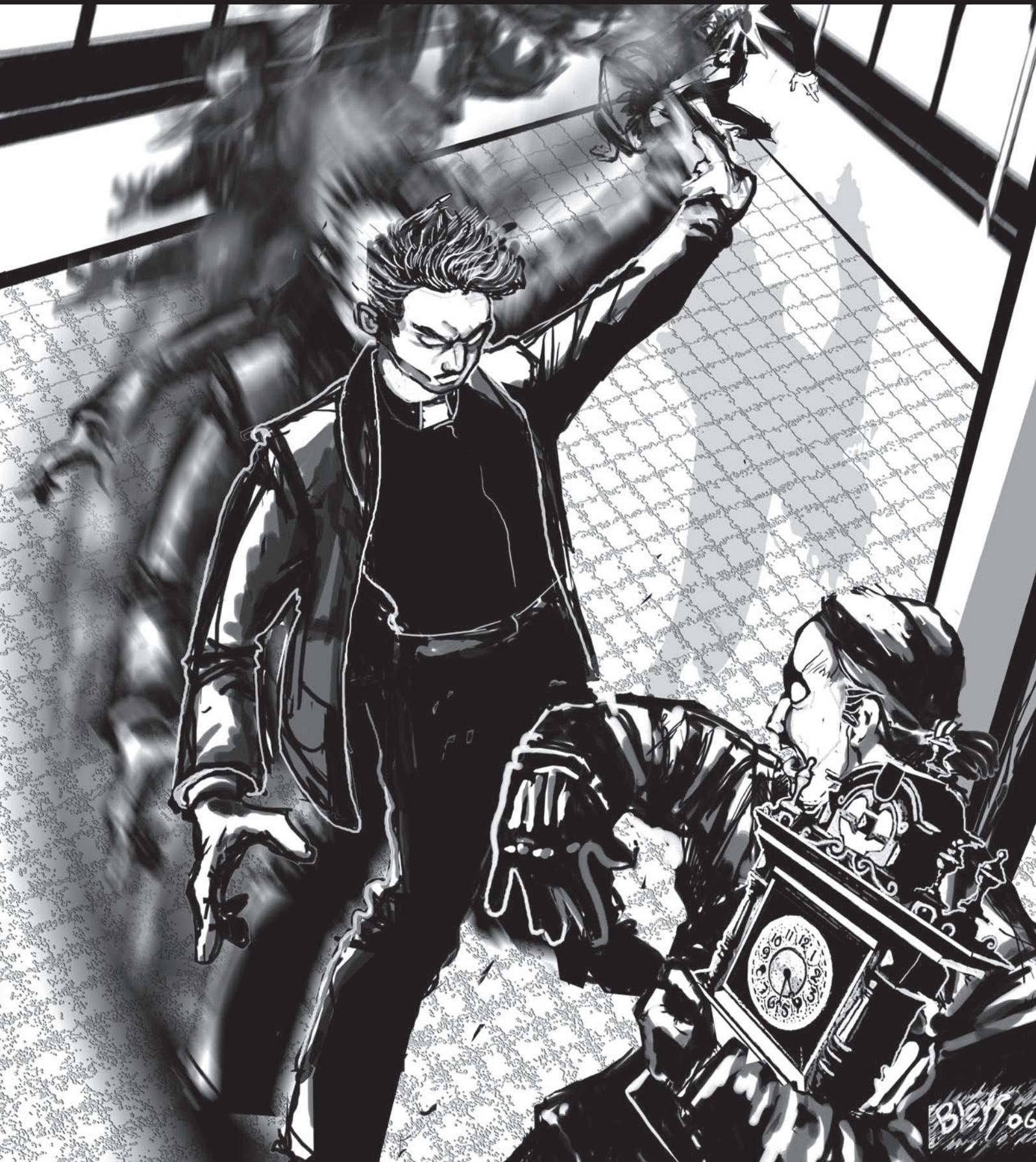




BORROWED TIME



Time flows like a river out of the infinite energy at the beginning of the universe, into the infinite reservoir at the end of space and time. Human beings can't stop it any more than monkeys could dam the Nile by throwing sticks at the river. But they can use and shape its flow.

