

Foreword

*I teased out this structure beginning with concepts from Chainmail and OD&D. I also considered materials from the systems based on different rules that were in circulation in the Twin Cities gaming circles (as recorded in *Dragons Beyond*, *Fantastical Medieval Campaigns*, and *Wight Box*), especially looking at those that didn't make the final draft found in the LBB. Then I examined concepts from later iterations of the rules to find out what added something of substance to the system as I wanted it. Most of what's included here will be at least somewhat familiar, though many details will be different.*

It was only after getting most of this finished that I found out a splat book for AD&D2 contains a five phase combat ordering system, from a discussion online. I found the book in question (I never bought any splat books when 2e launched, just the core books to augment my 1e games) and skimmed through it. That system differs in most of the elements I looked at, so I expect the feel of the two to be quite different.

There will be references in this text to character abilities that are not standard to OSE or OSRIC. That's because this subsystem is intended as part of a project to recast the flavor and approach of B/X and AD&D1 into a version that benefits from a few decades of change in RPG thought. I'm a thoroughly old school GM, so the styles of play the system is intended to support should prove familiar and welcoming to other old school grognards.

Elements of the Abstraction

The combat system detailed here involves using side ordering rolls coupled with action speed adjustments per character based on weapons and activities. Weapon Facility, Casting Facility, and Movement Facility all affect the order of resolution of actions by PCs, NPCs, and creatures in an action encounter.

This system also uses an ordering priority structure within phases. That internal priority won't have much effect on the majority of character actions, yet in instances of tied ordering rolls — when actions in the phase are generally simultaneous — the priority of an action will determine resolution timing. The priority order can make a difference in whether a spell gets cast or interrupted.

Action Rounds

Each round in this system is considered to be about twenty seconds in length. These rounds are shorter in duration than standard AD&D (OSRIC) combat rounds, while being longer than in B/X (OSE). The twenty second length works better for movement rates and the abstractions of action within a round.

Each participant is assumed to be involved in doing all the things that can be expected: dodge, parry, step, lunge, duck, feint, slash, stab, suck air, and so on. An attack is thus not a single attempt at striking an opponent. A loss of hit points is also not necessarily a measure of bodily damage, more a measure of loss of overall capacity to continue fighting. Movement is not necessarily an unbroken dash from one point to another. Action rounds are chaotic and sloppy, which makes trying to use exact measures of time and distance difficult, at best, and a largely useless exercise.

Phases

The action round is divided into five phases. This allows for tracking of various speed factors and multiple attack routines, breaking them out explicitly for purposes of verisimilitude. It also allows for

movement to be easier to track, which allows for movement to be handled in discrete units less than a full round's worth.

Characters may act before or after their regularly-indicated phase(s) due to circumstance or choice. Rushing action makes attempts more difficult, so the player must choose wisely or their PC will suffer from an ill-fated decision. Delaying an action can lead to taking advantage of an opportunity that wouldn't have been available on an earlier phase when the character could have acted. The five phase structure and the ability to shift actions around create conditions for players to have a greater effect on fighting sequences than with the standard rules.

Key elements to keep in mind include being able to combine movement and attacks in multiple ways; melee, missiles, and magic all use the same timing system; both sides in a fight act in turns for each phase; every choice about action demands careful consideration; finding advantages in every situation is more than prudent.

THE PROCEDURE FOR ACTION ROUNDS

- A. Declare Action Intentions
- B. Establish Order & Determine Action by Phase
 - Ordering Roll
 - Action Speeds
 - Modifying Action Speeds
- C. Play Out First Phase
 - Movement
 - Missiles & Magic
 - Melee
- D. Play Out Second Phase
 - Movement
 - Missiles & Magic
 - Melee
- E. Play Out Third Phase
 - Movement
 - Missiles & Magic
 - Melee
- F. Play Out Fourth Phase
 - Movement
 - Missiles & Magic
 - Melee
- G. Play Out Fifth Phase
 - Movement
 - Missiles & Magic
 - Melee
- H. Last Actions
- I. Morale & Record Keeping
 - Morale Checks
 - Damage & Wounding
 - Status Updates

Repeat as needed to finish the action.

A. Declare Intentions

All of the parties involved in the scene decide what their intentions are for the round. The GM will decide what all of the non-player actors want to do. The players will declare what they want their PCs, and any allies the players control, to do. If one side is surprised, it makes no declarations until after the surprise has run its course and the first full round of melee begins.

