

STRANGE BREW – SOLUTION

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You're looking at a bunch of cards from the collectible card game MAGIC: THE GATHERING. A desperate hope – that we only care about the cards in each hand (eg. they have something in common) – is crushed by the presence of a decklist, which suggests that cards that search the deck ('library', in Magic jargon) do, in fact, search. We're going to play some Magic.

Learning to play Magic the Gathering. The only game with more rules than game.

— Nathan Fillion

At this point it's easy to guess the mechanic of this puzzle – we want to maximize the life lost by our opponent. Since players draw cards at the beginning of each turn (except during the first player's first turn) and our deck is unordered, we need to do this in a single turn. The maximal life lost by our opponent is

19, 20, 15, 18, 13, 19, 3, 1, 12, 5,

which spells **STORM SCALE** alphanumerically. The full solutions for each hand are listed below:

Hand # 1: Play Grove of the Burnwillows, tap for [G], and cast Crop Rotation (sacrificing Grove) to search for Darigaaz's Caldera. Tap Caldera for [G] in response to the enter-the-battlefield (ETB) trigger, then sacrifice it to the trigger and use the [G] to cast Fastbond. Play Mishra's Workshop, losing a life to Fastbond (19 life (L)), then tap it for [3] and cast Crucible of Worlds. *Note: We can now combine Crucible and Caldera to turn 1 life into [B], [R], or [G].*

Cast Summoner's Pact, searching for Primeval Titan. Generate [3R], falling to 15L, and cast Past in Flames. Flashback Summoner's Pact, searching for Animar, Soul of Elements. Generate [4GG], falling to 9L, and cast Primeval Titan. Search for Dark Depths and Thespian's Stage using the ETB trigger. Flashback Crop Rotation (8L) and Rotate Thespian's Stage into Flamekin Village. Reveal Animar to have Flamekin Village ETB untapped. Replay Thespian's Stage (7L), generate [2] (5L), and activate the ability on Stage, targeting Dark Depths.

The Thespian's Stage will become a copy of Dark Depths, but it has not ETB'ed and is therefore without ice counters. Sacrifice the real Dark Depths to the Legend Rule, and sacrifice the fake one to create a Marit Lage. Generate [R] (4L), then give Marit Lage haste using Flamekin Village and attack for 20. Your opponent falls from 21 to 1, and you have dealt **19**.

ERRATA – After giving Marit Lage haste, replay Caldera (3L) and sacrifice Flamekin Village to keep Caldera around. Replay Flamekin Village (untapped, 2L), then give Primeval Titan haste as well. Swing for 26, dealing 25 overall. Thanks to Sam Connolly for pointing this out.

Hand # 2: Play Black Lotus and sacrifice it for [UUU]. Cast Summoner's Pact, searching for Protean Hulk, and cast Flash to have it ETB (floating [U]). Allow Protean Hulk to be sacrificed, and search for Sidisi, Undead Vizier and Veteran Explorer. Exploit Explorer, search for Mountain and Swamp, and tap them to float [URB]. Cast Culling the Weak, sacrificing Sidisi, and float [URBBBB]. Cast Grapeshot (dealing 5 damage) and Yawgmoth's Will (floating [B]).

Replay Black Lotus and sacrifice it to float [BGGG], then cast Summoner's Pact for Burning-Tree Emissary. Play Emissary [BGGR], play Explorer [BGR], and play Culling the Weak, sacrificing

Explorer or Emissary [BBBBRG].¹ Cast Sidisi [R], exploit Sidisi to search for Lion's Eye Diamond, and play and sacrifice Lion's Eye Diamond [RUUU]. Cast Flash (for no effect), then cast Grapeshot for 15 damage. This deals **20** damage overall.

Hand # 3: Cast Lotus and sacrifice it for [GGG]. Cast Summoner's Pact for Protean Hulk, then Cast Nostalgic Dreams [G], discarding Protean Hulk and Bridge from Below to get back Lotus and Summoner's Pact. Cast Summoner's Pact for Veteran Explorer and play it. Cast Lotus and sacrifice it [BBB] to play Recurring Nightmare.

Sacrifice Explorer to Recurring Nightmare, returning Protean Hulk to play. This triggers Veteran Explorer (search for Mountain/Swamp, floating [BR]) as well as Bridge from Below, which creates a 2/2 Zombie. Sacrifice Protean Hulk to cast Diabolic Intent (searching for Demon of Death's Gate), triggering Bridge and creating a second 2/2 Zombie. Search for Painter's Servant and Anger using the Protean Hulk trigger, then name black as Painter's Servant ETBs. Cast Demon of Death's Gate by sacrificing Anger, Painter's Servant, and a Zombie, creating two more Zombies in the process. With Anger giving haste, attack with Demon of Death's Gate and three Zombies for **15** damage.

Hand # 4: Play Thespian's Stage [1], then cast Lotus and sacrifice it for [1BBB]. Play Lion's Eye Diamond (LED), then cast Infernal Tutor, sacrificing LED in response [BBBBB], and searching for Yawgmoth's Will. Cast Yawgmoth's Will [BB], then replay Lotus and LED [BBBBBRRR]. Cast Infernal Tutor [BBBRRR] for Burning Wish, then cast Burning Wish [BBBR] for Tendrils of Agony. Cast Tendrils, causing the opponent to lose **18** life.

