PORTAL

Player Oriented Roleplaying:
Timing, Action, & Lucidity

Jared Presler

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Welcome

Welcome to PORTAL (Player Oriented Roleplaying: Timing, Action & Lucidity), a universal roleplaying system ready to be adapted to whatever your imagination can come up with. It's a system which strives to strike a balance between roleplaying and gaming. There's a lot less material here than in many tabletop roleplaying games. I know. This is just the system, not the whole game like most tabletop roleplaying games. Players and storytellers bring their own material to the system.

Inspiration and Thanks

Much of the material in this system was inspired by *The Window*, by Scott Lininger of Methods in the Madness Games, and *The FORGE System*, from Ætherial Forge. To them I offer my humble thanks and gratitude.

Thank you to all my guinea pigs- ahem… play testers: especially Phillip, Sariah, and Emma Kinney, Chris Arnone, Chris Ballard, Jon Schellinger, and Keith Sadler. Thanks also to all the people who gave editorial assistance, including Chris Ballard, Chris Arnone, Keith Sadler, and my parents, Frank and Janette. Thanks for catching all the stuff I miss; without all of you, PORTAL would never have seen the light of day. This is truly a collaborative effort.

A Roleplayer's Manifesto

I started my roleplaying career like many, with *Second Edition AD&D*, with all its tables, THAC0 and number crunching. Somewhere along the way, I noticed I was spending more time being a *D&D* accountant than I was having fun roleplaying. For several years it was what I used, because it was what I had. It was fun. More fun than not roleplaying at all, anyway.

Eventually, *Third Edition AD&D* came out which simplified the math a little, but ultimately suffered from the same problem. Things weren't streamlined enough for me. I had this crazy idea that the rules of a game should facilitate the game and the player's enjoyment of it. The rules shouldn't be the game in and of themselves.

This eventually led to my complete hatred of dice; I set out to find a system of roleplaying that didn't use the nasty things. After many months of searching, I found there was no such thing. Not on the whole of the Internet. I amassed over 200 pages of different systems, and all of them used dice; some used more dice more often than others, but they were still there.

All this searching taught me that what I hated wasn't dice at all, but math. I was always good at math; I just never found it fun. Many systems used too much math to determine every little detail of what could and couldn't be done in the system. If I wanted to do math for fun, I would have been an accountant. I loved imagination and freedom. This eventually led me to *The Window*: a system that was less a roleplaying system than a philosophical set of concepts which facilitated roleplaying.

I was not alone anymore. *The Window* was driven by character and conflict, not dice rolling and number crunching. Combat was part of the plot instead of the entirety of the game. Above all, *The Window* was about telling a good story, and not letting the rules get in the way of that. I had finally found the system I'd been searching for.

I used *The Window* to finally turn some of my own settings into playable games. I got my group together and started to play, and found about half of my group hated it. I found two distinct types of tabletop roleplaying game players: those who mainly focus on character and story, and those who focus mainly on mechanics and system: "Roleplayers" and "Gamers." At the time I was solidly in the "Roleplayer" camp, so part of the group divided, and we went and used *The Window* in our games.

We soon discovered that our "Gamer" brothers had something going. We found the lack of structure that we loved so much was leading to misunderstandings which slowed the game down, making it less fun. We started altering the system and came up with a set of house rules that we liked, although it had two or three different variations, depending on who was running the game.

Those games concluded and I got back and played in a few games with my "Gamer" group. This reminded me of all the things I didn't like about gaming: lack of control over your character, having decisions forced onto your character due to dice rolls, severely limited actions in the game compared to realistic situations, having characters run by the GM... the list goes on. Things weren't cooperative enough. There were, on the other hand, many things that were good about the "Gaming" system of doing things. Everyone was on the same page, misunderstandings were at a minimum, things were very balanced by design, and there was an even playing field. Nevertheless, the focus was far too much on playing and mastering the game system, and not nearly enough on playing and mastering your character.

I was also tired of the Gamemaster having all the answers. How could someone else know my character better than I did? Players might not have all the answers, but they do know what they're doing, and deserve some credit in the cooperative process that is roleplaying. They collectively do just as much work as the GM; in many cases completely handing over their precious character to the GM to use as they see fit. Sometimes even expanding the game itself.

I wanted to come up with a system that had enough structure to make "Gamers" happy, but focused enough on character to make "Roleplayers" happy. There were a lot of gaming systems out there, and there were a few role playing systems out there. What I wanted was an RP&G system, a "roleplaying & gaming system." This started with altering *The Window*, but it soon became apparent that what we were playing was no longer *The Window*, but a unique creation of our own. Over time, the structure of the system changed and matured, coming up with better and simpler rules. Much of this process was verbal agreement, and was never actually written down. I have now decided to put it all together in writing. This is an RP/G system, a structured way to create and play dynamic characters in engaging stories driven by an easy system that provides enough structure to keep everyone balanced and on the same page.

What to Expect

What PORTAL is:	What PORTAL is not:
A system with necessary structure	A beginner's system
A system based on character and story	An armory or general store
A universal system	A physics engine
A "bare bones" system	A combat driven system
A common sense system	A skills and powers list
A system that gives power to players	A setting or sourcebook

PORTAL lends a necessary amount of structure to the process of creating and playing unique characters. I say "necessary" here because, in my experience, a certain "critical mass" of structure is needed to make players and storytellers happy. Without some structure, the process falls apart, but structure for structure's sake limits creativity and interrupts narrative. PORTAL is founded on the belief that any good roleplaying game should be based on character and story, not dice rolls, charts or math. Dice should be tools that help tell a good story.

PORTAL is a universal "bare bones" system that can be easily and seamlessly molded around any genre, any setting, any story, allowing the Storyteller to focus on telling their story, not on mechanics, charts or numbers. There is no setting here. The best stories come not from predefined settings, worlds, or characters, but are collaboratively told by the storyteller and the players, using their collective imagination. This system is designed to work with users' original ideas in a way that allows them to focus on developing story and setting without worrying about the system. There are no charts of equipment in these rules other than in examples, because a good roleplaying game should be more about story than about getting cool stuff. Not to say cool stuff is bad; quite the contrary, it can be a wonderful motivator for players, but since cool stuff should help facilitate telling the story, there is no set chart on it here.

There are no skills, or powers, or feats, or abilities lists in PORTAL. Players and storytellers come up with better ideas than even the most comprehensive list could ever include. Lists do nothing but limit creativity, so it isn't found here. PORTAL is a common sense system which lets players and storytellers make their own choices about how to act in a situation; a system that refuses to pigeonhole creativity for the sake of ease, balance or structure.

PORTAL is not a beginner's system. If you are new to roleplaying, this might not be the best place to start. This might be right up your alley, but if you don't have some experience with a more structured system, you will likely have trouble with PORTAL. This is especially true if you want to tell a story using PORTAL. If you're unfamiliar with storytelling a more structured system, you will likely have trouble storytelling PORTAL. PORTAL puts the players and storyteller above any book or rule, respecting that they know what they're doing. PORTAL puts true power and responsibility in the hands of its players.

PORTAL doesn't pretend to have rules for every possible interaction conceivable by Newton. A lot of what makes roleplaying fun is the stuff that breaks the rules of physics; like magic, superpowers, miracles, and technology. PORTAL does have an action resolution system, but it's much broader than physics. Likewise, PORTAL isn't driven by combat. In good stories, combat is just another scene in the story, not the story in its entirety. Although combat is necessary (and fun) in roleplaying, it shouldn't be the focus of everything that happens. Although much of PORTAL deals with combat, the driving idea is that combat should be dealt with the same way as everything else.

PORTAL is by no means a new idea. As was said earlier, many of the ideas presented here are based in part on other systems that have been around for years. The underlying philosophy has been thought of by many people in many places at many times throughout the thirty(ish) year history of roleplaying. PORTAL is simply one take on these older ideas presented here for ease of use.

General Concepts

In order to make sense of PORTAL, some general ideas need to be understood. The root of PORTAL is a series of philosophies I came upon in my search. I picked up and used what felt right and left what didn't. Where there was nothing, I fit what I knew to be true. The following are a set of ideas which I feel are important to all roleplaying, regardless of what system you use.

The RP&G System 9 Commandments

1. An RP&G system should be fun.

This one should go without saying, but isn't the goal of any game, roleplaying or otherwise, to have fun? If an RP&G isn't fun, you aren't doing it right. This goes for players and storytellers alike; fun for everyone is the first and most important goal of roleplaying.

2. RP&G systems should be simple and fast.

A system should be simple to use and easy to understand. The fewer charts and numbers the better. The harder it is to learn a system, the harder it is to have fun with. The KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid) mandate is a good rule for everything, and games are no exception. The faster a system is to use, the more transparent it can be, reducing interruptions to the flow of the game and the narrative of the story.

3. Character should be most important to an RP&G system.

Without good characters, any roleplaying game wouldn't work. Characters should therefore be well thought out, well rounded, and well balanced. Time should be spent on making original and unique characters, not sets of numbers with a name at the top. Make a background for your character; make them real and believable. Personality is not determined by a character's abilities; rather, their abilities are determined by their personality. Characters should be created accordingly.

4. Players should play their characters responsibly.

Nothing kills a good game faster than a player who suddenly decides they're God. Roleplaying isn't about egos or power trips; it's rarely even about personal glory. Respect the limits of a character; they're there for a reason. Stay in character while playing the game, and play the character ahead of playing the system. After all, it is the whole point of a roleplaying game.

5. Storytellers should cooperate with players.

A character's creator understands their character better than anyone else. Storytellers should work with this fact, not against it. Players should be allowed to make their own decisions for their character, both while creating it and while playing it.

6. AN RP/G SYSTEM SHOULD BE REALISTIC.

The system should be as realistic and consistent as possible to its setting, allowing users to make realistic decisions for their characters. This level of realism should be reliable, not changing partway through a story or varying for different characters.

7. GOOD STORY SHOULD BE THE GOAL.

The goal of an RP/G should be to tell a good interactive story. Anything hindering that process isn't needed. The more things get in the way of the story, the less engaging it will be. Be they systems, players, storytellers, mechanics, or anything else, if it doesn't help tell a good story, it doesn't belong in a good RP/G.

8. GAME ELEMENTS SHOULD BE DESCRIBED, NOT NUMBERED.

In good stories, things aren't represented by numbers, they are described. Bill doesn't have a dexterity of 18, he has a sharply honed dexterity from his many years training as a pianist. Kate doesn't have a charisma of 25, she has a smoldering appeal that gets the attention of everyone in the room. Things should be described with words first. Then numbers should be assigned to the description for use in the system. This also includes a description of the character and their background. Remember, abilities come from personality.

9. SPECIAL EFFECTS SHOULD HELP THE STORY.

The definition of special effects will vary from one setting to another, but the truly extraordinary should be special and awe inspiring, not boring and routine. Good stories have arcs; anticipation, climax and resolution. Special effects are great for a climax, but do little to tone things down in a resolution. If every fourth event in a story is truly extraordinary, it looses credibility and becomes taxing on players and their characters, who need some downtime too. Make sure anything truly extraordinary is there to help tell the story, not just to be cool.

I use the word "should" because none of these rules are set in stone. If you disagree with one or all of them, throw them out. Do whatever makes your group happy. Regardless, these are good suggestions on how a good RP/G should work, and are the basis for much of the system presented here. With these in mind, much of PORTAL should run itself. When in doubt, come back to these principles.

PLAYER ORIENTED ROLEPLAYING

PORTAL stands for Player Oriented Roleplaying: Timing, Action, and Lucidity. So what does all that mean? One of the biggest philosophies that led to the creation of PORTAL was that the player is always right. In many ways a storyteller should be there to manage and direct the players' stories, more than to tell their own.

Far too often my character was mandated to do or not do something because it fit a scenario the GM had laid out. As a player, this really irritated me. In the real world, how would I feel if a retail clerk said I had to buy jeans instead of a shirt because it fit the plan they had set out for the store before I walked in? Real people would never put up with this kind of abuse; why should characters?

Player Oriented Roleplaying means trust that players know what they're doing. It means cooperative storytelling. It means that each player acts like a node, expanding the setting with their character, background, and personal play experience. Player Oriented Roleplaying embraces this idea, working with a player's idea of what they want to do in the story, not against it.

Timing

Timing means just that: what time things happen. One of the most important functions of a roleplaying game is determining in what order things happen. Like somebody famous once said: "Time is the universe's way of making sure everything doesn't happen all at once." Roleplaying games need to have a system for dealing with time for the same reason: to make sure all hell doesn't break loose around the gaming table. The problem lies in managing time realistically, without dragging it out.

I found many systems had very arbitrary rules in place to manage the flow of time. To a point, any time management rule is arbitrary; after all, time itself is. The random, dice-rolled initiative was an oversimple, unrealistic rule for determining timing. I found the vitality system much better. With it, people can get tired, rest, overexert themselves, or collapse, which is a much more realistic way to deal with timing. It does demand more responsibility of the player, which is probably why it's used so infrequently.

Action

The other big function of a roleplaying game is action resolution and a representation of chance in a character's experience. This should allow for actions as free, open, and creative as players can imagine. To limit actions available to a character limits the creativity of the player, and dampens a story's realism. Dice rolls should be simple and kept to a minimum.

