

Open Role Playing

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Orp's Copyright

Orp is copyrighted and is the property of a particular Tom Olson. However, he grants the citizens of earth and all other sentient beings certain rights according to the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Sharealike 2.5 License. This is a little like the GNU Public License or the Open Game License, under which much of the d20 system lives. A copy of this license should've been included with this document, but if it hasn't, visit

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/>

or send a letter to Creative Commons, 559 Nathan Abbott Way, Stanford, California 94305, USA. You should examine the full license for all the precise legal details, but essentially Orp is "Open Source". That means you're allowed to copy, modify, and republish Orp and any associated documents that are under the same license, provided you're willing to abide by the rules laid out in that license.

For the reasons why Orp is released this way and more details about what you can do with it, see section 1.7.3.

We also politely ask that you please tell us what you're up to; we may like your ideas so much that we incorporate them into the next version of Orp. In fact, we're always looking for more help. Email Tom at tom.olson@gmail.com with any questions, suggestions, or cookies.

1.2 Orp is Incomplete

Sadly, Orp isn't finished yet. I've worked on it for a long time, but someone wanted to use it, so here it is, such as it is. Much is left to be done. The game *is* usable, with some work and possibly some grafting from whatever system is available.

1.2.1 What's Done

Right now, here's what's finished:

Campaign creation. All a GM needs to do to start an Orp campaign is draft a skill list, determine a starting experience level for the player characters, and cook up or steal a setting.

Character creation. The parts of an Orp character are well-defined, as is the way to flesh out the details.

Basic gameplay. This includes basic character actions and interactions, the timing of events, and the essentials of combat and physical injury.

1.2.2 What's Not Done

And, here's what is *not* finished yet:

Situational rules. Few rules exist for very specific in-game situations and activities; see the beginning of Chapter 6.

Supernatural powers and exceptional abilities. Although a basic method for defining such things is provided, it is short on details and examples.

Clearer Event-based Timing. The event-based timing system works, but I think the chapter needs a rewrite to improve clarity and brevity.

Turn-based Timing. Eventually I want to provide a turn-based system in addition to the unconventional alternative detailed in Chapter 4.

Customization. Specific Guidance is not yet provided for customizing Orp to particular styles of gameplay.

Despite this, the game is playable at present, though GMs and source authors will be forced to cook up whatever isn't provided on an ad-hoc basis for now.

I'm looking for help for all these things. If you want to contribute, email me at tom.olson@gmail.com.

1.3 What We Assume You Know Already

This book is primarily aimed at people who already know what roleplaying games are all about. If you've no idea what a roleplaying game is, or think that RPGs are a kind of video game, about ten seconds with Google should net you a good introduction. The book further assumes that you've played a few roleplaying games before, so phrases like 'dice mechanic' shouldn't bother you. We're going to assume that you know what the following terms mean:

1. Gamemaster (GM)
2. Character
3. Player character (PC)
4. Nonplayer character (NPC)
5. Campaign
6. Integer
7. Polyhedral die (d4, d6, d12, etc)
8. Modifier ($+x$ / $-x$)
9. Bonus ($+x$)
10. Penalty ($-x$)

1.4 Orp in Five Minutes

For the impatient: Orp is intended to be exceedingly flexible, so almost everything in the game is modifiable to suit the needs of a particular campaign. However, if you don't change anything, what follows is the bare minimum knowledge needed to play the game.

Orp characters are skill-based. Almost all rolls in the game follow the familiar formula:

$$d12 + skill + trait \text{ vs. target number}$$

where skills and traits are zero-average (meaning that a 0 is a perfectly respectable value for an average human being, -1 represents slightly below-average tendencies, while a $+4$ represents a rare gift or great expertise). There are no classes or levels; characters can learn any skill at any time with no *mechanical* restriction (the GM may impose *roleplaying* restrictions based on the campaign setting at any time, of course).

In un-messed-with Orp, there are only three traits: Body, Mind, and Soul. In addition, there are four traits derived from the first three: Fortitude, Reflexes, Willpower, and Combat. These traits serve the same purpose as attributes, ability scores, or statistics in other games.

To represent the tendency of stress to deplete a person's abilities over time, Orp characters also have physical, mental, and spiritual resources, which are represented by three depletable pools, respectively: Stamina, Concentration, and Essence. Each is a reservoir which may be drawn upon to improve rolls, or could be drained by difficult activities or stressful situations. As characters rest and recover, their resources will replenish.

Combat works by skill usage. Attacks are resolved by an opposed roll in the usual pattern, with some attack-related skill matched against an evasion skill. Attacks between willing antagonists (for example, two swordsmen having a duel) are resolved by opposed combat skill rolls (in this example, sword skill vs. sword skill). The winner then inflicts harm on the loser, with some chance that both combatants will be hurt.

Speaking of which, Orp's default health system is based on discrete injuries, where one injury, of vary-

ing intensity, is inflicted per successful attack. Each injury's severity is applied as a penalty to all character actions. Death from injury results from falling to a total penalty of -12 .

When the timing of in-game events requires precision (such as combat or a chase scene), Orp can be either turn-based or event-based. The turn-based timing subsystem works like most other roleplaying games: A turn order is determined (based on a Reflexes-based skill roll) and characters take actions in that order. If you want to jump right in to Orp and work out the details later, this is probably for you.

The event-based timing subsystem, on the other hand, is more detailed and, we believe, more realistic. It attempts to resolve events "as they occur" rather than in a fixed turn order. Events that have inherently uncertain duration (most combat activity, for example) are resolved by the GM, who rolls a die and assigns a duration (in seconds) to the event. There are also ways of establishing who "finishes first" when it matters. It's not as weird or complex as it sounds ... we think.

Orp can easily accommodate paranormal, magical, or superhuman abilities; these are folded into the skill system as it suits the campaign. Generally speaking, supernatural effects (magic spells, the use of psychic or super powers, etc) are represented by skill rolls, where powerful effects require large resource expenditures. So, for example, a wizard in Orp would cast one of her stronger spells by making a skill roll and spending Concentration or Essence, depending on the nature of the campaign. Likewise, depending on the setting of the campaign, spells could have inherently negative side-effects (or the risks thereof) as well.

1.5 Structure of This Book

This is not really a user-friendly manual. For the moment, it is descriptive rather than instructional. If you want to use this book to learn the game, reading straight through from beginning to end (skipping over whatever is trivial or irrelevant to you) is probably as good a method as any.

1.6 Orp's Structured Approach to Rules

Most roleplaying books have all these vague masses of text that aren't numbered and aren't solidly organized. Sometimes, you have to hunt for a rule buried in piles and piles of pontification. The whole game should be indexed and organized into a neat structure, but it usually isn't. Back before D&D and computer games united to destroy the tabletop wargaming market, many game manuals were highly organized. That sort of thing is missed. This book makes an attempt at capturing the spirit of old style; here's the gist of it:

Rules are special, and they're laid out in a particular way that is intended to be easily recognizable. Here is the very first Orp rule:

Rule 0: The Gamemaster is Always Right.

The gamemaster has the right to alter, modify, or ignore whatever rules he or she sees fit, and need not maintain consistency or even sanity when doing so.

In fact, once the GM has defined the setting and other campaign information (see Chapter 8), there should be no reason to look up *anything* in this book beyond the rules themselves. In fact, one of these days someone will hopefully produce a short booklet that contains the rules alone, which would be very convenient at the gaming table.

One caveat: Don't assume that there's a rule for "everything." Some questions are deliberately left unanswered. A game with too many rules, even good ones, is worse than a game with too few, because every rule decreases the creative power of the players and the GM, no matter how well-written it is.

We've all seen it happen in some game or another: A character comes up with an innovative solution to an in-game problem, only to discover that the GM isn't familiar with the ad-hoc, exception-riddled, inelegant mechanics that system provides. It turns out that those rules, when finally located, make the character's innovative solution nearly impossible in order to prevent some powergamer's trick from unbalancing the game.

There's really no way around this; more of what the people call "crunch" these days is more potential for abuse. Instead, hopefully, Orp will give you the freedom to do what makes sense.

Still, if crunch is what you like, go ahead and make the game crunchy; Chapter 9 will tell you how.

1.7 Philosophy

1.7.1 Linguistics

Orp stands for Open Role Playing. It's not in capitals when it's written, unless you're yelling at someone, preferably about how much you like it. It is a proper noun though, so write it *Orp* and not *orp*, if you please.

All the terms in Orp are flexible. What we call *body*, *mind*, and *soul* you could easily call *brawn*, *brain*, and *being*. We tried to choose terms that are handy and easy to remember, but if your group would like to use something else, please feel free. We don't care, as long as you're having fun.

1.7.2 Orp is Flexible

When the opponent expands, I contract.
When he contracts, I expand.

—Bruce Lee

Orp is designed so that you can adapt it to your needs in a way that I think is rather unique. Most games allow you to remove this or that insignificant feature. Most of the time, the rules they allow you to remove or add are vestigial or cosmetic, and at best are only 'bolt-on'. Some so-called generic systems are capable of quite extensive customization, but overall they tend to hang on to their 'feel'. This isn't a bad thing, because often a game's feel is the reason we play it and love it.

Orp isn't really like that. If you want, you can turn Orp into something that hardly resembles the default game at all. In short, Orp will 'feel' however you want it to feel.

1.7.3 Orp is Free

Much of the following is baldly stolen from the general philosophy of the open-source software movement. If you're already down with that, or just not in the mood for cheerleading, feel free to ignore.

What That Means

Orp is free in both the *libre* and *gratis* senses of the word: I'm giving it away rather than selling it, and I'm letting people copy and redistribute it as much as they like. Anyone can charge a distribution fee if they like, to recover printing or bandwidth costs, and if they can make a profit at this, that's fine too.

You can also tinker with it and publish your tinkering if you wish, provided that those tinkering (that is, those *modifications* of Orp) also carry these same permissions (technically, it must be released under the same license as the original version of the game). In short, you can publish your own version of Orp, but only if you agree to allow other people to publish their own versions of *your* version.

People can even write new stuff to use *with* Orp (such as source material and completely new rules) and distribute it under whatever license they like. The important thing is that the new material be really new, and not merely derived from Orp itself.

So, if you write a cool setting or adventure for Orp and you want to publish it like a traditional roleplaying manual with a traditional copyright, go right ahead; I'll probably even buy it.

But I'd also urge you to consider something less restrictive.

Why Orp is Free

I wanted to write a roleplaying game because few of the games on the market were really what I wanted to play. I liked this feature from this game and that feature from that game, but none of them really had *all* the features I wanted (some of which weren't in *any* game, to my knowledge). So, I decided to write the game I wanted to play, a game that anyone could tailor to their needs, and since I didn't want to do it for a living, I decided to do it for fun instead.

I'm also kind of a cheapskate. Forgive my acridity here, but I don't think any book is worth forty dollars, much less a book about imaginary things. Seriously, folks, how did we ever come to believe that a few tables and instructions (which will have errors) are worth so much money?

On the other hand, I've been realizing for a long time that it's really unfair the way we gamers treat our industry; perhaps I've just done so. There just aren't enough of us to sustain the little group of publishers and writers who produce roleplaying games. I'm no expert, but as I understand it, there are only a few companies that reliably make money, while the rest struggle along without much success. Despite the rising cost of roleplaying materials (especially new manuals), people still make less money in roleplaying games than they do elsewhere in the gaming and publishing markets.

It may seem like a contradiction to make a free game to compete with the proprietary games out there, because seemingly that will only depress the market even further. But I don't believe that is what will happen: Witness the rise of the d20 market. Thanks to a free, common framework from which to publish, the market has taken off in an unprecedented way. Honestly, I think if Orp has any effect on the market at all, it will be a positive one.

Now I'll get a little weird (weirder?) for a minute. I sincerely believe that free could be the future, when it comes to intellectual property like roleplaying games. Witness the rise of Linux (I mean GNU/Linux; hi Richard!) and other free software, which continues to have a positive effect on the computing world. Likewise, an increasing number of writers, musicians, and other artists are offering their work for free over the internet. Believe it or not, these people are still able to make a living from their work, despite the fact that they are ostensibly giving it away.

After all, in the old days, people didn't pay storytellers for the story, they paid for the telling, when they paid at all. In any case, good storytellers rarely went hungry.

Lastly, I don't need to mention that the great success of D&D in recent years has been, in significant part, due to the d20 system and its Open Game License. I have to applaud them for their open-

mindedness. It's not easy for people used to traditional ways of thinking about intellectual property to fit their heads around this strange new paradigm.

