

WIZARD CARDS

A Great Game For Two People With Nothing But A Deck Of Cards And These Rules They Conveniently Printed Ahead Of Time

This is a simple game for two players that is designed to be played in about ten minutes. I wrote it on vacation and playtesting consisted of Sara and I sitting on the lodge bed playing a handful of games, so it's still a little rough around the edges.

Backstory

Long ago, when the world was young, the earth roiled and cracked under the forces of immense arcane battles. Wizard dueled witch, warlock fought mage, and chaos reigned. This game represents those battles.

Setup

To set up the game, take a regular deck of 52 playing cards (Jokers are optional). This is the spell pile, and it contains the raw magical components that make up your wizard's spells. Next to the spell pile is the spell discard pile (currently empty). This will be filled in as the game goes on and wizards cast spells. In addition to the shared spell deck and spell discard pile, each player has their own damage discard pile, to which they will discard cards from their hand when they take damage.

Now that the setup is done and the discard piles are understood, each player draws five cards, and the wizard battle is set to begin!

Turn Order

Decide on who will be the first player however you please. We prefer to decide who plays first by playing a practice game of Wizard Cards, but that's just us. Once the first player is chosen, the first turn can begin! Turns consist of the following steps:

1. Discard the ward components from the spell you played last round (goodnight, you valiant watchdog)
2. Play a spell!
3. Draw back up to five cards (so the other player has something to shoot at next turn)

Play continues like this until the spell deck is empty. Remember: there's one spell deck for both players, not one spell deck per player. At this point the game has entered the final phase, and will end after the next turn

of the player who did not go first in the game. That's a bit of a mouthful, so to break it out a bit:

- If you went first in the game and the deck is exhausted on your turn, the other player will take their turn, and then the game is over.
- If you went second in the game and the deck is exhausted on your turn, the other player will take their turn, then you will take a turn, and then the game is over.

At the end of the game, whoever has the smallest damage discard pile is the winner.

Playing a Spell

Each turn you will have the chance to play but a single spell. It might let you draw some cards, or it might let you damage your opponent or shield yourself from harm. It might even let you do two or three of these things! During the spell phase you will play spell cards out of your hand, resolving their effects one by one, until you run out of actions.

Each card in the deck represents a component of a spell, and that component has two features: the school, and the magnitude. The different schools are Ward, Vigor, Fortune, and Wrath. The magnitudes are lesser, greater, and major.

To find a card's school, check its suit:

- Spades: Ward
- Hearts: Vigor
- Diamonds: Fortune
- Clubs: Wrath

To find a card's magnitude, check its value:

- A - 5: lesser (magnitude 1)
- 6 - 10: greater (magnitude 2)
- J/Q/K: major (magnitude 3)

If you're playing with Jokers, they're a Wild Magic card! They count as a major and lesser component of a single school of the player's choice. For example, if a player chose Wrath for the school when they cast a Wild Magic card, the resulting spell component will be a magnitude 4 Wrath spell.

Ward

Ward spells form the backbone of any cautious wizard's repertoire. At the end of the turn, all spell components of your spell except for ward components are moved to the spell discard pile. Ward components stick around for your opponent's round, and absorb damage equal to their magnitude value before being sent to the spell discard pile. If a ward component survives to the start of your next round, it is discarded before you begin casting your spell.

Example: Sara played an Lesser Ward and Greater Ward on her turn, using the power of Major Vigor. When Julia's turn rolls around, Sara has a Ward value of 3. The first 3 damage Julia deals to Sara this turn will be ignored, and only after Julia had gotten through the ward will they be able to force Sara to take damage discards.

Fortune

Fortune spells are used to manipulate the strands of fate themselves, to turn the tide of luck towards the caster. When played, Fortune components let you draw a number of cards equal to their magnitude value. Drawing one card might not seem like a very useful ability for a spell component to have, but keep in mind that one or two less useful cards in your hand can mean the difference between having to get rid of a powerful card like Major Wrath or not, and Lesser Fortune and Lesser Vigor make great "soak" cards.

