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Best of The Rifter® & The Rifter® Index



A Palladium Books® 25 Year Anniversary Special

Dedicated to everyone who has had the courage to share their ideas and submit gaming material, stories or artwork to *The Rifter*®, whether it was published or not.

To Palladium stalwarts: *Wayne Smith, Alex Marciniszyn, and Julius Rosenstein*, who have worked on every single issue of *The Rifter*® for these past nine years – may many more years follow.

To those inspired by our feeble efforts to write, draw and unleash your imaginations in any venture.

And to all of you, the quiet multitude of gamers for whom we publish *The Rifter*® and dedicate all our creative efforts. Keep those imaginations burning bright.

– Kevin Siembieda, 2006

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Best of The Rifter®

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A Palladium Books® 25 Year Anniversary Special

Special thanks to all our contributors, writers and artists from past to present for expanding the Palladium Megaverse® and inspiring fellow gamers. Our apologies to anybody who got accidentally left out or their name misspelled.

– Kevin Siembieda, 2006

A Note to the Readers

The Rifter® is one of those rare “noble experiments” that is a success. A quality, professional-looking quarterly sourcebook series that is really a “fanzine.” A fan magazine put together, paid for, published and distributed by a professional company for its fans. Palladium’s way of giving a little back to its most dedicated fans, spreading fun ideas, and encouraging imagination.

As a fanzine, **The Rifter®** is predominantly written by ordinary gamers, not professional RPG designers or writers. Oh sure, there’s the occasional guest article by me or Wujcik or some other Palladium writer/designer, but overall, the material is by ordinary gamers, and fans of Palladium’s role-playing games.

Not only do the fan contributors get to see their work in print, and have it read (and collected) by thousands of other gamers, but they get paid a nominal fee and get free copies of the issue they appear in. Nice.

The Rifter® is also a talent search where those fans with the talent and a dream of becoming a professional writer or artist may get their start. Like a comedian at a Comedy Club who catches the right eye, that ordinary fan may get a shot at writing or contributing to a Palladium sourcebook or RPG. I think the number of freelance writers and artists who started with work printed in **The Rifter®** is now around one dozen, and climbing.

It also gives Palladium a vehicle with which to spread news and information to our most dedicated, core audience, the readers of **The Rifter®**.

Launched in 1998, **The Rifter®**, turns eight years old. To his credit, *Wayne Smith* has been the sole guiding hand who picks the source material, cleans it up, and puts it all together every issue. Wayne’s done a great job, especially since I think **The Rifter®** is better than it has ever been.

2006 being *Palladium’s 25 Year Anniversary*, I thought it would be nice to collect *some* of the most popular and fun articles of past Rifters and collect them in a special edition. It made sense, since **The Rifter®** spans the entire *Megaverse®* of Palladium RPGs, but there are so many good ones it was tough making the final selections. To those of you who made the cut, don’t let it go to your head, there was a lot of other material that almost took your place. For the multitude of you who didn’t make it this time, smile, because you were probably considered, and you have been part of something special. Truth be told, to offer a fair representation of the “best” this book should be 224 pages or bigger! But that seemed rather excessive.

The Rifter® Index. This wonderful series has needed some kind of index and listing for years. A reference to find your favorite articles, source material, G.M. tips and adventures. I decided to tackle that job, personally, and hope it meets with your approval. I also thought it was important to give a nod to every contributor these past nine years, and to let readers locate material written by their favorite authors, hence the inclusion of an *Authors’ Index*.

I hope you enjoy all our efforts and continue to read (and contribute to) **The Rifter®** for years to come.