But the problem with d20 and the OGL is that it isn't free *enough*. Sure, you can download the d20 system off the internet and copy it, but it's not really a complete game. There's no way to advance the characters, for crying out loud! I wanted people to have an alternative to d20 that is free in the way that Linux or the book *Free Culture* is free: No gotchas, no caveats, no hidden revenue generation mechanisms. If you want the game, you can have it. Period.

Chapter 2

Characters

The Orp roleplaying game is defined primarily in terms of characters; this chapter describes how they are structured. It also describes how they are created and how they change during a campaign.

2.1 Parts of a Character

A character in terms of the game rules is really just a structured piece of information (we'd call it a *data structure* in computer programming lingo, but anyway). In Orp, a character is defined as follows:

Rule 1: Characters. A character is described by six major parts: traits, resources, skills, knowledge, health, and experience. Each is specially defined below.

Most of the crunchy parts of an Orp character are *zero-average*, which means that a zero is a perfectly respectable value for a given value.

2.1.1 Traits

As in most role-playing systems, Orp characters all share certain qualities. They're often called *attributes*, *statistics*, or even, these days, *ability scores*. In some systems, there can be as many as a dozen of them, while in others there are only three or four.

In the baseline game (that is, the one described by this document), there are only three traits: Body, Mind, and Soul.

Rule 2: Traits. All characters possess zero-average values called Body, Mind, and Soul.

Body describes everything about the character's body. This includes physical strength, agility, and general healthiness. Athletes always have high Body ratings.

Mind describes the character's brain and nervous system, including smarts, senses, and overall capacity for knowledge. Computer geeks, such as the author of this book, usually believe that they have above-average Mind ratings.

Soul is more ethereal. A person's general force of personality, including his ability to influence others, as well as his ability to empathize and 'see into' another person's feelings, are measured by his Soul rating. Finally, Soul also describes a person's attitude or spirit, and can serve as a measure of their courage. Depending on the setting of your campaign, it may also describe certain qualities related to the supernatural, such as affinity for and resistance to magic. James Brown, the hardest-working man in show business, had a high Soul rating.

See Chapter 9 for ideas about how to expand the number of traits in the game.

2.1.2 Derived Traits

Orp characters also have a few traits that are derived from the primary traits. They are also zero-average.

Rule 3: Derived Traits. All characters possess the following zero-average values:

Fortitude is the average of Body and Soul.

Reflexes is the average of Body and Mind.

Willpower is the average of Mind and Soul.

Combat is the average of Body, Mind, and Soul.

Astute readers will notice that each combination of traits is represented in the list of derived traits. This is intentional, as it allows skills (see 2.1.4) to be based any subset of the character's traits, and not just a particular trait. That way, skills that really do depend on both a person's physical and mental abilities can be accurately portrayed in game terms.

Why is Combat based on all three and not just body or reflexes? Simply put, based on the author's admittedly limited experience, it is the most realistic way of designing the game. Orp is not the first game designed this way, either.

More specifically, it's clear upon examination that each trait has a role to play in most forms of combat. A person's physical fitness is obviously important to fighting, even with respect to dogfights between aircraft and the like. Fencers will speak volumes about how the sword is a game of the mind, while during the second world war a sign admonished new recruits at a pistol range to "THINK DAMMIT". Indeed, according to one source the US military stresses situational awareness in particular during combat training. The soul trait, which is used to "read people" in Orp and also describe a character's force of personality, is useful for most kinds of fighting as well.

Basing a character's combat abilities on all three primary traits has a fortunate side-effect of balancing the worth of the traits as well. Hopefully, in Orp there is no "dump stat."

2.1.3 Resources

Each person carries inside them a capacity to face difficulty, which is drained away by stress and effort. After time spent recovering or resting, a person can face tough problems and choose to push themselves once again.

To represent this fact of human life, each Orp character has a set of special values called resources. Each

resource is a pool that may be temporarily depleted, but which replenishes over time and can be influenced by various factors.

Rule 4: Resources. All characters possess these values, which are related to the character's traits:

Stamina is related to Body.

Concentration is related to Mind.

Essence is related to Soul.

Each has a maximum value of the related trait plus 5. Each may be reduced, even to negative values, and later restored.

See Section 3.6 for details on how resource depletion and restoration works.

Stamina is related to Body, and describes a person's capacity for physical exertion over long periods. A distance runner or Navy Seal would have a high stamina rating.

Concentration is related to Mind, and defines the character's ability to perform difficult mental tasks over long periods. Painters, surgeons, and post-docs have high concentration ratings.

Essence is based on the character's Soul. Whenever a character undergoes a difficult emotional or spiritual trial, or must exert considerable "social energy", the character is probably expending part of their Essence resource. A musician who gives frequent performances before large audiences generally will have considerable Essence resources to draw upon.

2.1.4 Skills

In Orp, a skill is a numeric value (again, zero-average) that represents learned expertise in performing some activity or related set of activities. Like all numeric values in Orp, a higher skill value represents greater efficacy.

Rule 5: Skills. All characters possess a set of skills. Each skill has a unique name, is a zero-average value, is related to a trait, and is tied to a class of activities or tasks.

In general, anything a person can learn by experience, education, or practice is a skill. Remember that a zero for a skill is an *average*, meaning that most people possess most commonly-learned skills at roughly that value. When a character has *no* training for a skill, use the default value instead:

Rule 6: Default Skill Value. A character’s skill rating for any untrained or unimproved skill is -3 .

So, briefly, Orp skills “start” at -3 , and improve with education and practice. They eventually reach zero, which is a mediocre but common value. Over time, the skill will grow further into positive values, as the character becomes more and more proficient. Various skill values and their rough real-world meanings are detailed below:

Table 2.1: The Meaning of Skill Values

<i>Value</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
-3	No training; utter beginner
-1	College undergraduate or intern
$+0$	Early career; general life skill; serious amateur or hobbyist
$+1$	College graduate with a few year’s experience
$+3$	Veteran professional; advanced college degree
$+5$	Real expert; among the best in a large region (such as a few US states)
$+7$	Approaching true genius; among best in the world

As an example, say a particular character is known for his cooking. He likes to try new recipes and cook for his friends, who usually pay him compliments. The character therefore has the cooking skill at value 2. His girlfriend, on the other hand, is markedly less capable in the kitchen, though she is far from incompetent. She also has the cooking skill, but only

at zero. Her little sister, who is in the third grade, has never cooked anything and has never been taught how. Her skill value for cooking is -3 .

2.1.5 Knowledge

Sometimes it is useful to know what a character knows based on their education and experience. In Orp, knowledge ratings provide this mechanism. Knowledge ratings are like skill ratings in many ways.

Rule 7: Knowledge. All characters possess a body of knowledge, represented by a set of zero-average ratings corresponding to broad, unique, named categories of information.

Default knowledge ratings are similar to default skill ratings:

Rule 8: Default Knowledge Value. A character’s knowledge rating for all unimproved areas of knowledge is -3 .

For an example of knowledge in action, assume a certain naturalist, Dr. Phillip Osgood, is living in Manhattan in the Roaring Twenties. He is a learned man, having attended a university in his youth and subsequently participating in several expeditions to Africa, South America, and elsewhere. His knowledge of plant and animal taxonomy is now $+4$. His assistant, Howard Jenkins, has only just finished his academic study of the same subject, so his knowledge rating for the same field is only $+0$. Their friend, police officer Connor O’Flaherty, has lived in the city his whole life and only went to school for a few years. His knowledge of biology is minimal, at -3 .

2.1.6 Health

Rule 9: Character Health. A character’s health is described by the set of injuries the character has received.

Instead of hit points or wound levels, an Orp character’s physical well-being is described by all the injuries that character has suffered (injuries are described in section 3.7). Essentially, in Orp a healthy

character has no injuries, while a character in critical condition could have suffered either many relatively light injuries or a few more serious injuries.

2.1.7 Experience

Human beings (and their analogs in fantasy and science fiction) change through time, particularly with respect to learning and personal growth. Unfortunately, they may also suffer permanent physical, emotional, and psychological harm. Experience points help simulate these long-term changes.

Rule 10: Experience Points. Each character has some number of experience points, which represent the character’s unrealized personal potential.

Briefly, experience points may be spent to improve the character’s traits, skills, or knowledge. Worsening these will conversely add experience to the total. The GM may award more experience points as the game progresses, in a way similar to many other games. See section 2.2 for details.

2.1.8 Everything Else

These items are critical to the description of a character (and to good roleplaying) but have no particular interaction with the game rules.

Biography

In addition to all these crunchy numerical values, Orp characters are also defined by all the ordinary details of life, such as personal history, work experience, religious beliefs, political or social affiliation, favorite band, and so forth.

Biometrics

Orp characters, being generally humanoid sentient life-forms (or approximations thereof) also are described by their height, weight, hair and eye color, general build, nationality, and so forth. Not much else needs to be said.

2.1.9 Puissance

Technically, a character’s overall “awesomeness” can be measured by the sum total of experience points that character has spent, from character creation forward. Some games use this value to judge whether or not a particular challenge is suitable for a character or characters. Orp GMs are welcome to do the same, though it provides a very rough estimate of the challenge at best.

2.2 Character Growth and Change

As first described in section 2.1.7, Orp characters, like their real counterparts, can learn and grow through time, and suffer calamities severe enough to cause permanent harm. Experience point transactions describe these changes in terms of the game rules.

Rule 11: Earning Experience. A character’s experience total increases at the GM’s discretion.

GMs are of course free to award experience in whatever way they see fit. Possible criteria may include good roleplaying, some sort of in-game transformative event in the character’s life, or even good sportsmanship on the part of the player.

The following sections detail how a player may spend experience to improve their character, and how a character may be intentionally worsened in some way to provide additional experience. Usually these act as a sort of tradeoff, allowing some other desired improvement.

2.2.1 Changing a Character’s Traits

In Orp, a character may alter their traits over time in either direction. The intentional worsening of a trait is incentivized so that players will be encouraged to play complex and textured characters.

The following rule governs what happens when a trait’s value moves away from zero, either when a positive trait increases or a negative trait decreases. Essentially, raising a positive trait is exactly the same as lowering a negative trait, except that the former

costs experience (since the character is gaining something) while the latter grants experience (to compensate the character for losing something).

Rule 12: Moving a Trait Away from Zero.

To move a trait away from zero by one unit, multiply the new value of the trait by five and subtract the result from the experience point total.

For instance, raising a trait from +3 to +4 costs $4 \times 5 = 20$ experience points, but raising a trait from 0 to +1 only costs $1 \times 5 = 5$ experience points.

Conversely, lowering a trait from 0 to -1 costs $-1 \times 5 = -5$ experience, or in other words, it actually increases the character's experience total by five. This is intentional; the character is voluntarily giving something up by lowering a trait, so they should get something back in return.

Rule 13: Moving a Trait Towards Zero. To

move a trait towards zero by one unit, reverse the experience transaction that resulted in the current value of the trait.

So, say a character's body rating is +2. His player wishes to reduce it to +1 because his character is aging and is no longer as capable athletically. Originally, the player spent $2 \times 5 = 10$ experience to raise it from +1 to +2, so that amount is returned to the character in exchange for worsening the body rating.

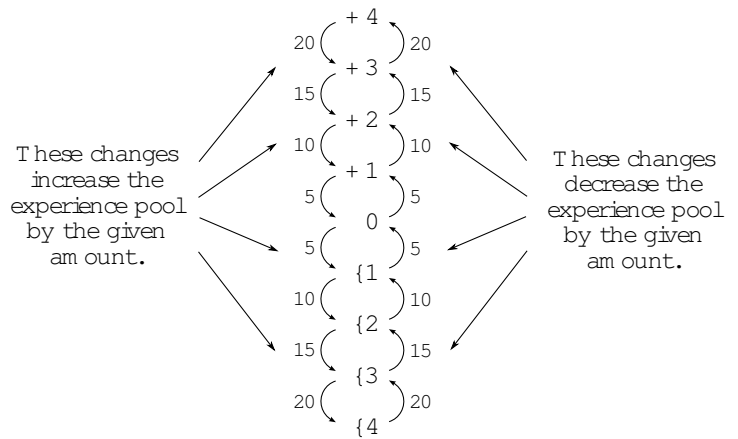
The rule also works in the negative case. Assume a character is increasing a trait from -2 to -1. Since the character was once given 10 extra experience for lowering the trait from -1 to -2, the character just has to give up that quantity to raise his trait back to -1.

To help understand all this, examine Figure 2.1, which shows what experience pool transactions are required for the various trait value changes.

