Portal D20, The System

A straightforward descriptive D20 fantasy system

The basic rule is roll a 1d20, add modifiers, and see if you get a total over a target number.

Modifiers can come from

- Ability modifiers
- Backgrounds
- Skill Rank (for Skill Tests)
- Attack bonus (for Combat)

For example

Organo the Sly, a 5th Level Expert, doing a flying tumble over a large number of Mage-Guards of the Arcane Guild, rolls 1d20 with +5 for her Skill Rank, +8 for her background of being a member of a travelling circus and +3 for her Dexterity Modifier. For a whopping + 16 in total.

If Hargvard the Brute, a 5th level Warrior, is trying to do the same thing he doesn't have any backgrounds that help acrobatics, so he would only get a + 1 from his Dexterity modifier. As a result, his player is far more likely to barge through the group of warriors, which allows Hargvard to bring in bonuses from both his background as a street thug and skills as a warrior into play for a much higher modifier.

The target number is assigned by the Referee and starts at 10, +5 for each complication involved in the test. Rolls can be opposed so that the target number can be a d20 roll generated by the opposition. So, in the above example, the Referee could roll a skill test for the Guards collectively and use the result as the target number. The Referee figures this to be ten plus another five for the densely packed mob of Mage-Guards.

Finally, if you can bring into play one of your character's drives written on the character sheet as short descriptions of what motivates the character, you get to roll twice, picking the more favourable roll. However, if you fail, despite rolling twice, you land your character at great risk.

In the above example, Organo's player invokes her drive of "To live life to the full" and the Referee warns them that if Organo fails she will end up tumbling gracefully right into the middle of the crowd of Mage-Guards, ready to pound her with their poleaxes.

Characters also have special class-based abilities. Such as fighting styles for warriors, spell casting and magic for magicians, and various tricks of the trade for Experts. Some of these are expected D20 abilities, and some are from the setting.

Spell casting uses a familiar spell list, but casters have Magic Points, so it's not the usual fire-and-forget system. All the spells from regular D20 that break a magic point system, such as Sleep and Charm Person, have been removed or rewritten to fit in.

Here's an example character (one of four in the book). Dinos Lantiri, a Noble Dandy and Level 3 Expert.

Dionos Lantiri

Dionos is a noble of the Five Families, one of the esteemed citizens of Ys with just two names. As such he had access to education and opportunities, which he wasted in order to become something of a rake about town, indulging in duels, fashion, and minor but daring crimes. Dionos's family has disowned him.

Now it's time for Dionos to be independent, to finally grow up, to find what he really wants to do. He knows enough about the workings of Ys and the empire to know that the system cannot be allowed to continue as it is.

Level: 3
Class: Expert
Experience Points: 20

Backgrounds
- Black Sheep of the Lantiri family (+4)
- Dandy (+4)
- I squandered the best education money can buy (+4)
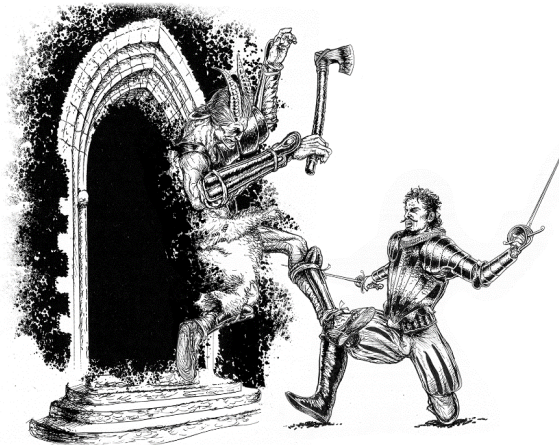- Amateur burglar (+4)

Drives
- The Ysian Empire must be protected from itself.
- I need to find a cause and purpose.

Ability Scores (with modifiers)
- Prowess 13 (+1)
- Dexterity 14 (+2)
- Vigour 12 (+1)
- Knowledge 12 (+1)
- Spirit 12 (+1)
- Charisma 16 (+3)
- Perception 8 (-1)

Other Scores
- Skill Rank: 3
- Initiative: +2
- Defence: 17
- Attack Rank: +1
- Hit Points: 17

Languages
- Ysian
- The High Tongue

Weapons
- Shortsword: Attack Bonus +5, Damage d6+2
- Dagger (thrown): Attack Bonus +3, Damage d6+1

Special Abilities
- *Swashbuckler:* When in light or no armour, and fighting with a one-handed weapon and no shield, gain a +2 bonus to defence, and the Dexterity modifier as a further attack bonus with melee weapons (already noted above).
- *Burglar:* The character can climb any surface, even without tools, find secret doors and compartments, and break into any lock. No skill tests are needed.

Equipment
- 5gp
- Fashionable Dandy's outfit
- Five Families Noble formal outfit
- Shortsword(+1 attack bonus, Base Damage d6+1)
- Toughened Silk Armour (+3 defence)
- Bottle of Fine Wine from Breiz
- Two throwing daggers (Base Damage d6)
- Snappy Hat
- Family Signet Ring