

Vancian Caster

A.k.a Wizard, Ritualist, Slow Speller, Canny Stockiest, Occult Battery, Pedantic Slowpoke

It was inevitable. With the success of a well known RPG advertising Jack Vance's system of magic, it was only a matter of time before one of the Cursed tried to replicate it. As a matter of fact, the art of Vancian magic was first perfected by an apprentice Sorcerer. Tired of waiting to be initiated into the higher secrets of magic, he tried to devise a method of spell casting that would liberate him from his dependence upon his mentor's watered-down teachings. He did have access to his mentor's library, and thus to the magical secrets therein, but he could not extract the power of the spells contained within these books without his mentor's assistance.

After some frustrating false starts, and managing to do no more than 'Push the Boundaries', he decided to go for a walk and sulk. As he wandered through the park, lost in his own miseries, he overheard someone talking about magic. Wandering closer, desperate for even the slightest clue, he soon discovered that the speaker was referring to a game. The young apprentice was about to sink back into his depression when some of the words began to echo round in his skull. Yes, they were talking about fictional wizards, but some of the theories they mentioned sounded interesting. After all, were not his own powers considered fictional by most?

After finding out what they were talking about, he went and bought himself a copy of the game's books to study. His mentor greeted his student's new hobby with amused condescension, reminding his student that even the best needed to indulge in a little recreation at times. To this the young apprentice readily agreed, and continued his efforts in private. Several months later, he left his mentor and set out into the wide world, armed with the power of his new magic. With roots in popular culture, it did not take long for the art of the Vancian Caster to spread.

Becoming a Vancian Caster

Vancian Casters are something of an anomaly amongst the Cursed because, like the Sorcerers themselves, it is a Curse you can *choose* to adopt. It all begins with a single ritual, a mystery to all but those who have actually endured it. Those who have begun their path to becoming a Sorcerer can mimic the effects of this initiation through several months of hard work. Others need a mentor. The core of the ritual is simple enough – the two (master and apprentice) go through the process of preparing a spell. The master does the actual work – his apprentice is merely going through the motions – but at the conclusion of the ritual, the master stores the spell within his student rather than himself.

This mimics the initiation of Sorcerers in many ways, in that, despite the ritualistic trappings, all it really comes down to is the mentor instilling a trace of his own Cursed power within his apprentice. Though Sorcerers use their own blood to effect the transfer, Vancian Casters use the mystical medium of their spells. To seal the process, the newly Cursed Vancian Caster must prepare a spell of his own, usually under the guidance of his mentor. The first spell is always the hardest, but once the student has held two spells within himself at once (one gifted by a mentor, one placed through his own hard work) he is forever changed by the experience. No longer a mere student of the occult, he is a Vancian Caster.

Vancian Caster Penalties

This form of magic is academically rigorous, and only bright students will ever have much to show for their efforts.. All prospective Vancian Casters must, therefore, have an unmodified Mind stat score of at least 4, in order to complete the second stage of their initiation. In addition, they are completely unable to cast spells in the normal fashion – they must prepare their spells in advance

(see Bonuses below). This does not hinder them in using other types of magic, however, such as their 'Push the Boundaries' ability and other arcane Bonuses. Only spells must be prepared ahead of casting.

Vancian Caster Bonuses

- 1) **Arcane Education:** All Vancian Casters receive an extensive education in magical matters, resulting in a +5 bonus to the Magic skill, as well as +2 to Riddles.
- 2) **Strong Soul:** Bearing prepared spells places a strain upon the practitioner's soul, and bearing that strain strengthens the soul. As a result of this constant spiritual exercise, Vancian Casters receive +1 to their Soul stat. This cannot raise the stat above 10.
- 3) **Secret Knowledge:** All Vancian Casters receive, or are the result of, a fairly well rounded education. This results in a wellspring of obscure facts that can prove useful at the most unlikely of times. This equates to a free re-roll on all riddles checks at one degree of difficulty higher and +2 to one Trivia skill of your choice. They are also trained to pay attention, as the slightest mistake can disrupt the preparation of a spell, resulting in the same bonus (a re-roll at one degree higher) to Perception rolls.
- 4) **Library:** The practise of Vancian Magic, like any other academically rigorous discipline, becomes much easier with a good reference selection. Therefore, all Vancian Casters receive the Library Bonus for free at character creation.
- 5) **Vancian Magic:** Vancian Casters can learn the same spells as Mystics and Sorcerers, though they cannot cast them in the same way. A Vancian Caster must prepare his spells in advance, storing the almost-cast spell upon the narrow bridge between his mind and his soul.

The art of Vancian Magic in the world of the Cursed

To begin preparing spells, the Vancian Caster must first enter a meditative state, which can be achieved automatically in a single minute. Halving this time to 30 seconds requires a successful Concentration roll of Challenging (failure wastes the 30 seconds, and the caster must begin again). Each successive halving (round down to the nearest second) increases the difficulty by one degree, to a maximum of Nigh Impossible for 3 seconds. Additional distractions may, at the GM's option, increase the difficulty, or require a successful Concentration roll if the practitioner takes the full minute.