2.2.2 Improving and Worsening Skills

Orp characters can also (much more cheaply) increase their skill ratings. As a quick reminder, all skills start at -3, which is the default skill rating. It represents the basic human capacity to try completely new, unfamiliar things.

Figure 2.1: Trait Changes and Experience Costs



Rule 14: Improving Skills. The cost to improve a negative skill rating by one is one experience point. The cost to improve a nonnegative skill rating by one is equal to the new rating.

For instance, improving a skill from -3 to -2 or from -1 to -0 costs one experience, as does improving it from 0 to +1. Improving it from +1 to +2, however, costs *two* experience, and it will be more and more expensive to improve it from there.

This is intentional, mostly because it is realistic. With all real-world skills, improvement is rapid as a person learns a new skill, but the improvement slows down over time, even if a student is very diligent. In addition, hopefully this rule will encourage well-rounded and balanced characters.

To encourage characters to give up old skills and acquire new ones as their lives change, skill improvements may be removed and the associated experience reclaimed.

Rule 15: Reversing a Skill Improvement. An improvement to a skill rating may be voluntarily undone at the player's discretion. Such undoing also reverts the corresponding experience expenditure.

For example, an engineer at some firm could be promoted to a managerial position, for instance, and over time the engineer's technical skills will probably decline somewhat, while concentration on new leadership tasks will improve social skills.

2.2.3 Gaining and Losing Knowledge

As with skills, knowledge ratings may be improved by spending experience.

Rule 16: Gaining Knowledge. To improve a knowledge rating by one, spend experience equal to *half* the new rating, or one experience, whichever is greater.

Don't round fractional knowledge-related experience costs; if a character has 13.5 experience, that's okay.

As with skills, improvements to knowledge ratings may be reversed. This allows characters to become forgetful of learned information if they wish.

Rule 17: Reversing Knowledge Gains. An improvement to a knowledge rating may be voluntarily undone at the player's discretion. Such undoing also reverts the corresponding experience expenditure.

2.2.4 Limits on Character Changes

Because a human being usually changes slowly, and because often life does not permit a person to improve themselves in exactly the way they would wish, there are rules to limit character changes.

Rule 18: Limits on Character Changes. Any change to a character's values must be made with the GM's approval, and unless the GM rules otherwise no more than one change may be made per session.

The approval clause is to emphasize the freedom that the GM has regarding experience point expenditure: Orp GMs are free to require training time, recent use of a skill or trait, finding an appropriate

teacher, or any other roleplaying prerequisite before allowing a particular improvement.

The GM exception is suggested here for sessions wherein characters may have long periods of downtime in which to study and practice their various arts. If a year of in-game time passes during a five minute period at the gaming table, characters should be able to change a lot.

2.3 Character Creation

Creating a character in Orp is simple and entirely freeform:

1. Get the abstract from the GM, which will explain the game's setting and guide you into the character creation process.
2. Cook up a nifty character concept and discuss it with the GM.
3. Set up a generic Orp character with zeros for all traits and no skills or knowledge.
4. Flesh out those values by spending experience.
5. Work out the remaining details, such as what the derived traits and resources are, and what possessions or property your character may own.

These steps are detailed as follows:

2.3.1 Get the Abstract from the GM

The first step in creating a character is talking to the GM. The GM will give you an abstract, which is a small document intended to guide you in the character creation process and introduce the campaign.

In particular, the abstract will fill in all the holes in this section, including how much experience one may spend creating a character, what skills are available, and what is possible for character backgrounds.

The abstract will also detail how the GM has customized Orp to suit the campaign.

2.3.2 Cook up a Character Concept

Use the abstract to devise a niche for your character to occupy in the game world. Think about your character's personality, and what they look like. How old are they, and what are they good at? Do they have any particular motivations or goals as the campaign begins? This initial sketch can always be revised, of course.

2.3.3 Set up a Blank Orp Character

Orp characters start with zeros for all traits, and with no skills or knowledge. Set the experience total equal to the starting value given by the GM in the abstract.

2.3.4 Spend Experience to Customize Your Character

To flesh out the character's traits, skills, and knowledge, spend experience points as defined in section 2.2. Be sure to consider traits as well as skills and knowledge. There may be special rules in play regarding supernatural talents or special abilities; your GM will have information about that.

Note that you can stop any time you like, and even leave some experience purposely unspent. That way, perhaps your character begins the game with a lot of unrealized potential. He or she could then grow rapidly once the game has begun, picking up skills and knowledge rapidly. The character could have just started a new exercise program or gotten a library card, so that rapid improvements to traits are possible as well.

2.3.5 Work out the remaining details

Calculate Derived Values

After the traits are determined, calculate the other values according to their definitions. See earlier this chapter or consult Table 2.2.

Unlike the d20 System, always round fractions to the nearest whole number.

Table 2.2: Derived Values

Value	Formula
Fortitude	$(Body + Soul)/2$
Reflexes	$(Body + Mind)/2$
Willpower	$(Mind + Soul)/2$
Combat	$(Body + Mind + Soul)/3$
Stamina	$Body + 5$
Concentration	$Mind + 5$
Essence	$Soul + 5$

Possessions and Property

Unless your GM wants to do it differently, the equipment system in Orp is unconstrained. Your character possesses whatever you and the GM agree is reasonable for them to possess.

2.4 Example Character

Say Jim decides to join Susan's action-adventure science fiction game. They exchange email during the week leading up to Jim's first session at the gaming table, during which Jim and Susan work together on Jim's character.

2.4.1 Susan Gives Jim the Abstract

The first thing Susan does is send Jim a copy of the game's abstract. Reading it, Jim discovers that Susan must be a big fan of Star Wars and similar fare, because her campaign is a fairly gritty take on space opera, complete with interstellar space travel, robots, bizaare aliens, and huge starships. This suits Jim just fine (he's seen the original trilogy thirty-five times).

2.4.2 Jim Brainstorms About His Character

Consulting with Susan about what sorts of characters might get along well in her campaign, Jim discovers that the group could really use a good space pilot. He decides to cook up a semi-reputable spacelane merchant who owns his own small starship, perhaps simi-

lar to Han Solo or Mal Reynolds. Feeling a bit punchy by this point, Jim decides to call his character Jake Starfield.

2.4.3 Setting Up a Basic Character

Using a bit of scratch paper, Jim jots down the following, noting from the game abstract that he has fifty experience points to spend:

Figure 2.2: Jake Starfield, Not Quite Finished

Jake Starfield
“independent trader”
average height, good-looking, fit
short black hair, goatee?
smirking grin?
wears an old military service uniform
(patches/rank etc removed)
 –
Unspent Experience: 50
 –
Body: +0
Mind: +0
Soul: +0

2.4.4 Spending Initial Experience

First, Jim thinks about the three primary traits. He decides to spend experience improving Jake’s body rating once to +1, which costs $1 \times 5 = 5$ experience. Since he wants his character to be cunning, he improves Jake’s mind rating once, to +1. This also costs 5 experience. He thinks about lowering Jake’s soul trait, to partially represent his ability to get himself into trouble, but decides against it since he wants Jake to be fairly courageous and also good at reading people’s motivations and the like. He leaves Jake’s soul rating at zero.

Jim thinks about his character’s skills and knowledge next. Looking at the abstract, he sees several good choices for his character, and with some consideration, makes some decisions. These are detailed in Tables 2.3 and 2.4.

These skill ratings may seem a bit low, but remember that +0 is a mediocre rating, and that –3 is the

Table 2.3: Jake Starfield’s Skills

<i>Skill Name</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Cost</i>
Starship Piloting	+1	4
Starship Operations	+1	4
Starship Repair	–1	2
Zero-G Acclimation	–1	2
Empathy	+0	3
Charm	–2	1
Deception	–1	2
Spoken Trangese	+0	3
Marksmanship	+1	4
Brawling	–1	2
Notice	–1	2
Stealth	–2	1
<i>Total Cost</i>		30

minimum. From the first few skills we can see that Starfield spends a lot of time working and living in space. We can tell from the list of interpersonal skills that Jake isn’t too bad at reading people, but he’s probably not much of a socialite. A foreign language (the Trang are an alien species in the campaign), and a few action-oriented skills round out the list.

Table 2.4: Jake Starfield’s Knowledge

<i>Knowledge</i>	<i>Value</i>	<i>Cost</i>
Markets	+1	2
Starships	+1	2
Criminal Underworld	–1	1
Galactic Geography	+1	2
Galactic Politics	–1	1
Current Events	+0	1.5
Pop Culture	–2	0.5
<i>Total Cost</i>		10

We can get a sense of Jake’s life from the knowledge ratings as well, as shown in Table 2.4. It seems Jake maintains a broad body of knowledge related to his work (including a hint at smuggling or other illicit operations), and that he knows a little about the general goings-on around the galaxy as well. He doesn’t seem to have any academic or scientific knowledge, though, which means he probably didn’t pay much attention at school, if he went in the first place.

2.4.5 Working Out the Remaining Details

Jim then determines his character's derived values, as shown in Table 2.5. These aren't really choices, just applications of the rules above, as summarized in Table 2.2.

Table 2.5: Jake Starfield's Derived Values

<i>Reflexes:</i>	<i>+1</i>
<i>Willpower:</i>	<i>+1</i>
<i>Fortitude:</i>	<i>+1</i>
<i>Combat:</i>	<i>+1</i>
—	
<i>Stamina:</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Concentration:</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Essence:</i>	<i>5</i>

Susan the GM has decided not to implement a rigorous equipment policy; she instead asks players to accept her judgement in exchange for not having to track every last item.

So, Jim thinks this over and decides to design a small starship for Jake to own, which turns out to be very much like the *Bebop*. Susan the GM is just fine with this, provided that Jake doesn't own much else, since it would give the group a way to travel independently.

He finishes up by making notes about a few small items Jake is likely to carry with him most of the time, and several personal items that he keeps on the ship.

Then, Jake is finished and ready to be played in the next game session.

Chapter 3

Basic Game Mechanics

This chapter outlines Orp gameplay. All the fundamental methods of resolving game events systematically are detailed. From these, later chapters will extend into specific in-game scenarios and situations.

3.1 The One True Mechanic

Often, at the gaming table, the primary task of the roleplaying system is to determine the results of character actions that carry a risk of failure. Default Orp is designed to be clean, simple, and easy to use. As such, most of these risky actions can be decided using a single die-rolling mechanism.

Rule 19: The One True Mechanic. When a character's actions carry a risk of failure, the GM should choose a target number based on that risk. If a d12 roll *equals or exceeds* the target number, the character succeeds. Otherwise, it is a failure.

So, the only die you need to play Orp is a single d12; for the game to really flow well you'll probably want one per player and a few for the GM. The following rules build on this foundation.

The d12 is the One True Die (Unless You've Changed It) for several reasons. Firstly, twelve is a convenient number. It is divisible by 2, 3, 4, and 6, for instance. Another reason is that gameplay quality is best served by striking a balance between variability and ease-of-use. A large die favors the former, while a small die favors the latter. Among the com-

monly available polyhedral gamer dice, the d12 seems to achieve this balance.

In any case, if you disagree, change it around all you like; see Chapter 9. Even this part of Orp is malleable.

Various target numbers are outlined below, though the GM is free to use any others:

Table 3.1: Sample Target Numbers

Target Number	Odds	Meaningless Descriptors
2	11/12	trivial
4	3/4	easy
7	1/2	standard; moderate
10	1/4	tough
12	1/12	heroic

If you are unsure about which target number to use, just use a 7:

Rule 20: The Default Target Number. When a rule mentions a roll but suggests no target, a target of 7 is implied, though at the GM's discretion other numbers may be used.

This "standard" target number of 7 corresponds to a 50% chance of success for the average case for most kinds of rolls (see 3.5 for how this works out in practice).

Like most other games, Orp rolls and target numbers can be *modified* in the usual way:

Rule 21: Modifiers. Before a roll, a GM may modify the roll or target number by a positive or negative whole number, depending on in-game circumstances.

Notice that a +1 bonus to a roll increases the likelihood of success by 1/12, or about 8.33%. Likewise, a +4 changes the results by about 33.3%.

3.2 Margins of Success and Margins of Failure

During play, it is sometimes useful to know more about a die roll than whether it was a success or a failure. It may also be relevant to know *how* successful a roll was. Calculating the *margin of success* gives this extra information:

Rule 22: Margins of Success and Failure. To find the margin of success or failure, find the difference between the target number and the roll result. The greater the magnitude of the number, the more astounding the success or failure.

