Word Wizards

by Brendan Albano

Common folk may think that language describes reality. But you are not common folk. Whether at a quirky school for young wizards, through studying eldritch tomes from a civilization driven mad, or simply from the sheer quantity of hallucinogenic drugs you have ingested, you and your companions have pierced the veil and become something uncommon. You have become wizards! And a wizard knows that language can do more than describe reality. It can reshape it! It can create it! All you need is the mental fortitude to keep the etymological back pressure from squeezing your brains out your ears.

What is Word Wizards?

Word Wizards is a role-playing game (RPG) about a group of wizards who have just discovered wizarding and are rapidly and chaotically expanding their UNDERSTANDING of TRUE WORDS of magic. These stories can play out in a variety of settings and genres. Think stories about children going to wizard school, ill-advised deals with devils and faeries, government experiments with psychedelics, or anything else that sparks your imagination!

You'll need one or more players, a gamemaster (GM), and a handful of 6-sided dice (**d6s**) to play Word Wizards. If no one in your group has played an RPG before, you may want to search online for an introduction to RPGs, but here is an extremely brief explanation of how an RPG works: each player makes up a character, the GM describes a scene, the players describe what their characters do, the GM describes how the world responds, and repeat! If a character attempts something risky, the GM will have the player roll dice to determine the outcome of the action.

True Words and Understanding

A wizard's knowledge of TRUE WORDS is what allows them to do magic. A TRUE WORD can be any word, and represents a deep magical ability to affect reality related to that word. Each TRUE WORD a wizard learns begins with an UNDERSTANDING of **1**. A higher UNDERSTANDING represents greater ability to do magic with that TRUE WORD.

The maximum UNDERSTANDING you can have in a TRUE WORD is **3**.

Any word can be a TRUE WORD, from "Wind" to "Punch" to "Ball". Using your UNDERSTANDING of a TRUE WORD like "Punch" might enable anything from a magically enhanced uppercut, a spell to punch a hole in a wall, or the conjuring of a bowl full of a fruit-based beverage. Playing with your words is the point of the game!

Character Creation

1. Name your wizard.

2. Jot down a few sentences about your wizard's connections to the world they inhabit. Goals, dreams, family, and friends are all great connections to have.

3. Select the first TRUE WORD your wizard knows. You might select this before the game begins during character creation, or you might role-play the scene where your characters all learn their first TRUE WORDS. You begin with an UNDERSTANDING of **1** in the TRUE WORD you have selected.

If you would like to begin with a randomly generated true word, roll **2d6** and consult the table below. You may read the dice in either order, giving you two options, unless you roll doubles.
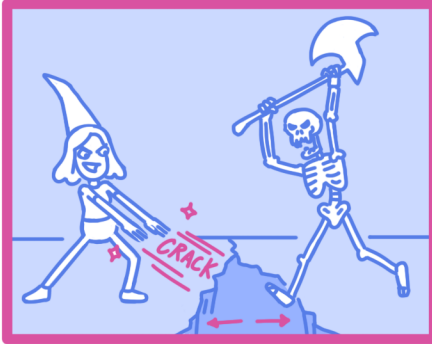
Example Words

1-1	Cow		**3-1**	Crack		**5-1**	Rot
1-2	Cloud		**3-2**	Cycle		**5-2**	Bear
1-3	Spin		**3-3**	Wind		**5-3**	Gold
1-4	Launch		**3-4**	Earth		**5-4**	Jam
1-5	Fly		**3-5**	Fire		**5-5**	Rock
1-6	Dart		**3-6**	Water		**5-6**	Pain
2-1	Ball		**4-1**	Plant		**6-1**	Hair
2-2	Egg		**4-2**	Bug		**6-2**	Saw
2-3	Might		**4-3**	Kill		**6-3**	Dump
2-4	Punch		**4-4**	Light		**6-4**	Divorce
2-5	Slice		**4-5**	Sea		**6-5**	Mist
2-6	Duck		**4-6**	Thong		**6-6**	Trip
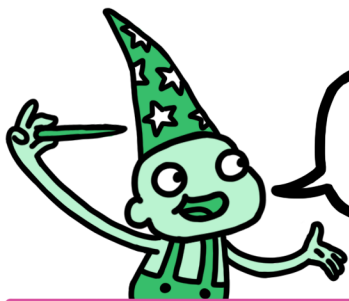
EXAMPLE WORD: CRACK!

