

Magic User Template for BTS-2

Note: Books that are useful to have as of this writing include *RIFTS: Book of Magic* (invocation spells), *RIFTS: Federation of Magic* (Conjurer O.C.C.), *Nightbane* (the core book and *Through the Glass Darkly*, for O.C.C.'s), *The Rifter #13, 21 & 27*, and of course *BTS-1*.

This template was designed to offer magic users in BTS-2. GM's who use this template to allow their PC's to play mages, you'll need to do this with an understanding that the rules and details can (and probably will) alter and change as new rules, updates, clarifications, and more information about the upcoming BTS sourcebook *Beyond Arcanum* becomes available. Whenever this happens, the GM's / Players should update the rules accordingly to closer match what the BTS-2 magic system will be like. The GM & Players will need to work together to make this template work until *Beyond Arcanum* is available. Note that once released, this template will be obsolete and no longer needed.

UPDATE NOTE: After practicing the original inception of magic rules that acted very similar to power levels to I.S.P., they have been scrapped in favor of the new rules below. However, I'll attach the original rules to the bottom of this template writing for those interested in them.

Also note that the release of the *Creature Feature sourcebook* for BTS provided new examples, ideas and details about what magic will be like in BTS, which has altered some of the text below.

Magic Rules and Spell Usage in BTS-2

P.P.E. Base: Due to the success I've been seeing with the "go to the tap, not the source" method at my game table, all magic users have their full P.P.E. base amount as written in their O.C.C., but their spell casting is hampered by the same threat levels that affect psychics. The rules are as follows:

Threat Level effects on magic users and spell casting

Under the Microscope: Like psychics, magic users do not perform well under the microscope.

Any attempted spell or ritual requires twice as much time and P.P.E. to successfully cast (doesn't work otherwise), and even then, the spell will most likely only function at 25% of its normal ability (reduce all stats, duration, range, damage, etc. by 75%), roll percentile dice. A roll of 01-19% means the spell functions as it should with no penalty. The percentage number is the same regardless of the mage's level.

Under the Microscope note: All mages suffer the same effects as psychics (see BTS-2, page 31), even when the spell is cast as a ritual. In virtually all cases, any successfully cast spell will either be seen/experienced as being harmless, ineffective, or underwhelming at best, offering no proof of the existence of magic to those observing or scrutinizing the mage. At its worst, the results of the spell will be seen as trickery or chicanery. As difficult and time-consuming as it is to replenish P.P.E., most mages consider casting spells under the microscope to be both foolish and wasteful. Even worse, casting spells successfully has been known to draw unwanted attention to magic users, so most mages actively avoid trying to prove magic exists these days.

Sidenote on 'flashy' spells: Spells considered to be "flashy" and "grandiose" - the kinds that could potentially be witnessed by masses of people - suffer the same effects of *Under the Microscope* if more than a 1D4+2 "ordinary people" or "nonbelievers" are witnessing and/or observing the spell caster or the spell. This is why you'll likely never see grander, flashier spells like *Dimensional Portal*, or an *Impenetrable Wall of Force* appear in high traffic, crowded places on BTS Earth, and why most cultists practice their greatest spells in the darkest corners of the Earth. Note the GM always has the final say on what's considered a flashy spell/ritual or not.

At Base Level: Whether practicing in private, or having no outside source of P.P.E. available to them, nor being affected by a threat level, regardless if the mage is casting a spell or ritual, it is only half as effective (half the range, duration, etc.) unless the mage spends twice the amount of the spell's/ritual's P.P.E. cost to get the full

effect. As a reminder, all offensive/attack spells do minimal against ordinary humans / mortals / animals (a single point of damage for every 1D6 damage).

Base Level Note: This is why having familiars, or being involved in a magic group/coven/cult or some sort, and even making pacts with supernatural/demonic beings and creatures of magic are commonplace with mages as they lack the P.P.E. to even practice casting spells or rituals that require high amounts of P.P.E.

Investigation Level: All “investigation” related/themed spells can be used without penalty or additional cost. Any offensive/attack/damaging spells still only do a point of damage against humans/mortals for every 1D6 damage and spells cast on them only has half the duration, range and penalties (rounding down); spending twice the P.P.E. cost negates this penalty. Defensive spells or spells meant to help or enhance the magic user casting them (like *Armor of Ithan*) works as normal.