For example, a character rolls a 10, succeeding against a target number of 6. The margin of success of the roll is 4. If the character had only rolled a 9, then the roll could be considered less successful, since the margin of success would be 3 instead. If the roll had been a 5 instead, then the character failed, with a margin of failure of 1.

It's easy to misuse this rule during play, so GMs be careful: *Never* turn a successful roll into a failing one by abusing a low, but still positive, margin of success. Instead, you should've modified the target number or roll before the player rolled.

3.3 Aces and Fumbles

Occasionally, rolls can be astonishingly good or bad in ways that are highly unanticipated. These are often called *wild successes* or *botches* or even, I've no idea why, *critical hits* in some games. In any case, in Orp we call 'em aces and fumbles. You can call them

something else if you like; we like linguistic diversity around here.

Rule 23: Aces. Whenever a successful die roll results in the *maximum* for that die, there is a 50% chance that the roll is an ace. Aces represent great, extraordinary success.

For example, a character is scouting for an army marching to war. The GM sets a difficulty for this activity and the character's d12 roll is a 12. With modifiers, the roll is successful. Because the roll is both successful *and* a so-called "natural" 12, the GM flips a coin. Because the coin was heads, the GM rules that the character scouts so well that the enemy's movements are known with exceptional accuracy. The GM could then rule that this presents the opportunity for an ambush, which would not be possible had the character not aced the scouting attempt.

Rule 24: Fumbles. Whenever an unsuccessful die roll results in the *minimum* for that die, there is a 50% chance that the roll is a fumble. Fumbles are spectacular failures.

Had the same character failed at the attempt *and* rolled a "natural" 1, the character would have risked fumbling. The GM, in addition to informing the player that the scouting attempt has failed, flips a coin. On the result of heads, the GM rules that the character has also been detected by enemy outriders!

How to interpret any particular ace or fumble is of course up to the GM, but here are a few suggestions:

1. Fumbles should never directly result in a PC's death unless the roll could've caused the PC's death in the first place. It's particularly poor sportsmanship for one poor combat roll to kill a character outright.
2. Likewise, an ace should never cause an NPC to outright kill a PC unless the roll could've gone that way anyway.
3. Fumbles shouldn't be ruinous; they do represent something pretty bad happening to the fumbler, though.

4. The golden rule for aces and fumbles: Aces provide *opportunities* for unexpected advantage, while fumbles cause a *risk* of a situation becoming more dangerous or complicated.

A sports metaphor might help to make sense of all this. In tennis, an ace doesn't win you the whole contest, even if it does represent an automatic score. Likewise, in football a fumble is most certainly a bad mistake for the ball carrier, but it is not *unrecoverably* bad. Failing to recover the ball after it has been dropped is the unrecoverable failure. So to speak.

3.4 Opposed Rolls

Sometimes (often?) two or more characters compete with each other to accomplish the same thing, or are in direct conflict with one another. Opposed rolls are used for these situations. Most combat rolls in Orp, for example, are resolved with opposed rolls.

Rule 25: Opposed Rolls. An opposed roll is a collection of simultaneous Orp rolls which represent direct competition or conflict among characters. The highest roll is considered successful, while the others are all failures. If there is a tie for the highest roll, all the tied rolls are successes.

Of course, as always, the GM is allowed to interpret a tie differently if the circumstances call for it.

The probabilities of opposed rolls can be surprising. For instance, a +2 advantage in an opposed roll means that the side with the upper hand is about *twice* as likely to win the roll as the loser is. Roughly speaking:

$$\frac{P(\text{favored side wins})}{P(\text{underdog wins})} \approx \text{advantage} \quad (3.1)$$

Where $P(x)$ is fancy-pants math-writing for saying "The probability of x occurring," and \approx really means "roughly equals." Anyway.

Rule 26: Two-Way Margins of Success. To calculate the margins of success of a two-way

opposed roll, subtract the highest roll from the lowest. This yields the margin of success for the higher roll, and the margin of failure for the lower.

Which is pretty much what you'd expect. We purposely do not include rules for more than two-way margins of success because we feel the idea is kind of strange. What is the winner's margin of success? Is it the amount by which he beat his nearest competitor, or is it the amount by which he beat the person in *last* place? Or, could it be his performance measured against the *average*? It could also depend on the in-game circumstances. We feel it is better to leave such matters entirely in the hands of the GM.

3.5 Character-based Rolls

Characters may make rolls in any number of predetermined ways which will be very familiar to players of many roleplaying games. Most of these, of course, are modified by favorable and unfavorable circumstances at the GM's judgement.

3.5.1 Skill Rolls

A skill roll is made when an Orp character is attempting to use a skill to accomplish some task.

Rule 27: Skill Rolls. A skill roll is an Orp roll modified by one of the character's skill ratings and also by the trait associated with that skill:

$$d12 + \text{skill rating} + \text{associated trait}$$

As expected, the skill roll may be modified by circumstances, can be opposed by some other roll, and the margin of success can be examined as needed. As with several other games, the associated trait is added to the roll because it is assumed that both a person's natural talent and practice or training make a difference in most of life's skilled labors.

3.5.2 Trait Rolls

When no particular skill seems to cover a given activity, or when no amount of expertise or training will

aid in a given situation, the GM may call for a trait roll.

Rule 28: Trait Rolls. A trait roll is an Orp roll modified by a trait of the GM’s choice:

$$d12 + \textit{chosen trait}$$

Notice that a trait roll is identical to a skill roll in which the character has rating zero (which is the average rating for a person with some training in the skill, remember). In this way, target numbers do not have to be reconsidered when a GM rules that a trait roll and not a skill roll is required for a situation.

As a suggestion to GMs, it is not advisable to allow characters to make trait rolls when skill rolls are called for, because it cheapens the value of skills and discourages character diversity. It’s better to force characters to take the -3 penalty; they can always spend resources to improve the roll (see Section 3.6.1 for details).

3.5.3 Knowledge Rolls

A knowledge roll is an abstract way of easily defining what a character knows. There are two kinds: Rolls to see whether a character knows a particular fact, and rolls to see how much a character knows about a given subject.

Rule 29: Knowledge Rolls. At the GM’s discretion, a player may roll the following to determine what a character knows:

$$d12 + \textit{mind trait} + \textit{germane knowledge rating}$$

Success means a character knows a specific fact, or the margin of success can tell how much a character knows about a given topic.

Knowledge rolls can be modified by circumstances and resource expenditures, much like skill and trait rolls. This represents the tendency of a person to be distracted while trying to remember something, or concentrating very hard on a key realization.

Notice that knowledge isn’t quite the same as skill, so resist the urge to treat it exactly as such. For

instance, having the right knowledge is often only the beginning of experiencing an epiphany or revelation. If your campaign has a deduction or reasoning skill, it may be appropriate to call for one, or at least ask for a mind trait roll to represent “putting two and two together.” This sort of thing comes up a lot during mystery or detective-oriented adventures or campaigns.

3.6 Depleting & Replenishing Resources

As described in Section 2.1.3, each character has three types of resources (stamina, concentration, and essence, remember) which describe a person’s ability to cope with stress or tax themselves at need. Resources can be depleted in a number of ways, and are restored, generally, by rest.

3.6.1 Spending Resources to Improve Rolls

Resources can be spent voluntarily on Orp rolls to provide a one-time advantage in any situation in which extra effort would be useful.

Rule 30: Extra Effort. If the GM approves, a roll may be granted $+2$ once only in exchange for spending a unit of a related resource before the roll is made.

The GM must decide which resource is appropriate for a given task, but in general it should be related to the trait or skill being used. For example, a person could spend concentration to improve a long-distance rifle shot or attempt to fix the forward plasma cannon turret, but stamina is not necessarily appropriate for, say, improving a business presentation. For that, essence is the most likely candidate, since it is related to soul, the Orp social trait.

Notice that the expenditure is capped at one unit per roll. This is intentional because it is highly unlikely that a person can exhaust themselves in a single action that may only take a few seconds. The GM

may wish to enstate a new rule that allows a character performing a longer action (such as one requiring a minute or more of in-game time) to spend many resource points in exchange for a large bonus ($+n$ for spending n units of resources, for instance). See Chapter 9, if you're interested in that sort of thing.

3.6.2 Other Resource Expenditures

Sometimes, the GM may require that characters lose resources as part of inherently stressful actions. This may include running a long distance, for instance. Likewise, sometimes a character loses resources involuntarily due to situations beyond their control.

Rule 31: Circumstantial Resource Reduction.

The GM may deduct from a character's resource pools when that character experiences an inherently taxing or significantly stressful event.

Good examples may include encountering a particularly fearsome enemy, witnessing an especially tragic or horrible event, or becoming sick with a disease or poison. Certain substances (such as medicines and drugs) could have similar effects if abused.

3.6.3 Effects of Resource Depletion

Resources can be depleted "beyond" zero and into the negative range, which is designed to be a problem for the character. This is because sometimes people have to give so much to some difficult task that they actually harm themselves.

Rule 32: Effects of Resource Depletion.

When a resource is negative, apply its value as a penalty to any related actions. Only the worst such penalty applies.

In this way, it is easy to model the behavior of a human being who has exceeded his capabilities. Say such a person begins a difficult climb up a rocky cliff face. Though the character has 4 stamina at first, the climb itself is taxing, and they are forced to spend 6 stamina to make it to the top. This would reduce their stamina to -2 , which means they would suffer

a -2 to all actions involving physical exertion subsequently.

Notice that only the worst of such penalties applies at a time, as a mercy to player characters who will, no doubt, be taxed to the limits of human (and humanlike) endurance. There is a case for stacking the penalties; feel free to use Chapter 9 to modify the game if you agree.

Spending into the negatives is dangerous in other ways as well. Simply put, characters are running on borrowed time when they push themselves so hard, and there are risks. Since *sometimes* characters can keep going in such situations, a roll is made to see what happens:

Rule 33: Resource Depletion Rolls. When a resource is reduced to a negative value, a resource depletion roll is made, modified by the related trait. Resources may *not* be spent on such rolls.

The language of Orp rules should always be strictly interpreted: A resource that is already negative when it is reduced triggers a depletion roll.

The consequences of failure could be passing out due to exhaustion, or even mental or emotional breakdown. These effects are generally temporary; again, the GM is free to modify their durations according to circumstances, or systematically using Chapter 9.

Rule 34: Failing a Resource Depletion Roll.

A character that fails a resource depletion roll becomes inactive for a period related to the margin of failure. The full details are left to the GM's judgement.

The duration is intentionally left vague to allow for interpretation by GMs, but the suggested period should perhaps vary vaguely according to the square of the margin of failure. This would mean that failing the roll by a small amount causes less than half a minute of inactivity, but that failing by a large margin could cause up to several minutes of inactivity.

For suggestions as to the details of becoming inactive, stamina-depleted characters could become either prone and motionless or lose consciousness entirely. Those with negative concentration values

could fall into a catatonic state and have trouble “snapping out of it”. Finally, depleting essence could cause a character fall into a listless, emotionless shock.

3.6.4 Recovering Resources

Luckily, despite all these dangers, resources are replenished automatically by rest and time.

Rule 35: Resource Replenishment. If a character performs no taxing activity related to a resource for eight hours, the character recovers an amount equal to the maximum value of that resource. Other durations recover proportionate amounts.

So, an exhausted character gets a good night’s sleep to restore stamina. A spaced-out scientist plays video games for awhile and then gets back to research. An emotionally unstable character could spend time with their children or a good book to achieve a sense of peace.

Note that it’s even possible to engage in stressful activity so long as that activity is not stressful in the “wrong way.” This is why people who’ve worked a long day at an office job may want to perform some kind of physical exercise after work, for example. The exercise is stressful to the body, but the “differentness” of it could help restore the depleted ability to concentrate.

Finally, the GM may rule that a given situation is inherently stressful for the character’s entire being, so no resource recovery of any kind is possible. A squad of US infantry on patrol in Bagdad, for instance, cannot recover resources until it returns to the Green Zone. The circumstances are physically, mentally, and emotionally stressful, regardless of whether or not the soldiers are doing anything that is ostensibly taxing. A similar fact could be true of adventurers exploring dangerous abandoned mines.

3.7 Injuries

In Orp, physical harm to a character is described in a simple, abstract way to save time and bookkeeping

trouble. The GM is free to describe injuries in as detailed a way as he’d like, but they are all handled the same way. If more specific rules are wanted for all the different kinds of injury that could be inflicted on a character, see Chapter 9.

Rule 36: Injuries. An injury is a discrete unit of physical harm inflicted upon a character, and is described by a nonnegative intensity rating. When an injured character takes any action, the GM usually applies a penalty equal to the sum of all the intensities of all the injuries that character has sustained to that action.

