

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns

Flames of the Blood Hand

Adrian Sullivan
Single-Card Strategies
Wednesday, June 1, 2005



Fire Week. By the time you read this, it will be half over, but as I'm writing this article now, I have to say, I have absolutely no idea what kind of exciting stuff the other columnists will be putting out this week. I almost wish I had a little time machine so I could gorge on all of it! (I'm aware I could do a lot more noteworthy stuff if I had a time machine – I could buy [a box of Arabian Nights](#), for example.)

There were so many possibilities when it came to Fire Week. I thought about doing [Burning Cinder Fury of Crimson Chaos Fire](#) or [Skyfire Kirin](#). I thought a lot about Burn decks (if ever there was a week I could do that, surely Fire Week is it right?) and started laughing to myself in Beavis and Butthead fashion about "Fire! Fire!" In the end, the pop-culture geek in me was done in by a movie trailer for the upcoming Fantastic Four movie and I chose [Flames of the Blood Hand](#).



Flame on!

[Flames of the Blood Hand](#) is one of those simple spells that has a job and does it well. It's an efficient damage dealer all by its lonesome, and it answers two of the problems that plague red damage spells: prevention and life gain. [Flames of the Blood Hand](#) will have none of that.

The efficiency of damage is certainly a big deal, a powerful twist on good ol' straight-forward burn. [Firebolt](#) can deal 4 damage as well, but it takes twice as much mana and is a sorcery to boot. Tricks aside, [Flames of the Blood Hand](#) and [Pulse of the Forge](#) are about as efficient a bit of burn as you can point at an opponent right now, per card and mana. This comes into play the more damage that you run in your deck. Essentially, the damage begins to cascade into something far more important – the ever approaching 0 life total of your opponent.

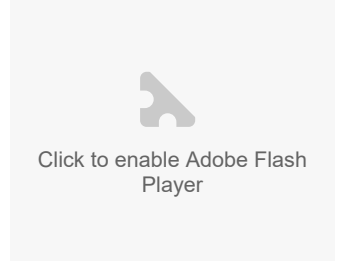
Take this deck from the Extended Season for Philadelphia:

Jody Godin, Red Deck Wins, 5th Place
PTQ: Moncton, New Brunswick, March 5

Main Deck 64 cards	Sideboard
4 Wooded Foothills	2 Fledgling Dragon
8 Mountain	3 Pyrostatic Pillar
4 Bloodstained Mire	3 Ensnaring Bridge
4 Wasteland	3 Overload
4 Rishadan Port	11 sideboard cards
24 land	
4 Jackal Pup	24 other spells



PRO TOUR-SAN DIEGO



Poison at the Pro Tour

TENTH EDITION PREVIEW

14 Days Until Magic Game Day!

-discuss-

FIND OUT MORE!

PRODUCTS

Tenth Edition Future Sight

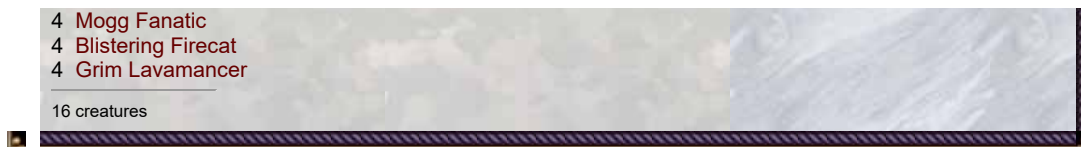
All Magic products

RULES

Core Game
Basic Rulebook
Comprehensive Rules
All Magic Rules

MESSAGE BOARDS

All Magic message boards
magicthegathering.com forum
Rules Q&A forum
Magic Online announcements



If we pretend that they just burn the other player every turn, you can have a turn sequence like this:

- Turn 1 – Seal of Fire (18)
- Turn 2 – Volcanic Hammer (15)
- Turn 3 – Flames of the Blood Hand (11)
- Turn 4 – Blistering Firecat (4)

Of course, your opponent is likely to resist you, but when you have a deck like the one that is built here by Jody Godin, every little burn spell becomes all that much more powerful because you have other efficient burn spells. My former Wednesday co-columnist Mike Flores wrote an excellent article about this entitled [The Philosophy of Fire](#). I really recommend reading it.

Responsive

A lot of cards that I look at are very specifically about how you can use Card X with Card Y and Bam! Crazy/powerful/clever/cool Effect Z pops out of the works. One of the things with a card like **Flames of the Blood Hand** is that it is essentially a very responsive card with respect to the environment. Yes, you use it to actively hit your opponent's head, but it doesn't do anything to interact with most of the cards that you are planning on using, rather it interacts with what your *opponent* is going to be doing.