PORTAL aims to be as simple and straightforward as possible, while still lending enough structure to the process to put everyone on the same page and avoid disagreements. This doesn't mean a list of possible actions that everyone can take in the game system. If a player is creative enough to invent some new and interesting way to use a character's skill in cosmetology to avoid being assaulted by a mugger on the street, great.

LUCIDITY

As mentioned many times in this chapter, PORTAL is designed to be as transparent as you the user want it to be. Feel free to change any rule that does not fit your goal in telling your story. PORTAL is designed with the guiding principle that users know best. In your use of the system, strive to keep the system in the background and focus on the flow of the story. Above all, have fun. Do whatever you need to have an entertaining time roleplaying.

CHARACTER CREATION

Good characters are the first step to a good story, meaning good character, not good numbers. It can be more interesting to play a good character with bad numbers. Character creation isn't rolling stats and assigning numbers. Character creation is the burst of creative energy in which you create a unique imaginary being and bring them to life. And while playing with a wide-open "dramatis personae" based solely on description would be wonderful, more rigid definitions of a character's limits are often necessary to play them in a game system. This is where defining the character in the system comes in.

Most systems have a complex set of limits which pigeonhole characters into the world and its stereotypes. This often leads to a rigid process which fills in numbers on a character sheet, and very little time is spent on the actual character of the character. PORTAL answers this problem by starting character creation with a detailed background and description. Then, after the character is created, each player works with the storyteller to define their character accurately in the PORTAL system.

CHARACTER CREATION STEPS

1. Write character background and description.
2. Generate primary attribute scores.
3. Assign primary attribute scores according to character.
4. Determine secondary attribute scores.
5. Determine total available skills.
6. Determine skill points.
7. Define skills according to character.
8. Assign skill points according to character.
9. Determine total available abilities.
10. Determine ability points.
11. Define abilities according to character.
12. Assign ability points according to character.
13. Apply any modifiers.
14. Detail any gifts or flaws.

Background & Description

This is where the character is actually created, and is by far the most important step. Significant time should be spent on fleshing out the character and making them real. One of the most important things to remember here is in order to create a good character, you must know the world they come from. Make sure you have a clear idea from the storyteller what the world is before you start. The storyteller should be present during the process of creating the character and their background, as they will most likely have questions and ideas that can help the process along. And while the storyteller will never understand your character as well as you do, they do need to know it well enough to include it in the story.

In creating a good character, it's very important to be specific and original. A few good lines of specific description can tell more than all the generalizations in the world. A good metaphor can create a better image of a character than a whole page of dry description. Don't just put a character together from bits and pieces you've picked up along the way. Make it truly original: a character that's never existed before. When starting a character background, getting a good literary character creation book might help. For those of you who don't want to go outside of these rules to make a character, here are some of the more important and useful questions you might answer:

Background Questions

How old is he?
What race is she?
Where was she born?
Who were his parents?
What religion is she?
What religion are his parents?
How was her relationship with her parents?
What was happening during his childhood?
Where did she grow up?
How did he spend his time as a kid?
How happy was her childhood?
How did he decide what to do as an adult?
What does she do now?

Personality Questions

What one word describes his personality best?
What one thing does her personality most remind you of?
What are his motivations and goals?
How far will she go to achieve goals?
What is his greatest fear?
What is her greatest love?
How competitive is he?
What are her passions?
What is his best quality?
What is her worst quality?
How does he react to different types of people?
How do different types of people react to her?

At each point in a person's life, they have a network of important people who affect their life. Make sure that you include them. Characters don't live in a vacuum, they have an effect on those around them and those around them have an effect on the character. This can be a very important aspect of character background, especially for a storyteller, as it may fill in some of the supporting cast.

Important People

Who was his first love?
Who was her best teacher?
Who was his biggest inspiration?
Who were her role-models?
What enemies has he made?
Who else is important to their life? Why?
How have these people changed the character?
Where is the character's relationship with them now?

It can also be very helpful to write a description of your character from the viewpoint of some important figure in their life, to get a view of the character from outside their head. It can be most enlightening, to player and storyteller alike.

Important events in a character's life will do much to shape the character. Any well rounded character will have a series of life changing, pivotal events in their background. Make sure your character lives an interesting life which has had an effect on how they are now.

Signifigant Events

What was her first experience with death?
What was his most important experience with love?
When did she first experience betrayal?
What were the major historic events during the character's life?
What other events have shaped his life?
Who were these experiences with?
When did they happen?
Where did they happen?
How have these events shaped the character into what she is now?

A good description can tell as much about a character as the best background. A well placed scar or specific posture can make a big difference to a character's image. How a character dresses can communicate volumes of information. The details of a character's wardrobe can tell a great deal about the character's confidence and social outlook. Make sure to have a clear picture of what your character looks like. After all, a picture is worth a thousand words.

Appearance

How tall is he?
How would you describe her build?
What does he wear at work? At play? When no one's watching?
Is her posture good or bad? Why?
How does he stand? Sit?
What color skin, hair, and eyes does he have?
What defining features does she have? Scars? Birthmarks?
What is his face to the world? To the mirror?
What about her hygiene?

Another important part of a character's description is the character's voice. This is probably the most useful part of a description, because it directly affects how the character is played in the game. It's important you know the voice of your character to connect with and portray them accurately.

VOICE

How talkative is she?
Does he talk quickly or slowly?
Does she speak loudly or softly?
Is his voice smooth or abrasive?
What accent does she speak with?
Is his voice deep or high? Rich or nasal?
What mannerisms and catch phrases is she fond of?
Does he view speech as a tool or as a pastime?

Sometimes the little stuff can help to bring a character to life as well. Does he always read the morning paper with coffee? Does she always twirl her hair when she's nervous? Does he always have a pencil behind his ear? These little quirks can make a character all the more real and a lot more entertaining.

Don't think you have to use all of these. All of the above are merely ideas and starting points. Some characters will be simple, some complex. Some of this may be very useful to you, some of it may not be helpful at all. The long and short of this section is do whatever you need to create a unique, original character which you will enjoy bringing to life in the story. Whatever method you use to do that is up to you.

Some people will be able to make a unique character right out of the box; some people will need to spend more time on the process. That's okay. This part should take the longest anyway. The more time and effort that is spent at this point, the less you will have to spend later. Expect your image of a character to change during the definition process as well. Often, new thoughts about a character will be inspired by the process of assigning descriptors to the different attributes and skills and abilities. Nothing is set in stone in this system. Characters change, thats what makes them interesting.

ATTRIBUTES

Now that you have created a character, we define that character in the PORTAL system, starting with attributes. Attributes are qualities intrinsic to everyone, that all characters possess to varying degrees. They are a necessary evil to just about any roleplaying system, but they do provide an equal base for all characters to start. In PORTAL they are divided into Primary and Secondary Attributes.

PRIMARY ATTRIBUTES

Primary attributes are the things that are intrinsic to all characters and are determined and assigned by the player directly. They are the most permanent, the fewest things in gameplay alter them and they change the slowest as a character progresses through the story. Although numbers are assigned to all of these attributes for use in the system, they should all be described with words before assigning numbers to them.

PRIMARY ATTRIBUTE RANGES

The general rules for primary attribute scores follow, but remember these are only general suggestions. If your setting demands different ranges, by all means change them.

SCORE	DESCRIPTION
1	Lowest possible score
5	Very low score, childlike
10-20	Average human score
21-25	The very best human achievement
30	Few gifted humans score this high
35-50	Superhuman range
50-75	Techological range
75-100	Godlike range

MIND, BODY, SPIRIT

Most systems are concerned with only the physical body and the mind. The thing which was missing to me was the spirit, or supernatural aspect of us which can't be defined physically or mentally. So the primary attributes represent the Physical, Mental, and Spiritual aspects of Endurance, Strength, and Agility.

MENTAL ATTRIBUTES

The mental attributes deal with the mind's capabilities and limits. Any time a character needs to use their mind, the action will be based on one or more of these attributes.

MENTAL ENDURANCE (ME)

Mental endurance (ME) is a representation of the mind's ability to keep working through mental stress, and the mind's lower-level responses. It encompasses the ideas of Wisdom, Sanity, Memory, Resolve, Instinct, and Focus. Someone with a low mental endurance might lose focus easily, be easily scared, or forgetful. Someone with a high mental endurance might be hard to rattle, persevere through trouble, have an excellent memory, or good instincts.

MENTAL STRENGTH (MS)

Mental strength (MS) is a representation of the mind's ability to process information; intelligence, and the ability to reason. It encompasses the ideas of Intelligence, IQ, Learning, Smarts, and Knowledge. Someone with a low mental strength might be of a lower grade education or be a slower learner than someone with a high mental strength, who might learn especially quickly, or be smarter.

MENTAL AGILITY (MA)

Mental agility (MA) is a measure of the mind's ability to react quickly, to read emotional responses; general charisma, and attitude. It encompasses the ideas of Charisma, Wits, Quick Thinking, and Adaptation. Someone with a high mental agility might have a natural charisma, think on their feet, always have the right thing to say, read people like books, or be able to go with the flow of just about any situation. Someone with a low mental agility might have trouble saying the right things at the right time to the right people, not be able to get a read on anyone, stumble with things that required quick thought, or have a general lack of charisma.

PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

The physical attributes deal with the body and its limits and capabilities. Whenever a character needs to use their body to make an action, one or more of these attributes will be used.

PHYSICAL ENDURANCE (PE)

Physical endurance (PE) is a representation of the strength of one's immune system; the ability to stay awake, the resilience of one's body; one's resistance to disease,

and the ability to keep functioning in an injured state. It encompasses the ideas of Constitution, Fortitude, and Stamina. Someone with a high physical endurance might be generally strident, be able to go longer than someone with a low physical endurance, who might get winded easily, or be sickly.

PHYSICAL STRENGTH (PS)

Physical strength (PS) is a measure of the body's ability to deal out offensive power; muscle tone, lifting power, and the strength of a punch. It encompasses the ideas of Strength and Power. Someone with a high physical strength might be able to leap higher, punch harder or lift more than someone with a low physical strength who might be weaker or not be able to lift much, or hit hard.

PHYSICAL AGILITY (PA)

Physical agility (PA) is a measure of the body's ability to react; reflexes, dexterity and flexibility. It encompasses the ideas of Dexterity, Coordination, Grace, and Swiftness. Someone with a high physical agility might be able to dodge a blow, climb a wall, squeeze through a fence, run faster, or do acrobatics better than someone with a low physical agility, who might be awkward, slow to react, or clumsy.

SPIRITUAL ATTRIBUTES

The spiritual attributes deal with the limits and capabilities of the spirit and the unconscious. When a character needs to call on their inner self, their deity, or other supernatural power to make something happen, one or more of these attributes will come into play.

SPIRITUAL ENDURANCE (SE)

Spiritual endurance (SE) is a representation of one's ability to stay the course through tests of faith; the power of belief, and strength of character. It encompasses the ideas of Faith, Conviction, Belief, and Willpower. Someone with a high spiritual endurance might have very set convictions on which they were immovable. These would allow them to deal with things that those with a low spiritual endurance might have to deal with mentally. Someone with a low spiritual endurance might be an agnostic, possessing no real firm spiritual base.

The difference between spiritual and mental endurance is blurry, but mental endurance deals more with stress of a mentally, consciously, or emotionally taxing variety. Spiritual endurance deals more with philosophically, spiritually, or subconsciously taxing stresses, things that are hard to rationalize and deal with on a mental level.

SPIRITUAL STRENGTH (SS)

Spiritual strength (SS) is a representation of one's ability to exert spiritual power; spiritual clout, supernatural or magical potency. It encompasses the ideas of Fervor, Gusto, Magical Power, and Spiritual Presence. Someone with a high spiritual strength might be able to perform an exorcism or other magical rite with greater effect than someone with a low spiritual strength, who might have very little effect on the spiritual world at all.

SPIRITUAL AGILITY (SA)

Spiritual agility (SA) is a representation of one's creative spirit; inspiration, luck, and fortune. It encompasses the ideas of Creativity, Inspiration, Luck, Fortune, and Favor. Someone with high spiritual agility might be luckier, more inspired, able to read omens and signs easier than one with a low spiritual agility, who might be unlucky, in a slump, or unable to see obvious warning signs.

STARTING ATTRIBUTE SCORES

After assigning descriptors to your attributes, the time has come to assign some numbers to them for use in the system. There are many methods you can use to do this, and if you have a method for determining scores for your story, by all means use it.

Three methods are presented here; some use all chance, while others leave nothing to chance. Which method you use is entirely up to you and will likely depend on the kind of story you are telling. Whatever method you use, for a general rule, no attribute may start higher than 25 at the beginning of the story. Of course if you are telling a story about superheroes, feel free to up that number.

METHOD 1: RANDOM MATRIX

Roll a 9 by 9 grid of numbers by rolling three 10-sided dice (3d10), ignoring the lowest number and adding the other two together, re-rolling anything less than 5 to 10, whatever minimum score is decided upon for the type of story you're telling. Form a grid starting at the top and working down from left to right. After creating this matrix of 81 numbers, 20 possible sets of starting attribute scores are presented: each horizontal row, each vertical column and both diagonals. Chose which of these sets best suits your character and assign each number to an attribute as you see fit for your character.