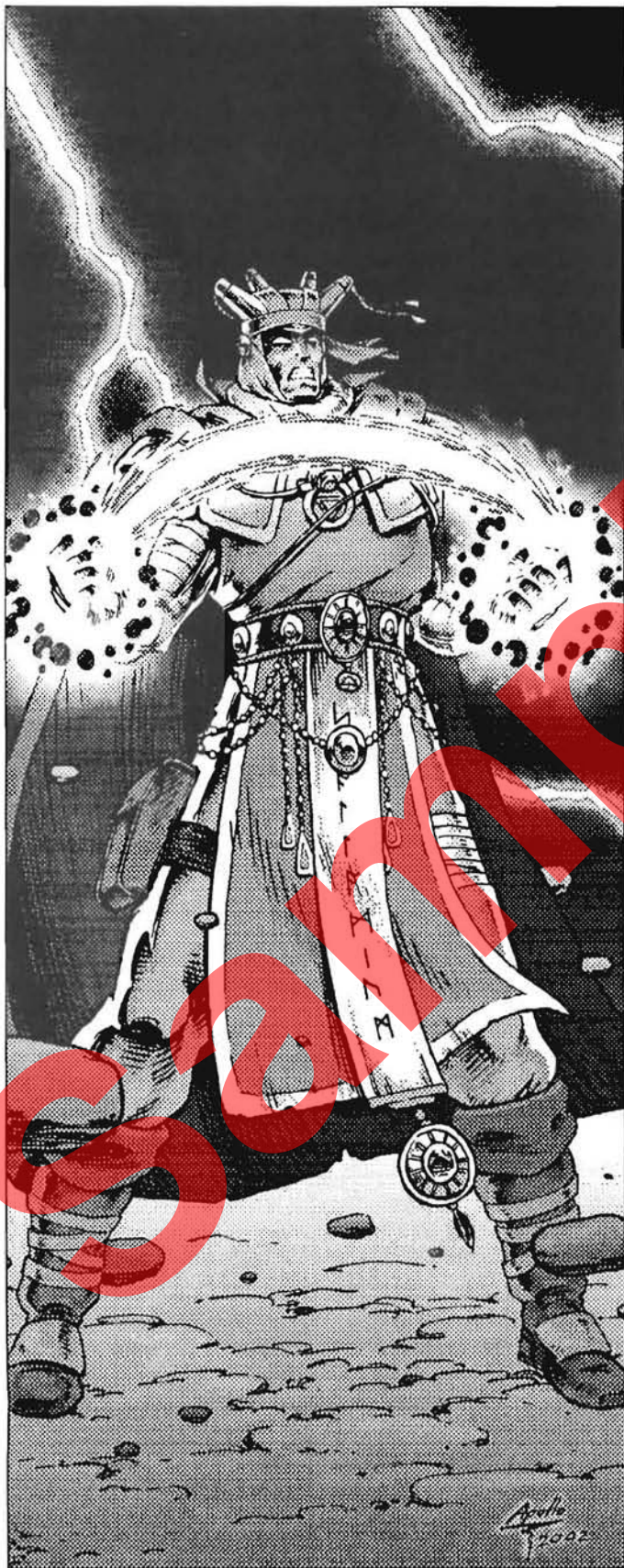
— Kevin Siembieda, 2006

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P.P.E. Channeling



An Optional New Spell Casting System for All Palladium Games

By Jason Richards

First Appeared in *The Rifter*® #21

Not too long ago, I was serving humbly as Game Master for three of my best friends. We were sitting around my coffee table strewn with books, scrap paper, and various fried snack foods when I began to marvel as the one level five character and his two fourth-level companions suffered terribly at the hands of fate, as the players rolled one, after one, after one on the crystal blue 20-sided die. Not only were their strike, parry and dodge rolls suffering, but damage rolls were falling far below average, and not one of them had passed a Prowl roll in more than an hour of gaming.

It was at this time that I became concerned for the fate of the fictional world in which they adventured.

After all, they were nearing the inner sanctum of *Glade the Worldcleaver*, a tenth-level magic user of incredible power. Their armor was running low as they managed to make a few Prowl rolls and stay hidden from the guards long enough to make it into the lair of their nemesis. They were about to come face to face with the end of a six month campaign and the probable doom of their badly injured player characters. Still, they had a world to save...

As wonders never cease, they got the drop on the mage, who was deep into some dark ritual to bring about a new age of chaos. The sniper was out of ammunition, the hand to hand nut had basically zero armor, and the psychic had barely enough I.S.P. left to repress the pain of his many wounds. They knew that it would take less than a minute for the mage to summon the score of minions waiting outside in the main chamber for their master to finish his ritual. Out of options, three mid-level characters charged the biggest menace I had ever thrown at them. They were completely outmatched.

And they won.

They didn't just win. They trounced the villain. Destroyed him. He never even got off a decent shot. If he had been able to raise his Armor of Ithan he would have at least beaten them back, but he didn't have seven seconds to spare.

It took one attack for the heroes to cover the distance to their enemy. He instantly responded with a defense, to empower his Armor of Ithan. He began to chant his mantra and focus his energy. He chanted as he dodged the punch of the penalty-laden psychic and parried a poor punch by the sniper. (Note: I am aware that dodging or parrying should have negated the spell and forced the mage to start his mantra over, but I had to do *something*!) The man at arms landed a punch and knocked back the mage, who lost his focus and had his spell fizzle. Bellowing for his guards, Glade the Worldcleaver decided the best defense is a good offense, and began to summon a Fireball with which to take the fighter out of commission. Wham! Another punch connected, fizzling the spell.

When the heroes pulled their knives I knew it was over. Within the next attack the mage was unconscious, and he was dead by the time his guards came charging through the door a few seconds later.

Like I said, it took about seven seconds. Of three attacks from each of the three heroes, a total of five hit. How much damage they did was irrelevant. The simple fact was that they never should have had a chance doing things the way they did. My players had no satisfaction from the victory. Nobody had any fun, and my players looked to me to fix it.

The Problem

Right then and there I set my mind to developing a house rule that would balance things out. I talked to my players and asked why none of them had chosen a magic O.C.C. I came to realize that while magic users across the boards in Palladium's system have vast spell knowledge and power at their command, they are terribly unbalanced in combat and any other situation where time is a factor.