MAKE A CRACK

SHOW A CRACK

OR ANYTHING YOU CAN IMAGINE!
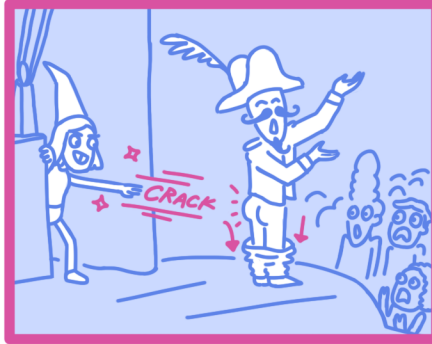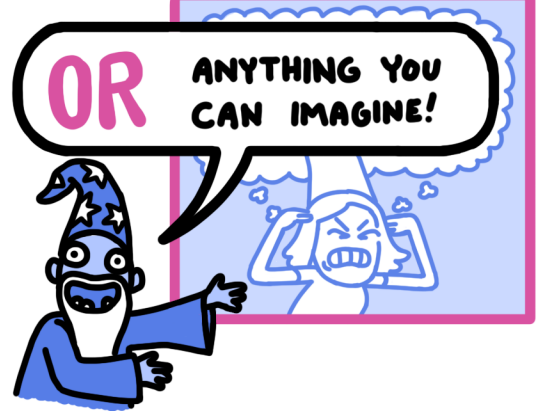
Doing Magic and Rolling Dice

When you do magic the GM will ask you to roll to determine how it goes! Choose the TRUE WORD you are using from the TRUE WORDS you know and describe the magical effect and what you are trying to accomplish. The limits of what you can accomplish with your magic are informed by the genre and tone of your game and should be approached as a collaborative negotiation about what kind of story you want to tell.

If you are really stretching a word by using a homonym, a pun, or other poetic device, treat full successes as partial successes. The GM is the final arbiter of what constitutes a stretch. An example of a stretch might be using "cow" to declare "I'm no COWard!"

Roll a number of **d6s** equal to your UNDERSTANDING of the TRUE WORD you are using and read the result on the highest die.

6 **Full Success:** If the highest die is a **6**, it's a FULL SUCCESS—things go well. If you roll more than one **6**, it's a CRITICAL SUCCESS—you gain some additional advantage.

4-5 **Partial Success:** If the highest die is a **4** or **5**, that's a PARTIAL SUCCESS—you do what you were trying to do, but there are consequences: trouble, harm, reduced effect, etc.

1-3 **Bad Outcome:** If the highest die is **1-3**, it's a BAD OUTCOME. Things go poorly. You probably don't achieve your goal and you suffer complications, too.

In addition, on a BAD OUTCOME, you suffer **1** STRAIN.

Learning from your mistakes: When your highest die is a **1-3** (BAD OUTCOME), you may increase your UNDERSTANDING of the TRUE WORD you used by **1**, or you may learn a new TRUE WORD with an UNDERSTANDING of **1** that also could have been used in that situation.

Trying again: If you get a BAD OUTCOME, you can't try to solve the same problem again with the same TRUE WORD, unless the context has changed.

Combining Words: You can combine multiple TRUE WORDS into a single magical effect. When you do, explain how you are combining the words and use the highest UNDERSTANDING among them **+1** to determine how many **d6s** to roll.

Rolling Dice without Magic: If you are trying to accomplish something risky without using magic, roll **1d6**. The scale of what you can achieve without magic is limited. Even a FULL SUCCESS may not completely solve a big problem without using magic. You're a wizard after all! If you get a BAD OUTCOME when you aren't using magic, you don't automatically suffer STRAIN.

Strain

Strain represents the cumulative effects on your body of your ill-advised attempts to distort reality with your TRUE WORDS, as well as the effects of injuries and fatigue.

When you suffer STRAIN, either from getting a bad outcome when you do magic, or from some narrative consequence described by the GM, note it on your character sheet.

Taking a nap reduces your current STRAIN by **1**. A full night of sleep reduces your STRAIN to **0**.

If you reach **5** STRAIN, you immediately collapse with a debilitating migraine, or some other narratively appropriate malady, and can't use magic until you reduce your STRAIN below **5**. You will need to take a nap or go to bed to reduce your STRAIN.