“Lesser” Threat Level or Higher: All spells work as normal against the Supernatural/Creatures of Magic. Any damaging spells cast at humans/mortals/animals uses the *Math Conversion* rules on page 2.

Other sources of P.P.E. Note: P.P.E. Recovery, alternative P.P.E. sources, number of actions to cast a spell and such remain unchanged at this time. Note that any reference to Mega-Damage uses S.D.C. equivalents.

Meditation Skill Update: Per pages 115-116 of the **Coalition Manhunters/PSI-Ops** sourcebook, all magic users now have the standard **Meditation** skill, which recovers **6 P.P.E.** per level of experience for every hour they meditate. This skill is considered to be canon across all Palladium Books game lines.

Time it takes to cast a spell: Invocation levels 1-5 costs 1 attack/action (about 3-4 seconds).

Levels 6-10 count as two melee attacks/actions (about 5-8 seconds).

Levels 11-15 and Spells of Legend use up three of the character’s melee attacks/actions (9-10 seconds).

Note: Casting time does not apply for those using the *P.P.E. Channeling* rules (see below).

To cast a spell requires verbalization: The mantra of the spell must be spoken aloud and with authority. Hand gestures are also usually part of the spell casting process that helps focus and direct the mystic energy.

Reminder about Magic Combat: Every character has their strengths & weaknesses. The strength of any Practitioner of Magic is the power of magic itself. The PC wields amazing power and can make things happen and appear using their mind, knowledge, internal energy (P.P.E.) and force of will. The range of spells available to them will depend on what spells they, the character, studies (and the player selects). The weakness of spell casting is that even offensive spells have their limitations in range, damage, etc., and the unspoken limitation that the spell caster is not the best at one-on-one combat action. They often times lack initiative and are the last to attack/respond in melee combat rotation.

However, the restructuring of the amount of time it takes to cast low level spells (one melee attack/action to cast any spell levels 1-5) gives the character a chance to respond quickly and get off his spell as fast or faster than his opponent may get off a gunshot. This also makes logical sense, because it is the low-level spells that cost the least P.P.E. and are the most likely to be fired off in a combat or panic situation. The more powerful mid-and high-level spells require more time, concentration and focus, but the low-level spells are so familiar to the character (because they’re used so often) that they are like second nature to cast.

When firing off a level 1-5 invocation, roll initiative on a D20 as usual. **The high roll wins, meaning whoever has the initiative gets to fire or attack first.** If it is the spell caster, he gets his spell off before his attackers shoot or swing with fists, clubs, blades, flying leap kicks or chomping teeth or slashing claws. The low-level spell counts as ONE of the character’s melee attacks.

The mid-and high-level spells count as two or three of the mage’s melee attacks and will require the character to take a step back from the action to use his magic to the best strategic purpose. While this may remove him from the immediate action of combat, his spell may have a profound effect on the battle, that’s the trade-off.

They are Vulnerable to a pressed attack. Most practitioners of magic are not experts in hand-to-hand combat. Most can handle themselves in a fight, but they aren't warriors, they just aren't. Furthermore, magic has the disadvantage of requiring concentration and speaking, two things you can't do while under attack! So unless the spell being cast is a Level 1-5 invocation that can be popped off in three or four seconds, the action of parrying, dodging or striking back will break the spell invocation and prevent the mage from casting his spell (he'll need a "breather" of 7-10 seconds to cast a higher-level spell). Likewise, getting popped in the mouth or stomach, or getting knocked down or blinded, or anything that breaks the spell caster's concentration and makes him stop in the middle of his verbalization of the spell prevents him from finishing it.

When a spell is interrupted, the mage must start all over again. He doesn't lose the P.P.E. (that's not spent until the spell is completed and cast), but he does lose precious time. (A good rule of thumb is if the mage is hit, it breaks his spell casting, especially if he or his armor takes any damage from the attack.)

