

Manipulating Time—Why I Love Aeon Timeline

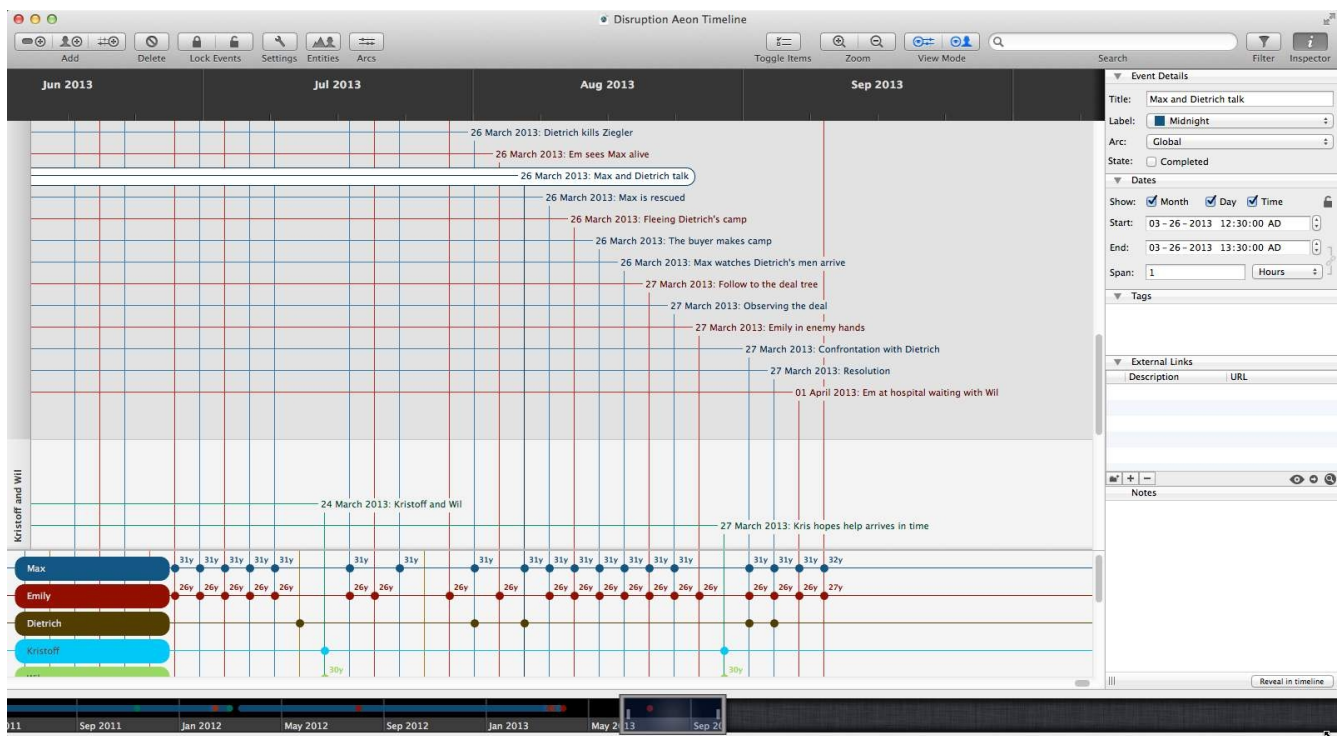
by Vanessa Kier

Keeping events straight in my manuscripts, and in my series overall, is one of the most frustrating and time-consuming tasks I deal with as a writer. Back in early 2011, I wrote an article reviewing the then available options for timeline software. My conclusion was that all the software that might help a writer was pricey—in the \$100-\$200 range—and beyond the budget of a lot of authors. Plus, most of the software was business oriented, not writer oriented.

That changed with the arrival on the scene of Aeon Timeline by Scribble Code (<http://www.scribblecode.com/index.html>). With both a Mac OS X and a Windows version available, and the ability to synchronize with the popular writing software, Scrivener, Aeon Timeline is now one of the most valuable tools in my writer's arsenal.

The features that make Aeon helpful to me as a writer are the following:

Event Color Coding. I assign a label color to each Aeon event based on the POV character. This allows me to see if one character doesn't have enough POV scenes or is in two different places at the same time.