The Vancian Caster then prepares the spells he wishes to be able to cast later. This is worked out like normal spell casting (taking 1 minute per degree of difficulty, and requiring a successful roll against the spell's difficulty) with the following 3 exceptions: The time taken cannot be shortened by increasing the difficulty, or lengthened to reduce it; A spell which normally take a different amount of time to cast still take a number of minutes equal to it's degrees of difficulty to prepare; and the spell is not actually cast at the end, but stored within the practitioner for later use. Each spell must be prepared one at a time, and a failure will disrupt the meditative state. Preparing a spell from a book is one degree easier (and one minute shorter) than the specified difficulty, whilst preparing one from memory is one degree harder (and so takes one minute longer).

The Vancian Caster can safely store a number of spells equal to the highest of either his Mind or his Soul stat. The difficulty of preparing additional spells increases by one degree for each spell beyond this limit (which also increases the length of time it takes to prepare the spells). If the Vancian Caster loses consciousness, such as when he goes to sleep or is stunned, he must pass a successful

Concentration test with a difficulty of Easy to retain his prepared spells upon awakening. Any spells he has prepared above his safe limit increase the difficulty of this test by one degree per spell, just as with preparation of the spells. If the test is failed, a number of spells (chosen by the Vancian Caster) equal to the degrees of failure dissipate harmlessly and are lost.

Where Vancian Casters have the greatest advantage is in actually casting their spells, as most of the work is done in advance – all that remains is to release the spell. Releasing a prepared spell takes about three seconds (one round) and requires a spell roll. This works exactly as casting a spell which has been shortened to three seconds of casting, except that the Vancian Caster suffers no penalties for doing so. If the spell specifies a specific casting time that it cannot be shortened below (as in the case of the Teleport spell) use that casting time instead. If the spell is successfully cast, work out the results as normal and remove the spell from the character's list of prepared spells. If the casting fails, nothing happens unless the degrees of failure are greater than the lesser of the caster's Mind or Soul stat, in which case the spell is botched – remove it from the caster's list of prepared spells, as it's energies are used to fuel a random magical occurrence.

Vancian Casters' Opinions on Other Cursed

Shamans – Ancient ways may have stood the test of time, but that does not make them perfect. I wonder if our magic will last as long as theirs?

Mystics – These people can cast their spells on the fly, naturally improvising that which we must laboriously prepare. No-one ever said life was fair, though, and at least I was ready for my power when it came.

Sorcerers – We could have been like them, but no – they had to hide their power from those who might prove worthy of it. So be it. We have gained greater power than they could ever imagine, and woe to them if they should think to test us.

Summoners – Now, why didn't I think of that?

Psychics – Impressive, but abusing your brain like that must give you a terrible headache. That, at least, is one problem I have been fortunate enough to sidestep.

Blessed – Arrogant wretches. They tell me that god is good who created the world, and Magic is an abomination to be avoided in his name. Surely, he would not have given us Magic if he did not mean for us to use it? After all, even these blind zealots make liberal use of that power.

Changelings – The path to power is fraught with peril. As grateful as I am to have avoided their suffering, I am somewhat envious of the powers they have gained.

Opinions of Other Cursed on Vancian Casters

Shamans – It is difficult to trust these Cursed ones. We had to make a hard decision, to sacrifice our deaths for this service, whilst they willingly sought to cast aside all we held dear. Like many, however, they did not truly realise what they had sacrificed until it is too late.

Mystics – I sometimes feel a combination of joy and pity for the Vancian Casters. They want to be like us, so much so that they have sacrificed much to gain a little of what we have. On the other hand, what comes so easily to us they must laboriously construct. At least we can be friends.

Sorcerers – Ironic. Too impatient to master the ways of Sorcery, they choose to follow an even

slower and weaker path. I suppose that they cannot have good enough to become one of us in the first instance, then.

Summoners – Sorcerers on steroids. Like us, they were tired of being left behind. Like us, they refused to be sucked into the vicious backstabbing and study of useless lies that define the Sorcerers. Like us, they do better for coming prepared. They are our cousins, and usually have an interesting trick or two up their sleeves.

Psychics – These guys are almost as bad as the Sorcerers. They waste their time poring over the written ramblings of idiots, to prepare a few pretty tricks that they soon run out of. I'd rather trust my mind, but at least they can be more open than the Sorcerers.

Blessed – What is a Vancian Caster if not a clumsy Sorcerer? When will these heathens learn, and when will they understand and accept the divine truth we bring?

Demon-stolen Changelings – As foolish as Sorcerers. They do not hide in such large groups, but that just makes them more vulnerable. As if their magic was not laughably weak already.

Fey-stolen Changelings – Too serious to be Mystics, too right to be Sorcerers. I do not know what to make of these Cursed, but they are fun to play with if you can persuade them to relax.

Spirit-found Changelings – Be wary of these children. They seem to want to help, but there is also much else that they want. Try to show them the right path if you can, flee from them if you cannot.