So, for example, say Nathaniel, an intrepid naturalist of pre-revolution New England, is exploring in the wilderness. He trips and falls into an unexpected gully, and the GM rules that he sustains an injury with an intensity of three from the fall. This means that the character makes all future rolls with an automatic -3 penalty, due to the physical pain and disability caused by, the GM says, a twisted ankle. Later, while limping home, Nathaniel trips over a tree root and badly bloodies his nose. The GM says Nathaniel has suffered another injury, of intensity one. Now all Nathaniel’s actions are made at -4 , due to the added difficulty of his bleeding nose.

The injury penalty is designed to make injury a bad thing beyond physical suffering. This way, *players* will be inclined to avoid allowing their *characters* to become injured. The penalty applies to all actions and not just physical ones because injuries are both painful and distracting. This means that wounds can hamper one’s mind as well as one’s body.

Some injuries are bad enough that they run a risk of serious deterioration.

Rule 37: Unstable Injuries. An injury of intensity four or greater is unstable. Each unstable injury causes a fortitude roll every d12 pulses (pulses are described in 4). Success stabilizes the injury, while failure increases its intensity by one.

These injuries represent very serious, immediate danger to the character, because they run the risk of causing major dysfunction, and even death. Note

that a character can continue acting normally while suffering from such an injury (aside from a significant action penalty, of course), but unless immediate action is taken, such as the administration of first aid or similar help (see ??) the character will likely be at risk of death.

To continue our rather cold-hearted example, suppose that our hapless Nate has recovered from his previous injuries, only to accidentally find himself forced into fighting a duel against the local master marksman. Nathaniel, determined to maintain his honor, shows himself at the dueling grounds at dawn, pistol in hand. Shaky as he is, it is a wonder he is not killed on the spot, though he does sustain a major injury (intensity 5). This means that d12 pulses after the shot is fired, Nate must succeed at a fortitude roll or the wound will worsen to intensity six. Luckily though, he succeeds at his roll and so does not face any immediate danger.

However, no matter how intense an injury is, it still may either improve or worsen over time:

Rule 38: Injury Recovery and Deterioration.

Once per game day, an injured character rolls a fortitude roll (modified by the injury penalty as usual). Success means a randomly selected injury improves by one, while failure means the injury worsens by one.

Of course, a human (or human-like) body can only suffer so much abuse before finally succumbing to the long goodnight:

Rule 39: Death from Injury. When a character's total injury penalty is -12, the character has died from their injuries.

The GM may allow a character at -12 to make a death speech, if dramatically appropriate.

Finally, note that all of these rules assume that *no* medical treatment has been received. For those specifics, see ??.

Chapter 4

Timing

Roleplaying games try to emulate reality, or a variation thereof. Thus, they are obliged to answer questions of timing. Such questions might include:

- Does the tiger reach me before I finish reloading my gun?
- When will I finish fixing the engine?
- How much of the book can I read before Thursday?
- Who wins when both of us try to grab the pencil?
- If I rush, how much will the thesis' quality suffer?
- Can I get by the underling and cut down the wizard before he turns my boyfriend into a toad?

Most roleplaying games use turn-based rules of varying complexity to answer these questions. In such games, time is broken into large blocks in which all the characters act in a strict sequence. Usually nobody is allowed to “do anything” while it is someone else's turn.

However, Orp takes a radically different approach, one that breaks strongly with roleplaying tradition. It is best characterized as event-based rather than turn-based, and its development was prompted by an earnest examination of causality and the way events unfold over time.

The event-based system is detailed below. For players wishing to use a more conventional method than this, simply use whatever turn-based rules are appropriate from any game or system.

4.1 Marking Time by Pulses

Although the GM may keep records in whatever time units are convenient, in the Orp timing subsystem, it is measured in units called pulses. Generally, a pulse is equal to one second, but the GM may change this value to suit the needs of the campaign or a particular situation.

Rule 40: Pulses. A pulse is a period of time equal to one second, or any other value the GM deems appropriate. They are used to measure the in-game flow of time in order to resolve timing issues.

For instance, while simulating a large sea battle, the GM rules that a pulse is equal to one hour. Otherwise, it will take tens of thousands of pulses to finish the battle.

4.2 Understanding the Timing Problem

In roleplaying games, there are three kinds of timing issues: Those that are questions of priority, those that are questions of duration, and those that are questions of sequence. In the first case, the GM must decide which character manages to seize an opportunity first, where the duration of the action is essentially irrelevant. In the second case, we are instead interested in how much time a given event will require. Finally, in the third case, it is often useful to

establish an ordering of events, especially when those events may interact with each other in complex ways. Orp provides mechanics for interruption and interference for this purpose.

Orp provides discrete mechanics for all three, which may be used individually whenever in-game situations call for them. They may even be combined, yielding a comprehensive method of deciding “what happens when” for any in-game purpose, in a fluid, intuitive way. Likewise, elements of this catch-all mechanism may be simplified, altered, or ignored, at the players’ (er, the GM’s) discretion.

4.3 Timing by Priority

Say two characters are both looking for a key that could provide access to some valuable object or document, and that each wants it for himself. If the key suddenly sails through the air and clatters onto the table at which they are sitting—the work of some mischievous force, no doubt—who gets the key? This is an example of a timing question based on an issue of priority. As you might imagine, this is best resolved by opposed rolls:

Rule 41: Priority. To determine which of two or more competing character actions occurs first, the GM may call for opposed rolls, usually of reflexes or some appropriate skill.

Using this rule as a guide, the GM could therefore resolve the above situation as follows. The GM decides that in this case no particular skill is appropriate for deciding who thinks and acts the fastest. So, she calls for an opposed reflexes roll, and declares that the winner will take the key.

Had a skill applied to the situation above, the GM could’ve easily called for an opposed skill roll instead. For instance, say two foreign diplomats are seeking audience before a king’s throne. Whomever speaks first wins the king’s attention. Since speaking persuasively is covered by the debate skill in this campaign, the GM calls for an opposed debate skill roll. The winner speaks first, and so is allowed to roleplay a few words with the king before the other character has the chance to speak.

4.4 Timing by Duration

Often it is useful to know how long it will take a character to do something. Many tasks require an uncertain quantity of time, while others always need a constant amount. Orp is also equipped to allow characters to increase or decrease the time required for actions. The following rule provides the foundation for this:

Rule 42: Duration. When assigning a duration to an event, a GM may choose a value or roll randomly. d12 pulses is suggested for variable-length events.

It may seem sensible to modify the duration of skill tests by the character’s reflexes or skill. After all, highly-skilled individuals are often capable of performing tasks rapidly. However, this is not the default mechanism because it penalizes low and middle skill levels beyond the disadvantage of having less skill. It is also an additional recordkeeping question, which is undesirable.

The following rule provides skilled characters with the *option* of trading precision for speed. When a character needs to hurry with a given action, or has the opportunity to take his time and improve his chances of success, the GM may allow the character to do so:

Rule 43: Rushing or Going Slow. If the GM permits, a character may take a $-n$ penalty to a test in exchange for shortening the duration of the test by n pulses, and may increase the duration of the test by n pulses to receive a $+n$ bonus to the test.

The GM may of course also rule that a given test cannot be modified this way, or may set a limit to the modification. Many difficult jobs cannot be made any simpler once the character is already taking his time, and some things don’t get easier no matter how slowly one proceeds. Likewise, some other tasks (such as baking a loaf of bread) cannot be rushed either.

4.5 Timing by Sequence

All games are ultimately about the way that circumstances change over time. Sometimes these changes are partially or fully concurrent with one another. When precision is desired, the GM may establish a sequence of events (either character actions or otherwise).

Rule 44: Sequence. The GM should interpret the ordering of events in time as appropriate, but by default, events take effect in order of the pulse in which they conclude.

The big advice here is that things should flow how the GM feels they should flow based on the evidence of the situation. This is what everybody does when they're not using the high-precision Orp timing rules anyway.

4.6 Interrupting Events In Progress

What happens when one event prevents the conclusion of some other, already running event? The interruption rule provides the answer:

Rule 45: Interruption. At the GM's discretion, an event may interrupt any other event according to the game circumstances. When an event involving a roll is interrupted, interruption may modify the rolls, cause a risk of failure, or even result in automatic failure.

For example, assume that a character is attempting to screw in a lightbulb, and is balanced on another character's shoulders. Unbeknownst to either, a devious spirit has taken up residence in their home, and is bent on mischief. When it pulls the rug from under the characters, obviously, this should have some interaction with the lightbulb-screwing event.

The GM could approach this a few ways. The GM could rule that the pulling of the rug is so unbalancing that the characters immediately must give up on their previous action and make balance tests to remain upright. The GM could instead allow the characters balance tests to see if any interruption happens

at all. The GM could even alter the probability at succeeding at screwing in the lightbulb in the original attempt, on the logic that the characters are (for instance) highly skilled acrobats with superb balance and reflexes. Whatever approach is suitable to the campaign and to the situation is acceptable.

4.7 Doing Many Things At Once

Sometimes characters will wish to perform multiple actions at one time. This makes less sense in Orp than it does in other games, because there is no "turn" in which a character can choose to do many things in rapid succession. As such, a character cannot take "multiple attacks" because each attack is a separate event already (see Chapter 5 for details on Combat). If a character really does want to attack many times rapidly, just use the rushing rules above.

However, sometimes it really does make sense for a character to do more than one thing at a time. For instance, a character may be trying to run quietly along a rooftop while performing some other action, such as throwing poisoned shuriken to assassinate an evil merchant.

Rule 46: Multitasking. When the GM rules that a character is performing more than one action at a time, all such actions are modified by $-n$, where n is the number of such actions.

So, our vigilante above would roll both his stealth and throwing actions at a -2 penalty, because he is performing two actions at once. If he were also evading a sword cut by a bodyguard, each action would roll at -3 instead.

4.8 Putting It All Together

The various parts of the Orp timing mechanism interlock together to form a mighty composite organism capable of great feats, in a manner reminiscent of Voltron, Defender of the Universe. This is for cases in which players wish to know not only who "goes first" but also how long things take and when they

conflict with each other. When it is clear that such a complex situation is about to unfold, follow these steps to play it out:

4.8.1 How to start the timing system:

1. Every character who is aware of the situation (see 6.1) picks an action *independently of everyone else*. A character wishing to take a “wait and see” posture is considered to be doing nothing, but may initiate an action at any time.
2. Decide on durations for all these events.
3. Move to running the timing system:

4.8.2 How to run the timing system:

1. Allow pulses to elapse until an event resolves. That is, the event resolving “soonest” should resolve first.
2. Resolve the event, which may involve questions of priority or interruption.
3. If a character is now “doing nothing” have them pick a new action (or else continue to do nothing until the next event resolves; let them change their minds later on if they want).
4. Repeat this process until precise timing is no longer relevant to the in-game situation.

4.9 Extended Example of Orp Timing Rules

In this example, a dashing band of adventuring heroes has entered the Forgotten Caverns, a cave network which supposedly holds a lost object of great power. While delving there, they suddenly come upon a goblin warband. Both groups are surprised, but swing into decisive action immediately.

Dramatis Personae

Sir Jonathan (Jeff): A Knight of the Line

Zamfastar (Marvin): A loremaster and weaver of magicks and glamers

Nenia (Eve): A noble-elf of the nearby woods, who journeys with them to seek rare underground plants and mushrooms

Fúkil (Jin): Their Dwarven guide

Orcs & Orc Chief (Jim the GM): Foul denizens of the undermountain

The Timing Rules in Action

Jim the GM. So, you’ve rounded the corner and encountered a band of several orcs; it’s hard to tell how many in the gloom of the cavern. *Rolls a few dice.* Although both groups are surprised, nobody hesitates. You can all choose your first actions.

Jin. Uh, who goes first?

Jim the GM. Remember you’re just choosing your action now, not performing it yet. You can all choose at once.

Eve. Nenia wants to fire her bow at the nearest orc.

Jim the GM. You were carrying it with an arrow nocked, right?

Eve. Yeah.

Jim the GM. Okay. *Makes a note of this.*

Marvin. I think I want to blow them over with magical wind. *Details the particulars of the spell he wants to cast.*

Jim the GM. Gotcha.

Jin. How far away are they?

Jim the GM. About five meters.

Jin. *Consults his character’s movement rate.* So Ninny and Zam are using ranged attacks?

Jim the GM. Remember, you don’t know yet. We’re just picking actions, nothing has happened yet.

