

ALTERNATIVE SPELL CASTING

Introduction

Recent experimentation has yielded the following procedure for Casting Spells. I don't mind the standard **Vancian** conceits of Spell Casting, but this could appeal to other Referees who might wish to try something different. Instead of being limited by Slots or Level, this Spell Caster can harness these sometimes-dangerous magical forces by risking harm to themselves. While they may have access to greater power sooner than their counterpart casters, this does not come without a cost.

Currently, this tinkering hasn't been *thoroughly play-tested* through the course of a full Fourteen level campaign and on the surface it seems that it might work best for the shorter-scale Campaigns that are a little more common these days. I do offer some tweaks below that might help it scale a little better to the Standard Tiers.

Preserve the standard **Magic-User** HD, Armor, and Weapon Restrictions. The **XP Progression** can also stay the same. Consider altering the Prime requisite of the Class to **CHA** however, because as you'll see below, that Score ends up being remarkably less imperiled through a lovely little quirk of this system.

Spell Casting

To Cast a Spell, this Class uses the **Turn Undead** Matrix. (truncated at HD Six unless you make higher level Spells available in your games). In place of Monster HD, their Level is cross-referenced with the **Level of the Spell** they wish to attempt to cast and this provides the Target Number they must roll higher or equal to on a **2d6**.

If successful in this, the Spell is cast normally, but when failure occurs, we employ the following system (one that I also tend to use in Combat for grievous injury at 0 HP).

Using the failed 2d6 Results, the Caster Chooses one of these dice to determine an Ability Score:

1. **Strength**
2. **Dexterity**
3. **Constitution**
4. **Intelligence**
5. **Wisdom**
6. **Charisma**

The other die is then used to determine the Damage or **Drain** on the Score. The Score is then reduced by this **Drain** amount.

Since failures on the Turn Undead table tend to result from ***lower*** rolls, this has the interesting effect of primarily targeting **STR**, **DEX**, and **CON** a little more frequently (though the Caster can still usually choose, except in the event of rolling doubles for failure). Should any Score be **Drained** to 0 this way, the Caster perishes.

Example #1: Pedra the Macabre is a first level Caster. In her previous adventures she managed to locate an ancient **Grimoire** that contains the incantation for **Invisibility 10' Radius** (a Third Level Spell). Wishing to conceal herself and allies from a ravenous patrol of **Gormful Trolls**, she decides to assume the significant risk of casting this Spell. Rolling a **2d6** and hoping for an **11+**, the results are a **2** and a **3**. Not enough to successfully bully this bewitchment, so she must Choose: Lower her **Dexterity** by three points, or her **Constitution** by two. She opts to channel the unpredictable forces into **Constitution**, wincing as if having just run a marathon.

Example #2: Kadelor the Conjurer has reached third level and wishes to unleash a **Lightning Bolt** he's learned during his various perilous adventures. This is a Third Level Spell and **Kadelor** needs a **7+** on the **2d6** to channel the crackling energy of the invocation without harm to himself. Rolling the dice, he receives a **4** and **1**. Not enough to successfully cast, and now must choose: Reduce his **Intelligence** by 1 or **Strength** by 4 points.

"T" and "D" Results

"T" results on the **Turn Undead** table mean the character has sufficiently mastered magics of a given circle or level so that the risk to themselves is far more calculated. They simply pay a point of **Drain** in the Score of their choice. "D" results eliminate even this cost, representing magics they've developed full control over through experience.

Removing the Drain

With a full night's rest (at least 8 uninterrupted hours, sometimes difficult to come by in **Dungeons**) the caster is faced with another Choice: They may either restore all lost points from a single Ability Score or roll **2d6** and distribute the total between multiple Scores.

Example: Abethe the Enchanter (a 5th level Caster) after a particularly eventful day, has the following **Drain** at their time of Rest: **STR** -3, **DEX** -2, **CON** -4, **INT** 0, **WIS** -1, **CHA** 0. After a peaceful night's respite, their choice is to restore one Score fully, or distribute the results of a **2d6** and they opt for the later: Rolling a **5** and a **3** for a total of **8** points, they opt to restore their **DEX**, **CON**, and **WIS**. They do not have enough to fully restore their **STR**, but the **Drain** is reduced by **1** to **STR** -2.



Hardly a restful night's sleep

Tuning the Power Level

The type of sustainable/consistent play required to reach higher levels isn't incredibly common these days, but if rapid access to power seems a bit excessive, even with the corresponding risks, or you'd like advancement to occur more gradually in terms of Spell Casting, one quick tweak that might assist is to simply treat the Caster's Level as halved for the purposes of the **Turn Undead** Table. So, a Second Level Caster still uses the row/column for 1, a Tenth level would use 5, and a Fourteenth would use 7 (as below):

Character Level	Spell Level					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	7	9	11	-	-	-
2	7	9	11	-	-	-
3	T	7	9	11	-	-
4	T	7	9	11	-	-
5	T	T	7	9	11	-
6	T	T	7	9	11	-
7	D	T	T	7	9	11
8	D	T	T	7	9	11
9	D	D	T	T	7	9
10	D	D	T	T	7	9
11	D	D	D	T	T	7
12	D	D	D	T	T	7
13	D	D	D	D	T	T
14	D	D	D	D	T	T

Another option (hat tip to [@Matt P](#)) would be to re-Tune your **Turn Undead** Tables to a slightly different progression **3/5/7/9/11**. This maintains that risk of failure and **Drain** for a little longer than the standard progression.

Further Elaborations & Other Considerations

Outside of an initial single 1st Level Spell outlay, **Spell Acquisition** via discovery in play seems to work best with this as a gradual governor. **Scrolls** are still a very precious source of reliable Casting, and adherence to the standard Declaration procedures in Combat does a surprising amount of heavy-lifting to prevent the perceived repetition "on paper." I personally have no issues with a **Magic User** being able to launch volleys **Magic Missiles** at around level 4 (conveniently around the time the Ogre-gate activates for **Sleep**) because other procedural factors in the Combat Sequence still serve as a very effective tactical limiter.