

# Alternate Spellcasting System

Spellcasting in the AD&D gaming world has long presented many difficulties for me, as both a DM and a player. It's not that I find a problem with the mechanics, but more the general approach and concept.

To me, a mage has always been one who could perform incredible feats of magic, at will. Not someone limited to choosing spells in advance. In fiction, when a mage has to pre-memorize spells (as in the Dragonlance™ books by TSR), it just seems that, co-incidentally, he has chosen exactly the most effective spells possible for every encounter of the day to come.

As anyone who has ever played a mage knows, it is impossible to chose all spells in advance, and have the best possible selection available. How many times have you been in a situation where that *polymorph self* spell would have been invaluable, but instead you just happened to have pre-memorized *stoneskin*?

## Changes to the Spellcasting System

Instead of the typical spellcasting system, I decided to change the way magic was handled in my world, both for mages and clerics. To do so, I have changed the concept of magic to reflect two divisions: the Lesser and Greater paths.

Lesser path magicians and clerics are those who must pre-memorize and store spells in advance (according to the rules of the classical AD&D spellcasting system). Spellcasters who follow the Greater path are freed from the restraint of pre-memorizing spells. They can pick and chose their spells, as they please.

## The Lesser Path

Practitioners of the Lesser Path are those mages who cast spells according to the standard AD&D rules. Hence, no further examination of this path is required, except to note that any mage may belong to the Lesser path.

## The Greater Path

Greater path magicians and clerics are those rare individuals who have gleaned a greater understanding of the inner workings of magic. These spellcasters are capable of directly harnessing a form of arcane magical energy, known as manna.

Manna exists in the world around us - it is a natural energy force, given off by all living creatures. It is possible to find manna dead areas, but these are extremely rare. Harnessing the manna from these forces does no harm to any living creature, as the manna has been emitted naturally.

It is important to note that practitioners of the Greater path must still gain spells as do those of the Lesser path. Furthermore, mages must still maintain a spellbook, and must spend time in study and reflection. While not technically "memorizing" spells, Greater path mages must still maintain a working knowledge of their magics.

Greater path clerics too must still spend their time in prayer every morning, but do not have to pre-choose their spells for the day. Rather, they call upon their god to provide the energy necessary to power the spells they will need during the day.

Those who wish to follow the Greater path must first pass two requirements. First, they must be Lesser path mages or clerics of at least 5th level. Only by achieving 5 levels as a Lesser Path spellcaster will the character have the necessary understanding of the mechanics of magic needed to harness the power of the Greater path.

Secondly, the character must have a prime requisite score of at least 16 in the applicable statistic (Intelligence for mages, Wisdom for clerics). Upon achieving 5th level, the mage or cleric rolls a check on his prime requisite score. If he makes the check, he can abandon the Lesser Path, and become a Greater path spellcaster.

If he fails the check, he remains a Lesser Path magician. However, every time he gains a new experience level, he may make the check again. Optionally, if his prime requisite is somehow raised before achieving the next level, he may make an extra check.

When the check is successful, the mage loses all experience he gained as a practitioner of the Lesser Path. He becomes a Level one mage of the Greater path. Once embarked upon the Greater path, the spellcaster is there forever. Greater path spellcasters cannot chose at a later date to return to the Lesser path. The change is total, and permanent.

## Manna Points

Greater path spellcasters use manna points to power their spells. Manna points are gained through study and experience. To calculate a Greater path spellcaster's manna points, one simply looks at the number of spells they are able to cast under the Lesser path spellcaster rules.

For instance, a level 5 mage is capable of casting 1 third level spell, 2 second level spells, and 4 first level spells. Each spell is converted into manna points by multiplying it by its level. In this example, the Greater path spellcaster would have 11 mp (manna points).

Every first level spell is worth 1 mp. Second level spells are worth 2 mp each, third level 3, and fourth level 4, etc., all the way up to ninth level spells (which are worth 9 mp each).