Jin. Right. I'm not sure what Fúkil would do. Can I just ready my axe and take up a defensive stance?

Jim the GM. Of course. You can pick another action as soon as you're finished doing that.

Jin. Okay, cool. I'm actually in the lead at the moment so I'm probably closest to the orcs anyway ... I want to be ready to fight!

Jim the GM. Got it. Jeff, what does the noble Sir Jon do when he sees the orcs?

Jeff. How many orcs, did you say?

Jim the GM. It's hard to tell.

Jeff. Ballpark? More than ten?

Jim the GM. You definitely *see* less than ten.

Jeff. Heh, right. In that case, Sir Jon does what he always does: Charge!

Eve & Marvin. No, wait!

Jim the GM. Remember you don't really know what the other characters are doing yet, and your actions could resolve before the good knight gets in the way, so don't worry. Okay, so that's everyone. *Also decides on an action for the orcs (most decide to draw their wicked knives while the leader, who is holding a spear, prepares to throw it).*

So at this point the matter stands thusly:

Sir Jonathan plans to rush into melee.

Zamfastar wants to cast a spell.

Nenia means to let fly an arrow.

Fúkil wishes to draw his axe and stand ready.

The orcs intend to draw steel and attack.

The orc leader hopes to throw his spear.

Jim the GM. *Makes a few rolls, and discovers that Nenia will finish her action first, unless she decides not to shoot after all.* It looks like the orcs are going to attack! The leader appears to be raising his spear, as if to thrust with it or

throw it. Do any of you wish to alter your actions? *None do.* Okay, so here's what happens. First things first: Nenia, in a twinkling, draws and fires her bow; I assume you targeted the orc leader?

Eve. Sure, that's fine.

They resolve this action, which results in a painful chest wound for the orc leader. According to the GM's house rules, he is phased by this and staggers back, an arrow protruding from between the scales of his crude armor. He doesn't drop his spear, but his action is interrupted and he loses it. He's phased for three pulses.

Marvin. Good shot, Rogue Two! *Everybody chuckles.*

Jim the GM. That action takes two pulses. In that time, the orcs have drawn their weapons and begun to charge, while Sir J is moving up as well. What does Nenia do next?

Eve. She nocks another arrow, planning to fire it at the leader as well.

Jim the GM. Okie doke. *Rolls an unusually long duration for the action.* Nenia is having trouble with her arrow, which got stuck in the quiver. It's going to be awhile before she manages to fire.

Eve. Stupid arrow. If we live I'm going to burn it.

Marvin. Boy, wouldn't it be great if I finished my spell right about now?

Jim the GM. Yet, sadly, you're not yet finished with the incantation. You're about half done, give or take. So, in the next moment, Fúkil has finished retrieving his axe and is in a fighting stance. Sir J flies past you, a battle cry on his lips. He's about to enter melee. You're up, Jin.

Jin. Excellent! With a Dwarven battle-roar I'll join him.

Jim the GM. Alright, you dash after him towards the stinking orcs . . . you're not as fast as he is, though, so he'll probably reach them one pulse ahead of you.

Jim. Curse my stumpy legs! *Eve laughs.*

Marvin. *Realizing his spell is probably going to catch both the orcs and his companions.* Can I cancel my spell? I'm not done yet so I'll stop casting before it goes off.

Jim the GM. You can try. You're concentrating pretty hard on the spell so you may not quite realize that your friends are in danger.

Marvin. *Fails his self-interruption roll.* Looks like I'm finishing the spell. I really meant well, too.

Jim the GM. So, in the next pulse: Only about three orcs can fight side-by-side in this passage, so three orcs reach and assault brave Sir Jonathan, who fights back furiously. *Doesn't bother rolling for duration, because he knows the melee is going to be interrupted.* But in the pulse after that, with a dramatic sweep of his hand, Marvin summons up a howling gale that slams into the orcs, and also Fúkil and Sir Jonathan.

Several reflexes rolls later, most of the orcs and Jonathan have been blown down the passage a meter or two and knocked over. Several suffer injury from falling or crashing into the rough walls. Fúkil, standing with iron-shod boots firmly planted on the stone floor, has not moved an inch and remains standing. Jonathan is stunned for the moment.

Jim. Did someone sneeze? I felt a bit of a draft.

Jim the GM. Heh. So, after all this, the orcish captain struggles to his feet, evidently still alive. You all can see that he's standing over Jonathan, who has started to recover his wind and get to his feet. It looks like he's going to spear the knight unawares! *This is a sneak-attack, not an ongoing swordfight, so the GM rules a single pulse is sufficient.*

Jim. Fúkil to the rescue! He dashes in to behead the villain!

Jim the GM. Actually, it looks like both Eve's shooting action and the orc's spear attack are both resolving in this pulse. You need time to cover the distance; you'll strike in the pulse after next.

Eve. Yay! I finally nocked that dumb arrow!

Jim the GM. Eve, you roll your archery, opposed to the orc's melee. Whomever wins resolves first.

Eve. I could still miss with the arrow even if I get priority right?

Jim the GM. Quite right.

Jim the GM and Eve roll off. Eve wins by a substantial margin, and also hits on the attack. Had Jim the GM won, the orcish captain would've struck first, which would've been pretty bad since Sir J isn't able to defend himself very well at the moment.

The second shot is enough to stun the beast and save Jonathan, who had sustained a major bruise from the fall. Just after Nenia's arrow strikes, Fúkil arrives and finishes the orc leader off. At the death of their leader and the terrifying display of sorcerous might, the orcs quickly lose heart, running in terror into the darkness.

Chapter 5

Combat

Orp combat is intended to be highly dynamic by default, so less time is spent on whose weapon deals how much damage, and more time is spent on whose swordplay was most effective, or who made the best use of cover, and so forth.

Most of the rules that make combat work have already been explained. Combat (and other violence) is nothing but a special application of the rules in Chapter 3. Combat features skill and trait rolls, which may be modified by resource usage. Combat is managed by the timing rules given in the last chapter, and which gives Orp combat much of its vitality and dynamism.

One caution: In Orp, deadly situations really are deadly.

5.1 Attacking & Defending

The basic way to resolve an attack against a foe *who is not fighting back* is as follows:

Rule 47: Attacking and Defending. Attacks are usually events of variable duration. Resolve by an opposed roll of appropriate skills. Victory for the attacker means that the victim sustains an injury.

This rule is for use against opponents who are attempting to avoid being injured by whatever means (parrying, dodging, diving behind cover) but are not also attempting to harm the attacker (See 5.2 below).

To give an example, assume a secret agent shoots at a hapless guard with an assault rifle. The guard is

aware of the agent but has decided that dashing for the alarm control mounted on the wall nearby is more important than shooting back. So, for the moment, the guard is dodging out of the way of the agent's fire, trying to reach the alarm.

To measure the duration of this event, the GM rolls d12 with result 5, which means the action requires five pulses (equal to five seconds, unless the GM has altered the definition of a pulse). The GM rules that the event will run its course before the guard reaches the alarm.

The GM rolls the guard's evasion skill against the agent's shooting skill, and loses, which means that the guard is hit by at least one bullet and sustains an injury before he reaches the alarm.

5.2 Mutual Aggression

Often, two characters are both simultaneously attempting to harm each other. When this is the case, the two combat skills (say, swordsmanship skill vs. quarterstaff skill) are rolled opposed to each other as part of a single event. The winner then inflicts damage on the loser (see Section 5.3: Damage & Injury below). Since there are no "turns" in default Orp, both characters are acting in the event and are taking their "turns" together.

Rule 48: Mutual Aggression. When an attacked character is able to fight back and wishes to do so, or when characters simultaneously attack each other, it counts as a single event of variable duration that is resolved with a single opposed

roll. The winner inflicts damage on the loser according to the margin of success.

For example, assume Mary the Martial Artist is on her way to visit her grandmother in a bad part of town. She's not carrying any weapons, so it looks bad for her when a street thug emerges from the shadows of an alley and attacks her with a baseball bat. In Orp game terms, what's happening is that the precise timing system has been started up, as follows:

1. Mary doesn't notice the thug in the alley through failing some awareness roll.
2. The thug steps into the light and approaches her. The GM rules that while he moves towards her, Mary finally notices what's going on and may start an action. The GM tells her the thug will be in melee range after two pulses.
3. Mary decides to ready herself for the coming fight. She has no weapons to draw but she does slow to a stop and subtly shift her weight into a fighting stance. This action takes one pulse, so she "does nothing" for the next pulse, waiting for the thug to attack her.
4. On the third pulse, the thug begins his melee combat by taking a swing at her. Since she is accepting the melee combat action that the thug wishes to initiate, there is no chasing or the like. The GM rolls a 6 for the duration, meaning that the two will be locked in combat for six pulses (six seconds, remember) before the event concludes.
5. During that six pulses, nothing happens but repeated swingings of the bat and dodging about by our intrepid Mary, who is deftly avoiding or deflecting each attack but can't seem to get close enough to strike back.
6. At the final pulse, the GM and Mary make appropriate rolls (the thug gets a +3 bonus to the roll thanks to the numerous tactical advantages of his baseball bat), with his street fighting skill (which is minimal) pitted against her karate training (she's practiced Goju Ryu karate for several years).

7. Mary wins the roll by four, which means she scores a "hit" (in her case, she probably deflected the bat by intercepting her opponent's forearms, then struck the fellow with a punch or kick).

Notice that Mary could have responded to the thug's approach by charging him and attacking. The event would have been resolved in exactly the same way, albeit the engagement would have started perhaps a pulse sooner and at a slightly different location on the sidewalk. This is intentional, both for realism and simplicity. The rule is intended to capture the idea that it doesn't really matter who strikes first, especially compared with who strikes last.

It may seem strange, but the mutual aggression rule is also intended to apply to ranged combat as well as hand-to-hand fights. Seemingly, it is an accurate way to characterize such events. Picture a running gun battle between two cowboys in the dusty streets. At times, one is really shooting while the other is really dodging, but most of the time it is a little of both. Things tend to run together, so that pitting one shooting skill against another is good enough most of the time. Moreover, you can assume if it makes you feel better that most combat skills also include some defensive training as well.

GMs who don't buy this or previous arguments can instead ignore the rule and run exchanges of fire as repeated use of the multitasking rules given above. That way should be roughly equivalent anyway, and it's not an unreasonable way of looking at ranged combat.

5.3 Damage & Injury

The intensity of the injury sustained from a successful attack is as follows:

Rule 49: Combat Injury Intensity. The intensity of any combat injury is equal to the margin of success of the attack. The attacker may choose a less-intense value instead, with the GM's permission. The GM may also require that this intention be stated before the attack roll.

To continue the previous example, say that the margin of success of the attack is three. This means

that Mary inflicts a somewhat severe injury (intensity three) on the thug with the bat. If she had been feeling merciful, however, she could've instead inflicted a less severe injury, of intensity two, one or even zero (representing a "graze" or scratch . . . noticeable and perhaps humiliating but not distracting or debilitating enough to have a game effect).

It may seem hokey to allow characters to always pull their punches with no combat penalty and no risk of accidentally doing more harm than intended. However, in real life people usually have ample opportunity to avoid using excessive force. It is surprisingly easy to kill a man with one's bare hands, but this rarely happens in bar fights and the like precisely because the combatants, knowingly or not, are refusing to fight with maximum potential for harm. Street or playground fights (usually) do not risk eye gouges, groin and throat rips, limb breaks, and the like, but they will instead usually result in bruises, scrapes, and cuts.

Another reason for this unorthodox rule is the abstract nature of Orp combat. In Orp, getting a higher margin of success on a combat roll does not mean the attacker "hit harder" necessarily. Remember that the same force applied to different parts of the body could result in dramatically different injuries. The attacker could be choosing to avoid the really vulnerable areas on the opponent's body.

Ultimately, the GM has final arbitration over when this makes sense. Most guns and other intentionally lethal ranged weapons, for instance, usually cannot be used in a nonlethal way without considerable trouble. Therefore, the GM may place a penalty on the attack roll in such cases (such as the previous example of the secret agent and the guard).

5.4 Cool Tricks

To represent all the interesting, cinematic, and chaotic events of conflict and fighting (beyond attempting to harm one's opponents), cool tricks may be attempted by any combatant:

Rule 50: Cool Tricks. Instead of or along with attempting to injure the victim, an attacker may

attempt some other hostile act, such as disarming or knocking over the opponent. These attacks are performed at a GM-selected penalty based on the difficulty of the act, generally -2.