Arcs. In the photo of my main screen (above), the events at the top with a slightly darker background are part of my global arc. I use this just for my hero/heroine POV scenes. Events in the next section down, with a slightly lighter background, are part of one of my secondary character arcs. Aeon allows filtering, so I could instead change my view if I only wanted to see secondary characters, but I find arcs faster, because I don't have to click on anything.

Elapsed time calculation. This feature has been a life saver. By a combination of clicking, holding

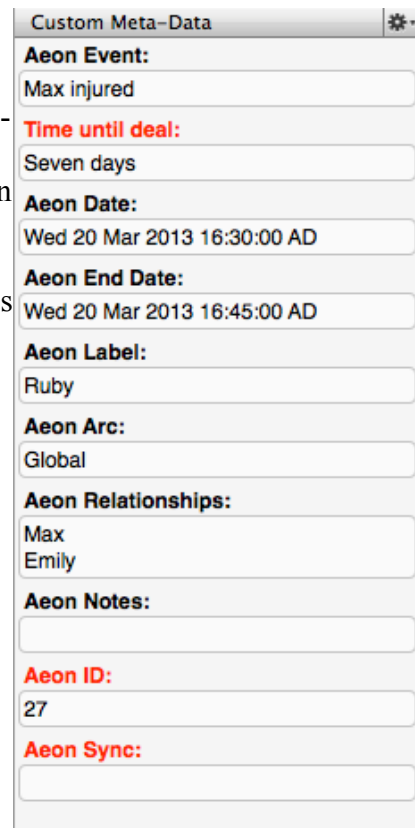
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down certain keys, and then dragging one event onto another, Aeon will calculate the elapsed time between the two events. Using this technique, I discovered that a critical event which was supposed to take place six days after the opening scene actually occurred twelve days later. Oops! Thanks to Aeon, I was able to fix that.

Character management. Characters fall under the category of entities in Aeon. You can assign a color to each character. This is separate from the event color and allows you to keep track of multiple characters easily. Put in a birth date for a character and Aeon will display their age during each event. If you look at the bottom of the picture of my main screen, you'll see that my hero Max was 31 throughout the book, then had a birthday before the epilogue. :) You can add a character to an event as an observer or a participant. Closed circles represent participant status. Open circles represent observer status. Also, an entity doesn't have to be a person. There are several other entity types you can choose from, including: object, technology, and organization. I created an organization entity to represent WAR, the special ops group for my new series.

Scrivener syncing.* When you first sync with your Scrivener document, Aeon will add labels to each document in Scrivener's binder. To see these labels, open the custom meta-data view in Scrivener's inspector. Almost all of the fields in this screenshot of my custom meta-data were created by Aeon during the first sync. I created the *Time Until Deal* label inside Scrivener, so this does not sync back to Aeon. Only Aeon can add fields to Scrivener that it will sync with. What's nice about these meta-data fields is that you don't have to leave Scrivener if you want to change the day or hour of an event, or add participants. Just type the new information in the appropriate field and it will carry over to Aeon when you sync.