Can't cast magic when under direct attack. This also means if the mage is being hammered by a full press attack (i.e., his attacker keeps striking at him at every opportunity), even if the sorcerer is successfully parrying each attack, he is focused on protecting and defending himself and cannot get a higher-level spell off. The same is true if he's doing the physical attacking, or running or performing any physical action. To cast a spell the practitioner of magic will need to stop, catch his breath (that should count as one or two of his melee actions/attacks) and then cast his spell (another one or more of his melee actions depending on the spell level).

That's just how magic works, and a PC has to be smart about how he uses magic to take full advantage of the strengths and avoid the pitfall of the weaknesses. For example, a spell caster who is hidden can make a devastating sniper. A mage who is away from the action at a strategic position, but can see the battlefield and is defended by a warrior or two, can effectively be a human howitzer firing off Call Lightning or illusions, or Firequakes, or god only knows what! He may also be able to instantly heal the injured or summon a fog or storm or monster to cover a retreat or magically hide or disguise himself (and others), and the list goes on and on. That versatility and range of power is the strength of the spell caster. Focus on those strengths and wish for good luck and a helping hand when the mage gets into a jam.

Magic Scrolls: Magic scrolls are generally uncommon on BTS Earth, and expensive to purchase / obtain when you can even find them or someone who can make them and is willing to sell/part with them. There are few mages out there that are either skilled enough or even willing to write a spell invocation down for fear other mages will learn the spell from the scroll.

Scroll magic is slightly different because it has a certain amount of magic built right into it. However, a literate mage has a chance of learning spells by translating scrolls. **Base Skill:** 10%+2% per level of experience. Note that the spell is instantly activated the moment it is read aloud and the words then disappear or turn into gibberish or a magic symbol.

Ley Lines and Magic

The rules found on pages 123-124 of **Nightbane** have worked at my table with a few changes:

Midday (noon) and Midnight only adds 5 P.P.E. per level of the mage. Note that this bonus only lasts for that minute (sixty seconds), requiring magic users to plan the timing of their spells (commonly via casting ritual spells) to make use of this short burst of extra energy. Like always, any extra P.P.E. cannot be saved or used later.

Any bonus P.P.E. from an equinox, or solstice, or eclipse is halved. Even at these heightened moments, there's just not enough energy on BTS-Earth to offer the higher levels of P.P.E. noted in NB.

Magic spells are predominantly effective against Supernatural Beings, Creatures of Magic, and other Magic Users

Similar to how psychic abilities work, magic spells are far more potent against supernatural beings, creatures of magic, and other magic users/witches/mystics than they are against normal, or otherwise ordinary humans and animals. In short, the damage of offensive spells inflicted on ordinary humans/mortals is 10% (rounding down) of their full damage capability, and any effects (duration, penalties) are reduced to 1/2 their potency.

Example: Joe the Arcanist knows the 4th level spell “Fire Bolt”. When casting Fire Bolt against a supernatural being, or creature of magic, or at another magic user, the normal dice roll for damage is 6D6 (36 max damage potential). When this same spell is cast at an ordinary human or animal, it only does 1D4 points of damage, which is roughly 10% of max damage. Those 1D4 points of damage are enough to inflict minor damage, maybe 2nd or 3rd degree burns and stings like the dickens (and *maybe* requiring a save vs. Pain to avoid flinching or recoiling in pain and losing an action), and burns holes in their clothing, but isn’t really worth the P.P.E. cost beyond acts of opportunity or desperation.

Math Note: Math examples of this conversion include:

2D6 points of normal damage or less does **NO** damage to ordinary humans/mortals

3D6 points of normal damage = 1 point of damage to ordinary humans/mortals

6D6 points of normal damage = 1D4 point of damage to ordinary humans/mortal

1D6x10+4 points of normal damage = 2D4 points of damage to ordinary humans/mortals

Notes on select spell types:

Physical based spells like *Telekinesis* will do normal damage to humans/mortals as it’s the physical object doing the damage, not the spell itself. Conjured items (like those from the Conjuror O.C.C.) do normal damage as well, even if the physical object only temporarily exists.

Illusion spells, like *Apparition* on page 136 of *Nightbane*, works as normal on humans/mortals in BTS. In fact, illusion spells sometimes work better than expected against ordinary human/mortals who don’t know of, or don’t believe, in magic, which is most people on BTS Earth.