This method leaves a lot to chance, since you have an equal chance of rolling three bad numbers as you do of rolling three good numbers. This is evened out by rolling 20 sets of possible numbers, and it does generate lots of average numbers in

the 10-15 range. It can generate numbers in whatever range you want it to, depending on where you set your minimum re-roll. It's best for groups that don't like determining attributes using point distribution, and prefer leaving it completely to the dice. The total point spread varies greatly; theoretically from as low as 18, if you have no minimum re-rolls, to as high as 180.

Method 2: Random Additions

Start with 10 points per attribute. Roll one 10-sided die (1d10) nine times and add one number to each attribute as you see fit for your character.

This is a much quicker method, and generates mostly average to high-average scores between 13 and 17. It is recommended for groups who want to leave something up to chance, but feel the many options presented in Method 1 too confusing, lengthy, or open for comfort. The total point spread is between 99 and 180.

This method could incorporate the grid rolling of Method 1. Giving many different options for what set of additions the player wants to add to the base. By varying the base that each attribute starts at, a story may be more or less powerful.

Method 3: Assigning Points

Start with 5 points per attribute. Assign 90 points between all the attributes however the player decides. With even distribution, it generates 9 scores of 15, but is obviously designed to give players the capability to control their character's strengths and weaknesses. A player may only move points from an attribute to make the score less than 5 with the approval of the storyteller. Scores below 5 are very difficult to roleplay.

This is recommended for more advanced groups who have very clear ideas of what attributes their characters need. The total point spread is always exactly 135.

This method can use any number of points to distribute, depending on the type of story you intend to tell. The more points the players can spend, the higher-powered the game will be.

Assigning Scores According to Character

Whatever method is used to generate scores, the scores should always be assigned according to the character background created in the first step's creation process. This is why we went to the trouble of describing them all before we started assigning numbers to them. If your character has weak physical strength, don't assign a high number to it; a 6-10 would probably fit better. If your character has a well

established spiritual endurance, be sure to assign it a number that is high enough to support the descriptor; probably in the 15-20 range.

Remember, character is more important than any number. If you get into a situation where you really can't assign numbers appropriately- which if you have created a well rounded character, should be very rarely- then take it up with the storyteller. Roll new numbers or modify numbers to fit; whatever needs to happen to represent the character accurately in the system.

Secondary Attributes

Secondary attributes are also intrinsic to all characters, but are related in some way to the more core primary attributes and are therefore determined by a character's primary attributes. They are more fluid, and will change during gameplay as a character progresses through the story.

Health

Starting health is determined by adding (ME + PE + SE + MS + PS + SS).

Health is a measure of a character's entire being to take pain, damage, stress and injury before they begin to permanently and more seriously affect the character. It encompasses the ideas of Hit Points, Damage Threshold, Trauma, and Status. The higher a character's health, the better their chance of surviving future injury, the more damage the character can take and the better the character deals with it. When a character is injured or is healing, health will be rolled.

Vitality

Starting vitality is determined by adding (MA + PA + SA) and dividing by 10, rounded off.

Vitality is a measure of the amount of energy your body has available to perform strenuous activities which involve lengthy periods of time or a high output of energy. Vitality is used when you perform any normal activity which requires an expulsion of physical and/or mental energy.

This number will be between 3 and 6 for most characters. Many actions within round-based time reduce vitality. It's easy to lose a few points per round. If you're not prepared and don't have time to rest, you'll quickly become tired, and your actions will become compromised. Vitality is also used to determine the order of action within round-based time; those with higher vitality go before those with lower vital-

ity. Since vitality is lost during round based time, the order can quickly shift if one is exhausted.

ENERGY

Starting energy is determined by adding (SE + SS + SA).

Energy is the essence of a character's spiritual being, and is used to power special abilities, such as magic spells or superpowers. Call it adrenaline, call it chi, call it mystical power, call it faith, call it mana, whatever. Abilities have an energy cost, and whenever an ability is used, energy is spent.

REPUTATION

Starting reputation is equal to a character's starting MA.

Reputation represents a character's recognizability, how well known they are. Although essentially a representation of fame, it works as well for infamy. As a result of role-playing, characters can gain or lose influence and reputation within the story. Not only can reputation aid in role-playing, but it's another means of reward outside of experience points, increasing skills, etc.

It should be mentioned that if a character is based around having a specific reputation, that should be taken into account by the storyteller when generating this number. Remember, character is more important than any number.

WEALTH

Starting wealth is determined by adding (MS + MA + SA).

As was stated earlier, PORTAL is not an equipment depot or a general store, so there is no money. Rather, a character's wealth is assigned an attribute score representing their basic ability to acquire goods and their likelihood of having enough money to make a major purchase.

It should be mentioned that if a character is based around having a specific social status, that should be taken into account by the storyteller when generating this number. Remember, character is more important than any number.

Skills

Now that the broad stuff is taken care of, we need to get the details of the character down. Let's start with skills. Skills are the things you excel at, or possibly things at which you are especially mediocre; the characteristics that define who you are and what you become. Skills represent things that are learned and practiced. They are not intrinsic to everyone and effort must be made on the part of the individual character to develop them. Skills form a foundation on which much of PORTAL's action is based on.

Skills in general should only be a guide. Just as with attributes, it's important to describe and define skills according to the character they belong to before assigning scores to them. Skill scores should never replace roleplaying through a situation. Skill rolls are used to resolve actions that involve variables or chance, not interactions between characters. For example, a skill roll might interrupt narrative when attempting to sweet talk someone. In roleplaying situations, calling a skill roll could force a decision which a character would not otherwise make, limiting creativity and freedom. The presence of an appropriate skill should be taken into account while roleplaying, but that doesn't mean dice should be rolled every time a skill is used.

There are situations where dice are needed, and that's why numbers are associated with skills. Combat, for one, is usually decided by rolls determining attacks that hit or miss; characters that dodge or fall into the line of fire; damage that shrugged off or causes problems.

There is no long list of skills here for players to chose from, because no list could ever hope to include the specific skills possessed by any given character, and to force a character into a narrow set of skills limits creativity. Anything that can be learned over time can be a skill. The same skill might be defined slightly differently from one character to the next. Different people do the same things in different ways and with different focuses. The player and the storyteller define specific skill sets a character has based on the character's background, not according to some rigid list of possible actions in the game system.

Skill Nesting

PORTAL uses a nesting system to represent skills; starting with a primary attribute, which covers the widest groups of skills, then to broad skill groups, then to narrow skill groups, then to specialized skills. This is a representation of how most of us learn. We start out with something broad: "I like books." Then we move on to something more narrow, like a degree in English literature. Then we specialize with a PHD in Shakespearian poetry. A character may define the different groups in any way that makes sense to the character and skill in question; the college example is just an

easy to understand well-known example.

People gradually narrow their knowledge to more specific things; we get more and more focused the more we learn. So when determining targets, broad skills add the score of the skill and the attribute; narrow skills add the narrow skill, broad skill and the attribute; and specialized skills add the specialized skill, narrow skill, broad skill, and the attribute. The more specific one is in their knowledge the more useful and comprehensive the knowledge is.

Attributes of Skills

The first group in this nesting process is always a primary attribute. They cover the most general types of skills a person can have: focus, intelligence, wits, endurance, strength, agility, resolve, faith, creativity. Attributes are rolled only when a character has little to no knowledge about an action and doesn't have a more specific skill to roll for it.

Broad Skills

The broad skill group represents the broadest description of any skill. Subjects in school are good examples. Subjects of study in school are very broad in scope, but still far more specific than general intelligence, which is represented by the primary attribute mental strength. Broad skills are rolled when a character has some general knowledge of an action, but might not have studied it in any detail.

Narrow Skills

Narrow group skills represent areas of interest to a character that are better studied and practiced. Individual classes can be helpful examples, since they often cover more specific areas like biology, trigonometry, or calculus. (Though depending on how deeply a character studies something, these could just as easily be broad skills.) Narrow skills are rolled when a character has studied or practiced at least some of the specifics involved in something.

Specialized Skills

Skills in the specialized group are specific areas of intense focus, study, or practice by a character. Specific specializations in knowledge and well practiced, finely honed skills fall here. Specific techniques in a martial arts system, specific planes a pilot is trained in, or other frequently repeated actions. Specialized skills are rolled when a character has a specific focus in an action or type of action that is being used.

Starting Skills

One of the biggest problems with less structured systems is often a vastly differing number of skills from one character to the next. This can cause problems for many simpler characters, and allow characters with lots of skills to run away with the show. PORTAL moderates this problem by using the character's attributes to determine a character's maximum starting number of skills and the points that can be assigned to those skills. Since everyone uses the same system to determine their attributes, everyone has equal ground for their skills as well.

Total Skills

A character's maximum starting number of specialized skills is determined by adding the character's (MS + MA). Half the characters maximum specialized skills is the character's maximum starting number of narrowed skills. Half the character's maximum narrowed skills is the character's maximum starting number of broad skills. Most average characters have 20 to 40 specialized skills, 10 to 20 narrow skills, and 5 to 10 broad skills available to them; though certainly if you are telling a story that needs fewer or more skills feel free to alter this process.

In some settings, there may be skills that are "free" to everyone which might not count toward this number. These may represent skills so necessary or second nature to anyone in the setting that everyone has them to one degree or another. In a water-world, for instance, everyone might have a "water navigation" skill with "swimming" and "diving" under it. It's up to the storyteller. Keep in mind this represents the maximum number of skills a character may start the game with. A player may chose to have fewer than this number, and characters can gain skills through the story.

Skill Points

A character's starting skill points are determined by multiplying the total of all nine primary attributes (ME + MS + MA + PE + PS + PA + SE + SS + SA) by 4. This provides an average score of roughly 10 for the maximum number of skills. Feel free to change the multiplier if your story requires more or less skilled characters.

Skill points are then assigned to skills in any amount the player chooses with the following restrictions:

Skill Target Ranges

All broad skills are based on a primary attribute. No broad skill's score may be higher than the score of the attribute it's based on. All narrow skills are based on a broad skill. No narrow skill's score may be higher than the score of the broad skill it's based on. All specialized skills are based on a narrow skill. No specialized skill's

score may be higher than the score of the narrow skill it's based on.

Average human range for most skills is 10 to 20, though a well rounded character should probably include some skills they're particularly mediocre at as well. This can be a good way to spend those extra few skill points that don't have anywhere else to go. We all have things we don't do very well.

Bad Skills

Any good character has some skills that they're really bad at. Skills that the character pulls off every once in a while, but generally speaking, doesn't succeed at. These are represented by skills with a target of 10 or less (a player might roll a ten sided die to determine the target) which don't nest with any other skill or primary attribute. No skill points are spent on these skills and they don't count against the maximum starting number of skills.

When rolling bad skills, since the rating is so low, a hyper-critical result is treated as a critical result, critical results are treated as successes or even near misses.

Defining skills according to character

Skill scores should always be assigned according to the character background created in the first step's creation process. This is why all skills need to be defined and described before assigning numbers to them. It's also important to define skills so they make sense for the character using them.

A character's maximum number of available skills is determined by a character's MS and MA, but a character may take fewer skills in order to focus more heavily on them, spending more points on each. All characters have roughly the same number of points to spend. This is based on the idea that everyone has the same basic potential, but different people use that potential in different areas based on their strengths.

Some of us are jacks-of-all-trades and know a little about almost everything. Some of us are very focused and knowledgeable on a specific subject, but know very little outside of it. Being "smarter" only allows a character the option of knowing more, not knowing better. Scores in any specific skill tree are determined by the attribute the tree is under. Placement of attributes is important; it limits how high any skill based on it can score. A character's focus is important.

A priest will likely have higher numbers in his spiritual attributes than his mental attributes, since they are where most of his skills are based, allowing him the best ability. It's his focus. Don't place high numbers in mental attributes to get more or

higher-scored skills. Very little of this system is based on having high mental attributes unless it's your character's focus.

Just as with attributes, remember character is more important than any number.

Abilities

Abilities are things which make a character unique, but aren't really skills. They are things which are just part of a character. They often represent things a character has an intrinsic knowledge of or things a character can do where others cannot. Often, they can't be learned by just anyone. They aren't intrinsic to everyone. Sometimes they're a blessing; sometimes they're a curse.

Some stories might not need abilities, but since they cover things as amazing as magic or superpowers to things as mundane as sex appeal or a photographic memory, most stories can incorporate them in some way. After all, much of what makes roleplaying fun is playing characters with abilities and talents that differ from the norm.

Abilities, like skills, should only be a guide. It's just as important to describe and define abilities according to the character's background before assigning any scores to them. Ability scores should never replace roleplaying through a situation. Just as skill rolls resolve situations involving variables or chance, ability rolls determine the effectiveness of the ability when it is used. Someone with amazing hearing won't hear everything all the time. Abilities just don't work as well some times as they do others. The presence of specific abilities should be taken into account while roleplaying, and just as with skills, that doesn't mean dice should be rolled every time a character uses one.

There is no list of abilities here for players to chose from, because no list could ever hope to include all the abilities the human imagination can invent. Forcing a character to choose from a specific set of abilities limits creativity. What constitutes an ability will vary depending on the story, but generally anything that a character is capable of that wouldn't fall neatly into a skill can probably be an ability. The same ability will quite likely be defined differently from one character to another. No two abilities are exactly alike. The player and the storyteller define the specific abilities a character has based on the character's background.

