

SPARKLING SUMMIT (solution)

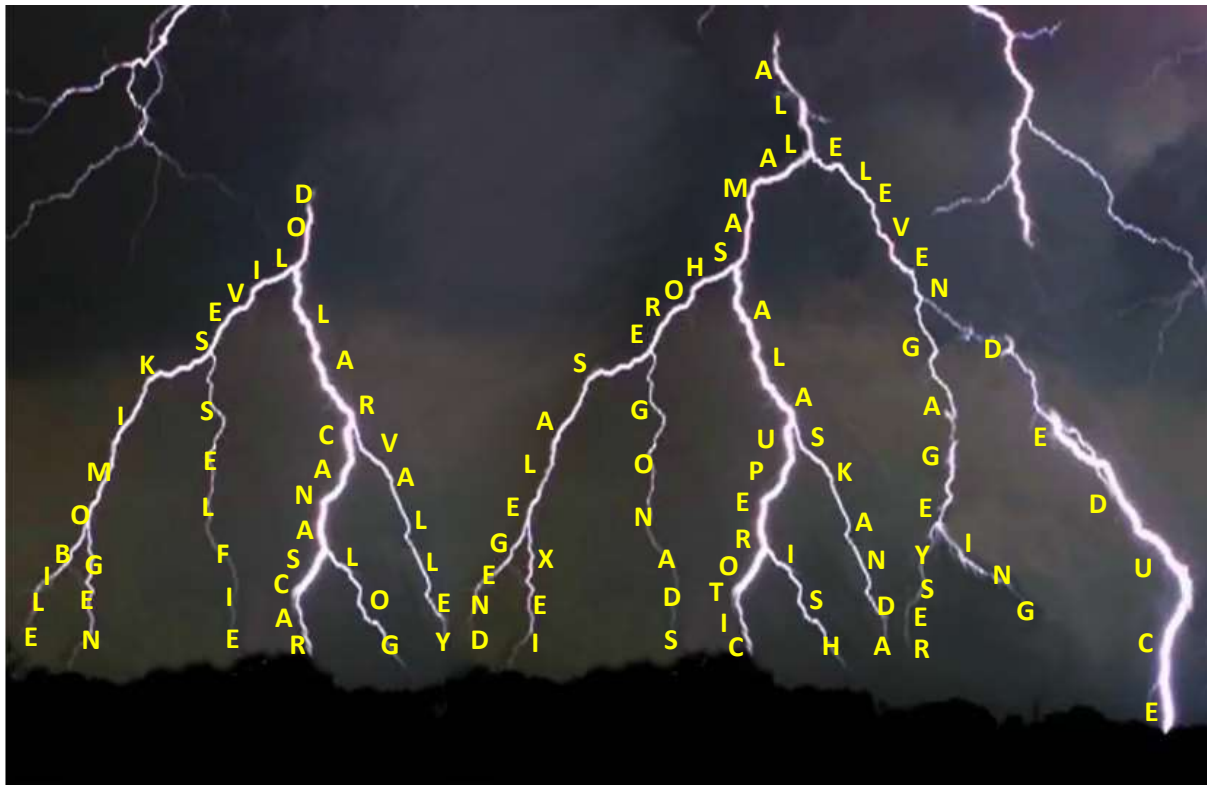
by Ong Kah Kien

The first step is to solve all the provided word clues, which have answers in alphabetical order as confirmation and to aid solving. A commonality and another confirmation point is also that all the answers have 6-letters. The table below summarizes the answers to the clues:

Clues	Answers
Growing old or maturing	AGEING
Biggest US state	ALASKA
Tolstoy's Vronsky	ALEXEI
Alternative form of a gene	ALLELE
Like a mechanical watch	ANALOG
Major or minor part of a tarot deck	ARCANA
One way boats come	ASHORE
Figure out using logic	DEDUCE
US currency	DOLLAR
Number on a soccer team	ELEVEN
Betroth	ENGAGE
Like a sensual novel	EROTIC
Arctic native	ESKIMO
Hot spring that ejects water	GEYSER
Male reproductive glands	GONADS
Cymbeline's daughter in Shakespeare	IMOGEN
Like caterpillars	LARVAL
Singer Cyndi	LAUPER
Mythical tale	LEGEND
Alpacas' cousins	LLAMAS
Indian spice mix	MASALA
Not in a fixed position	MOBILE
Daytona org.	NASCAR
Martinis have them	OLIVES
Mount Hood state	OREGON
Die	PERISH
House flip	RESALE
Personal photo	SELFIE
Hindu god of war	SKANDA
Lowland between hills	VALLEY
Peddled one's wares	VENDED
Boat, ship	VESSEL

The next step is to make use of the provided image, which has circles overlaid along the lightning streaks, similar to a tree diagram. Notably, there is a circle at each branching point, further confirming that the diagram should be filled in with the answers from the clues, and following the branching paths. One useful observation clued by the theme of “chain lightning”

is that many of the answers have repeated substrings, and could potentially be chained with these overlapping substrings when filling in the diagram. So, one approach to filling in the diagram could be to start from the lightning ends near the ground, e.g. looking for pairs of answers where the first and second letters of one word, matched the second and third letters of another. From the diagram, there should be 5 of these pairs, and the rest of the answers could eventually be chained to these to fill the entire diagram as shown below. Reading off the letters at the ends of the bolts as clued by the flavortext gives the answer to this puzzle and the Lightning Guardian's magic **ENERGY DISCHARGE**.



Constructor's notes:

The idea of using word chains with the thematic concept of chain lightning came very naturally, as the branching patterns of lightning resembled tree diagrams. The biggest challenge in the construction was to allow solvers to figure out where to place each word in the chain uniquely, without needing to provide additional clueing. The original idea was to have symmetrical word chains that overlapped in exactly trigram substrings (half of each word). However, this meant that it would not be possible to differentiate different branches and trees from each other. Hence, I ended up with a slightly less elegant chaining method where the length of the overlapping substrings varied, but would ensure that the words in each branch would be distinct. The final extraction uses the ends of the lightning bolts, which had to be “dodged”. This is a nod to the infamous FFX side quest Lightning Dodger, where a player has to react to the regular lightning flashes at the Thunder Plains and dodge 200 consecutive bolts/strikes to obtain the Venus Sigil.