Magic spells and rituals will offer more personal flavor in BTS

Due to the low magic energy level of BTS Earth, most magic spells work as minimally, as efficiently, and as personal as possible. Kevin has offered some examples of this in past discussions. One example mentioned was the “Sense Evil” spell. Instead of getting a simple “sensing of the presence” note, the environment around him provides the magic user with noticeable differences and changes.

For example, all the dogs in the neighborhood begin barking hysterically, birds and insects start squawking and chirping alarmingly (or suddenly go silent), a peculiar gust of wind springs up out of nowhere from a specific direction, the picture and sound from a nearby television or smartphone screen and speaker fills with static and has trouble transmitting, the picture frames in the room all tilt a little, and other unusual events happen, warning the magic user of the presence of nearby supernatural evil while being subtle about it.

In past conversations with Kevin, he’s mentioned a big emphasis on atmospheric based spells (casting fog, summoning clouds, dimming the ambient light in the area, create bone chilling cold and frost, making it festering hot and steamy, causing blackouts, etc.), spells that summon different types of animals, spells to summon temporary familiars, spells that affect the dead (such as reading how long they’ve been dead, what killed them, etc.), and spells that offer various protections, like desensitizing someone to Horror Factor, various types of protections and shielding, or turning themselves into ghostly-like beings, and the like.

While I hope to add examples in future updates, at this time it’s up to the GM and players to come up with personal touches, horror vibes and flavor text when using spells. I encourage experimenting with this to make your game feel more BTS-like.

Note: I always ask you wonderful GM's & Players that whenever you come up with a clever use of a spell with flavor text or a more personal touch or method of using them to send an email to me at hostofthehouseofbts@gmail.com (or message me via [Facebook](#) or [Discord](#)) and let me know what you did and/or how you did it. Your example may be added to this template or even an upcoming sourcebook!

Additional Notes

Spells and references to non-BTS specific games are ignored. For example, the spell *Nightland Portal* on page 141 of *Nightbane RPG* is not an applicable spell in BTS, nor any other *Nightbane* specific spell.

The Nega-Psychic's *Magic Disruption* ability (BTS-2, page 60) works as intended against magic users.

Invocation spells can be found in multiple sources, including BTS-1, *Nightbane* (especially the great horror themed spells found in *Through the Glass Darkly*) and *RIFTS Book of Magic*.

P.P.E. Channeling note: Based on the request of one of my players, we've been using the *P.P.E. Channeling* rules from [The Rifter #21](#) at my game table, and so far they're working out well. They even add a sort of elegance to spell casting that the canon rules seem to be lacking.

(AKA, it avoids moments like "No, wait... I need to check what level the spell is to see if I can cast it in one action or not.")

The following magic classes are considered *BTS friendly* at this time:

-**The Arcanist** from BTS-1 works, but the rules are outdated. **The Sorcerer** from *Nightbane* is recommended as it's a newer class with similar vibes.

-**The Mystic, The Acolyte, the Channeller, the Cybermage** (with a seasoned GM who understands their eccentricities) and **Fleshsculpters** from *Nightbane* & the *Through the Glass Darkly* sourcebook.

Note that **Fleshsculpters** will take a joined effort between GM and player as their spells affect ordinary people as normal. Keep it real and consider the logic of how their flesh spells would work in BTS.

-**The Arcane Detective** on page 125 of *Nightbane: Between the Shadows*. Note that the GM will have to decide if they want to have/use the agency mentioned in the book, or make the PC a member of the **Lazlo Agency** and/or **The Lazlo Society**, or use their own ideas for an agency.

-**The Conjurer** from *RIFTS: Federation of Magic* (I created/played a Conjurer NPC for my home game and it went well).

-**The Arcane Archaeologist** from [The Rifter #13](#).

Note: I've got nearly every book from Palladium, but not the time to pour through them all. If you come across what you think is a good candidate for a magic O.C.C. in BTS, let me know.

Magic Users and being Gainful Employed: Note that those mages who are not employed or funded by a magic guild or brotherhood, a wealthy patron, or paranormal research group/company can usually find employment as a detective, an entertainer, a professional 'magician', an antique dealer/consultant, a librarian, a researcher, a writer or novelist, or a similar profession that plays to the strengths of the magic users' skills or magic aptitudes.