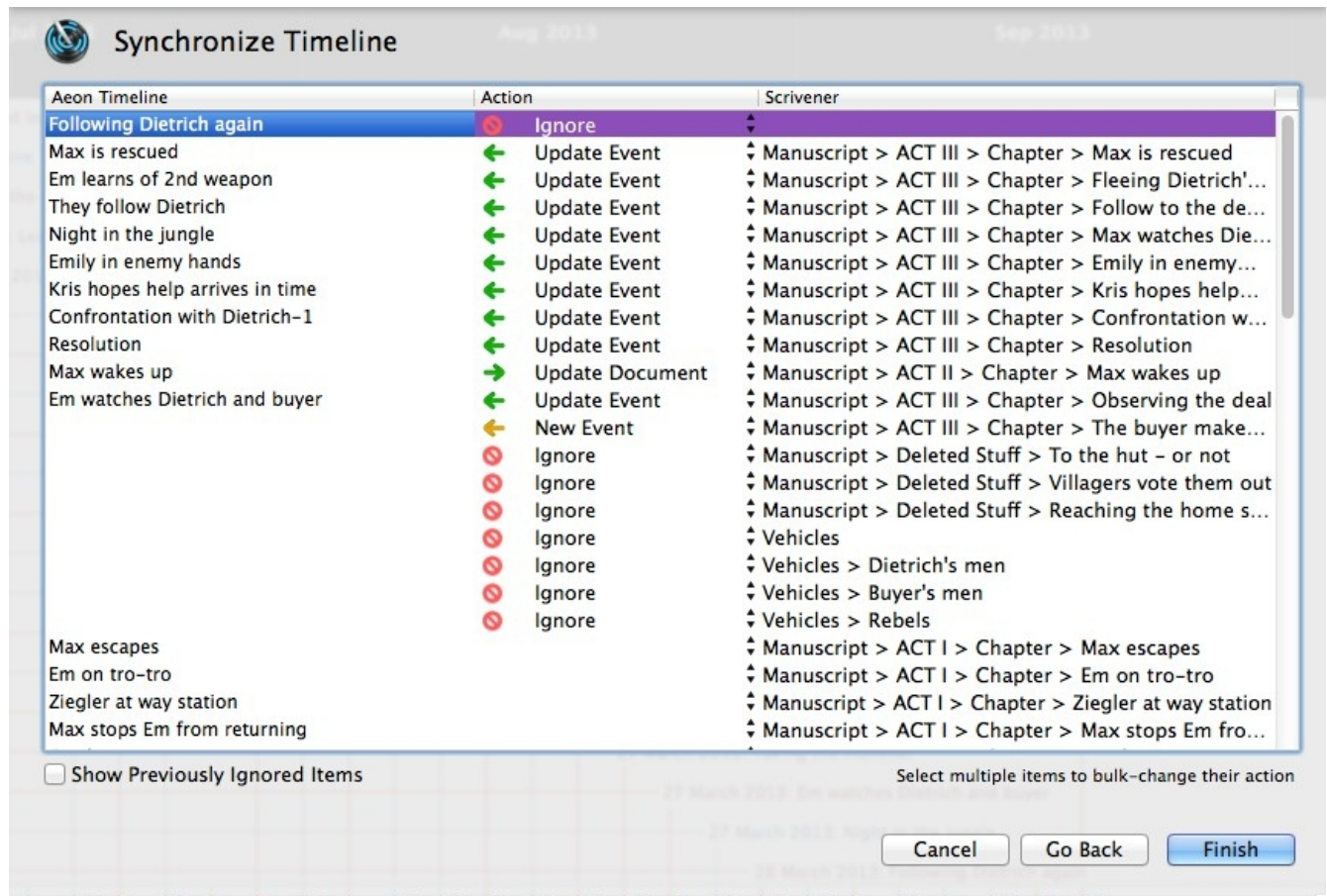
The screenshot shows a 'Custom Meta-Data' panel in Scrivener's inspector. It contains several fields with labels in bold or red text:

- Aeon Event:** Max injured
- Time until deal:** Seven days
- Aeon Date:** Wed 20 Mar 2013 16:30:00 AD
- Aeon End Date:** Wed 20 Mar 2013 16:45:00 AD
- Aeon Label:** Ruby
- Aeon Arc:** Global
- Aeon Relationships:** Max, Emily
- Aeon Notes:** (empty text area)
- Aeon ID:** 27
- Aeon Sync:** (empty text area)