Ability Nesting

Just as with skills, PORTAL uses a nesting system to represent abilities; starting with a primary attribute, which cover the widest groups of ability, then to broad spheres of influence, then to narrow areas of effect, and finally down to specialized, practiced abilities. How these groups are defined depends greatly on the specific types of abilities a character has. Magic might be divided into "elementalism," "elements," and "spells." A superhero might have "super-speed," "invisible movement," and "going out of phase." These are just examples. Define these groups according to the character using them. The sky's the limit.

People gradually hone their ability to more specific effects and get more and

more focused and controlled the more they develop. So when determining targets, broad abilities add the score of the ability and the attribute; narrow abilities add the narrow ability, broad ability and the attribute; and specialized abilities add the specialized ability, narrow ability, broad ability, and the attribute. The more developed one is in their ability the more controlled and powerful the ability is.

ATTRIBUTES OF ABILITIES

The first group in nesting abilities is always a primary attribute. Attributes represent where an ability is based; where it gets its power: focus, intelligence, charisma, stamina, power, agility, resolve, faith, creativity, fortune, spirit. Attributes are never rolled for abilities unless a character is exploring possible new abilities they might have, which should be worked out with the storyteller.

BROAD ABILITIES

Broad abilities represent the broadest description of an ability; its sphere of influence. Schools of magic are useful examples. Elementalism, Illusion, Necromancy, and Spiritualism would all be examples of broad abilities. These are the widest spheres of influence an ability can be based in. Broad abilities are rolled when a character has some general ability in an area, but might not have practiced any specifics.

NARROW ABILITIES

Narrow abilities cover specific areas of effect that a character has isolated and practiced. This is the first level at which a character reproduces results with an ability. If a character has elementalism, narrow abilities could represent elements they're familiar with. Narrow abilities are rolled when a character has studied or practiced at least some of the specifics involved in an area.

SPECIALIZED ABILITIES

Abilities in the specialized group are specific areas of intense focus, study, or practice by a character; specializations which produce specific results; well practiced, finely honed abilities. If a character has elementalism, specialized abilities could represent specific, well practiced spells under each element which might even be developed by the character. Specialized abilities are rolled when a character has a specific focus on an area or type of effect.

STARTING ABILITIES

Abilities need to be balanced between characters just as skills do. Having unbalanced levels and numbers of abilities in a group can cause the same problems as skill imbalances, to an even greater degree. PORTAL moderates this problem by using the

character's attributes to determine a character's maximum starting number of abilities and the points that can be assigned to them.

Total Abilities

A character's maximum starting number of specialized abilities is equal to their SA. Half the character's maximum specialized abilities is the character's maximum starting number of narrowed abilities. Half the character's maximum narrowed abilities is the character's maximum starting number of broad abilities. Most characters have 10 to 20 specialized abilities, 5 to 10 narrow abilities, and 3 to 5 broad abilities available to them; though certainly if you are telling a story that needs fewer or more abilities feel free to change this process.

In some settings, there may be abilities that are "free" to everyone which might not count toward this number. Possibly genetic traits everyone in the world has to varying degrees. Certain races might also have certain abilities which are specific to them. Elves might have heightened senses or the ability to speak with nature. It's up to the storyteller. Keep in mind this represents the maximum number of abilities a character may start the game with. A player may chose to have fewer than this number, and characters can gain abilities through the story.

Ability Points

A character's starting ability points are determined by multiplying the total of the three spiritual attributes (SE + SS + SA) by 4. This provides an average score of 5 to 7 for the maximum number of abilities. Feel free to change the multiplier if your story requires more or less powerful abilities.

Ability points are then assigned to abilities in any amount the player chooses with the following restrictions:

Ability Target Ranges

All broad abilities are based on a primary attribute. No broad ability's score may be higher than the score of the attribute it's based on. All narrow abilities are based on a broad ability. No narrow ability's score may be higher than the score of the broad ability it's based on. Specialized abilities are based on a narrow ability. No specialized ability's score may be higher than the score of the narrow ability it's based on.

There really is no average range for abilities because abilities aren't really average, though scores will likely be in the 5 to 10 range.

ENERGY COST

In addition to ability scores, each ability has an energy cost. As a general rule, the more powerful an ability, the more draining it is; and the more practiced and developed an ability becomes, the less energy is needed to use it. Therefore, specialized abilities will generally cost less than narrow abilities, which will generally cost less than broad abilities, which will generally cost less than newly discovered abilities; though the power of an ability can cause exceptions to this rule.

A general idea for coming up with energy costs for average power abilities is to take the target of each broad ability, subtract it from 100, and divide that number by 4. (With a target of 40: 100-40=60/4=15) Each narrow ability costs half the broad skill above it. (15/2=7.5 rounded to 8) Each specialized ability costs half the narrow skill above it. (8/2=4) This is just a derivative method to come up with starting points for average power ability costs, not a set rule. Players should work with the storyteller to apply appropriate energy costs to each ability as it applies to the character and the story being told.

DEFINING ABILITIES ACCORDING TO CHARACTER

Ability scores should always be assigned according to the character background created in the first step's creation process, and should be defined and described before assigning numbers to them. It's particularly important to define abilities in specific terms to the character using them. Sometimes this will involve description of any "special effects" an ability may have, and how the ability manifests in the character.

A character's maximum number of available abilities is determined by a character's SA, but a character may take fewer abilities in order to focus more heavily, spending more points on each.

Some of us are multi-talented with lots of reasonable abilities. Some of us are gifted in a specific area, but very lacking in others. Being "creative" only allows a character the option of being multi-talented, not more talented. Scores in any tree of abilities are determined by the attribute the ability tree is under. Placement of attributes is important, as it limits how high any ability based on it can score. A character's focus is important.

A priest will likely have higher numbers in his SS than his SA, since it's where most of his abilities are based, allowing him the best ability. It's his focus. Don't place high numbers in SA to get more or higher-scored abilities. Very little of this system is based on having high SA unless that's your character's focus.

Like with all numbers, remember character is more important than any number.

Misc. Character Creation Rules

As alluded to throughout character creation, there are many other rules which aid the character definition process. Some of the more common additional rules to finish up a character for the system are presented here. Anything you need to add or ignore to tell your story is encouraged.

Modifiers

The most common rule used to flesh out and balance characters for a setting is modifiers: additions and minuses to specific numbers on the character sheet. Modifiers can represent any number of things: race, profession, age, gadgetry.

Be cautioned not to let modifiers unbalance a balanced game. It's easy to do. Don't let modifiers get out of hand. Remember, any modifiers in the system should represent some tangible aspect of the setting, not just to have a modifier. If it doesn't help tell a good story, don't use it.

Gifts & Flaws

Another common rule used to round out a character is gifts and flaws. Gifts and flaws are most useful for representing aspects of a character that can't really go anywhere else in the system, things which directly affect game-play, but aren't skills or abilities. Blindness, claws, night vision, webbed feet, deafness, albinism, and wings could be gifts or flaws, as well as many other creative and imaginative details. They can be used to represent things in a character's background which can't be represented in the system any other way. A storyteller might offer players the opportunity to gain experience points by taking a flaw or two.

TIMING & ACTION: THE RULES

Now that you have amazing original characters, it's time to play them! Now we come to the system. The actual rules of how to play the game. As with the rest of PORTAL, you are encouraged to alter this system to meet your own particular needs. Keep in mind of course, lots of thought and play testing went into the system you're about to read, so you should at least give it a try.

TIMING

Players need to know what order everything happens in. In a perfect roleplaying universe, everyone would take turns according to when their character would typically act, but the gaming world creeps in and makes everyone go first, because they have the most important action for the battle. Humans are competitive, so some kind of system needs to be in place to handle what order things happen in.

In theory, timing should be so transparent and intuitive it's invisible. It should work with the idea that some characters are front line fighters, and others are back line strategists. The fact that fighters are going to jump into the fray while the strategists are still analyzing the situation should be built into the system. This should happen in a way which makes things feel totally natural and realistic to the players.

In practice, however, things are a bit more complicated. Timing systems are notoriously difficult to shove to the back and ignore because they determine too much of what happens when and how. They tend to involve lots of deliberation and out of character "table talk." These are issues which must be dealt with for a roleplaying game to work. All involved should strive to keep timing natural and unobtrusive to the narrative.

NARRATIVE TIME

Most stories should use what PORTAL refers to as "narrative time," an open, freeform time structure which primarily tells the story. Scenes of the story which involve actions undertaken on a very long or continuing basis, such as travel, always use narrative time. Dialog is almost always roleplayed in narrative time. If, at any time, the order in which things happen isn't really important, then it isn't important. Don't worry about it. Players can take care of themselves.

ACTIONS IN NARRATIVE TIME

As the name implies, narrative time is storytelling intensive, so be sure to have an open time structure which allows players to act. Characters, like the rest of us, need to go shopping, go out to eat, upgrade equipment, and otherwise enjoy their spoils.

Make sure storytelling doesn't keep characters from making their own decisions. "Action" does not mean "roll dice," and although there are instances in narrative time when dice are rolled, they should be kept to a minimum.

"Taking 100"

In fact, most actions taken in narrative time will succeed. In narrative time, characters aren't under any pressure, and can take as long as needed to get it right. This is sometimes referred to as "taking 100" (in reference to "taking 10" in round-based time to prepare an action, thus improving the chance of success.) Also due to the elongated time structure, characters need not spend vitality points to make most actions in narrative time.

Round-Based Time

Any high-pressure situation in which timing becomes important, such as combat, uses round-based time, a far more detailed way to determine what order actions take place in. Where narrative time is very open and free-form, round-based time (while still very open in comparison to many systems) is more structured.

Organizing Rounds

Round-based time takes each minute and divides it into 10 rounds of 6 seconds each. This is a fairly standard, albeit arbitrary number used by many roleplaying games. Every round, each player character and each non-player character get one opportunity to act. This doesn't mean each character gets only one action each round; rather, that each character will have one opportunity to make conscious actions each round. Each character's actions happen in the same 6 second period of time; rounds simply provide a way of organizing those actions in the system.

There are many ways to organize rounds. If you have a specific way of dealing with timing you would like to use in your story, by all means try it out. Players should play their characters responsibly. If your character could do the action or actions in 6 seconds or less, the character can take the action or actions in one round. Players and the storyteller should strive to keep a good balance when determining what actions can or cannot be taken in a round.

Actions in Round-based Time

Since there's pressure to act within a specific time, actions are somewhat more complicated in round-based time. Acting order gives everyone a chance to make actions according to their ability to do them. This is determined by vitality.

Acting Order

The acting order each round is easy: characters with higher vitality go before characters with lower vitality, until everyone has had an opportunity to act. Acting in round-based time wears characters out. This is represented by characters spending vitality to make actions. As vitality is spent, acting order can change.

Spending Vitality

In most cases, a character spends 1 vitality point for each action made. Particularly strenuous or energetic actions might spend 2. Some abilities might drain additional vitality as well as energy. In general, 1 vitality point is spent for each action made by a character.

Action vs Reaction

In spending vitality, anything initiated or consciously undertaken by a character is an action; attacks and other offensive measures for example. Anything done in direct reaction to another action not initiated by the character is a reaction. Defensive measures are usually reactive, made in response to some offensive action. Counter-attacks typically spend vitality, since one must successfully defend against an attack (the reaction) in order to counter it (an action). Preparatory actions also spend vitality, since proactive action is being initiated by the character in order to guard against some future situation.

Actions spend vitality points, reactions do not. It's up to the storyteller to define just where the limits of "action" and "reaction" are for their story, as well as defining the specifics of what action 1 vitality point will allow before spending more. One shot with the pistol? One punch? Or are 1-vitality-point actions larger, allowing an entire 3-shot attack with the pistol, or jab-jab-hook combo?

Exhaustion & Resting

By spending vitality points over the course of several rounds, the acting order changes, with some characters becoming tired more quickly than others. A character may rest, meaning make no actions (reactions are still fine), during a round in order to gain 1 vitality point. Characters may gain more than their starting vitality by resting. If a character has 0 vitality points at the start of a round, they are exhausted, unable to act. They must rest that round.

Adrenaline & Negative Vitality

A character may act when they have 0 vitality by spending vitality as normal, causing their vitality to become negative. This represents a last ditch effort or adrena-

line rush. A character may spend as much vitality as needed in the negative, but only for a single round. At the end of that round, the character collapses; totally drained and unable to do anything, not even defend, until the character's vitality reaches 0. Since vitality is gained 1 point per round, the character will be unable to act or react for as many rounds as their vitality is negative.

Movement in Round-based Time

Movement in narrative time is rarely an issue, since characters can take as long as needed to get to any given location. Movement in round-based time is somewhat more restrictive since there are time constraints. Most people walk at 3 to 4 miles per hour, run at 7 to 12 miles an hour, and all out sprint at about 20-25 miles an hour. Therefore, in one round, a character can walk up to 30 feet, run up to 100 feet, and all out sprint up to 200 feet. Walking spends no vitality, running spends 1 vitality per round, sprinting all out spends 3 vitality per round.