Most of special combat actions, such as shooting a weapon out of someone's hand, cutting a letter or symbol into someone's clothing, shoving someone into a bad position, and so forth, are managed by this rule and the GM's judgement. Generally, more powerful effects should have a higher penalty than less powerful ones.

Keep in mind that the suggested -2 penalty is more serious than it may seem because many such attempts will occur during mutual aggression, which means that the target will not only be more likely to strike back, but will also inflict more serious injuries. This is intentional, because it is risky to attempt to disarm or trip a person who is trying to *kill you*.

5.5 Aces & Fumbles in Combat

Generally speaking, aces and fumbles do not simply represent extra damage in combat (unless you want them to; see Chapter 9). Instead, they usually represent a cool trick or bad mistake instead.

Particularly, aces represent a cool trick or fancy maneuver (such as a disarm, lucky shot, or take-down) while a fumble is a bad mistake (dropping the weapon, injuring oneself, losing one's footing, jamming a gun, breaking a bowstring, etc).

Rule 51: Aces in Combat. When an attacker scores an ace, they may choose to forgo dealing damage and instead automatically succeed at a cool trick. Defenders may choose this also (in addition to avoiding damage) if the GM deems it appropriate.

The GM has some extra say in this because sometimes the best a defender can do (as in the case of a man dodging a hail of arrows) is avoid injury. Usually, characters avoiding injury by pure evasion are not entitled to a cool trick on an ace, while those defending in a more interactive way (by parrying attacks with a weapon, for instance) are entitled to

appropriate cool tricks (disarming is a personal favorite).

Similar effects (but they're bad) occur when fumbles occur during combat:

Rule 52: Fumbles in Combat. When an attacker or defender fumbles, they are subject to a negative effect of the GM's choosing, which is usually given instead of an injury. Such may be the dropping or damaging of a weapon, falling to the ground, and so forth.

It may seem strange that a character can be saved from injury by fumble, but remember that this could actually happen. For instance, an unfortunate high-school student is about to be struck by a bully, only to slip on a patch of spilled milk and fall to the ground. He would avoid the fists of his rugby-playing nemesis, but would instead be lying on the ground at the bully's feet.

If it makes sense that a player *should* receive an injury from a fumble, the GM is free to rule that this is what happens.

5.6 Special Combat Modifiers

Like any other Orp roll, combat rolls may be modified to suit the circumstances. See Section 3.1: The One True Mechanic for general rules about modifiers, which of course also apply to combat. Modifying circumstances could include terrain, weapons used, the emotional states of the combatants, and so forth.

As a convenience, suggestions for some of these modifiers are detailed below. This section isn't really rules material, and much of it is of course campaign-specific.

5.6.1 Equipment

Weapons & Shields

Orp handles personal arms of all kinds (firearms, swords, clubs, knives, and so forth) differently from most games.

Instead of a damage die, weapons have simple effectiveness value generally based on how "good" the

weapon is. This value is added to appropriate combat rolls as given in the combat modifiers rule above.

The bonus given by any close combat weapon is based on lethality, reach, and defensive capability; this is given as a bonus to both attack and defense actions. Table 5.1 provides some samples.

Table 5.1: Close Combat Weapons

Value	Examples
+0	unarmed
+1	knives, daggers, brass knuckles, small clubs, claw hammer
+2	short swords, large clubs, police batons (aka tonfa), short staves (jo)
+3	long(er) swords, quarterstaves, war hammers
+4	basic polearms, greatswords
+5	more complex polearms

The bonus applies to both attack and defense because, generally, weapons good at attacks are also good at defense. In addition, even highly dangerous weapons that seem to have no defensive value due to their size or fragility (such as a taser) can be used to "menace" the attacker and keep him at bay.

Shields should likewise provide a bonus to any combat roll, (I suggest +1, +2, or +3 depending on the size and material) on the idea that most shields were highly useful for aggression as well as defense. This should be obvious given that some had spikes specifically for this purpose. Shields are also useful against deflecting ranged attacks, and usually provide their bonus to such defensive opposed rolls.

Ranged weapons are treated similarly to close combat weapons. However, the bonus almost never applies to defensive activity (such as resisting, but not fighting back against, an attack), because most ranged weapons are useless in this regard. If a defender wishes to improvise (by using a rifle's stock to deflect a spear thrust or the like) the GM may choose to assign some reasonable modifier.

This list is more or less arbitrary because the author has almost no idea what he's talking about when it comes to projectile and thrown weapons; help would be appreciated! The GM should tweak or limit

Table 5.2: Ranged Weapons

Value	Type
+0...4	Thrown weapons
+2...5	Mechanical projectile devices
+3...7	Gunpowder-based hand weapons

this list as appropriate to the campaign.

Armor and Protection

Similarly to weapons, armor functions very simply in Orp. Armor reduces the intensity of injuries received by most kinds of danger, as follows:

Rule 53: Armor and Protection. The intensity of most injuries is decreased by the protection value associated with a character, which is usually given by the armor or clothing worn.

Table 5.3 is *highly* approximate, but is a good guide.

Table 5.3: Armor & Protective Clothing

Value	Historical	Modern
0	Tunic	T-shirt
1	Leather	Leather jacket?
2	Chain or scale	Kevlar vest?
3	Plate	Police riot gear?
4	Full Plate	Military armor?

For example, assume a medieval lord has taken a severe wound (intensity 7). Since he's wearing an extremely expensive suit of jointed plates (protection value 4), the wound's intensity is reduced to 3 instead.

5.7 This Section is Under Development

Orp is a work in progress in many ways. For the moment the rest of this section (including rules suggestions for such topics as movement and position and terrain effects) is not yet ready for publication.

Chapter 6

Rules for Specific Game Situations

This chapter is under active development. At some point, it will offer rules concerning many diverse but common roleplaying topics. Such topics are intended to include:

- Social interaction, such as diplomacy or intimidation
- Research, forensics, and investigation
- Making and repairing objects and devices
- Vehicles and mounts
- Stealth and detection
- Noncombat physical hazards, such as fire
- Disease, poison, medicine and healthcare
- Wealth and fame

For the time being, only the following is ready for public view:

6.1 Detection, Stealth, & Surprise

Sometimes characters fail to notice something important, or wish to go unnoticed. These situations are resolved by skill or trait rolls as determined by the GM's vision for the campaign.

Depending on the campaign and the in-game circumstances, there may be many different skills for

detection and stealth. These may be based on whatever trait the GM feels is appropriate, though mind seems to be the most sensible choice. There may even be *no* detection or stealth skills, in which case the use of trait rolls will suffice instead.

Specifically, hidden or obscured inanimate objects may be detected by rolling against a constant target chosen by the GM. When that which is hidden is actively attempting to remain undetected (as in the case of a sneaky rogue), an opposed roll is made instead, pitting the detection skill against whatever stealth skill is in use.

6.1.1 Surprise and Hesitation

When something surprising happens to a character, they may hesitate. A surprise in Orp is any unexpected event, the kind of thing that makes a real-world person flinch, stutter, or simply freeze for a moment. One possible surprise could be an unexpected attack. Another could be the unanticipated appearance of an old love interest.

Rule 54: Surprise. The GM may call for a reflexes or skill roll during a surprising event. Failure of this roll means that a character hesitates according to the margin of success of the roll.

Simply put, a hesitating character either freezes for a few pulses or takes a penalty to some situation-specific roll according to the GM's judgement and the circumstances of the event.

Rule 55: Hesitation. At the Gm's discretion, when a character hesitates, they either take no action for a period of time or suffer a penalty to a subsequent roll. In either case, the magnitude of it is equal to the margin of success of the surprise roll.

For instance, a character who is ambushed must make a surprise roll. Success means the character reacts "fast enough" to be able to act normally (for whatever that means in the situation). Failure means that the character hesitates for a number of pulses (if the precision timing rules are in effect). Alternatively, if the surprise is probably only going to involve one or two rolls, the GM may instead simply impose the margin of success of the roll as a penalty to the rolls.

Chapter 7

Providing for Supernatural Character Abilities

Most roleplaying campaigns have science fiction or fantasy settings. In such settings, characters frequently wield supernatural power of some sort. Magical and psychic abilities are perhaps the most common of these, but the same logic can be applied to any unrealistic and relatively permanent advantage a character can acquire. Some examples from existing fiction include cybernetic implants, genetic alteration or mutation, and cinematic martial arts.

Since every setting treats such material differently, Orp makes few decisions about what the relevant game rules ought to be. Instead, GMs and sourcebook authors can use the tools below to construct customized rules to perfectly suit the flavor of their settings.

7.1 How to Construct an Ability

To use supernatural powers in a campaign, one must construct the necessary rules infrastructure beforehand. In addition to defining the abilities themselves, in order for the game to be playable, working rules for acquiring and using the abilities must also exist.

7.1.1 Defining the Ability

Supernatural abilities and powers need precise definitions, which must be given by new game rules. These

rules must explain the different pieces of information needed to know how a given ability works, and what variation in that information is possible.

As an example, the following rule defines the ability to use magic, as might be useful for sword-and-sorcery dungeon-crawling games:

Sample Rule 1: Using Magic. Some characters can use magic. Every use of magic must have a magical type, a duration, a target, and an in-game effect.

Notice that some terms may need special definition by additional rules. To continue the above example, the phrase *magical type* may need special attention:

Sample Rule 2: Magical Types. The magical type of a magical effect is either matter, energy, mind, or any combination of the three.

These definitions may be as simple or as detailed as is necessary to capture the essence of the writer's creative vision.

7.1.2 Ability Use or Activation

For every sort of supernatural ability, there are several ways in which the benefits can be realized. If the ability is of a passive or permanent nature, the advantage is gained automatically. For instance, say a certain race of aliens in a science fiction campaign is

naturally resistant to certain kinds of physical harm. Aliens of this race gain the benefits of the ability automatically.

On the other hand, sometimes supernatural abilities are of a more active nature. For the above example of magic in the style of medieval fantasy, one might write a rule like the following:

Sample Rule 3: Magic is a Skill. To use magic, a character must succeed at a magic skill roll. The target number is set by the GM according to the magnitude of the effect.

In the source material for the setting, it would be helpful to provide a list of sample magical effects and their associated target numbers, so that the GM may apply the above rule consistently.

7.1.3 Ability Acquisition and Improvement

In addition to defining the nature of the ability and how it is used, the rules need to provide a way for characters to acquire the ability. The word *acquire* is used loosely here, since obviously not all supernatural abilities seen in existing fiction can be voluntarily gained. Some, like those inherent to members of a certain species, would be automatically granted at character creation. Others might be involuntarily inflicted on characters due to exposure to unusual phenomena, such as comic-book-style radiation or a rare mystical event.

Notice that the existing rules for an ability might have answered the question preemptively. This is the case for the continuing example of the fantasy magic system. In this context, magic is an Orp skill, and so can be learned and improved by spending experience, like any other Orp skill.

On the other hand, the present form of this definition could cause problems. In Orp, it is assumed that characters may always attempt to use any skill, even if they have no training. This may be hostile to the author's creative vision for the setting, since it implies that all characters can use magic. For situations like these, a rule can remedy the situation:

Sample Rule 4: Magic Can't Be Defaulted.

A character that has not spent experience on the magic skill cannot use magic.

7.2 One Useful Approach

The creation of a supernatural ability can become very complicated. For those in need of guidance, a structured approach may be used.

7.2.1 Write an Overview

First, it can be tremendously helpful to document the way supernatural power ought to work in the setting. Don't write any rules, yet—instead, focus on the thing itself. How does it work? Are some people born with it? Can a person acquire it, and if so, how? What can it be used for, and is it dangerous or unpredictable? Perhaps most importantly, what does it cost the wielder, if anything?

Thinking about history and culture can help a lot, too. For instance, where did the power come from? Has it changed through time, and is it changing at the time of the campaign? How has it affected the societies in which it exists? Do people use it to gain economic or political power?

7.2.2 Write a Draft of the Rules

Once the concept of the particular supernatural ability is firmly fixed in the mind, the process of building the rules for the ability can begin. Remember that rules, in Orp, are almost mathematical in structure and exactness. This is intentional, because it provides clarity, which is especially important in an activity as fuzzy and emotional as roleplaying can be.

Remember, though, the cardinal rule of game design: Keep it simple.

7.2.3 Test Drive the New Rules

After a complete draft is, er, drafted, uh, I mean, completed, hmm, change gears and think like a player. Write a character or two utilizing the newly minted rules, and a few that don't use any supernatural abilities at all. Compare them with one another:

Is there an ability or combination of abilities that is too powerful? In much of roleplaying culture, a sense of balance among the characters is highly valued. Special powers often cause the lion's share of balance problems, so be careful.