Physics is mostly right about time. It usually moves from past to future at one second per second, speeding up and slowing down as local spacetime conditions change, just as the equations predict. It can do more, though. It can run faster or slower than usual, or drift sideways into improbable outcomes and away from predictable conditions, and it can even turn back on itself to make events happen again, or change its flow so some things never really happen(ed) at all. Furthermore, in addition to following its own, sometimes surprising, internal dynamics, time can and does change when conscious minds manipulate it with the right combinations of logic, tools, and sheer force of will.

Just as people turn aside rivers to make reservoirs and irrigation systems, so they can turn aside some of time, too. There are "pockets" or pools of unused time waiting for people to draw on them when the moment is right. There are mathematics for borrowing time in this way. A tiny fraction of a second can reverse a moment's misfortune for one person. The more people involved and the deeper the roots of the problem, the more time must be borrowed to change a situation. It could take days or years of accumulated hidden time to save a planet. The scope of the reservoirs varies along with the quantity of borrowed time needed: some are bound to specific people or places, some can be tapped from anywhere in a city or continent, some are available worldwide and even farther.

It's possible both to set aside time and to borrow it later without any deliberate effort. Activities that focus the mind away from external

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reality help detach the soul from time's normal flow, and can help channel a little time into a quiet pond. Desperate need and desire can open up a sluice gate and bring that time back out. People remember intense experiences and

their weird luck in them, both good and bad, not just for reasons of primate psychology but because, thanks to time borrowing, the world really *does* work differently in those moments.

Borrowing time on a bigger scale requires more effort, and doesn't happen by accident. Nobody knows who first discovered the rituals. "First" may not even mean all that much, given the possibilities for moving around, above, and below the normal routes from past to future. The fact is that the rituals exist and have been used. Storing time on the small scale is a little distracting; the experience of *déjà vu* often points at a moment where the person unconsciously stored away a little time. The larger the scale, the greater the trauma can be, including hallucinations, "missing time" on the scale of hours and days, amnesia, false memories, and worse. This is why, long before recorded history began, rituals were concealed inside justifications of other sorts. Carnivals, year-end "between time" days, and calendar reforms requiring a shift of several days all provide convenient rationalizations for the disruptive experience.

One way or another, every few centuries, some individual or group with strong influence on their society manages to set aside several days' worth of borrowed time. This is what keeps the world safe. If the big reservoir ever ran dry, there would be no last-minute escapes, no fortunate survivals, just the iron law of probability ticking the fixed beat until inescapable doom wipes us all out. The last time the reservoir got refreshed was in 1582, when Pope Gregory XIII provided the cover for his team of temporal scholars. Modern histories sometimes play up



FAR, FAR AWAY: EXOTIC POSSIBILITIES

Borrowed Time focuses on modern-day Earth and its inhabitants, with the Red Harvest thrown in for variety. This doesn't exhaust the fun options your group may wish to include. Alien spaceships cruising faster than light thanks to temporal drift? Spies, invaders, or refugees from alternate histories, and one or more different pasts and futures? It's all fair game, or can be if the Narrator and players want to include it. The intent here is to describe a range of options and suggest an attitude rather than to lay down boundaries beyond which you must not go.

Borrowed Time also works well as a "capstone" setting for *True20*, able to "overlay" any of the other settings in this book, giving them a hidden layer of temporal conspiracy. Imagine, for example, time channelers operating in the Crucible of Nexus Sector in *Lux Aeternum* or behind the scenes of the Sultan's palace in *Caliphate Nights*. You can even combine *Borrowed Time* with multiple *True20* worlds, setting them up as parallel realities for the heroes to visit.