Action

There is no list of actions, feats, attacks, defenses, or any other system to make actions work flawlessly with the math and tables of the game. Literally anything that can be imagined can be an action. That is to say, if it's plausible that your character would take the action, you can attempt it. Remember, players should play their characters responsibly. Some things that can be imagined are harder to actually do than others; that's where dice come in.

Percent System

As was mentioned earlier, almost everything in PORTAL is based on percentage rolls, with the best of human achievement in any part of the system represented by a 25, and 4 levels of skills and abilities (4 x 25 = 100). When the system calls for a roll, it's based on a chance out of 100. The same action resolution system is used for everything.

There are no conversions in PORTAL. 1 = 1, and 57 = 57. Each number in the system represents something, and while some numbers change over time, none are converted to some other number when doing one action as opposed to another. All numbers are what they say they are, all the time.

Targets

Targets represent the chance out of 100 that an action will succeed. Obviously, the higher the target, the better chance the action has of succeeding. Most average humans will have scores for individual attributes, skills, and abilities in the 10 to 20 range. This gives specialized skills and abilities a total target of 40 to 80. The most difficult actions have the lowest targets. As an action becomes easier to perform, the target gets higher. For an action to succeed, a player must roll the target or under. So the higher the target, the easier the action; the lower the target, the harder the action.

To determine a target, find the appropriate skill group, getting as specific as you can, always falling back to more general groups if the character doesn't have the specifics. Add up all groups leading to the skill, including the attribute, then adjust with any modifiers. 1. Find the most specific group for the skill. 2. Add all appropriate groups leading to that skill. 3. Add the appropriate attribute score. 4. Add/subtract any modifiers.

Modifiers

A target number can be modified by many things. Modifiers always modify targets, never rolls. Some of the more common modifiers follow with suggestions, but modifiers work differently in different genres and settings. The ultimate decision on

modifiers always lies with the storyteller. Modifiers should be more about roleplaying and less about dice rolling, and therefore kept to a minimum. When in doubt, apply no modifiers at all. Scene and mood should affect the flow of events more than numbers or dice.

Modifier Ranges

Modifier	Description
-100	Impossible
-80	Extremely Difficult
-60	Very Difficult
-40	Challenging
-20	Tricky
-10 to +10	Normal
+20	Easy
+40	Very Easy
+60	Obvious
+80	Simplistic
+100	Automatic

Most modifiers are used during combat. Here are some suggestions on a few common combat modifiers:

Aiming: A normal attack should be based on hitting the central mass of an opponent. Extremities such as the head, arms or legs might be as much as -20, to hit the face or hand could be -40, to hit the nose or thumb might be -60, and so forth. Aiming is most important in determining if an attack causes a vital wound or not.

Distance: Distance will play the biggest role in ranged combat using guns, arrows, darts, and the like. It can, although rarely, make a difference in hand to hand combat. "Normal range" depends on the weapon. There is no modifier for a weapon at "normal range". Every time "normal range" is added to the distance, it might subtract 20 from the target. Anything less than "normal range" might add 20 to the target, point blank (3 feet or so) might be as high as +40, touching +60, restrained or immobile (coup de gras) +80.

Speed: Although not as common as some others, speed affects combat, such as when attacking a vehicle or other target moving at high speed. Most people move at a maximum of about 15 to 20 MPH at high speed, which many combat actions will be. Just like with distance, every time that is added again to the speed of the object,

20 might be subtracted from the target needed to hit it.

COVER: In situations where a target is hiding at least partially behind something for cover, the aiming modifier should be applied to the attack, depending on how much of the target's body is exposed.

Many other situations might call for modifiers: visibility, inebriation, evasive movement, physical impairment, surface terrain, size, and weight just to name a few. Some actions might even have several modifiers applied to them, but the more modifiers you use, the more time you spend doing math, and the less time you spend roleplaying.

ROLLING

A lot has been said about targets, and ranges, and scores, and modifiers, which all relate to rolls. Just what is a roll and what does it do? Well, let's start off by saying again that rolls are not a substitute for roleplaying, and should be kept to a minimum. Rolls should be made when some chance of failure is present in the situation, or when there are worldly variables which could affect a character in ways out of the character's control. Don't get "roll happy," it does nothing for the story and slows down play significantly. Remember, dice are tools representing chance and variability, not the big G. If it can be done without a roll, it should be done without a roll.

That said, what are the specifics of rolling? Whenever the story calls for a roll, a player or storyteller will roll a percentage result on two 10-sided dice (2d10) which represent a percentage (1d100). One die representing the tens digit, the other representing the ones digit. The result determines the outcome of the action as a success, or a failure, though some will be more spectacular than others.

RESULTS

ROLL	RESULT
1	Hyper-critical Success
2 to 9	Critical Success
10 to target-5	Success
target-5 to target	Near-miss
target+1 to 89	Failure
90 to 99	Critical Failure
100	Hyper-critical Failure

SUCCESS

The most desirable result, of course. is success. Any roll equal to or under the target succeeds, and the action is carried out. Some successes are better than others. Generally, the lower the roll, the more successful the outcome. Therefore, the closer a roll is to the target, the less successful the result. Sometimes a low roll means doing a task with style, sometimes it means completing something more completely or with better quality. Three extremes have special rules: hyper-critical successes, critical successes, and near-misses.

HYPER-CRITICAL SUCCESS

A roll of 1 is a hyper-critical success ("hyper-crit"). The action goes even better than the character planned. Hyper-critical successes represent times when serendipity takes over, taking the action one step further than the character originally intended. In combat, hyper-critical attacks deal triple damage, and always cause a vital wound, regardless of defense actions from the target; hyper-critical defense actions avoid most or all damage. Out of combat, hyper-critical actions go better than you could ever imagine. If hacking a security system, this could mean the character not only infiltrates the system, but also effectively destroys its ability to retaliate. Since there's only a 1 in 100 chance, these won't happen often, but when they do, they are spectacular and can get a character out of serious trouble.

CRITICAL SUCCESS

Any roll in the single digits (2-9) is a critical success ("crit"). This means not only does the action succeed, but it succeeds flawlessly, as well as could be hoped. In combat, critical attacks deal double damage, and always cause a vital wound; critical defense actions reduce or avoid twice as much damage as with a normal success. Out of combat, critical actions go off without a hitch; as well as the character could imagine. If hacking a security system, this could mean not only does the character infiltrate the system, but also places a stop gap which keeps the system from kicking them out for a time.

NEAR-MISS

Any roll that is under, but within 5 of the target results in a near miss. The action is completed, but only just. Near-misses are times when a character gets the job done by the skin of their teeth. Often, a character might look clumsy or inept in their actions. In combat, near-miss attacks deal half their normal damage, and never inflict a vital wound; near-miss defense actions avoid half as much damage as with a normal success. Out of combat, the character just squeaks by, barely making something work. If hacking a security system, this might mean the character successfully infiltrates the system, but leaves a trail which can be followed.

FAILURE

Any roll over the target results in a failure, meaning the action in question is not successfully completed. Some failures are worse than others. Generally, the higher the roll, the worse the outcome. Sometimes this means a character simply fails to do the intended action. Sometimes it means collateral damage from a bad attempt. Two failure extremes have special rules: critical failure, and hyper-critical failure.

CRITICAL FAILURE

Any roll in the 90s (90-99) results in a critical failure (botch). Not only does the action fail, but fails miserably at best, spectacularly at worst. Critical failures represent times when despite the best efforts to the contrary, the universe just says no. In combat, critical failure can mean missing an enemy so badly that a character causes injury to allies or one's self. Out of combat, it can mean the worst outcome that could have been planned for. If hacking a security system, this could mean not only does the character fail to infiltrate the system, but also triggers the alarm, alerting the system of their position.

HYPER-CRITICAL FAILURE

A roll of 100 (zeros on both d10s) results in a hyper-critical failure (hyper-botch). Pray that the character or some other ally doesn't die in the process of screwing up so severely, no one could foresee the problems it creates. Hyper-critical failure represents those rare times that the universe seems to have it out for you, and nothing seems to help. If hacking a security system, this could mean the system not only signals the alarm, sending personnel to the character's location, but also sends an electric pulse through the equipment the character was using, electrocuting them. Thankfully, since there's only a 1 in 100 chance, these don't happen often.

TYPES OF ROLLS

Although theoretically anything could be determined by a roll, many things don't need one. Basic movement for example, even in combat, doesn't need to be rolled, as there is little that would keep a character from moving in average situations. Although all rolls in PORTAL are essentially the same, some need clarification. There are several broad types of roll which determine different situations. Feel free to alter or make new types of rolls if your story needs a specific kind of roll.

ACTION ROLLS

The most common roll is the action roll; called for when something tests a character's skill. Almost everything characters do could call for an action roll, but actions should be decided narratively whenever possible, especially in narrative time. Action

rolls should be used when the outcome won't derail the plot; the details could succeed or fail without seriously affecting the story. Sometimes an element of chance can add to the fun. The most common use of action rolls is in combat, which will be detailed later.

When making an action roll, characters should always roll the most specific and appropriate skill they have. Starting with specialized skills, then moving up, eventually ending with a primary attribute if necessary.

"Taking 10"

In narrative time, a character can take as long as needed to get something right. In round-based time, things are more pressed for time, but a character may still take time to prepare and focus on getting an action right. A character may "take 10" in order to prepare for an action to be made in a later round. They make no action, spend no vitality points, and gain no vitality points for the round. If the action is carried out the next round, the character adds a modifier of 10 to the target for the roll, representing the extra preparation. A character may do this as many times as they care to before making the action, so long as they don't double their original target or make a target of more than 100 by doing so.

For example, a character who has a target of 42 in a specialized skill may take 10 up to 4 times, giving a target of 82, which is less than 84. The character may not take 10 a fifth time, as it would total 92, more than double the original target for the skill. A character may not make a target greater than 100 by taking 10. A character may always take 10 once, regardless of their score.

Reaction Rolls

Reaction rolls are mentioned here to reinforce that all rolls in the system work essentially the same way. There's really no difference between an action roll and a reaction roll. Both are based on the character's skill target. The main difference comes in round-based time, where actions spend vitality and reactions do not. Reaction rolls are made in direct response to an action, and should be used when there is an element of failure present. When it's obvious a character should succeed in a reaction they make, a roll should most likely be avoided.

Contested Rolls

When one character directly opposes another, from arm-wrestling to psychic battle, a contested roll is used. The basic idea of a contested roll is simple: the character initiating the contest rolls their skill. If they roll under their target, they succeed, and pass the number rolled to the reacting character. The reacting character rolls their skill. If they roll over their skill target, they fail. If they roll under their skill target, but

over the number rolled by the initiating character, they succeed, but not well enough to win the contest at hand. If they roll under the number rolled by the initiating character, then the reacting character wins the contest. Whoever rolls lower wins.

The above method is simple, but can sometimes lead to unrealistic results. If a character initiates an action by rolling a 21 under a target of 86, and another character reacts by rolling an 18 under a target of 24, who really succeeded? When there's a large difference between the initiating and reacting characters' targets, a more complex but more realistic method can be used: the character initiating the contest rolls their skill. If they roll under their target, they succeed. They figure how far under their target the roll was by subtracting the roll from the target. The reacting character rolls their skill. If they roll over their target, they fail, and the initiating character wins. If they roll under their target, they also figure how far under their target they rolled by subtracting the roll from the target. If the reacting character rolls farther under their target than the initiating character, they win the contest. If they do not roll farther under their target than the initiating character, they succeed, but not well enough to win the contest at hand. With this method, whoever rolls the farthest under their target wins.

Either of these methods may be used. The first method is simple, completely equal, and works well when there's no large difference in skill targets. The second is more complex and lends advantage to skilled characters, making it more realistic. Using either method, when one character rolls a critical success, while the other does not, the character who rolled the critical always wins the contest.

 The definition of "win" differs with the contest. Winning in combat usually means dealing or avoiding damage. Winning in a debate could mean anything from getting recognition to gaining an ally. Though many times characters will be rolling the same skill, it isn't always the case. Offensive actions will often be met by defensive reactions. Characters should roll their most appropriate and specific skill for any action; contests are no exception.

Cooperative Rolls

Sometimes one character assists another, which uses a cooperative roll. The assisting character rolls their skill first. If they roll over their target, they fail to assist the character. If they roll under their target, they assist the acting character. The assisting character figures how far under their target they rolled by subtracting the roll from the target. This number is added to the acting character's target as an assistance modifier.

An assisting character holds their action till the acting character makes the action. More than one character may assist in completing an action. It generally isn't

possible to assist a character after the action has been attempted. Actions which take several rounds to complete are exceptions to this rule. Assistance can come in the middle of an extended action.

Health Rolls

Health rolls work essentially like anything else. The difference is the results. In some systems, health rolls might be called "saving rolls," since health rolls represent the body's ability to keep working with injury. Health rolls are called for in times when a character is injured. They can also deal with the effects of poison or other debilitation. Health rolls should be kept to a minimum, and are most effective in determining if a character stays conscious. When a character takes a large amount of damage or is traumatically injured, a health roll may be rolled to see if it can be dealt with or if the character passes out. Still, health rolls shouldn't be used every time a character takes damage.