On the other hand, if the intended audience is assumed to be mature enough to avoid abusing this power, or if the power is universally used by player characters, then it may not matter so much.

7.2.4 See What Other People Think

If other players and GMs haven't been involved in the process yet, it could be very valuable to expose them to the rules and background information and have them opine. Have them run a one-shot campaign with the new rules, or run them in a game personally, and see how it plays out in live roleplaying. The results are often surprising.

7.2.5 Repeat Until Bored

Over time, design flaws will become obvious, so correct them, and then test them again. This process is ongoing and not often really finished, as with all creative works.

Again, remember the cardinal rule of game design: Keep It Simple. Greater complexity is inherently more dangerous, for a very real arithmetic reason. As the number of rules increases, the number of interactions among them probably increases as well, but at a much faster rate. Some of these will inevitably go unnoticed until after the game is published or played, and cause unforeseen problems.

7.3 Suggestions and Options for Abilities

This section is under active development, but it has been included since it contains useful information.

7.3.1 Ways to Define Abilities

Skill-Based Abilities

Skills make an excellent basis for some abilities. Any ability that a character can possess by training and practice fits very well into a skill or multiple skills. Another advantage is that skills are already well-defined by existing rules, so much of the work of designing the ability is already done.

Possible Targets

Some abilities always affect only the user of the ability, while others, such as supernatural attacks and the like, have a single target. Still others can have an area of effect or multiple targets, such as "everyone who can hear my voice," or "every living thing within ten miles."

Possible Durations

Many games feature special effects that last for a period of time, such as an advantage to a trait or skill that lasts only for a few minutes. Other abilities don't really have a duration, being either a one-time event that occurs in an instant of time, or a permanent advantage that is continuously active.

Some other options for durations are as follows:

Roll result: The ability will last a number of pulses (or tens of pulses, etc) equal to the margin of success of some roll.

Character's discretion: Once the ability is activated, it lasts until the character chooses to deactivate it.

Resource expenditure: The ability is active as long as a character spends resources at some rate, such as one unit per ten pulses.

7.3.2 Game Balance Issues

Breaking Up Abilities

If an ability is too powerful, it may be broken into distinct abilities that can be acquired independently. This raises the cost of achieving the power of the

original, and also allows greater richness and diversity in what characters acquire.

Offsetting Powerful Abilities

There are many ways to limit or balance the power of abilities. These often provide the ability with nuance or flavor, as well. Some suggestions:

- Ability acquisition is costly or restricted. Only characters who pay a large sum, or must join a restrictive organization can learn to use the ability.
- Acquiring the ability also causes a permanent problem of some sort. Possessors of the ability must suffer a physical or mental disability. Instead, they might acquire a weakness to some kind of attack or otherwise benign substance.
- Ability use is somehow costly. Perhaps the character must spend resources or some expensive physical material to use it, like ammunition for a firearm.
- The ability needs a long time to become active. Perhaps the ability cannot be used on short notice.
- The ability depends on some condition. The character needs to possess some object to use the ability, or must use it at certain times or in certain places.
- The ability comes with a social stigma. The possession of the ability is physically disfiguring, or if the ability is used in public, prejudice will be suffered.
- The ability is dangerous to the user. When the ability is activated, there is a risk of some harm to the user, either directly, through some sort of malfunction, or through attracting negative attention.

Taking Abilities Away

A powerful ability can be taken away through any number of in-game means, depending on the campaign. If the ability is skill-based, it is a simple matter of forcing the player to reclaim the experience spent on the ability's skill or skills. That way, the character remains the same overall because the experience can be spent over time on other improvements.

Chapter 8

Crafting an Orp Campaign

In order to make Orp function, mechanically speaking, a few decisions need to be made before the campaign begins. These choices are more or less technical in nature, and rely on the GM to have a solid vision of the campaign's setting, genre, and feel.

8.1 Configure the Skill and Knowledge Lists

It's pretty easy, really: Pick a bunch of skills, decide on which trait influences rolls of each one, and add some descriptions.

One of the wackier parts of Orp is the ability of skills, knowledges, and the traits to expand and contract according to the needs of the campaign, and even specific characters. So, some day there should be a big tree that defines skills and their subskills and superskills. Since there is more than one way to look at a skill and its related skills, there will probably be several suggestions for how this tree ought to be structured.

For now, though, you're on your own.

8.2 Draft Equipment and Wealth Policies

If your campaign is particularly interested in what sorts of gear, devices, vehicles, and other equipment the characters will be using, you'll want to write up your campaign's rules on the subject. For some

games (mystery and supers games come to mind) this probably doesn't matter so much, but for others (space opera, dungeon-crawling fantasy games) it may make a big difference.

For some kinds of games, it can be no more complex than putting together a big list of weapons, armor, and other gear the characters can purchase. For others, such as games set in societies with advanced technology (such as real life, for instance), more subtle effort may be necessary, since there may be availability and legality issues.

Chapter 9 has more details on that subject, or will someday.

8.3 Decide on Supernatural Abilities

Does your campaign feature anything unnatural or unrealistic that could be considered inherent to a character? If so, consult Chapter 7 for details.

8.4 Calibrate Beginning Character Experience

The GM must decide how much experience players may spend on character creation. Since experience is the basic currency of efficacy, a small starting experience pool will result in player characters who are ordinary or green, while a large one will result in highly gifted heroes.

As detailed in section 2.3, players have four broad ways to spend experience: traits, skills, knowledge, and whatever special add-ons that may be in play (See chapters 7 and 9 for those). A good approach to choosing the size of the experience pool available for character creation is to choose an appropriate value for each of these areas invidually, and then add them together.

8.4.1 Starting Experience for Traits

The average trait value for members of a population is assumed to be zero, so if you're planning a campaign featuring average joes as player characters, players won't really need any experience to spend on traits.

On the other hand, most games' player characters are above average. Table 8.1 gives a few examples of trait values and their experience costs, so you can decide on what you want your players' traits to be, roughly.

Table 8.1: Experience Costs for Traits

<i>Body</i>	<i>Mind</i>	<i>Soul</i>	<i>Total Cost</i>
+0	+0	+0	0
+1	+1	+1	15
+2	+2	+2	45
+3	+3	+3	90

Keep in mind that traits provide an extra edge to skill rolls. This can provide a clue to what trait values are appropriate for the campaign. For instance, a +3 to a trait effectively raises all skills related to that trait to $+3 + -3 = 0$, which is the average rating for basic, everyday skills. Moreover, that +3 is worth a +25% to the chances of success for such rolls.

Remember that traits also provide the basis for resources, so the more experience you allow for traits, the more durable characters will be.

8.4.2 Starting Experience for Skills

The GM should develop a vision for how highly skilled starting characters ought to be, and then make experience available for the purpose accordingly.

Generally speaking, player characters are usually specialists, meaning that they are highly skilled in a few areas, perhaps related to a career, moderately skilled in a larger number of skills necessary to everyone living in society, and fairly unskilled in most other ways. This means that the bulk of experience will probably be spent on a small number of skills, while others receive a small quantity or none at all.

An example is perhaps the best way to demonstrate this. Say that I'm developing a campaign set in the real, modern world. A starting character could be expected to know three or four everyday life skills (such as driving a car and cooking), two or three skills that they use for their livelihood, and one or two skills unrelated to the others, such as a hobby.

Assume this makes about seven skills for a starting character. Assume that the three work-related skills are at +2, while the four everyday life skills are at +0. This costs a total of 30 experience, so the GM adds that amount to the experience available for character creation.

If the GM wants a more highly-skilled group of player characters, simply increase the values and recalculate the total. Continuing the example, the GM could add +1 to everything; the results would be three skills at +3 and four skills at +1, for a total cost of about 45 experience.

8.4.3 Starting Experience for Knowledge

Deciding on the amount of experience to use for knowledge during character creation is similar to deciding on the amount for skills. Usually, knowledge follows a similar pattern: A character will know a lot about a few subjects, and a moderate to low amount about many others.

So, as a quick and dirty solution for GMs on the go, simply divide the amount of experience intended for skills in half, to account for the smaller cost of knowledge improvement. This will result in an average-case character whose knowledge ratings have about the same "spread" as their skill ratings. GMs can raise and lower this value depending on the needs of the campaign.

8.4.4 Skill and Knowledge Packages

Since sometimes players can face a daunting task at character creation, it may be worth it to spend some of the experience for them beforehand, to help streamline the process. This is an especially good idea when most or all of the player characters have similar backgrounds.

For instance, if all four characters are modern American teenagers, why not pre-improve the skills they'd pick up during their schooling? Almost all of them would have a few academic knowledge ratings, basic math and computer skills, and, allegedly, skill with the English language.

You could also provide a few different package choices for different kinds of characters. This idea has some kinship with the painfully obsolete concept of character classes, which are, amazingly, still used in some games.

Unless the in-game situation is very restrictive, however, you should allow people to modify these starting values if they wish. After all, Orp is all about freedom and choice.

8.5 Write the Abstract

The campaign abstract is a small document the GM (or the setting author, or whomever) provides to guide in the character creation process, and it also outlines the setting, skills list, and so forth. Since Orp is so freeform and so variable, this document is necessary to establish the premises of the game. The abstract will also provide hooks for character backgrounds, and give the players a place to start. At minimum, the abstract should contain the following:

- A general overview of the campaign setting.
- The most relevant parts of the skills and knowledge lists.
- Character creation guidelines, including starting experience values.

Chapter 9

Customizing Orp

Orp is designed to be malleable, so that roleplayers can use it to have many different kinds of fun at the gaming table. This chapter details how Orp may be altered to suit a variety of needs.

This chapter is painfully incomplete, but because I kept referencing it, I felt I had to leave in all of my half-baked ideas.

9.1 Intended Structure of this Chapter

1. How to Change Orp
 - (a) Small changes – One or two rules, an extra weapon value
 - (b) Big changes – Removing and adding whole subsystems
 - (c) Sources of Inspiration
2. *When* to Change Orp
 - (a) How to alter the game during a campaign
3. Suggestions for Specific Changes
 - (a) Expanding and Contracting Skills and Traits
 - (b) Altering Skill and Trait Costs
 - (c) Success and Failure
 - (d) Special (but Not Supernatural) Character Abilities

- (e) New kinds of expendible resources, such as action points
- (f) Combat & Injury
- (g) Wealth, possessions, and encumbrance

4. Design Issues

- (a) Complexity = Realism?
- (b) Simplicity = Shallow Gameplay?

9.2 Automatic Success & Failure

One could replace the Ace & Fumble rules with the following rules:

Rule 56: 12 Always Succeeds (Optional).

Whenever a die roll results in a natural 12 but is still less than the target, the roll is successful with margin of success zero.

Rule 57: 1 Always Fails (Optional). Whenever a die roll results in a natural 1 but is still greater than the target, the roll is a failure with margin of success zero.

9.3 Extra Special Abilities

It ought to be possible to accomodate the advantages & disadvantages system of some games (feats

in D&D, edges and flaws in Coda, advantages & disadvantages in GURPS), though it's optional because that way lies quite a bit of complexity.

9.4 Reducing Heroism to Rules Mechanics

There should be an optional system of expendable action points here, similar to character points in many other systems (spend a point = extra die roll or something). Maybe unspent experience points can be used for that purpose.

9.5 How to Enjoy Violence Even More

Things to change about combat. A few ideas about tweaking damage:

- The maximum injury intensity for any attack is equal to the skill rating of the attacker (perhaps plus the effectiveness value of the weapon). That way there's no way you can use unarmed fighting to kill someone unless you're highly skilled.
- This is altered on a per-weapon basis, in that most lethal weapons (swords, guns, baseball bats, but not tasers or shinai) are not subject to this cap (unless you're adding the effectiveness, then it'd be just really dangerous weapons that are immune to the cap).
- Conversely, when a character aces on the attack they can inflict uncapped damage instead of the cool trick. That way, an unarmed guy can still get lucky and break someone's neck.

Ideas about movement & position:

A quick brainstorm. With close combat, freedom of movement is everything: The game will penalize characters backed against a wall (+2 to the other guy) or into a corner (+4).

As a GM's option, each melee event has a chance of moving one of the combatants a short distance (say, one hex if the players are using hexes). Likewise,

evading characters (dodging, not deflecting attacks with a weapon) may have to take a step to the side or backwards (the evasion actually happening) as part of the event. I'm not sure how to use rules to emulate these behaviors, except by much added complexity, which is why it's an optional thing (and a tentative thing too).