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# Referential Treatment

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How often does the text on a **Magic** card refer to another card by name? Not that often, really. But those that do are noteworthy.

Cards that interact with specific other cards in the game of **Magic** have been around in one form or another since Alpha. Some say that **Plague Rats** were the first card to have this mechanic, though I discount these since they interact solely with their own kind. Others point to the triumvirate of **Zombie Master**, **Goblin King**, and **Lord of Atlantis**, though they have the same effect within their creature type as **Sulfuric Vapors** has with red direct damage spells -- they dole out bonuses based on type, not name. While the Rats inspired the "building block" creatures of later sets such as **Slivers** and **Chimeras**, and the lords theme continues unabated to present day, the true originator of this theme came as one of the few cards in **Magic** to be functionally changed from its original printing!

The intent of the original **Gloom** was not only to make white spells cost more to put into play, but also specifically as a way for black to deal with **Circles of Protection**. If you go back to the Alpha printing of **Gloom**, you'll see that instead of making all white enchantments cost 3 more to activate, it pinpoints **Circles of Protection**. Ironically, **Circle of Protection: Black** was accidentally left off the original print sheet, causing a strange state of non-existence with a card specifically printed to hose it! **Gloom** did theoretically aim at five specific cards in **Magic**. This paved the way for the first cards which used the names of one specific other card.



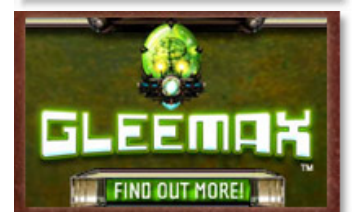
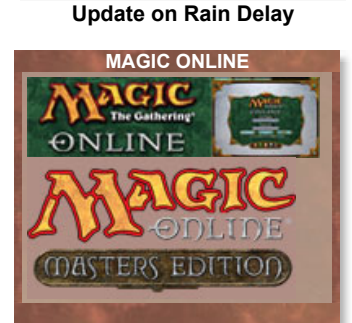
*The original Gloom referenced Circles of Protection, but subsequent versions affect all white enchantments with activation costs. The original versions have errata to function the same way.*

## ENTER SAND, MAN

**Arabian Nights** introduced the card **Desert**, the first land with the ability to kill attacking creatures. Not content to let this obviously powerful card go unhosed, Wizards printed no less than two cards designed specially to fight **Desert**: **Desert Nomads** and **Camel**. When you think about it in retrospect, it seems rather absurd that these three cards ever interacted as such. It would be highly unlikely that a non-color specific land would be printed which could deal damage to creatures (see **Balduvian Trading Post** for an updated version of **Desert**), much less a banding creature. Never the less, they were here in all their glory, and they introduced a colorful mini-cycle of cards into the game.

## THE URZATRON

Later in **Antiquities**, the mechanic was fully realized. Enter the Urza Lands three: **Mine**, **Power Plant**, and **Tower**. These lands truly harnessed the power of combination-specific cards. Players began to experiment with the viability of a built-in mana engine designed around having these three cards in play. While there weren't any cards which could easily tutor for your missing lands, outside of **Demonic Tutor** itself, the risk versus reward of playing these lands were undeniable. Without the **Mine**, the **Power Plant** and **Tower** were simply bad colorless mana producers. Same with the **Plant** and **Mine** without the **Tower**, and the **Tower** and **Mine** without the **Plant**. But put all three together, and suddenly you could have 7 mana as soon as the third turn. Undeniable. Suddenly, unplayably highly costed artifacts from other expansions were feasible in a Urza Land deck, especially combined with **Mishra's Workshops**. **Aladdin's Ring** came into play on turn four, ready to go. Splash a little red and you've got a rather large **Disintegrate** on turn 5. Even the gigantic **Colossus of Sardia** could be played and untapped as early as turn five without the need of **Dark Rituals**, **Basalt Monoliths**, or late game mana development.





*Urza's Tower, Urza's Mine, and Urza's Power Plant combine to increase each other's production. The three cards earned the nickname "Urzatron" because combined they generate insane amounts of mana. Note that if you have, say, one Mine, one Power Plant, and three Towers, all the Towers produce 3 mana. There only needs to be one of each in play for tall the bonuses, not complete sets.*

## CREATURE UPGRADES

*Legends* and *Mirage* took two opposite ended approaches to the specific-reference idea. *Legends* introduced **Rohgahh of Kher Keep**, a monstrous rare legend who powered up the seemingly endless legions of puny common **Kobolds of Kher Keep**. On the other end of the spectrum, the common **Urborg Panther** had the ability to bring the rare **Spirit of the Night** into play when combined with **Breathstealer** and **Feral Shadow**. *Visions* even took both these ideas at once, with the reiteration of the Spirit motif through **Viashivan Dragon** (brought forth by the **Kyscu** and **Spitting Drakes**), and the reverse of Rohgahh in **Kookus**, who needed his common friend (**Keeper of Kookus**) to keep him from being detrimental to your life total.

Right after *Visions*, these types of cards vanished entirely. Sure, the Urza Lands saw print in *Fifth Edition*, but no new cards were made which referenced specific other cards in **Magic**. *Tempest* block came and went with Slivers to fill that void, followed by *Urza's* block and it's brokenly fast cards, and finally *Masques* block with Rebels and Mercenaries. Although all of these constituted a larger sphere of card-type influence, **Magic** lacked the one-to-one interaction seen in the previous releases.

