

Manna Channeling

A Point-Based Spell System for Castles and Crusades

By Jason Vey

Introduction

This spell system presents a different feel and style of magic for an ongoing fantasy campaign. It starts off magic users with a great deal more power than they get in standard games, and balances off as the characters grow in level. The end intent is that magic users at lower levels are more survivable, while at higher levels they remain at similar levels of power.

These rules assume the use of the High-Level characters rules elsewhere on this website. Those not using those rules can simply ignore references to Bard and Ranger spell casters. They also assume the use of fatigue and exhaustion, as explained in the Traits pdf elsewhere on this website. CK's are encouraged to at least adopt these rules, for spell casters whose MEP drops below zero, if for no one else.

Manna and Divine Energy

Manna is the mystic energy that all spell casters draw upon to create magical effects. It is a natural force that permeates the world, created by living things, and by the world itself. Manna circles the world in *dragon lines*, or lines of magical power. At places where dragon lines intersect, there are *nexus points* possessed of vast mystical energy. Effects of dragon line nexus points will be discussed later.

Divine Energy is that which Clerics, Paladins, and other such characters use for casting spells. It is energy granted by the gods themselves, but is still Manna. Since their power comes from a different source, however, divine casters are not affected by dragon lines or nexus points, and do not have the innate ability to channel Manna as do arcane casters. Instead, divine casters gain the ability to heal, affect undead, and perform spell effects that most arcane casters do not have access to.

Manna Energy Points

All magic using characters, divine or arcane, have a pool of Manna Energy Points (MEP) from which they draw the energy to cast spells. Every time a magical character casts a spell, subtract the appropriate number of points from the character's MEP pool; casters can continue to cast spells until their MEP reaches zero, at which point they are fatigued and cannot under normal circumstances perform any further magical feats. In addition, any character with an MEP of zero or below (see *emergency spells*, later) is considered fatigued, and suffers a -2 to Strength and Dexterity as per the standard rules, until his MEP again reaches 1 or better. All spells are still subject to the listed casting times and components.

Regaining MEP

MEP is regained through meditation or (preferably) sleep. Each hour of meditation restores MEP at the rate of the caster's level plus his primary attribute bonus. Wizards, for example, regain MEP at the rate of level + Int bonus per hour of sleep; clerics regain MEP at level + Wis bonus per hour. Meditation restores half this amount, and each hour of meditation requires a successful Concentration (DC 15) check. If there are no outside distractions, it is possible to take 20 on this check. Mild distractions, such as setting up camp, quiet conversation, etc., allow taking 10 but not 20. Attempting to meditate in an area of high distraction such as a crowded tavern room requires a roll for every half hour, and taking 10 or 20 is not possible.

Creatures that do not sleep, such as Elves, regain MEP through meditation as others do through sleep, as Elves require a meditation cycle in place of normal sleep.

This process is the same for arcane or divine casters, as during these quiet periods, the body gradually opens itself back up to the return of magical energies.

Starting MEP

Each spell casting class starts play with MEP as follows:

Wizards, Illusionists: Int bonus + Con bonus + d4
Clerics, Druids: Wis bonus + Con bonus + d4
Bards: Cha bonus
Rangers: Wis bonus
Others: As appropriate to campaign.
Suggest Prime attribute + Con bonus for primary casters, Prime attribute for secondary casters.

Increasing MEP

Characters cannot gain additional MEP until they achieve second level of spell casting ability. All other spell casting classes gain additional MEP starting at second level. Multiclass characters gain MEP as per the class they are currently advancing.

At each additional class level, a character in a spell casting class gains additional MEP by the roll of a die, just like characters gain hit dice as they increase in level. MEP dice are as follows:

Wizards, Illusionists, Clerics, Druids: d12
Bards, Rangers: d6
Generic Class: d8 or d10, as appropriate to the campaign.

Casting Spells

Spells are organized into levels based upon their basic power. All spells of a given level are considered and assumed to be of equal power to all other spells of that same level. Thus, each spell of a given level costs the same number of MEP to cast. Spells cost a number of MEP equal to the spell's level + 1. 0-level spells cost 1 MEP, 1st level spells cost 2, etc.