Injury

Generally, health rolls should be reserved for times when a character's injury could cause them to loose consciousness or when they're dealt more than 25% of their current health score in a short time. Health rolls work like any other roll, with a target of the character's current health score. A botch might result in the character passing out and taking additional damage (internal injuries, continued bleeding, etc.). A failure might mean anything from being stunned, to the character passing out or going into shock. A success means the character maintains consciousness and can deal with the damage, at least for a while. A critical reduces the damage received by half. A hyper-critical "soaks" most or all damage from an attack.

Healing

When unconscious, a character may make a health roll each round to see if they regain consciousness; the target is their current health score. A botch means the character continues to degrade. A failure means they remain unconscious. A success means they come to. If a character's injuries are serious enough, a storyteller might have the character make a health roll each round to see if they stabilize. Each failed roll causing the character's health to degrade even further.

Healing is treated realistically in PORTAL; damage and injury do not "magically" heal a set amount over a certain time period. A character with serious injuries needs medical help to stabilize and get back to full potential. Many skills and abilities help healing in mundane or supernatural ways. It's important to roleplay the healing process accurately for the setting the story uses. When a character is on their last legs, it should be roleplayed. As they get help, characters become more involved.

Health Ranges

Here are some general ranges for roleplaying health and healing:

Score	Description
0	Dead
1-9	On the way out, probably unconcious
10-20	Seriously injured, needs medical attention
21-30	Injured or weak
31-59	Not at peak, vulnerable
60-89	Healthy, low average
90-120	Very healthy, high average
121-150	Strident
151-180+	The healthiest humans

Remember these are just general ranges, not set limits, and are here to help players portray their characters responsibly.

Death

When a character's health drops to zero or below, the character is effectively dead. While sometimes this will mean creating a new character, remember that oftentimes the most memorable moment in a story is the death of a beloved character. Death also leaves a player free to create a whole new character; a chance to bring a new face into the story.

In some settings, death might not mean rolling a new character. There could be advanced medical technology that can bring a character back from the brink, or resurrect spells. If a character comes back to life, the situation should be played realistically, with healing taking place before the character is fully active again.

Reputation Rolls

Reputation can be used to estimate the odds of bumping into someone who knows you well enough to recognize you on the street. Players might use a reputation roll when calling in a favor or trying to find someone to cut them a good deal. Reputation rolls should be made when looking for a specific contact. They can also be used to see if a character is recognized by any enemies. Remember, well known

figures aren't universally liked. The target is usually the character's current reputation score, but modifiers affect this. Approximate reputation ranges:

REPUTATION RANGES

SCORE	DESCRIPTION
1-20	You're a nobody, No one knows you.
21-40	Normal person.
41-60	Lots of friends, some really good ones.
61-80	Some influence, Well known.
81-100	Major influence.
100+	A household name.

WEALTH ROLLS

As was mentioned earlier, wealth is assigned an attribute score which is rolled when a character needs to buy or trade for goods and services. A character may need to spend wealth points to make major purchases, and a character can earn wealth points through roleplaying (getting a job or raise, selling something particularly valuable). Wealth rolls should only be made when a character is making expensive purchases above their normal means. The target is usually the character's current wealth score, but the higher the price, the lower the target to purchase it. A character's wealth is a representation of their financial state:

WEALTH RANGES

SCORE	DESCRIPTION
1-20	Poor. Almost no money.
21-40	Working class
41-60	Lower middle class
61-80	Upper middle class
81-100	Upper class
100+	Independently wealthy

PLOT ROLLS

While using dice to determine the plot of your story is not recommended, there are times when details of a situation might be determined using dice. Questions like:

"Is it raining?" "Do I have a flashlight?" and "Did I remember the rope?" often have little impact on the larger story, but certainly affect the situation at hand. The most common way of resolving these is with a coin flip, high/low, or even/odd roll, but use whatever method you like. Sometimes dice can be good tools for figuring out the details, but like any other roll, these should be kept to a minimum. If it makes sense that a character would have a flashlight in their backpack, it's probably best they have one.

COMBAT

Let's face it, a large part of what makes roleplaying fun is beating stuff up. Combat should come up in your story at some point. Chances are, if it doesn't, your player's won't be happy. While PORTAL strives to make combat just like everything else in the system, it's clarified here.

THE DYNAMICS OF GOOD COMBAT

Before we get started on the combat system, let's look at some philosophies it's based on.

COMBAT SHOULD BE REALISTIC. Combat should be as realistic as possible, and portrayed consistently with the setting. Injury should also be realistic. Regardless of a character's health score, when they have a bullet in their foot, they should have trouble walking on it.

COMBAT SHOULD BE FAST. Real combat is fast, and often over in a matter of seconds. Combat in roleplaying games, while not able to be real-time, should strive to be as fast as possible. The slower combat goes, the more narrative gets bogged down.

COMBAT SHOULD BE NARRATIVE. Combat should be part of the story. Narrative shouldn't take a break just because a fight breaks out. In fact, the narrative should direct the fight that breaks out. Fights should have a buildup, climax, and resolution, just like any other part of the story.

COMBAT SHOULD BE BASED ON ACTION, NOT NUMBERS. Combat shouldn't be based on numbers, THAC0, Hit Dice, or HP. Combat should be described in intimate detail by the storyteller and the players. Combat should be driven by detailed actions and reactions, not by numbers.

COMBAT SHOULD BE CHALLENGING. Combat shouldn't be so easy that characters don't have to try. A distinct possibility that they could fail should be present. Consequences of loosing a fight could be anything from being humiliated to being captured or killed. Remember though, challenging does not mean impossible or frustrating.

COMBAT SHOULD BE FUN. That's the whole point of playing the game in the first place right? If combat becomes laborious or frustrating, something isn't right.

When in doubt, come back to these and the RP/G 9 Commandments. If you keep these in mind, much of combat should run itself.

WOUND BASED DAMAGE

PORTAL uses a wound based system to deal with combat damage. This comes from the idea that combat should be realistic. Combat results in wounds. Characters don't die from the weapons they are hit with; they die from the wounds they have sustained. Therefore, damage is determined according to the type and size of wound. Weapons deal damage according to the type and size of wound they inflict.

WOUND SIZE

The first and greatest factor in determining damage is wound size. There are five basic wound sizes: Minor, Small, Medium, Large, and Huge. These represent damage most commonly dealt from one person to another by fighting with common weapons. Two additional sizes: Massive and Extreme, represent large amounts of damage usually coming from weapons which cause more damage than people are usually capable of without mechanical or technological help. Massive damage isn't always fatal, but can be, and almost always requires a character to find medical attention quickly to stay alive. Extreme damage is usually fatal, although characters have been known to survive miraculously.

WOUND TYPE

The other factor in determining damage is the type of wound. The three basic wound types are Blunt Force (bruises), Laceration (cuts), and Puncture (holes). Lacerations usually bleed the most, punctures less so. Blunt force almost never bleed outwardly, though internal bleeding can result from large wounds. Blunt force can break bones, rarely do lacerations or punctures. These three basic types account for most common wounds from the majority of weapons.

SPECIAL WOUND TYPES

There are many special wound types which cause other damage past cuts, holes and bruises. Some include: burn, poison, electrical, neurological, sonic, magical, spiritual, neuropathic, disease, chemical, caustic, debilitation, and bleeding.

BLEEDING: Lacerations and punctures usually cause bleeding. A character who is bleeding will suffer additional damage each round until the bleeding is stopped.

BURN: Burns are probably the most common wound outside of the three basic wound types. Lots of weapons cause burn damage. Bombs, grenades, explosive bullets, flame throwers, fireballs. Chemicals and caustics can also cause burns. Though not from heat, the damage is much the same.

ELECTRICAL: Damage due to electricity can cause internal and external burns, broken bones due to arcing, brain and nervous system impairment, temporary or

long term loss of hearing, unconsciousness, convulsion, or cardiac arrest. Prolonged electrical shock continues to damage the body. Burns and broken bones tend to result from huge and larger shocks. Electricity tends to be fickle as far as damage, because it all depends on what path the current takes through the body.

POISON: Poisons are more difficult to deal with as far as damage goes, since many poisons follow a specific sequence of effects. Most poisons that will be encountered in a story are exotoxins. The three types of exotoxin are cytotoxin, enterotoxin, and neurotoxin.

Cytotoxins destroy cells. A brown recluse bite is a good example here. Other examples are gangrene and diphtheria. Many snake bites contain hemotoxin, a poison that specifically destroys blood cells. Cytotoxins tend to be very slow acting. Taking from hours to days to inflict damage.

Enterotoxins disrupt the gastrointestinal tract. Food poisoning is caused by enterotoxins. Few are potent enough to cause permanent damage or death.

Neurotoxins are the most common type of offensively used poisoning agent. They affect the brain and nervous system. The most common effect is paralysis, which can set in rapidly, nearly instantly in some cases. Rapid loss of consciousness is also common. Death can occur rapidly or slowly, depending on the potency. Since neurotoxins affect the nerves ability to conduct electrical signals, internal organs start shutting down and the body goes into shock.

Other poisons include drugs, such as fast acting tranquilizers, used on darts to make a target loose consciousness temporarily. The best way to deal with poisons is through roleplaying, though some poisons will deal actual damage, especially potent cytotoxins. It's up to the specific storyteller to determine appropriate damage and effects of poison.

DEBILITATION: Debilitation is most commonly associated with disease, but often comes into play in magical systems. In game terms, debilitation deals primary attribute damage. Sometimes this damage is temporary, sometimes it's permanent. Roleplaying the situation is very important with debilitation.

While the most common reason for debilitation is disease, it is important to note here that disease rarely has a place in roleplaying, since it often goes against the primary goal of having fun. Nobody likes to be sick, and few would want to pretend to be sick in a story.

NEUROPATHIC: Neuropathic damage is imagined or phantom damage that a character believes is being inflicted, but is not in reality. This damage can take any

form. The most common reason for neuropathic damage in a story is from illusions. If the character discovers the phantom nature of the damage and disbelieves it, all neuropathic damage is healed instantly.

VITAL WOUNDS

The last major factor in determining damage is where a character is wounded. Flesh wounds affect the body far less than wounds to vital areas. Therefore, a wound to a vital area will do more damage than the same wound to a non-vital area. Vital wounds usually have a lower attack target, as they need to be more precisely aimed. Generally, the target to cause a vital wound is at least 20 points lower than the target to cause a flesh wound, though many other factors can affect this.

DAMAGE RANGES

	PUNCTURE		LACERATION		BLUNT FORCE	
	FLESH	VITAL	FLESH	VITAL	FLESH	VITAL
MINOR	1d4	2d6	1d4	2d4	1d4	1d6
	Dart or Nail		Knife		Small Rock	
SMALL	2d4	2d8	2d4	3d4	1d6	1d8
	Crossbow bolt		Dagger		Punch	
MEDIUM	2d6	3d6	3d4	4d4	2d4	2d6
	Arrow		Katana		Kick	
LARGE	3d6	4d8	3d6	4d6	2d6	2d8
	Javelin		Longsword		Stick or Staff	
HUGE	3d8	4d12	4d6	5d6	2d8	2d12
	Spear		Greatsword		Club or Bat	
MASSIVE	3d20	4d20	6d8	6d10	4d10	4d12
	Horse Pike		Chainsaw		Sledgehammer	
EXTREME	6d20>		10d10>		8d12>	
	Deck Gun		Wood Chipper		Car	

Many weapons and wound sizes fall between these general guidelines. These are examples, not a strict table of weapon damage. These numbers are just suggestions; it's up to the storyteller to determine the specifics of each weapon used in their story.

The minimums are highest on lacerations since they do the most tissue damage and bleed the most. The difference between vital and flesh wounds is the greatest for

puncture wounds, since placement of puncture wounds makes the largest difference to damage. The "Extreme" wound size dice quantities are minimums, and it's up to the storyteller to assign appropriate damage dice for the specific instance.

In some cases, especially with blunt force wounds, a character's skill can make a difference to an attack's damage. A master martial artist will deal more damage than the average person with blunt force attacks.

SPECIAL WOUND DAMAGE RANGES

	BURN	ELECTRICAL	BLEEDING
MINOR	1d4	1d4 per second	1d4 per round
	2nd^o <50%	Car Battery	Small Cut
SMALL	2d4	1d6 per second	1d6 per round
	2nd^o >50%	110v Outlet	Medium Cut
MEDIUM	3d6	1d8 per second	2d4 per round
	3rd^o <20%	220v Outlet	Large Cut
LARGE	5d8	1d10 per second	2d6 per round
	3rd^o <40%	Taser	Deep Gash
HUGE	6d10	1d12 per second	3d4 per round
	3rd^o <60%	Cattle prod	Artery
MASSIVE	10d8	1d20 per second	4d6 per round
	3rd^o <80%	Electric Chair	Amputation
EXTREME	20d6	1d100 per second	6d6 per round
	3rd^o >80%	Lightning	Major Arteries

Remember, these are just examples, not strict numbers. Assign damage dice which make sense in the story.

Anytime an attack deals triple, double, or half damage, it is the number of dice rolled that is modified, not the total rolled on the dice. With fractions, always round down. Half of 1 is therefore 0.

ATTACKING

Attack actions work like any other action in the system. The character spends vitality and rolls their most specific and appropriate skill. If the roll results in a success, the attack hits; if the roll results in a failure, the attack misses. When an attack is successful, the attacked character may make a defense reaction, which can result in

a contested roll. When a successful attack still deals damage after all defense actions have been made, damage dice are rolled, and the total is subtracted from the defending character's health score.