## BURSTS AND BUDDIES

Flash forward to present day. *Odyssey* finally returned this very overlooked ability to the **Magic** scene, and did so in the most playable and complex form yet. Now there were four cards set off in pairs which enhanced one another. In one corner we had **Diligent Farmhand** powering up the already above average **Muscle Burst**. In the other, **Pardic Firecat** gave an extra edge to the **Kindle** reprint **Flame Burst**. It's amazing to think about how complex the game has become to get to this point: you've got two creatures which count both as themselves and as another type of card when these cards are in the graveyard. **Muscle Burst** tracks not only copies of **Muscle Burst** but also **Farmhands**. While these types of cards emerged seemingly out of nowhere (since they had been absent from the game for so long), it's impressive to see how much they came along from the days of simply being there as hosers or variants on **Goblin King**.

## BONUS STORY:

One of my favorite memories in **Magic** came during Pro Tour - Atlanta 1996. This particular Pro Tour stop retains the unique distinction of being the only one to ever use individual sealed deck as its format. Moreover, the set was debuting at the tournament itself, so none of the players had any prior exposure to the cards. Think of it as a giant prerelease. Although I didn't participate at this particular event, Neutral Ground commissioned me to put together a full spoiler for the set by the end of the weekend. Quickly I went to work, jotting down card names and card text on my notepad, frantically attempting to gather information of the shoulders of players as they built their decks. Since I didn't have knowledge of rarities or even the exact size of the set (keep in mind, back then the sets weren't printed in uniform sizes as they are in present day), I could only make page after page of notes without a clear end in sight.

Cards That Reference Other Cards		
Set	Card Name	Card(s) Referenced
<i>Alpha</i>	Gloom	Circles of Protection
<i>Arabian Nights</i>	Camel	Desert
<i>Arabian Nights</i>	Desert Nomads	Desert
<i>Antiquities</i>	Urza's Tower	Urza's Mine Urza's Power Plant
<i>Antiquities</i>	Urza's Power Plant	Urza's Mine Urza's Tower
<i>Antiquities</i>	Urza's Mine	Urza's Tower Urza's Power Plant
<i>Legends</i>	Rohgahh of Kher Keep	Kobolds of Kher Keep
<i>Mirage</i>	Urborg Panther	Breathstealer Feral Shadow Spirit of the Night
<i>Visions</i>	Kyscu Drake	Spitting Drake Viashivan Dragon
<i>Visions</i>	Kookus	Keeper of Kookus
<i>Odyssey</i>	Pardic Firecat	Flame Burst
<i>Odyssey</i>	Diligent Farmhand	Muscle Burst



Things initially went smoothly. Some competitors kept their decks in order, so quickly I ascertained how to tell the rarities of each card. A few cards astounded me, such as the reusable **Lightning Bolt** known as **Hammer of Bogardan**, or the red/green **Savage Twister**, a **Wrath of God** variant popping up with uncommon frequency. But none of these could match the buzz around the room from a simple slightly-above average common. **Urborg Panther** contained the following text:

*Sacrifice **Feral Shadow**, **Breathstealer**, and **Urborg Panther**: Search your library for **Spirit of the Night** and put it into play as though it were just played. Shuffle your library.*

Wow, we'd never seen a card like that before! I checked and rechecked my self-made spoiler. **Feral Shadow**, present. **Breathstealer**, present. **Urborg Panther**, I was looking right at him. But **Spirit of the Night**? It was nowhere to be seen. I made my rounds across the room, trying to ascertain if anyone had opened up a Spirit, but if they had they were not talking. Many people expressed interest in finding out what the Spirit did, and I promised to let them know as soon as I found one.

*These three commons can join hands and call forth the fury of the **Spirit of the Night**.*

an open mind that it might be an enchantment. We deduced correctly that it was rare, but then started running 'what-if?' scenarios in our heads: What if there was no **Spirit of the Night** in this set, and the other three cards were teasers for a future release? What if there was a **Spirit of the Night** but miraculously none of the competitors opened one? We threw these questions to Wizards of the Coast employees such as Skaff Elias and Andrew Finch, but they gave no definitive answers.

After round three, we still hadn't found a copy of this card. We guessed that it was a creature, since it involved being put directly into play, but we still kept

Finally, Brian David-Marshall came rushing to me. He had finally found a copy of **Spirit of the Night**! It cost nine mana and had a bazillion special abilities, certainly worthy of such a build up. It was one of the last cards we needed to complete the spoiler, but none of the other cards we collected that day gave us such a thrill as finding out the mystery behind the **Urborg Panther** and the **Spirit of the Night**.

Next week: A wish for green.

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*Ben Bleiweiss has written about his obsession with **Magic: The Gathering** for over a decade. He's travelled the world because of **Magic**, both as a player and a writer. When not spending time playing **Magic**, writing about **Magic**, or thinking about **Magic**, Ben is employed by [StarCityGames.com](http://StarCityGames.com), where he works with **Magic** cards all day long. He lives with his wife in Virginia, and they sleep comfortably at night under their Orgg down comforter.*



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