Take the classic case of life gain to dodge direct damage. Against a pure direct damage spell, a life gain card can be the equivalent of a counterspell. When I qualified for the Pro Tour with Scepter-Chant [way back in 2003](#), my **Heroes' Reunion** was like a K.O. for all of the burn decks like Red Deck Wins. A more extreme kind of life gain was used by Brian Schneider back in 1998's Extended. The original **Presence of the Wise** was **Gerrard's Wisdom**, and combined with **Meditate**, it could make for some ridiculous life gain to unmake all of the work of the poor burn deck.

Let's relook at that initial burn sequence and imagine a game between Jody and Brian. (The decks are from different eras, but this still works as a great example.)

- Turn 1 – Seal of Fire (18) – Brian does nothing
- Turn 2 – Volcanic Hammer (15) – Brian does nothing
- Turn 3 – Flames of the Blood Hand (11) – Brian counters (makes that 15!)
- Turn 4 – Blistering Firecat (4 8) – Brian casts **Meditate** at the end of opponent's turn (up to 10 cards)
- Turn 5 – Blistering Firecat again! (1) – Brian draws a land, lays it, casts **Gerrard's Wisdom** and gains 18 life! Hand sizes, Jody 2, Brian 7 after discarding



But let's change the order of spells and have Turn 3 save that **Flames of the Blood Hand** for later. If you simply leave the mana open on Turn 5 for the **Flames of the Blood Hand**, you'd not only be dealing four damage, but you'd be preventing a lifegain of around 18. To get the same 22 life swing from **Pulse of the Forge** (a card I would generally call stronger by far than **Flames of the Blood Hand**), you'd have to spend around 15 mana for it.

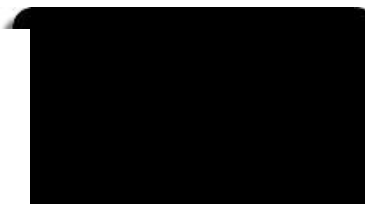
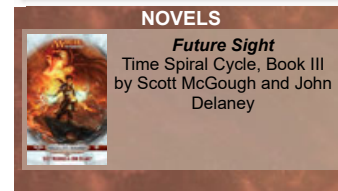
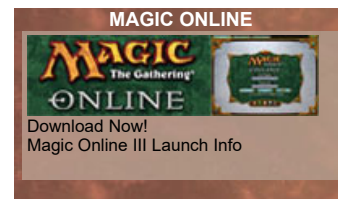
Here we can see an illustration of something important. First of all, by preventing life gain, you can actually accomplish the equivalent of a lot more virtual damage than the card might otherwise imply. This means that there is a home for this card in a damage-heavy deck. At the same time, though, you want to be careful about when you cast the card. If you have to worry about life gain, saving **Flames of the Blood Hand** for the appropriate moment is pretty important. In Extended tournaments, one place where **Flames of the Blood Hand** ended up showing up was in the sideboard of burn-heavy Red Deck Wins as a massive counter to the Life deck (a combo deck able to generate arbitrarily high life totals), but it could have been used in any deck that expected to get in a lot of massive damage quickly, but would lose to the Life combo; all you needed was a very splashable access to one red mana.

The unpreventable portion of the card is another very important thing to remember. A lot of decks expect to be able to survive through some form of prevention, whether it is **Circle of Protection: Red** or **Sphere of Law**. **Flames of the Blood Hand** can't be prevented, so all you have to plan on doing is attempting to get someone within range of a **Flames** and you don't have to worry about scary sideboard cards like those. I used **Lightning Surge** as a **Burning Wish** target in several decks for this very ability.

A few bells and whistles

Just because bells and whistles are fun, here are a couple of more amusing uses of the card:

The Richard Garfield, PHDs: [Both of the Phelddagrifs](#) have an activated ability that grants the opponent life. Well, not if *you* have something to say about it.



Fiery Justice: This *Ice Age* burn spell can do a very efficient 5 damage for only 3 mana. Unfortunately, it lets your opponent gain 5 life for the favor. But, it doesn't have to...

Game of Chaos: Break out your *Krark's Thumbs*. Playing a *Game of Chaos* with your opponent under a *Flames of the Blood Hand* means that your opponent could be taking a bit of damage. Get a Thumb in there too and watch the pain really go to town.