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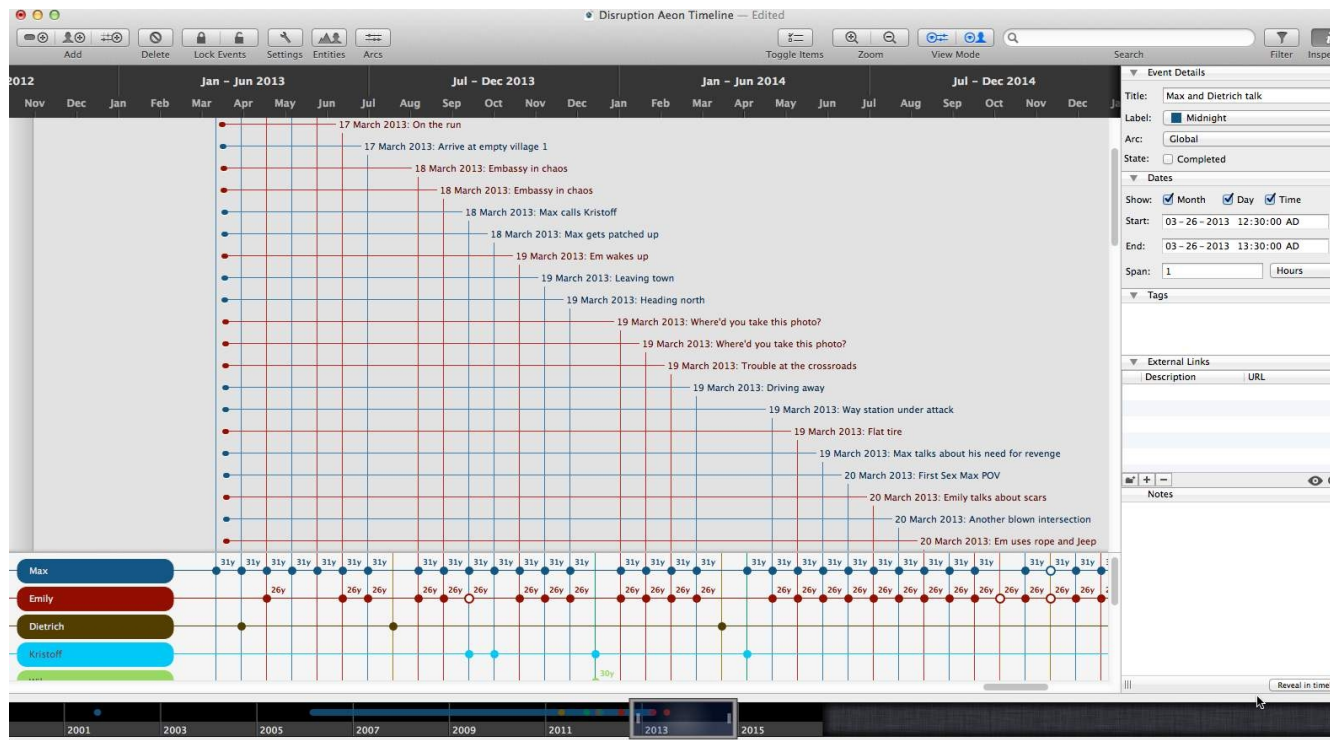
When syncing, you can tell Aeon to Ignore items. In this screenshot of my syncing window (below) I told Aeon to Ignore (in red) the *Following Dietrich Again* event from Aeon because I'd moved the scene to the trash in Scrivener and to also Ignore scenes that I'd moved into my deleted scenes folder in Scrivener. Green arrows indicate that currently existing documents and events are going to be updated. Yellow means an event exists in only one location and will be created in the other program. You can select several items and apply the same command, such as Ignore, to all of them at once. Syncing is a manual process, so if you make a change and then decide that was the wrong thing to do, you don't have to worry that you've automatically populated the other file with your mistake.



Adjustability. When you set up a new file in Aeon, you choose what calendar system (BC – AD, BCE – CE, Year Only (geological), etc.) the timeline will be based on. You can also create a custom calendar. According to people in the forums, this custom option is useful for fantasy writers who have worlds with a different concept of time. If you decide to change the sequence of events, you simply drag an event to a new location on the timeline. If you need to see more or less of your timeline, there are in/out zoom buttons on the toolbar. I normally have the zoom set so that I see single months, which for me allows a comfortable distance between event markers on the timeline. However, I could also zoom out to show intervals that span six months, such as in this example.

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The above features are only six of the many reasons to consider working with Aeon Timeline. I wish I'd had this program when I wrote my SSU series, because keeping the timeline straight for those books—the third book started before the second book!—was a complete nightmare. Aeon has already saved me hours of work trying to keep the timeline straight in my new book.

If you're interested, the developers of Aeon offer a trial version. The paid version costs \$40, far less than the programs I reviewed in 2011.

However, there is a bit of a learning curve. I advise looking through the user manual and watching the Getting Started and other videos available on their [website](#).

Good luck!

*As of September 19, 2014, Scrivener syncing is only available in the Mac OS X version, although a beta version for Windows that syncs with Scrivener has recently been released. If you're interested in the beta Windows version, check the user [forums](#) for the status.

This article first appeared in the October 2014 issue of *Heart of the Bay*, the San Francisco RWA chapter's newsletter.