These intentions guide what the character is doing and the speed at which they happen and is based on executing them without much hesitation. Should a player decide to change a character's course of action after the action commences, there may be a delay in the phase of action for the character because of the delay involved in changing intentions.

Each action selected for a character takes a bit of time to execute. The amount of time is measured in phases, with five phases each round. The length of a phase is not a discrete unit of time, however, as much as it's a measure of activity that corresponds to time only roughly.

B. Establish Order

The Ordering Check

One D6 will be rolled for each side involved in the action. The highest roll among the D6s wins initiative for that side; a tie in rolls means all actions are simultaneous with like actions in each phase. If more than two sides are involved, the die rolls rank from highest to lowest, with order assigned accordingly.

The Ordering Check determines which side acts first in each phase during the round. Those characters making a Quick Action on Side A will act during that phase before characters from other sides act in that phase.

Action Facility & Phases

The phase in which any character or monster acts is determined by that character's Action Facility. The Action Facility for a character relies on what the character is doing during the round and how they are doing it. A weapon attack uses the Weapon Speed rating as Action Facility, along with any modifiers. A spell uses the Casting Time as Action Facility, along with any modifiers.

The Action Facilities are Very Quick, Quick, Moderate, Slow, and Very Slow. These correspond with each of the phases, first through fifth, in order.

A full move involves two half-moves and doesn't allow for any other actions.

Other **movement** during the round may shift other actions the character attempts to a later phase.

A character may act on an earlier phase by rushing their action. The action may be moved ahead one phase in this fashion, the PC suffers a penalty of -4 to check rolls. Spell casting may be rushed, with the penalties attached to that described later in this text.

A character may act on a later phase by delaying their action.

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Optional Rule: Relative Action Facilities may allow for an extra attack action. If a character is acting with an Action Facility three steps quicker (e.g., Quick vs Very Slow), that character may make another attack in that same slower phase (e.g., Very Slow) with a penalty of -2. (-4?)

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Multiple attack sequences: having multiple attacks indicates the combatant is quick enough, through natural ability or trained experience, to act more quickly. For beasts and monsters, their listed Attack Facilities are used unaltered. For experienced fighters, the rounds in which additional attacks are

available involve shifting their first attack ahead one phase and adding the next attack in a phase one later than usual; if the attack would be moved after Phase Five, the character will attack as a Last Action.

Example: Erik the Bold now has 3 attacks every 2 rounds. He has a Moderate Facility weapon. In the rounds where he's due a single attack, he operates with an Action Facility of Moderate. In the rounds he's due two attacks, he attacks using a Quick Speed with his first attack, and then a Slow Speed with his second.

[Hmm. Weapon Specialization quickens Weapon Spd by 1 at all times?]

[Monster routines — e.g., claw/claw/bite — all at once or spread out? Spread out or just in consecutive phases? So, Speed of Quick would claw in phase two and four, then bite last in phase five? Or act in phases two, three, and four consecutively?]

[Thinking claw/claw should be consecutive phases if on same target, spaced with a phase between them if at different targets.]

[Perhaps each part of sequence has separate Action Facility?]

[Continuation: success on attack by 5+ pips on roll results in an added attack w/penalty on next phase?]

Any action delayed to happen after Phase Five happens immediately after the regular Phase Five actions have been resolved. All of the last actions are assumed to happen simultaneously.

Play Out Phases

The side that won the Ordering roll acts first (has actions adjudicated) in each phase before the other side, with few exceptions.

This means that characters on Side A will move and arrive at their destination just prior to Side B characters moving; A will get to the MacGuffin first, if such a race is underway.

Missiles launched and spells loosed will have full effect simultaneously after all such attacks have been completed. All other missile/magic activity (e.g., loading) is also simultaneous with launching and loosing.

In a melee clash, Side A will strike before Side B and effects from that strike can affect Side B's response; a mortal stroke won't result in B's death until the end of the melee in the phase, though a stun result would take effect and allow another character on Side A to have a greater chance to strike B.

If Ordering is tied, all actions within the phase are assumed simultaneous, so moving has no priority over missiles or melee. The GM can simply move around the table to adjudicate actions and alternate between sides as desired.