There are a couple of other similar examples, but you get the idea. *Flames of the Blood Hand* really isn't a card for tricks. Think of it more like red's version of *Counterspell* or *Disenchant* for the cards that red really cares about stopping.

Wrapping Up

For this week's deck, I have a modified version of one of the Block Decks that **Magic** Genius Ben Dempsey and I kicked around for Pro-Tour Philadelphia. In the end, we discarded this deck because of some massive weaknesses to White Weenie (especially *Blessed Breath*) and mediocre performance against Snakes, but the deck was very good against much of the rest of the field.



Half-Life Red

60 cards

<p>1 <i>Shinka, the Bloodsoaked Keep</i></p> <p>24 <i>Mountain</i></p> <hr/> <p>25 land</p>	<p>4 <i>Hearth Kami</i></p> <p>3 <i>Heartless Hidetsugu</i></p> <p>1 <i>Godo, Bandit Warlord</i></p> <hr/> <p>8 creatures</p>	<p>4 <i>Lava Spike</i></p> <p>4 <i>Glacial Ray</i></p> <p>4 <i>Yamabushi's Flame</i></p> <p>4 <i>Mindblaze</i></p> <p>4 <i>Umezawa's Jitte</i></p> <p>3 <i>Flames of the Blood Hand</i></p> <p>3 <i>Genju of the Spires</i></p> <p>1 <i>Tenza, Godo's Maul</i></p> <hr/> <p>27 other spells</p>
---	---	---

The deck went through probably about a million versions, but they all had some very important things in common: they could deal a lot of damage with very few cards. *Flames of the Blood Hand* becomes a lot better if you can expect to have an opponent at low life, and this deck packed enough burn that even if you were doing things to their creatures you could still hit them low.

Initially, the *Flames of the Blood Hand* hopped in there as a potential answer to the big problem of *Kokusho* being joined by a second *Kokusho* for the life gain, but there was more to it than that: occasionally you could score a nice life swing from a bad *Umezawa's Jitte* player gaining life all at once (rather than letting each activation resolve), and even if you only stopped one activation from mattering, you still hit them for effectively 6 life.

In the end, we decided that a losing record to White Weenie and a 50/50 Snake match-up wasn't all that hot, and we tried out different decks. I didn't end up winning the Last Chance Qualifier, so I took my Rat Deck Wins to tear up the Grand Prix Trials, and Ben took a black Snakes deck to the Pro Tour and picked up a couple of hundred dollars. Still, though, I wonder if he wouldn't have made more packing *Flames of the Blood Hand*.

Some Final Words on the Challenge

This is the last week to submit your decklists and ideas for the upcoming Tortured Existence Challenge. Regularly readers will already realize that this Challenge is a bit different than all of the previous ones. In the last fifteen months, I've done eight card Challenges (on *Mirror Gallery*, *Toshiro Umezawa*, *Psychic Vortex*, *Uyo*, *Silent Prophet*, *Furnace of Rath*, *Clock of Omens*, *Forgotten Ancient*, and *Sundering Titan*), and they all have a lot in common. Every Challenge has happened after I've already written an article on the card going over how to use the card. One of the things that is nice about this system is that everyone writing in is given the same set of ideas to get their gears working as they think about how to use and abuse a card. One of the bad things about running Challenges after the article is that many people felt like the card was already too explored. While a lot of readers loved to see some of the cool ideas like Ryan Fleischer's suggestions of *Urza's Contact Lenses* to go with *Clock of Omens*, there were other readers who only wanted to have another go at a new card.

I've already received several hundred submissions for Tortured Existence and decks to abuse it. If you're looking to get in on the action, the deadline for your decklist and comments is June 3rd. I'm going to reiterate a couple of the things I'm looking for.

- A deck that shows how the card is good. Even if the card plays a supporting role in your deck, it still needs to be good at what it does in the deck.
- The deck uses the card well. *Wild Mongrel* is a great card, but it isn't very good in a *Bottomless Pit* deck.
- Your comments explain why *Tortured Existence* was in the deck.
- If you use multiple decklists, each decklist shows off a different aspect of the card.

- Your deck or idea is original. I have already seen a lot of overlap on good ideas, so if you'd like to be showcased, be clever.
- As always, the early bird gets the worm – if I can't decide between submissions based on other merits, the decision goes to the early submitter.

I hope you've been enjoying Fire Week. See you again next week with the results of the Reader Challenge!



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Adrian Sullivan](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Inside Wizards](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#)

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