Cards you draw may be used immediately, if you played your Fortune card as part of a multi-component spell.

Wrath

Wrath is the meat and potatoes of these spells, and the primary component in moving closer to victory. When you play a Wrath spell component, your opponent must immediately discard a number of cards equal to the magnitude value from their hand into their damage discard pile, assuming they don't have enough Ward to ablate the damage. If you deal enough damage to another player to completely remove their hand, all further damage to them this turn is ignored since they have no cards to discard. Likewise, since they have no cards with which to play a spell, their next turn will consist only of drawing back up to five as the end of their turn.

Vigor

Vigor cards are the most powerful, as they let you combine multiple spell components into a more powerful spell. The Vigor rating of a card tells you how many *additional* components you can add to your current spell. A Lesser Vigor card only pays for itself, while a Major

Vigor card can easily turn the tide of the game. If you run out of cards to use for casting while you still have unspent Vigor values, your turn ends and you draw back up to five. You may not draw cards during a spell unless you play a Fortune component.

Example: Sara has an edge up on Julia as the game draws to a close, and she knows she can win the game now if she can just deal 5 damage to them. She begins her spell by casting the Major Vigor component, giving her 3 additional plays. This leaves her with three remaining components to play. Her only damaging spell right now is Greater Wrath, which knocks two cards out of Julia's hand. She takes a gamble and uses her second component to play Lesser Fortune. Almost! She draws a Greater Vigor, and uses that as the third component of her spell. She now has 5 components she can play and has used 3 components, leaving her with 2 left. She casts another Lesser Fortune, and success! She draws a Major Wrath, and wipes out the last of Julia's hand. With their next turn effectively skipped, it may as well be game over.

Starting Your Turn With Zero Cards

If you start your turn with no cards in your hand, you will not be able to cast a spell. Skip immediately to the draw part of your turn, then end it (as normal).

Draw Back Up To Five

You draw back up to 5 at the end of the turn, almost no matter what. If you couldn't cast a spell on your turn because you had been forced to discard all of your cards on your opponents turn, you still draw up to 5. The only case in which you don't draw is if the spell deck is empty.

If you end your turn with 5 or more cards, bully for you! Do not draw more, and do not discard the extra. You've given yourself a nice buffer until your next turn.

Winning The Game

Once the game ends, the player with the smallest discard pile (in terms of number of cards, not combined value) wins.

Optional Rule: Making it nerdier

Instead of just calling spell components "Lesser Wrath" or "Major Fortune," you could use the following names:

Lesser Fortune (Draw 1): Clairvoyance
Lesser Vigor (Play 1): Haste
Lesser Ward (Ward 1): Shield of Wood
Lesser Wrath (Damage 1): Zap
Greater Fortune (Draw 2): Divination
Greater Vigor (Play 2): Double Spell
Greater Ward (Ward 2): Wall of Stone
Greater Wrath (Damage 2): Fireball
Major Fortune (Draw 3): Seer's Sight
Major Vigor (Play 3): Arcane Mastery
Major Ward (Ward 3): Fortress of Iron
Major Wrath (Damage 3): Disintegrate

Optional Rule: Making it more hectic

If the base game seems a little slow, these changes will make it much more hectic:

- Vigor cards no longer cost an action to cast
- Draw back up to 5 cards at the start of each turn in addition to the end

Optional Rule: Constructed decks

If you like, you can do a short draft to play this game with separate constructed decks instead of one shared one, which makes it less likely that one player would end up drawing, say, all of the Major spells just due to luck.

To perform the draft, lay out four piles of cards, one for each suit, going from Ace on the bottom up until King on the top. Choose a first player (we like to play a game of *Wizard Cards*), who then takes a single card off the top of a stack and begins their deck. Then the other player chooses a card, and the two players alternate choosing one card at a time until all of the cards are gone. If you're playing with Jokers, just give each player one Joker.

Once the draft is done, whoever picked their cards second will take the first turn of the actual game. The game will proceed as normal, except the end of the game will begin once either player's deck is empty, since there is no shared deck.