There is no limit to how many times a magic using character can cast a given spell on his or her list, so long as she has enough Manna Energy Points

left in her pool to cast the spell. However, Wizard characters must still prepare spells each day by studying their spell book, according to the standard table for their character class. This leads to greater flexibility among Wizard characters, who no longer need to prepare Magic Missile, for example, multiple times if they feel they might need more than one instance of the spell. Rather, the first level Wizard character can now prepare four completely different zero level spells, and two first level spells, and may cast among those spells with impunity.

Likewise, Clerics and Druids must pray daily for their spells, preparing spells as per the "Spells per day" entry on their class table.

MEP and Spell-Like Abilities

Spell-like abilities, spells granted as "per day" class features, and similar magical effects are not governed by MEP and function exactly as outlined for a given class or item. Paladins, for example, can still use *detect evil* at will, and do not need to spend MEP to do so. Paladins of sixth level can still use *remove disease* once per week, and the Paladin's MEP pool is not affected by this ability in any way.

Bonus Spells

Under the Channeling rules, any time a character would receive bonus spells for high attributes, he receives extra spells on his daily list, as well as bonus MEP equal to that needed to cast each extra spell one time. This bonus MEP is gained at the level in which the character gains the bonus spell.

For Example: A Wizard with an Intelligence of 18 receives a bonus spell to his daily list, plus 2 MEP at first level. He then receives a second level spell plus 3 MEP at third level, and an extra third level spell plus 4 MEP at fifth level. By fifth level, he has received a total of 9 bonus MEP, as well as three extra spells per day (one first, one second, and one third level).

Bonus MEP is added to the character's base just as though he had gained MEP through a normal

level advancement. This bonus MEP may be used to cast any spell in the character's repertoire; it is not restricted to the casting of bonus spells.

Emergency Spells

Sometimes things get desperate. You're up against the wall, and the dragon is closing in. Your fighters are down, your cleric is running dangerously low on healing. You've got a Teleport spell, but damn it all, you're out of MEP and fatigued. Maybe, just maybe, if you put enough willpower and faith into the casting, you can still...

Emergency spells are for just these kinds of instances. When a spell caster is at zero MEP, sometimes it's possible to channel his very life energy into the casting of one last spell, to (hopefully) save the day. Casting an emergency spell is only possible in the most dire of circumstances, and results in severe and permanent consequences to the caster. To cast an emergency spell, the caster must first make a Wisdom check with a CC equal to the level of the spell being attempted. If this check is successful, he may use his own life energy to cast the spell. The caster takes temporary Constitution damage equal to half the MEP cost of the spell being cast; this energy replaces MEP in the cost of casting the spell (each point of Constitution spent is equal to 2 MEP), and the spell goes off as normal. This ability damage returns as normal at the rate of 1 point per day.

However, the end result of this casting is that the caster suffers 1d4 points of *permanent* ability loss divided as the player chooses between Constitution and the primary spellcasting attribute of his class. Also, the moment the spell goes off, the character is reduced to -1 hit points and is unconscious (but automatically stabilizes). If the spell requires the caster to remain conscious for the duration, unconsciousness sets in immediately after the spell has completed its intended function. The experience is quite harrowing for the caster, and is not something to be undertaken lightly. Still, there are times when it can save the day.

Spell Interference

In this system it is also possible for a spellcaster to interfere with another spellcaster of a similar type (arcane or divine) by channeling personal MEP. The process for this is simple: the caster attempting to interfere first makes a Spellcraft check (DC 15+ the level of spell being cast). If successful, he may devote a number of MEP up to his primary attribute bonus + class level in any one spell casting class to interfering with the spell, making it more taxing on the caster.

What this means in game terms is that the caster must make a Primary Spellcasting Attribute check (CC = ½ the MEP spent to interfere, rounded down) to successfully cast the spell. If he is unable or unwilling to make the check, his spell simply fails.