The manna points are then used to power magical spells. Manna can be applied as the caster wishes; they may be applied to any spell, at any level. For example, a 9th level spell gives the Greater path spellcaster 9 mp. These points can be used to power one 9th level spell, or two 4th level and one 1st level spells. By the same token, 5 mp gained from 5 first level spells could be used to power one fifth level spell.

## Spellcaster's Manna by Level

Level of Spellcaster	Manna
1	1
2	2
3	4
4	7
5	11
6	14
7	20
8	27
9	32
10	39
11	51
12	66
13	78
14	85
15	94
16	115
17	130
18	139
19	147

To keep things simple, add 5 mp for every level past 20th that the spellcaster achieves.

## Running Out of Manna Points

Once a Greater path spellcaster runs out of manna, he may no longer safely cast spells on that day. However, mp refresh after a minimum of 6 hours of rest. It is important to remember that this can be done only once per day. A mage cannot exhaust his mp at noon, sleep until six pm, then have all his mp back. The spellcaster's mp total can be recharged but once per day. Still, if a spellcaster who has run out of mp for the day wishes to cast another spell, he does have the option to do so.

This option is fraught with risk, however. If no manna remains, the mage must power the spell using his own life energy - a frightening risk indeed. In order to empower a spell using his own life force; the Greater path spellcaster must sacrifice two hit points for every level of the spell cast. For example, to empower a 5th level spell, the mage would sacrifice 10 hps.

Furthermore, each time a Greater path spellcaster uses his own life energy to empower a spell, he must pass a successful system shock roll. Failure means that half the hit point loss is permanent. Nothing except for a wish can bring back hit points lost in this fashion.

For example, Bronwyn, a female cleric of Tahl (a Lawful Good god of healing in my campaign, the World of Tryll), is out of mp for the day. In a savage battle, the party's fighter is badly injured. Harnessing her own life force, Bronwyn casts a heal spell on the fighter. She loses 14 hit points of her own life essence (14 hit points are needed to charge a seventh level spell), and makes a system shock roll. Sadly, she fails, and loses 7 hit points, permanently.

## Recharging Manna

Mages and clerics can only regain their manna after a good night's rest (minimum of 6 hours sleep). During the night, the spellcaster harnesses and stores the manna given off by the surrounding plant and wildlife. The mage can only do this while sleeping - normal rest (even if in a trance or hypnotic state) is not sufficient to gain the level of calm necessary to tap and store manna.

After six hours of sleep, the spellcaster has stored enough manna to be fully recharged. Note, it is possible for a spellcaster to regain partial manna. For instance, if a mage could only sleep 3 hours in a night, he would regain half of the manna he needed (round down).

The recharging period is set at six hours. This is true regardless of the number of mana points the mage needs to recharge. For example, if a mage had a maximum mp of 20, but only needed to recharge 5 mp, he would still need six hours of sleep to do so. The same is true if he needed all 20 - six hours of sleep is still required.

## Draining Manna

Certain rare practitioners of the Greater path have learned to drain mana directly from unwilling hosts. These individuals are referred to as derani (der-AHN-ee), and are treated with the greatest fear and loathing.

To begin, only beings with a minimum Intelligence of 5 possess enough mana in usable form to be a target for this draining. Unintelligent creatures such as plants or farm animals do not possess mana in sufficient quantity for a mage or cleric to drain.

It must be stressed that draining the mana from any living creature is an extremely evil act. Using the optional system of Alignment shift (detailed in another [rules supplement](#)) apply a shift of 1 point towards evil for every hit point drained in this fashion).

In order to be able to drain mana, a spellcaster must have a minimum Prime Requisite score of 18. To drain mana, the spellcaster merely concentrates on a victim for one round. The victim senses the attempt, and is aware of what the derani is trying to do.

The victim must be close to the spellcaster – maximum range is 1 yard for every level the derani possesses. The action takes a full round; like spellcasting, the act of draining mana can be interrupted should the spellcaster suffer damage while attempting to drain.

At the end of the round, the spellcaster and the victim each roll a check against their levels. If the victim rolls his level or under, then nothing happens for that round (this is true regardless of whether or not the Derani makes his level check). If the victim fails his level check, and the spellcaster succeeds, the derani drains a number of hit points from the target equal to the amount by which he passed his ability check. If the derani actually manages to touch the victim during the draining process, then the victim suffers a -4 penalty to the check.