ABOUT NARRATOR APPROVAL

Many temporal feats become available to characters only with the Narrator's approval. So when should the Narrator approve them? This is a matter of the campaign's focus. If you want to deal with the gradual discovery of time manipulation and its possibilities, allow them into play once the characters have dealings with others who know and can teach the secrets. On the other hand, if the characters start off with the right clues, these feats should be available at the start of the game. Just make sure you and the players agree on what's sensible and suitable for this particular game.

peasant hysteria about the fate of their souls on the days lost in changing from the Julian to Gregorian calendar, and other sorts of superstitious fears, but in truth that's all part of the cover story. What really upset them was the sensation of losing those days, and it was important to keep the masses from getting close enough to the truth to interfere with things. It all worked: the world's reservoir of borrowed time was nicely full again as 1582 came to an end.

The years and centuries went by and various groups, both heirs to the Gregorian time channelers and others who had the secret, gradually drew the reservoir down. Bad as the history of the last half millennium has sometimes been, it would have been worse. Global draws of borrowed time fended off at least one meteor strike, two humanity-destroying

plagues, one nuclear war and two conventional ones that would have escalated into collapses of civilization, and several more exotic threats. What remains is the often tragic, but nonetheless survivable mundane, observable sort of peril.

Along the way, something went wrong: the secret of setting aside time on a large scale got lost. Nobody today seems quite sure how it happened. It could be a calculated effort by someone who wants the world to lose its borrowed time altogether, or the sort of freak coincidence that surrounds those who manipulate time. Many groups can and do set aside time on smaller scales, but nobody can now renew the global reservoir...and it's running dry. It has no more than a few weeks left in it, perhaps only a few days, and the global threats haven't stopped coming.

NEW FEATS

Most of the feats presented here have the classification Temporal. This is vague, and deliberately so. As noted above in **Far, Far Away: Exotic Possibilities**, there may or may not be other things going on in the game world, like magic, psionics, other times and species intruding, and so forth. Where feats that clearly warrant the Adept label are in play, the Narrator may wish to rule that the Temporal feats are also Adept. But it may make sense for a specific setting that the temporal feats *not* be supernatural. Since *True20* worlds can vary so much, *Borrowed Time* leaves you some room for maneuvering on this point.

TEMPORAL BORROWING AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

There isn't an infinite supply of hidden time to borrow. The impact of repeated borrowing is easy to measure and increasingly dire in its consequences. The Narrator should keep a record of temporal feat usage in an area, and note down each round in which someone rolled a 1 or a 20 on a check involving time-manipulating powers. For every 5 rounds in which a 1 was rolled and every 10 rounds in which a 20 was rolled, the Difficulty of all temporal feats in the area rises by +1. This is a *permanent* increase, until and unless someone manages to renew the depleted hidden time in that area.

The area affected is one hundred feet square if it's indoors, or one thousand feet square if it's outdoors. The penalty tapers off: full effect in that area, one point less for a hundred feet indoors or a thousand feet outdoors all around, and so on by those range increments until it's down to zero.

Characters feel this depletion as a draining, tugging sensation. Anyone with a temporal feat can tell that there is a difficulty barrier in the area and identify its particular strength with a Concentration check of Difficulty (20 – the penalty). The fact of its existence also explains a crucial cinematic feature of the major groups' behavior. They maintain strongholds and sanctums in which the routine use of temporal feats is prohibited so when they really, really need the help, it won't be messed up. Regular temporal manipulation goes on in places far away from the bosses' lairs.

Renewing the hidden time should be possible by any of several means, except that the key lore is missing. For the moment, it takes sacrifice: to remove a point of temporal penalty, an individual must sacrifice 1 point of an ability score (any ability will do) or accept a permanent reduction in Conviction by 2 points. Understandably, this doesn't happen often, and certainly not as often as opportunities for penalty accumulation.

BETWEEN MOMENTS (TEMPORAL)

PREREQUISITE: NARRATOR APPROVAL

Using time manipulation in accordance with your group's methods, you can draw on stored time to act more rapidly than usual. Time goes slow for you, for a moment. You can take several actions in the space of time that just one normally requires. The sequence is known as an "action stack".

An action stack can include up to one standard action per point of your Dexterity, plus any bonus actions from feats, artifacts, and other sources. If you have Dexterity +2, you may stack two additional standard actions on top of the one normally possible in that moment. You can stack any mix of free, move, standard, and full actions, subject to the following limits.