For example: Martin, a wizard, finds himself and his comrades in battle with a horde of orcs led by an evil human necromancer. The necromancer begins to cast a spell, and Martin makes a spellcraft check. The GM secretly sets the CL at 17 (the necromancer is casting a 5th-level spell), and Martin rolls a 22. The GM says, "the evil wizard is casting a 5th-level spell."

Martin, being an eighth-level wizard with a Charisma score of 18, can devote up to 11 MEP to interfere with this spell. Since MEP interference is rounded down, spending 11 is pointless; Martin decides to spend 10. The necromancer is caught off guard by Martin's expenditure of power; his Intelligence check is only a 16, and he needed a 17. His spell fails, but Martin is now down 10 MEP for his trouble. Combat continues...

Dragon Lines

Magic energy is created by everything in the world, from the smallest blade of grass to a rock to a human being. It is a cosmic force generated by all matter. Dragon Lines are lines of mystic energy that crisscross the world. It is from these lines of magical energy that arcane casters draw their power. Dragon lines are invisible to the naked eye, and can only be detected by arcane spell casters who pass an Intelligence check with

a CL of 15. While standing directly on a Dragon Line, an arcane spell caster sees the MEP cost of all spells reduced by one. Some of the more powerful Dragon Lines may even reduce the cost of spell casting by two, though these are rare indeed. Regardless, however, the cost of casting a spell can never be reduced below one point by a Dragon Line. It should be noted that Dragon Lines only exist in areas where the mystical energy of the world is particularly strong, and they are not incredibly common. They are like eddies and currents, streams or rivers of magical energy. Direct encounters with Dragon Lines are always at the discretion of the GM.

Where Dragon Lines intersect, places of magical power, much revered to sorcerous types, exist. These places are commonly known as Sites of Power, or Nexus Points. Places such as this are rare indeed, with perhaps five on the continent, and an estimated twenty to thirty existing throughout the entire world. Nexus Points are sanctuaries for arcane and natural magic users of all types, and provide a number of tangible benefits. First, when at a nexus, spell casters may cast zero level spells without expending any magic energy whatsoever. Spells of first level and up see their costs reduced by a full five MEP, to a minimum of one, always see all variable, numeric effects increased by $\frac{1}{2}$, and are cast as though the caster were two levels higher. These effects are at no additional MEP cost, and since the effects are constant, magi must be extremely careful about casting spells on nexus points. With such power at their disposal, magic users have gone to open war over control of a nexus point, until finally at a Grand Conclave of magic users, it was decreed that no arcane or natural user of magic would be allowed to create a domicile or exercise sole control over one of these sites. Rather, it fell to the druids to maintain groves near (but not on) Sites of Power and protect them from interlopers.

Sites of Power are considered neutral ground, where spellcasters can meet without fear of violence, and often times are the subject of permanent Sanctuary spells, to ensure that no violence occurs within. All arcane or natural magicians resting at a Site of Power regain MEP at double their normal rate, and it is only at a Site of Power that permanent ability loss from the casting of emergency spells can be healed (at a rate of one point per day, as though it were ability damage).

Option: Skill-Based Casting

It is also possible to combine the standard Channeling rules with a "Spellcraft" check, to represent the caster's skill at crafting his magic. If using this option, in addition to spending the MEP for a spell, the caster must also make a Primary Casting Attribute check (Int for Wizards and Illusionists, Wis for Druids and Clerics) with a CC equal to the level of the spell being cast. If the check is successful, the MEP is spent and the spell goes off. The result of the Spellcraft check, in this case, is also the CL of any saving throws allowed by the spell.

For Example: A fifth-level Wizard casts Fireball, a third-level spell. This requires the expenditure of four MEP, and a Spellcraft check at a CL of 15 (12 for Prime Attribute +3 for the spell level CC). The wizard rolls and gets a 20 on his Spellcraft check. The spell goes off, and Dexterity saves for half damage are rolling against a CL of 20.

If the check fails, on the other hand, the spell fails. The MEP is still lost, and the caster suffers *spell burn* for his troubles. Spell burn is equal to 1d4 points of subdual damage per level of the spell that was attempted and failed.

Spell burn can also be applied to casters who fail spellcasting based on interference from another caster (see *Spell Interference*, page 3).

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