For example a 15th level derani attempts to drain mana from a 5th level fighter. Each rolls a 20-sided die. The spellcaster rolls a 7, and the poor fighter rolls an 18. The spellcaster then drains 8 hit points from the fighter. Like a Greater path spellcaster tapping his own life force, the fighter must then pass a system shock check or half of the hit point loss becomes permanent.

Manna drained from an unwilling target provides a number of mp equal to half the amount drained. For instance, in the preceding example, the spellcaster would gain 4 mana points ( $8/2 = 4$ ) to use in powering his spells. If the spellcaster was 20th level, and rolled a 2, he could then drain 18 hit points (and gain 9 mana points) in that round. A derani can never drain more mp than his the maximum allowed for his level.

If in the preceding example the derani had placed his hands upon the victim whilst attempting to drain life energy, then the fighter would have suffered a -4 penalty to his level check. Note, this does not affect the amount of mp drained (if the derani is successful); it just makes it more difficult for the victim to resist the draining attempt.

If the Greater path spellcaster drains enough hit points out of a target to kill it, then that creature will re-animate in 1d6 turns, as a ju-ju zombie under the control of the spellcaster.

## Empowered Items

There are rare magical items which are capable of storing manna, to be tapped and used by the spellcaster at a later date. These items are exceedingly rare, and the secrets to their construction are known by a certain select few.

The items are typically gems, or statues carved from gemstone. Only these hard, natural materials are capable of storing manna for any length of time. These items may store a varying amount of manna, ranging from 1 to 20 mp, depending on the strength and value of the item in question. To determine the strength of an empowered item, consult the following table.

1d20 Roll	Material	Maximum MP
1-3	Obsidian	3
4-9	Onyx	5
10-14	Black Pearl	8
14-17	Blue Sapphire	10
18-19	Diamond	15
20	Star Ruby	20

Empowered gems can be (and often are) fitted into the hilts, handles or pommels of magical weapons or items. For instance, a mage may wish to fix a black onyx empowered gem to the end of his *staff of the magi*, to provide him with an emergency cache of manna.

To charge an empowered gem, a Greater path spellcaster must concentrate on the item for a period of 1 hour for every point of manna stored. MP may be transferred at the rate of 2:1 (i.e. for every 2 mp the spellcaster sacrifices, the empowered gem is recharged by 1 mp).

Each time a gem is recharged, there is a flat 5% chance that it fails to correctly harness the manna, and is destroyed in the process. Destroyed gems are useless as empowered devices, and

crumble to dust. This dust may still, however, have monetary value (typically worth 1/10th of its gem value).

## Disadvantages of the Greater Path

The practitioner of the Greater path suffers from certain disadvantages. First off is the loss of his experience gained as a Lesser mage. When a 5th level (or higher) Lesser mage or cleric wishes to embark along the Greater path, he must sacrifice all experience gained thus far, becoming, once again, a 1st level spellcaster.

Due to their devotion to the Greater arts, spellcasters of the Greater path must always be single classed. Multi-class characters may never take the Greater path. Characters who start out as members of a non-mage or cleric class, then later dual class as mage or cleric are also incapable of taking the Greater path.

Should a character start out as a single-classed Lesser spellcaster, he may embark upon the Greater path after achieving 5th level. If, at any time, the Greater path spellcaster wishes to dual-class, he may do so, but not without penalty. If he does dual-class, he immediately loses all benefits of being on the Greater path – he becomes a Lesser path spellcaster once again. Furthermore, due to his less-than perfect knowledge of Lesser path practices, the spellcaster immediately loses four levels of experience.

Due to their intense concentration in their crafts, Greater path spellcasters require more experience to go up in levels. To simulate this, the DM should automatically deduct 10% from all experience earned by a Greater path spellcaster. The character will still use the mage experience progression chart for levels, but suffers the 10% penalty to all experience earned.