It's important to describe all actions, but attacking is especially important, as it gives the defending character specifics that will be important in describing their defense reaction to it. The more detail the better. Where is the attack aimed? What is the purpose of the attack? Is the attack slow or fast? Is it sudden or surprising? Sometimes it's best to describe attack details to the storyteller only, so they can accurately describe what the defending character would or would not observe.

Weapons

A large part of combat depends on what weapons are used. Many details come into play concerning weapons. How big or small is the weapon? How strong is the character? How agile is the character? What type of wound is inflicted by the weapon? Is the weapon capable of different wounds depending on how it is used? How fast or slow is the weapon? How quickly can the character attack?

Playing characters responsibly is important when attacking. Large and huge weapons like war hammers and axes are much slower to attack with than minor or small weapons like knives and daggers. Therefore, a hammer or axe might only make one attack in a round where a dagger might make three or more. A character might not be strong enough to use many large and huge melee weapons.

Skill plays a large role in weapon use. If a character has a skill target of 18 in handguns, they may not be able to effectively use every handgun they pick up. On the other hand, if a character has a target of 72 in blades, they can probably use almost any sharp object to kill someone. Damage is also affected by skill. First, the higher the initial skill target, the higher the target to hit vital areas for more damage. Second, skill can affect the damage dice a character rolls. While many weapons' damage potentials don't change in the hands of a skilled user, some (mainly blunt force) can. A grandmaster martial artist likely causes more damage than the average ranges in the damage table.

As with everything in PORTAL, it is important to describe and define all weapons your character uses. Although there are numbers associated with weapons, the description is what drives the narration of combat and allows realistic decisions to be made while using it. The more detailed a weapon's capabilities, the more useful it is.

Multiple and Compound Wound Types

Some weapons can do multiple types of damage depending on how they are used. The size of the different wound types may not be parallel. A spear for example, can cause large puncture wounds when stabbing with the point, minor or small laceration damage when slashing, and medium or large blunt force damage when using the butt as a staff.

Some weapons, most notably guns, do more than one type of damage at the same time. Although primarily a puncture weapon, much of the damage from a bullet is caused by the large amount of force dissipated through the body from the high speed of the projectile. Therefore, guns inflict a compound wound consisting of puncture and blunt force. A .38 caliber handgun might inflict a medium puncture wound along with a large or huge blunt force wound. This extra force makes guns more powerful than arrows in the real world, and PORTAL's system reflects that. Other examples of compound damage: a bomb might do blunt force from the pressure wave, laceration or puncture from shrapnel, and burn damage from the fire; a laser gun might do puncture and burn damage; antipersonnel bullets might do puncture, blunt force, and laceration damage.

Defending

Defense reactions work just like any other reaction in the system. When an attack is successful, the attacked character may make a defense reaction, which can result in a contested roll. The character rolls their most specific and appropriate skill. If the roll results in a success, the defense is effective, though this does not mean all damage is automatically avoided; if the roll results in a failure, the defense fails, and the attack goes through unchecked. When a successful attack still deals damage after all defense actions have been made, damage dice are rolled, and the total is subtracted from the defending character's health score. Remember, counterattacks are not defense reactions, but actions made directly after a successful defense reaction. Defense reactions do not spend vitality, counterattack actions do.

There is no defense rating or armor class in PORTAL because even the hardest to hit opponents slip up sometimes. The difficulty to hit an opponent depends on many factors: the speed of the target, environmental conditions, visibility, obstacles, cover, size of the target, and size of the weapon, just to name a few. A defense rating oversimplifies the details of how a fight really works. A fight should not be based on abstractions of characters' ability, but determined by specific and detailed choices.

Make sure to describe defense reactions. Not only does it make combat more interesting, it makes combat more playable for everyone involved. The better combat is described, the easier it is to follow. Since the storyteller determines the effectiveness of any given defense reaction, it's very important to describe defense reactions in

detail. This gives the storyteller a better idea of how your character is defending and helps determine the fight's direction.

Armor

A large part of defense is the use of armor. In many more structured systems, armor increases defense rating, making a character harder to hit. This isn't realistic. The only article of clothing which might make a character harder to hit is a cloak, cape, trench coat, or other flowing, or billowy article of clothing that makes it hard to see where a character's body actually is. Plate mail does not make a character more difficult to hit; it makes them easier to hit due to impaired mobility. Armor doesn't make a character harder to hit, it increases their ability to deal with damage when they are hit.

Armor absorbs damage of a specific wound type or types. Sometimes, as in the case of a bulletproof vest, from a specific kind of weapon. Chain mail might absorb minor, small, medium, and large laceration damage; as well as small and medium puncture damage. Most blades don't have the force necessary to cut through chain mail into the character wearing it. Minor puncture wounds are usually caused by weapons small enough to get through the holes in chain mail; large and huge puncture wounds are usually caused by weapons with enough force to bend chain mail out of the way. A bulletproof vest might absorb all puncture damage from non armor-piercing bullets; but would absorb no puncture damage from other sources; and no blunt force or laceration damage. A bulletproof vest does well against bullets, but does very little against a knife. An armored bank truck might absorb nearly everything.

If a character hits an armored character in a non-armored area, damage is calculated normally. Players should work with the storyteller to define the specifics of what their character's armor is and is not effective against. As with everything in PORTAL, armor should be described, not numbered. There are numbers associated with armor, but the description is what makes armor useful and realistic.

Abilities in Combat

While there needs to be some balance in the use of abilities, the memorization of spells, while an effective balancing device, is unrealistic to how many magic users and magic systems operate, and abilities are broader than just magic. It's fairly difficult to memorize a certain number of superpowers in the morning. Abilities in PORTAL use energy. This is not a new idea, many systems have used similar devices before. The majority of abilities, including magic, are treated as energy that's harnessed and directed in specific ways, not scrolls or spell books. This doesn't mean you cannot use scrolls or spell books. Scrolls could be one-shot spells that don't take energy to cast, although they would take energy to create. Spell books could still be

used to control what spells a character knows.

Many abilities have a direct impact on combat. Even those which aren't obviously offensive or defensive will be used in combat to alter the surroundings, slow someone down, speed something up, or any number of other things. When using abilities in combat, several things need to be considered.

Vitality Cost

Most abilities aren't any more strenuous than other actions in combat. Abilities which have a manifestation time of more than one round may spend more vitality. Defense abilities may sometimes cost vitality as well, it's up to the storyteller.

Energy Cost

All abilities expend energy. Generally, the more powerful the ability, the more energy it uses. The better practiced an ability is, the less energy it spends. Specific abilities expend less energy than narrow abilities, which expend less energy than broad abilities. The cost to use abilities makes a big difference to how often they are used. With the average energy score between 30 and 60, characters will be able to use abilities far more often if they cost 3 to 5 energy than if they cost 10 to 20.

If a character runs out of energy, they can no longer use abilities until they regain some. A character may, after spending all their energy, spend 2 health for 1 energy to continue using abilities.

Regaining Energy

Characters regain energy by resting. A general guideline is 5 points of energy regained during each hour of rest. Rest need not be sleep, just non-active time. Energy can also be gained from abilities or items like potions and elixirs. If made by characters, energy providing items should use more energy to produce than they provide when used.

Manifestation Time

Also important to any ability, especially in combat, is its manifestation time. This includes how long the ability's effect takes to start, and how long it lasts. Some abilities may be initiated on one round, but not have any noticeable effects until several rounds later. Others may take several rounds of preparation. A common balance device makes more powerful abilities slower to manifest than less powerful abilities. Players should have a clear idea of how long their abilities take and last.

OFFENSIVE ABILITES

Other than the above, offensive abilities should be considered a weapon, the ability target is rolled when it is used, just like a weapon's skill roll. Wound types are assigned to it, and damage is rolled the same as weapon damage. Players should work with the storyteller to assign appropriate damage dice to offensive abilities. Other factors are important as well, such as range, area of effect, number of targets, and additional effects the ability might cause.

DEFENSIVE ABILITES

In addition to the above, defensive abilities should be assigned a damage type they absorb, just like any other defensive action or armor. It's also important to describe the specifics of how the ability defends. Is it a shield? Is it a strong wind that flows out from the character, turning away arrows? Is it a force field? A repulsor ray? As with offensive abilities, it's important to determine other factors like range, area of effect, and additional effects the ability might cause.

Character Advancement

Characters need to grow and improve. Many systems use character levels and classes to achieve this. The problem is, in order to keep the system balanced, they limit what can and cannot be improved and by how much. This limits what directions a character can grow. PORTAL uses spendable experience to make the system more open to where each player wants their character to go. Experience is spent to improve scores, and gain new skills and abilities.

Earning Experience

Experience is earned by players through the game. There should be a minimum amount of experience every player receives after each session just for surviving. Generally this number should be from 50-150. Some characters will contribute more than others and this should be rewarded: Was the player "in character" for the majority of the session? Who made the most character progress this session? Who most furthered the plot? What experiences did each character survive? What enemies did they face? Who received the most damage? Who dealt the most damage? These should be considered and rewarded each session.

After the storyteller gives experience, players should nominate eachother for particularly witty lines, spectacular fights, great dialogs, heroic acts, etc. It's up to the storyteller to give experience, but players should make the nominations. It is recommended that each session not earn more than 500 experience for any character. This is of course just a suggestion, if your story requires characters to improve more quickly, feel free to give more.

Spending Experience

Players may accumulate as much experience as they like, and may spend it whenever they choose. Players should be encouraged to spend experience according to the character they are playing. When playing a bard, it makes very little sense to spend a lot of experience on using battle axes and wearing plate mail. When playing a blacksmith, it makes little sense to spend lots of experience on learning how to sing. Still, players may spend experience any way they wish.

Raising Skills

Skills of any group can be raised, 1 point at a time, up to a maximum of 25, by spending experience equal to the desired score. For example: to go from a score of 9 to a score of 10 costs 10 experience. To go from 10 to 11 costs an additional 11 experience.

When raising skills, the score cannot exceed the score of the skill or attribute it's

nested under.

If a player wishes to raise a skill score above 25, they must get approval to do so from the storyteller. This is usually accomplished through roleplaying and gameplay, not by spending experience. Any skill score may be raised through gameplay. If a character plays the piano every week, their skill will likely increase over time, due to practice. It is up to the storyteller to raise scores appropriately.

Gaining New Skills

Many new skills can be gained through roleplaying. When attempting a new skill, the primary attribute most closely related to the skill is rolled as the target. If the roll is successful, the new skill is added to the list. The storyteller then assigns a starting score for the skill based on the circumstances, level of success, etc. The storyteller may require the player to have the experience to spend or to repeat the new skill a number of times before adding it to the list.

If a player wants to gain a new skill by spending experience, the new skill score, regardless of nesting group, starts with a score of 1 (which costs 1 experience). The player then improves the skill, one point at a time, just like any other. To gain a new skill with a score of 10 costs 55 experience (1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 + 10), with a starting score of 15 the skill costs 120, with a score of 20 it costs 210, a score of 25 costs 325. As with any skill, the score cannot exceed the score of the skill or attribute it's nested under.

Raising Abilities

Abilities of any group can be raised, 1 point at a time, up to a maximum of 25, by spending experience equal to the desired score multiplied by two. For example: to go from a score of 9 to a score of 10 costs 20 experience. To go from 10 to 11 costs an additional 22 experience.

When raising abilities, the score cannot exceed the score of the skill or attribute it's nested under.

If a player wishes to raise an ability score above 25, they must get approval to do so from the storyteller. This is usually accomplished through roleplaying and gameplay, not by spending experience. Any ability score may be raised through gameplay. If a character throws fireballs at targets every week, their ability will likely increase over time, due to practice. It is up to the storyteller to raise scores appropriately.

Gaining New Abilities

Many new abilities can be gained through roleplaying. When attempting a new ability, the primary attribute most closely related to the ability is rolled as the target. If the roll is successful, the new ability is added to the list. The storyteller then assigns a starting score for the ability based on the circumstances, level of success, etc. The storyteller may require the player to have the experience to spend or to repeat the new ability a number of times before adding it to the list.

If a player wants to gain a new ability by spending experience, the new ability score, regardless of nesting group, starts with a score of 1 (which costs 2 experience). The player then improves the ability, one point at a time, just like any other. To gain a new ability with a score of 10 costs 110 experience (2 + 4 + 6 + 8 + 10 + 12 + 14 + 16 + 18 + 20), with a starting score of 15 the ability costs 240, with a score of 20 it costs 420, a score of 25 costs 650. As with any ability, the score cannot exceed the score of the ability or attribute it's nested under.

Raising Secondary Attributes

HEALTH: Health can be raised, one point at a time, by spending experience equal to the desired score. For example: to go from a score of 99 to a score of 100 costs 100 experience. To go from 100 to 101 costs an additional 101 experience.

VITALITY: Vitality can be raised, one point at a time, by spending experience equal to the desired score multiplied by 100. For example: to go from a score of 3 to a score of 4 costs 400 experience. To go from 4 to 5 costs an additional 500 experience.

ENERGY: Energy can be raised, one point at a time, by spending experience equal to the desired score multiplied by 2. For example: to go from a score of 99 to a score of 100 costs 200 experience. To go from 100 to 101 costs an additional 202 experience.