Within Each Phase

Movement

Missiles & Magic

Melee

Last Actions

Last Attacks

Post-Charge Very Slow Melee Attacks happen
Half-Move & Attack: Very Slow Melee Attacks happen
Last attack in multi-attack sequences, if not already taken

Morale

Rally: Attempt to rally any close allies
Morale Checks: All remaining morale checks
Record Activity: All damage and status changes recorded

A LIST OF ACTIONS

There are a great many choices which can be made for any random round of fighting, not all of which necessarily have to involve attempting to hurt a foe. The list of possible actions that follows includes the most common choices, though players may offer up unusual choices for the GM to adjudicate.

Delays & Distractions

These actions happen at the beginning of the movement phase.

Guard: A character may try to delay getting involved in a fight, putting the continuation of activity on hold, so to speak. The player may choose to delay one phase at a time. An opponent may step up and engage the character in melee; the guarding character has a +2 defensive bonus should this happen.

Parley: The character may try to shout over the burgeoning activity to get everybody's attention and start, or continue, parleying between the parties. If hostilities have already led to violence, getting attention can be quite tricky. [What sort of check for this?]

Spectacle: The character may create a spectacle that interrupts the action by distracting most, or all, of the beings involved. A spectacle requires something that all involved can readily apprehend. It may be something they each believe to be a threat of some sort. It may be something that is disorienting, such

as an illusion of an otherworldly being tearing a hole in the veil and stepping through. In any case, a successful attempt [what sort of check?] will result in hostilities stopping for a phase, which allows the PC a pause in which to act.

Bait: The character may toss food or other items out before the foes to draw their attention away from the PCs or allies. Such baiting may provide a phase for taking flight, imbibing a potion, readying a weapon, or other quick activity. [What sort of check?]

Movement

Any character that plans on moving during the round has to declare the intent to move, to include the direction of movement. A move may be part of an attack (see Charge), result in closing to engagement, or simply end with the character in a different position on the site.

Charge or Counter-Charge: Any intended charge attack.

- * A Charge requires at least 20' between the character charging and the target of the charge. The target of the intended charge must be within charging distance, which is one-half running distance.

- * A Counter-Charge can be announced against an announced Charge. Note that charging distance can extend to a distance of both a Charge and Counter-Charge together; We can assume that one combatant begins running toward the other and the other responds to counter.

- * A Charge or Charge & Counter-Charge ends with a Clash. Both of the combatants will attack in that clash, with the weapon with the longest reach attacking first.

- * Charge Attacks and Counter-Charges each attack with a -2 penalty to hit and a bonus of +2 to damage.

Set to Receive Charge: A combatant may set a spear or other long weapon to receive a charge from a foe. The bonus for setting vs a charge is +2 to attack, and the weapon set may attack first if its reach is longer than the weapon being used in the charge.

Morale Check Due to Charge: If Charged by a dragon or other giant creature, all non-Heroic creatures (those with fewer than 4HD) must make a morale check immediately. The effects are applied immediately.

Overbear: The character may attempt to overbear an opponent within 10 feet. The attempt to overbear involves running into the opponent with the intent to knock the foe off balance and off their feet.

Shift: The character may shift position, if not actively engaged. A shift is a repositioning within 10 feet of the beginning position and may be used to intercept a moving opponent. The character may attack normally after having shifted during First Phase. Spell casters may shift during First Phase, as they begin their channeling.

Split-Move Attack: A split-move attack sequence involves a short move and an attack followed by movement after the attack. A character can move up to 1/3 of their movement rate prior to attacking.

- * A split-move attack requires two phases for the initial move; one phase for the attack; then two phases for the second move.

- * A split-move attack sequence garners a penalty of -4 to the attack, in addition to any other modifiers involved.

Half-Move: The character moves half of their move allotment. The character may attack with a penalty of -3 in conjunction with a half-move.

Take Cover: The character may immediately move behind any adjacent cover. The character may move up to 1/3 of their movement to reach and take cover. The defensive bonus for cover accrues in the phase in which the character enters cover.

Withdrawal: If the opponent possesses initiative, a character may try to back away from the melee while foregoing an attack, attempting to take advantage of a lull in the opponent's aggression. The opponent may move with the character and may be able to re-engage in melee. If the opponent fails to strike the character, then some space between the two has opened up and the character may flee in the following round.

Retreat: If the character is engaged with an enemy and possesses initiative, the character may press the foe, which, if successful, allows the character to forego damage and instead drive the foe back and provide the character with some space to back away without suffering an attack in return. Once clear, the character can scurry away from the fight beginning the next round.