Editor's note on Modern Magicians: On BTS-Earth, in virtually all cases, those illusionists, stage magicians and magic show hosts that anyone can buy a ticket and see on stage, or on a tv show, or an uploaded video are either non magicians using deception and trickery or is a rare authentic magic user using their magic in plain sight under the guise of magician chicanery. I personally love stage magicians and have gone to several magic shows over the years and have watched many shows and videos. One of my favorite aspects is trying to deduce how they perform their tricks and enjoying them even when I don't / can't. Even when **I KNOW** it's all trickery, it's still fun watching them perform their "magic".

This is the same kind of energy GMs should use when their nonbeliever NPCs are witnessing or watching magic users perform magic; that even when the spell is successful and the crowd is enjoying the “trick”, the crowd honestly believes the spell to be a trick of some kind. They will NOT immediately start believing that “magic” is real. I’ve personally seen some incredible magic tricks that I cannot even begin to explain, but I still “know” that it’s all trickery and deception. This mentality should be the basis for most mundane observers when they see something magical.

For example: An NPC down the street sees Joe the Mage cast a *Blinding Flash* spell, and another person acts like they’ve been blinded / starbursting before running away in a panic from Joe. As Joe the Mage is about to take up pursuit, he hears people running up to him excitedly, saying something like “*Wow! Are you a street magician or something? Can you do another one? Show me a cool trick!*”

The Pros and Cons of Studying Magic: Starting on page 57 in [The Rifter #27](#), this article was written as a sort of add-on to the *Through the Glass Darkly* sourcebook for Nightbane, giving the magic user an option of gaining a variety of magic proficiencies as well as limitations to make their magic user more unique to them, as well as providing role-playing opportunities. However, due to its proven track record of abuse noted by myself a several other sources, the ability “Cast by Thought Alone” should **NOT** be an available option.

The Original Magic Template for Magic Users in BTS

Note: The intent of this original version of casting spells and rituals was to make it similar to how psychics deal with threat levels: AKA: the greater the threat, the more P.P.E. is available to them.

While on paper this made sense, but in practice over the past year, the “lack of P.P.E. at base level” proved problematic for various reasons. Even the aspect of not having enough P.P.E. to practice casting a spell felt like a gaping hole in this rule set.

However, rather than scrapping these old rules outright, I’m presenting them below for others to try them out if desired. Should you have better success with them or tweak them in a certain way that working well at your table, reach out to me and let me know why and how it works for your gaming group.

The Original Template:

Magic users work similarly to Psychics in BTS-2: First off, the magic system works similar to how psychics work via the *Proximity equals Power* rules (see BTS-2, page 30).

Base P.P.E.: Whatever magic class you’re using, roll the starting Base P.P.E. and increase normally.

Note: It’s recommended that the *Sorcerer* O.C.C. from Nightbane (the version from *Through the Glass Darkly* on page 10 offers even better flavor text and ideas) is used in place of the *Arcanist* from BTS-1 as it’s a newer version of a mage while having similar horror vibes, text and flavor.

From there, the base amount is divided by 4 (rounding down) to reflect the power boosts on page 31-32 of BTS-2. Once you have your base P.P.E., you multiply it using the same method as *Using I.S.P. Multipliers* on page 32 of BTS-2.

Under the Microscope – Base P.P.E. only

Works the same as *Under the Microscope* on page 31 of BTS-2.

Investigating the Supernatural -- Base P.P.E x2

Lesser Demons & Demonic Servants -- Base P.P.E x4

Greater Demons & Demonic Servants – Base P.P.E x6

Ancient Evil and Alien Intelligences -- Base P.P.E x10

Using P.P.E. Multipliers works the same as *Using I.S.P. Multipliers* on page 32 of BTS-2

Note: If you’re using the P.P.E. base option above, this should probably be adjusted to 6 P.P.E. per hour, which is the same as psychics. If you’re using the newer alternative P.P.E. Base option below (see last page), the 6 P.P.E. per level should work fine.

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From the writing desk of the Host of the House of BTS (houseofbts.net)