REPUTATION: Reputation can be raised one point at a time, by spending experience equal to the desired score multiplied by 3. For example, to go from a score of 19 to a score of 20 costs 60 experience. To go from 20 to 21 costs an additional 63 experience.

WEALTH: Wealth can be raised, one point at a time, by spending experience equal to the desired score multiplied by 3. For example: to go from a score of 34 to a score of 35 costs 105 experience. To go from 35 to 36 costs an additional 108 experience.

Raising Primary Attributes

Primary attributes may be raised, one point at a time, by spending experience equal to the desired score multiplied by 4. For example: to go from a score of 14 to a score of 15 costs 60 experience. To go from 15 to 16 costs an additional 64 experience.

LUCIDITY

PORTAL stands for Player Oriented Roleplaying: Timing, Action and Lucidity. We have established what is meant by Player Oriented Roleplaying, and laid down the general rules for dealing with Timing and Action. What does Lucidity mean? It means the rules should be so clear they're invisible. So easy they don't seem like rules.

STORYTELLING

As the storyteller, you are somewhat of a coach directing action on the field. Players will look to you to tell them when rolls are needed, what modifiers are used, what can and cannot be done in a given situation. In addition to the rules, the majority of the narration falls to the storyteller. While players should add to the story's details, it is the storyteller's job to tell the majority of the story.

Since there is no setting in these core rules, it is the storyteller's job to have an intrinsic knowledge of the setting, possibly even to create it. This includes the people who populate the world, the geography, the tech level, cities, towns, seasons, politics, as well as equipment such as weapons, armor, vehicles, and other items for sale and trade in the world. If there is magic or superpowers, the storyteller should be familiar with them.

The main duty of a storyteller is to help players have a good time. If everyone's not having a good time, it should first be the storyteller's job to see what's wrong. While it won't always be the storyteller's fault if people aren't having fun, the storyteller should be responsible for getting the game back on track, or for calling it a night.

Storytellers should do their best to direct and assist players in making good characters. They also need to be familiar enough with players' characters to involve them directly in the story.

Here are some tips and reminders to keep in mind when storytelling a PORTAL game, as well as some philosophy on the role of the storyteller in the game.

RULES & DICE ARE TOOLS

How the rules and dice are used can make a large impact on the story and narration. Actions taken actively by a character, such as attacking, are almost always rolled by the character. Passive actions, such as perception and listening, might be rolled by the storyteller or not rolled at all, in order to make the experience of hearing or seeing something faint more realistic. When the storyteller calls for a perception roll, it announces "Hey! There's something to notice here!" to all the players.

Just because the dice say something doesn't mean it has to be. If a roll is going to

derail the plot, fudge the numbers. This is most true when rolling dice as a storyteller. You don't want to undercut a character's thunder. Dice and the rules are not God. Players are bigger than dice.

Guiding Character Creation

It is very important to allow players to create their own characters. No one wants to be forced into a role they don't look forward to playing. As storyteller, you are there to guide the process, not dictate the details. Be available to direct and assist players with difficulties along the way. Be available to answer inevitable questions about the setting and the world which players ask when making characters.

Make sure you're familiar enough with all your players' characters to actively engage all of them in the story. Players get frustrated when they're "just along for the ride." Use the people who play heavily in characters' backgrounds in your supporting cast. Work an old rivalry into the main plot of the story. Pay attention to characters' goals and aspirations, and give characters opportunity to pursue them during the story.

One way to involve people in the story is make each of them have some dark element to their past: an arch rival, an act or event that can come back to haunt them, some trouble they got into in the past, someone they don't know is out to get them. The sky's the limit, and players should have a choice as to what about their past could cause them trouble. Another way is to give all your characters a "mystery background trait." Something they aren't aware of that will come up at some point in the story to bring the plot together.

Don't overly control character creation, but be present to guide it in order to make a good cohesive story.

Player Oriented Storytelling

When storytelling, be sure to work with your characters, not against them. Players do stuff which has nothing to do with the plot. It happens all the time. Players have a knack for derailing plot lines. Let them. Gently steer them back to where the story eventually needs to go. Till then, make stuff up. Go where your players want to go. Everyone has more fun doing what they want to. No one likes to have their thunder stolen because "Well he was the whole plot; he can't be dead." Cooperate. Adapt. Players might kill your main villain in the second session. Make the one they killed turn out to be the number two villain. Players could awaken the third form of your evil dragon on their first encounter with it. That's okay. Wake the dragon and let them see what it's really capable of.

Cooperation and adaptation is always better than control and belligerence. Re-

member, the goal is for everyone to have a good time. As long as your players are having fun, let them stay in town for three sessions and shop, heedless of all the hints that they should leave to go after the relic. So things take a little longer. Big deal. Trying to control characters only leads to upset, belligerent players. The more you control, the more they rebel, and nothing happens. Remember what the "POR" stands for: Player Oriented Roleplaying. That applies to storytelling as well.

NPC's: Your Cast

Interesting stories need more characters than just the main troupe of players. This is where non-player characters (NPCs) come in. The majority of NPCs will be played on the fly. They don't need to be terribly detailed, there just needs to be someone there to fill the bit parts: shopkeepers, bartenders, clerks, waiters, and random passersby. These are essentially extras who talk, and should have a definite character, but don't require any fleshing out.

Of course there should be a good supporting cast as well. After all, a story needs a villain. There should be at least one big, detailed, fleshed out antagonist in your story. Without one, there usually isn't much of a story to be told. Minor villains are good too. Any recurring characters should be just as detailed and use the same rules as your players' characters (PCs). The storyteller should have a background and full character sheet with detailed definitions for their bad guys. Make sure the recurring cast is just as original and unique as the main troupe.

Another option is the "in party" NPC. A character under the storyteller's control in the troupe of PCs which helps them out. This is helpful for both the storyteller and the party. It gives the party another member to help in fights and get them out of tough spots if necessary. It also helps the storyteller direct the party through the story. If the NPC is in need of protection or hires the party to help on some quest, it creates instant party cohesion.

There's usually a horde of extras as well, NPCs who don't really do much other than fill in the gaps: fodder for large battles, people on the highway, customers in a store, you name it. Extras help in establishing mood and tone, and make descriptions more realistic and complete.

Thugs are needed to keep combat happening in the story. They tend to have identical fairly weak skills and attributes, just to make playing them easier. Some might even be animals. Villains need henchmen and some players like dispatching lots of them in order to feel accomplished when the big "boss fight" comes around.

It's a big job. Players create one character each. The storyteller creates everyone else the players meet. Make sure NPCs are interesting and engaging.

Drama & Conflict

NPCs are half the job. Plot and setting are the other. The storyteller sets the mood through setting the scene. Its usually best to start small and build up to a climax, then let things simmer back down for a while, then bring it back up, etc. All good stories have character and plot arcs. Some storytellers will create a central event that's the high point of the story, and create plot events that lead up to it. This makes for a "mountain" plot, full of small peaks and valleys that all lead to one central idea or event, then work back down from it.

Others will start with one "big bang" event that raises plot points that will become the story. The troupe is chased out of a laboratory by masked soldiers, and upon escaping, the laboratory explodes. This event brings up questions that will be the story: Why were the characters chased? Who was chasing the characters? Did the characters know someone trapped in the lab? Why was the lab destroyed? Who destroyed it? When the characters answer these questions and others, the plot starts to take form.

What is the central conflict of your story? Man vs Man, Man vs Machine, Man vs Nature, Man vs Himself, Country vs Country? Is your story about governments and the wars that wreak havoc on the people? Is it about mortal enemies finally meeting after many years? Is it a hunt? A chase?

Regardless of the specifics, story arcs have five basic parts. The "introduction," the shortest, introduces the characters and the basics of the world. There really isn't much plot in the introduction, just establishing character and setting. Think of the first fifteen minutes of a horror film. The "opening" brings the troupe together and introduces the main conflict of the story; a problem to be solved. Everyone winds up in the same place at the same time, and something happens. The "body" is where the troupe starts to investigate and solve the problem from the opening. Most of a story's twists and turns will be here. The "climax" is the big reveal, the big fight, the defining moment of the story arc. Good finally vanquishes evil. Some triumph is achieved. Climaxes often ask more questions than they answer, leading to new story arcs. The "resolve" is where things get wrapped up. Things are reflected on for a time of recuperation and rest before setting out to solve other mysteries.

A detailed setting is also important to story, make sure you know in detail where the characters live and where they frequent. Set parts of the story in places the characters should be familiar with. If the storyteller is constantly removing characters from familiarity, it's hard for players to get to know their characters. Establish a home base that doesn't change. This allows them to have relationships with supporting characters in the area and make the roleplaying experience all the more immersive. This is not to say that new places are a bad thing. Make sure much thought is put into any new setting the characters find themselves in, and that the new setting moves the

story forward.

Make local color for all your different settings in the game. Make each place unique. Many times, the world a story takes place in is as much a character as any of the specific people in it. Start with what the characters know, the home base. Move out from there slowly and introduce new elements of the world slowly. After the players are familiar with the world the story is being told in, let the real story begin and throw the characters into the fray.

Balance

The other big thing that storytellers do is arbitrate the rules. Much has been said on using the rules already. If the rules don't work for the situation, make them work or get rid of them. A storyteller should strive for balance within the rules. Make sure that all the PCs are getting a good piece of the action. Moderate show-offs by offering a specific task which can only be done by one of the more minor party members. Keep everyone involved.

While letting certain characters run away with the story should be avoided, it's just as bad to undercut characters' successes. Whenever possible, don't call the "because the story won't work if you do that" ruling. Characters should be free to make their own decisions. Sometimes this will mean the storyteller needs to adapt the story to a different direction.

Try to keep PCs alive. Its hard to have a story without them. Occasionally it can be good to kill off a character, but it should be part of the story. If a player accidentally kills their character and wants to write a new one, let them. Its also a good idea to keep characters conscious most of the time, since roleplaying is boring and pointless when your character is out cold. Overall, keep everyone organized, alive, and involved.

Making the Rules Transparent

PORTAL strives to be as transparent as possible. Rules should only be in place to keep the order necessary to tell the story. If you're a gamer who plays the rules for fun, thats great; but if you're a roleplayer who plays your character for fun, it's important to keep the rules out of the way of the characters and the narrative of the story. PORTAL is designed to be used only when necessary. When in doubt, make fewer rules, not more. Good players can take care of balance without having it all delegated. When in doubt, don't roll dice. Rules and dice are tools for use in telling an amazing story. Keep the story in the front, and the rules in the background. More details on this are in the storytelling section.

CONCLUSION

There it is. The first ever RP/G system. Players, take PORTAL and make it your own. Tell wonderful stories with amazing characters. Eventually, there will be source books for PORTAL, but that is down the road. For now, go and tell your own stories. Above all, have a good time roleplaying!

PLAYER   EXPERIENCE

PORTAL

CHARACTER

RACE   SKIN   HAIR   EYES   CHARACTER SHEET

AGE   HEIGHT   WEIGHT   GENDER

SECONDARY ATTRIBUTES

PRIMARY ATTRIBUTES

	HEALTH	SCORE	CURRENT	DESCRIPTION
	VITALITY			
	ENERGY			
	REPUTATION			
	WEALTH			

	MENTAL	PHYSICAL	SPIRITUAL
ENDURANCE	SCORE / DESCRIPTION		
STRENGTH			
AGILITY			

DEFENSE

ARMOR/DEFENSE	SKILL	TARGET
WOUNDS TYPES AND SIZES ABSORBED		
ARMOR/DEFENSE	SKILL	TARGET
WOUNDS TYPES AND SIZES ABSORBED		
ARMOR/DEFENSE	SKILL	TARGET
WOUNDS TYPES AND SIZES ABSORBED		
ARMOR/DEFENSE	SKILL	TARGET
WOUNDS TYPES AND SIZES ABSORBED		
ARMOR/DEFENSE	SKILL	TARGET
WOUNDS TYPES AND SIZES ABSORBED		

ATTACKS

ATTACK/OFFENSE			SKILL		TARGET
WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH	WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH
ATTACK/OFFENSE			SKILL		TARGET
WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH	WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH
ATTACK/OFFENSE			SKILL		TARGET
WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH	WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH
ATTACK/OFFENSE			SKILL		TARGET
WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH	WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH
ATTACK/OFFENSE			SKILL		TARGET
WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH	WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH
ATTACK/OFFENSE			SKILL		TARGET
WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH	WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH
ATTACK/OFFENSE			SKILL		TARGET
WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH	WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH
ATTACK/OFFENSE			SKILL		TARGET
WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH	WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH
ATTACK/OFFENSE			SKILL		TARGET
WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH	WOUND SIZE / TYPE	VITAL	FLESH

Skills

ATTRIBUTE				SCORE	TARGET
	BROAD				
		NARROW			
			SPECIFIC		

ATTRIBUTE				SCORE	TARGET
	BROAD				
		NARROW			
			SPECIFIC		

Bad Skills

	TARGET

Gifts

Flaws

Abilities

ENERGY COST	ATTRIBUTE BROAD NARROW SPECIFIC		SCORE	TARGET

Equipment

Notes

Remember to include with this character sheet:
your character background and description
defenitions and descriptions of skills and abilities

Copies of these pages may be made if additional space is required.