



The Complete Psionics Handbook

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Are you ready for the mind-blowing potential of the psyche? This handbook describes over 150 paranormal powers—telepathy, ESP, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, biofeedback, out-of-body travel—plus many amazing talents never before revealed. The psionist is a completely new character class for AD&D games, both for player characters and NPCs. Explore inner space! Now you can really put mind over matter with *The Complete Psionics Handbook*.

The Complete Psionics Handbook Details

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From Reader Review The Complete Psionics Handbook for online ebook

Brian says

In the original Players Handbook, psionics was a tacked-on system in the appendices whose primary purpose was mostly to be ignored by prospective GMs, either because it seemed ridiculous or because it made no sense, or to be used in games and then cause all kinds of problems. Whether characters had them was all based on random dice rolls and psionics didn't really interact well with magic or the rest of the game. Not to mention that psionic combat took forever, since it happened 10x faster than physical combat and thus took up the majority of time at the table if it ever happened.

The Complete Psionics Handbook is ostensibly an attempt to solve all these problems. It makes the psionist a class, so that people who want to focus on psychic powers can do so, while still including a Wild Talent system for the people who want to use the old random system of assigning powers. It has sections focusing on how psionics and magic interact, so that you can figure out what happens if a wizard casts *free action* and a psionist tries to throw him using telekinesis, or a psionist uses mind blank and the wizard casts *ESP* on them. Furthermore, while psionists don't actually get that many powers--35 at level 20, out of a list of over 150--the point-based resource system and lack of material components and complicated gestures needed for their powers means they have more on-the-spot flexibility than wizards do, though wizards have the advantage if given time to prepare.

I'm not sure *The Complete Psionics Handbook* objectively deserves three stars, but I had to give it at least one extra one because it does something that's pretty difficult to do in kitchen-sink fantasy--it makes psychic powers feel different from magic. That's especially hard to do in a system like Dungeons & Dragons where magic's purview is so broad. They even managed to have a pretty extensive power list doing it, with all the classic psychic standbys like telepathy or telekinesis or prophetic dreams or seeing spirits, but also stuff like being able to hear light, so you can still see if you have a blindfold on, or absorb disease, to take other's sicknesses into yourself and then hopefully cure them, or all-around vision, to see in every direction simultaneously.

Okay. Now the problems, of which there are many.

First--every time you try to provide a scientific basis for why psychic powers work, G-d kills a kitten. Don't tell me that Molecular Agitation heats things up by exciting their molecules or Molecular Rearrangement turns lead into gold by changing metal's molecular structure in a world where owlbears exist and wizards shoot fire from their hands (especially since lead and gold are both atoms...). This is especially bad when several of the powers might as well be magic. Body Weaponry lets the psionist transform one of their limbs into a weapon, and it specifically says that the arm so changed actually turns into wood or metal. Metamorphosis says the psionist can change into anything with the same general mass, including a table or a rock. Share Strength can give strength points to someone else. The psionist loses them for its duration, and then if the target dies, the strength is lost forever. What exactly is being shared here? Trying to pseudoscientifically justify psionics just makes it harder to willingly suspend disbelief, not easier.

Second, as several of the other reviews point out, psionics aren't balanced at all. With the Wild Talents system, it's perfectly possible to roll a starting character who can disintegrate people once per day, or mind control an entire group of enemies, or summon a demon anywhere within 100 yards, or turn themselves into nearly anything. It's not particularly likely, true, but a balanced system shouldn't rely on "meh, it'll probably never happen" to maintain itself.

What's more, the designers apparently decided that the disadvantage for psionics' flexibility is a random chance for everything to go spectacularly wrong. Any time they roll to use their powers, if they roll a 20, the power flips out in the worst fashion. Disintegrate works on the user. Lend Health hurts the psionist as much as the target is currently hurt. Chemical Simulation turns sweat into acid and melts all the user's gear. Clairaudience deafens the user for 1d12 hours. Every power has something like this, and even if the psionist uses some of their meager power choices to improve their success chance at using their powers--and at one new power choice given up per +1 to an existing power, they'd be a complete idiot to ever do that--there's no way to remove that 5% chance to completely screw everything up. It'd be like if every spell a wizard cast had a chance to affect themselves.

The monsters at the end are also poorly integrated. Several of them are gotcha monsters, like the brain mole--good luck finding something that's anywhere within 30 yards and a foot underground while it mind blasts you--or the thought eater, and others are just bizarre, like the baku. Really, it all feels kind of tacked on.

I can't hate the psionics system completely, as it led to the Dark Sun setting, which is by far my favorite D&D setting and also has the benefit of psionics being much better integrated because it was built into the world from the beginning. Outside Dark Sun, though, I'm not sure I'd use this book at all. It's a lot of wonky oddness for not that much benefit.

Tetra says

While fun to play because of the lack of resources and money the psionic requires, this is often a problem area for DMs. The setting would have to cater to psionics along with magic in the sense that if it didn't, adversaries that were magic resistant would be more vulnerable, and the psionist would often operate outside the grid of the intended campaign.

Many other comments mention Dark Sun, and indeed this setting is great for psionics since it's integrated completely with the material. It really doesn't work with more traditional settings like Ravenloft or Forgotten Realms.

The psionic monsters at the back are nothing more than a freebie. At the same time this book came out, the Monster Compendium series of haphazard binder creatures was also in print. For those who don't know, these M.C. binders were meant to be combined and sorted as the player wished. Some of these binder sheets contained psionic monsters which are repeated here. The binder idea would have been a good one had they started logging monsters this way, and this is why the psionic monsters at the back of The Psionics Handbook are a flop... but I digress. The psionic creatures were meant to be a DM's weapon to balance a campaign with antagonists for the psionic, but they did a poor job since any encounter would pit the psionic against the creature, without too much involvement from the rest of the players. They would really 'live outside' the campaign in any non-Dark Sun setting.

Still a good read and it has a nice sci-fi (psi-fi?) element to it which I like. I always thought of psionists as out-of-time travelers to the D&D world.

Francisco Becerra says

A must for Dark Sun games, a nice option for other settings. Not very profound, but engaging.

Chad says

I only purchased this after buying the Dark Sun campaign setting. I was never really into the whole psionics thing. Probably the least used book of all my rpg books.

Nika says

It was always fun to play these characters.

Derek says

Ugh, such a failed experiment in AD&D 2nd Edition. While there were some interesting ideas presented (and I admit a bias, I don't think psionics really belong in fantasy rping) the execution was just poor. I commend them for not making it 'just another magic' but most powers were on the border of useless, the psionic combat system is needlessly complicated and the wild talent rules allowed for too much abuse.

Abraham Ray says

good read about a optional player class for dnd.

J.G. Keely says

As has been noted, quotes are needed around the word 'complete'. It was always lovely to create one of these in play and then show how unbalanced power creep can be a fun way to send a campaign wildly off course.