Hand # 5: Cast Lotus and sacrifice it for [GGG], then cast Regrowth, targeting Lotus. Cast Veteran Explorer, then replay Lotus and sacrifice for [BBB]. Cast Cabal Therapy (targeting yourself and missing), then flashback Therapy by sacrificing Veteran Explorer. Search for Mountain and Snow-Covered Mountain when the Explorer Dies, float [BBRR], then cast Fireblast by sacrificing the two lands to deal 4 damage. Cast Infernal Tutor [RR], searching for Grapeshot. Cast Grapeshot to deal 9 more damage, for a total of **13**.

Hand # 6: Play Grove of the Burnwillows, tap for [G], and cast Crop Rotation, putting Tree of Tales into play. Cast Fastbond, then play City of Traitors [2] (19L). Play Darkslick Shores [2U] (18L), sacrificing City, then cast Tinker (sacrificing Tree of Tales) to put Crucible of Worlds into play. Replay City, Tree, City, Grove, City [6RG] (13L).

Cast Past in Flames [3G], then flashback Crop Rotation (sacrificing Darkslick Shores) for Dari-gaaz's Caldera. Float [G] before sacrificing Caldera to its ETB trigger [3G] (13L). Replay Caldera (sacrificing it) and Darkslick Shores [3UGG] (11L), then flashback Tinker (sacrificing Tree of Tales) to put Soul Conduit into play. Replay Caldera until you reach 1 life, then activate Soul Conduit to make the opponent lose **19** life overall.

Hand # 7: Cast Lotus for [GGG], then cast Traverse the Ulvenwald for a Mountain [GG]. Cast Nostalgic Dreams, discarding Mountain and Anger in exchange for Lotus and Traverse. Cast Land Grant and fail to find. Recast Lotus and sacrifice for [GGG], then cast Traverse for Harvest Wurm [GG]. Cast Harvest Wurm, returning Mountain to your hand. Play Mountain, activate Anger, and attack with Harvest Wurm for **3**.

Hand # 8: Play City of Traitors, then cast Lotus and sacrifice it [2UUU]. Cast Summoner's Pact for Animar, Soul of Elements, then cast Dream Halls. Discard Animar to cast Firemind's Foresight via Dream Halls and search for Entomb, Flash, and Cunning Wish. Discard Flash to cast Cunning Wish, searching for Goryo's Vengeance. Cast Goryo's Vengeance (discarding Entomb) to animate Animar (with haste) and attack for **1**.

¹Sacrificing Explorer exiles it (because of Yawgmoth's Will), so you would not get the additional lands this time.

Hand # 9: Play Eye of Ugin, then cast Lotus (sacrifice for [RRR]) and Lion's Eye Diamond (LED). Cast Summoner's Pact, searching for and then exiling Elvish Spirit Guide [RRRG]. Cast Burning Wish, holding priority to sacrifice LED [RRGGG], then search for Channel. Cast Channel [RRG].

Channel up to [4RRG] (16L), then flashback Past in Flames [RG]. Channel up to [7RG] (9L) to activate Eye of Ugin, searching Painter's Servant. Cast Servant using Channel [RG] (7L), naming black. Flashback Summoner's Pact to search for Death's Shadow. Flashback Through the Breach using Channel [G] (3L) to put Death's Shadow into play. Channel to (1L) and attack for **12**.

*Alternative Solution: Cast Lotus (sacrifice for [RRR]) and LED. Cast Summoner's Pact, searching for and then casting Burning-Tree Emissary [RRG]. Cast Burning Wish, holding priority to sacrifice LED [RBBB], and search for Tendrils of Agony. Cast Tendrils, dealing **12**.²*

Hand # 10: Cast Black Lotus, sacrifice it for [GGG], then cast Summoner's Pact for Lotus Cobra and cast it [G]. Play Verdant Catacombs (float [RG]), then sacrifice Catacombs for Swamp [RGG] and tap it [BRGG]. Cast Crop Rotation, sacrificing Swamp to put Eye of Ugin into play [BRGG]. Cast Burning Wish for Channel [GG], then cast Channel. Pay 7L to add [7] via Channel (12L), then activate Eye of Ugin to search for Golem Artisan. Cast Golem Artisan (7L), give it haste (5L), give it +2/+2 (1L), then attack for **5**.

CONSTRUCTION NOTES

This puzzle was perhaps the most difficult to construct, but I worked on it over a long period of time so it is hard to tell exactly how long it took to complete. Most of this time was spent verifying optimality (by hand) and rewriting hands that kept breaking as more and more cards were added to the deck. The puzzle answer is a reference to MaRo's **Storm Scale**, a rating given to mechanics (like Storm) that indicates the likelihood they will be printed in a standard set ever again.

To be blunt, I think that this puzzle was the worst puzzle of the hunt. This particular puzzle would have probably been great for an MIT Hunt (where you can find an expert on any topic and time is less of an issue), but was not suited to the smaller team sizes in CRUMS. Moreover, it suffered during test-solving because nobody could solve it. (Note to self: this probably meant something.)

On the other hand, feedback suggests that this puzzle was well-regarded by the niche audience who understood it. I was intrigued (blinded?) by the pursuit of 10 mini-puzzles inside of a 75-card whole, and it seems that this puzzle did well to achieve that particular end. Anyhow, I apologize for what may have been an alienating puzzle experience. If you've read this far, have a rejected hand. Watch out, it's a toughie.



²The first (intended) solution was unique until I added Burning-Tree Emissary to the deck to increase storm count by 1 in Hand # 2. Luckily, this new solution merely tied the known one. Note that exiling Elvish Spirit Guide does not count as casting a card, and therefore will not increase storm count.