Not only that, but a level ten mage has no advantage when it comes to casting spells over when he was level one. Spell effects may be increased, and success rates go up (via Spell Strength), but it still takes the mage half of a melee round to cast Globe of Daylight.

While I do not believe that spell casters have huge advantages over mundane characters in many respects, I have found a variation on Palladium's official rules that allows for magic-using characters to hold their own in a great many more situations, while keeping the same spirit of the rules laid down by the writers of our favorite games. It even adjusts for some ways that these hard-luck mages might have it a little too easy.

Actions vs Attacks

You might note that in the following description I use the word "action" instead of "attack" when describing the casting of spells. This is to differentiate between a physical attack gained from Hand to Hand or Boxing, being ambidextrous, having a tail, or other such bonuses. In the **Rifts® Game Master Guide™**, Palladium outlines how those without Hand to Hand training can perform non-combat actions at (roughly) the same speed as combat savvy characters can shoot a gun or swing a sword. If a mage does not have a Hand to Hand skill, spells are cast using the non-combat actions instead of combat attacks. This gives them a comparable (but usually lower) number of actions in a melee round. For more information on actions for those without a Hand to Hand skill, see the G.M. Guide, pages 44-45.

If the mage has taken a Hand to Hand skill, all the better. Use attacks instead of actions and don't worry about it (I would still exclude extra attacks from extra limbs, tails, Extraordinary P.P., etc.).

The other question that arises is "How does combat training help one to cast spells faster?" In other words: "Why does someone with Hand to Hand: Assassin get to cast more spells in a melee than someone with Hand to Hand: Basic?" This is strictly a game balance issue. If you need more than that, assume that a mage with HtH Assassin (a rarity, to be sure) has practiced using spells in combat and incorporated it into his combat styling. This is the best explanation that can be given without requiring a major change in the Palladium combat sequence, and it certainly isn't unreasonable.

P.P.E. Channeling

This is the basic rule, and following sections outline special cases, examples, and clarifications. This section is all that you really need to use this optional spell casting system.

Instead of the purely time-based system found in **Rifts®**, **Palladium Fantasy RPG®**, **Beyond the Supernatural™**, and all other Palladium games, I developed (with much help from my players and the Palladium Bulletin Boards) a system called "P.P.E. Channeling." This determines the rate at which a magic-using character can "channel" P.P.E. into casting a spell. Most mages can channel 5 P.P.E. per level of experience, per melee action.

Thus, it takes a first level character only one action to cast the spell Levitation (5 P.P.E.), one action to cast Blinding Flash (1 P.P.E.), two actions to cast Shadow Meld (10 P.P.E.), or three actions to cast Energy Disruption (12 P.P.E.).

A third level character can channel up to 15 P.P.E. per action. So, he can cast Levitation, Blinding Flash, Energy Disruption, or any other spell with a P.P.E. cost of 15 or less in a single action. In two actions he can cast Invulnerability (25 P.P.E.) or Exorcism (30 P.P.E.). On the other hand, it will take the character ten actions to cast Summon Shadow Beast (140 P.P.E.).

Everything else stays the same. He cannot take other combat action while casting, and he must have enough P.P.E. available. The spell caster can be interrupted to negate his spell as normal, and rituals remain unchanged. Each spell cast uses at least one attack/action, regardless of how little P.P.E. it costs.

Different Kinds of Mages

Ley Line Walkers, Mystics, Wizards, and other basic "sorcerer" types are **Full Mages** and have the widest range of spell knowledge, and have no penalties when channeling P.P.E. for casting spells. All of their spells can be channeled at the standard 5 P.P.E. per level, per action.

Conjurers, Shifters, Warlocks, Necromancers, Temporal Wizards, and other such classes are **Specialists**, and channel at 5 P.P.E. per level, per action when using spells within their narrow area of specialty. However, they can only channel 3 P.P.E. per level of experience per action for spells outside their area of expertise. This nearly doubles the amount of time required to cast a spell outside the mage's specialized area of knowledge. In the case of the Techno-Wizard, the penalty to cast the spells only occurs when attempting to cast spells in the "traditional" manner and not into a device. The creation of the device is effectively a ritual, and therefore unaffected by the P.P.E. Channeling rule. Also remember that many of these classes already have advantages in P.P.E. costs to cast certain spells.

There exist, in various games, character classes that can learn to cast spells, or have the ability to cast them as a natural ability, which we'll call **Dabblers**. Also included are those who are spell casters second to some other skill, such as Temporal Warriors or the Battle Magus. Another example is any character that casts magic through another being's power, such as a Priest, Witch, or Mystically Bestowed character. There are also magic items, amulets, and talismans that may require the use of one's own P.P.E. to activate the magic. In all of these cases, and in any case where the character is not *primarily* a mage of some