Flight: After a successful withdrawal or retreat, a character has enough space from the opponent to no longer be engaged and can flee at triple move rate. The opponent may give chase.

Break & Run: A character failing a morale check (or by choice) will simply try to flee without regard to the enemy. Such a character will suffer an immediate attack from the rear by an engaged foe. Any close foe that is free to shift to the line of flight may attack the fleeing character, too, without bonus. Missile attacks may also be launched or hurled at the fleeing character.

Missiles, Hurlled or Launched

Pass-Through Fire: Missiles may be launched or hurled at foes moving around the melee scene provided the attacker has a clear line of sight to the target and a missile ready to launch. Attack at -2.

Split-Move Fire: The character may move, launch a missile, and then move again before the end of the round. The attack suffers a penalty of -4.

Artillery Fire: Any siege engines or similar contraptions may launch projectiles. Giant-thrown stones are considered artillery fire.

Magic

By Item: Use of a wand, staff, or other item. Each item has an Activation Speed listed in its description; these Activation Speeds range from 1 to 5.

By Caster: A magic using character working a spell.

By Scroll: Casting from a scroll. The casting time of a scroll is equivalent to the casting time of the spell +3 segments.

All missile effects and magical effects are applied at end of the Missiles & Magic section of a phase. Note: a caster on the side that won the initiative roll will lose their spell prior to receiving missile fire and thus can use full defensive capabilities, as the casting is finished prior to the taking the missile fire.

For purposes of spell duration, the first round after a spell is cast counts as the first round, even if the spell activates in an early segment.

Melee

Charge Attack Resolution: Attacks at the conclusion of a charge happen now. Initiative is ignored; the longest reach weapon attacks first; if reach is equal, attacks are simultaneous. A charging combatant receives a bonus of +2 on the attack. A combatant set to receive inflicts an extra half die of damage on a successful attack.

Clash: When two foes come together and begin fighting. Longest weapon strikes first; each combatant makes a Snap attack. Regular ordering then applies for rest of the round.

Weapon Attack: A chance to have significant effect using a weapon against a foe.

Body Fighting Attack: An attack using hand fighting (martial arts) or brawling abilities.

Subdual Stroke: An attack to finish off a foe that inflicts non-lethal damage — only KOs.

Multiple Attack Routine: A series of attacks throughout a round due to skill or by beasts with multiple natural weapons. Most of these will happen in different segments, according to attack speed.

Unarmed/Body Attack: A chance to inflict harm without using weapons other than hands or feet via throws and locks and chokes and strikes.

Feat: A specialized attack type used by skilled combatants (fighters). Includes cleave, sweep, etc.

Stunt: Executing a maneuver intended to set up a later attack. This can include body fighting attacks such as sweeps and throws.

Exploit: An attack following a set up by a stunt that includes a special effect beyond simple damage.

All melee damage and special effects are applied immediately. The other side's damage and special effects are applied after their turn in the segment. It is possible, with tied Initiative, for a pair of combatants to kill each other.

Other Actions

Imbibe: Try to open and drink a potion from a vial or bottle. The time this takes is 3 - 5 phases. The potion will take effect 2-5 phases after it's consumed.

* Bottle availability: in backpack, +5 phases; stowed in belt pouch or pocket, +1 phase

Finish Activity: Try to finish an action that isn't directly related to combat; e.g., picking a lock with melee happening close behind the character. 2 - 12 phases.

Retrieve/Stow: Pulling an item out of a backpack (or packing it away), requires 2 - 5 phases, at the least. This requires that the backpack already be off the character and available for ready handling. Taking a backpack off requires another 2 phases. Shrugging off a backpack and digging around in it during a fight is a questionable life choice, at best.

Draw & Ready: It takes but a phase to draw and ready a weapon in a scabbard or hanging on a belt.

Open or Close Door: 2 phases. The typical door in a dungeon or ruin is heavy and the hinges stiff.

Brace Door: 2 phases.

Bend Bars or Lift Gate: 5 phases.

Hammer a spike: if already in hand, 1 phase; if stowed at hand, 2 phases

Snatch Item: 1 phase.

Bind wounds: 2 - 5 phases

Hide: 1 phase.

Light a torch, lamp, or taper: 2-7 phases

EXAMPLE COMBATS