

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



# Power at a Price

Ben Bleiweiss  
Uncommon Knowledge  
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It's my pleasure again to welcome you to the middle of a theme week. This time around, we're taking a look at **Magic's** first expansion set, *Arabian Nights*. Unlike the original set, this group of cards took an existing theme (1,001 *Arabian Nights*) and built the flavor of the cards around the theme.



*Djinni and creatures with drawbacks debuted in Alpha, but Arabian Nights brought both concepts to the forefront.*

The base set introduced the concept of creatures with drawbacks, such as **Lord of the Pit** and **Force of Nature**. *Arabian Nights* brought this to a new level with a near cycle of destructive monsters, the Djinni and Efreeti. I say "near cycle" because while there was one Djinn and one Efreet for each of black, blue, green, and red; **King Suleiman** capped off both cycles for white.

## THE DRAWBACK SOLUTION

There were major differences between the base set creatures and the Djinni and Efreeti which would profoundly affect creature design for the rest of **Magic** history. Take a look at **Lord of the Pit**, or **Demonic Hordes**, or **Force of Nature**. Every creature in the original release which had a drawback also came with a workaround for its potentially debilitating effect. Don't want to take seven damage from the Pit Lord? Sacrifice a creature instead! Likewise, you could pay mana to feed the Force and the Hordes.

What of creatures with innate drawbacks, such as the "islandhome" **Sea Serpent** and **Pirate Ship**, the blocking-phobic **Ironclaw Orcs**, or the ever-attacking **Juggernaut**? Those effects were mildly annoying, not out-and-out harmful. The Djinni and Efreeti all tainted their controllers directly. Unlike creatures with built-in combat drawbacks, the Arabian spirits of the lamp, much to the chagrin of their more benevolent base-set cousin **Mahamoti Djinn**, heralded a creature type which became synonymous with taking a little pain in order to get a little more muscle.

## TAKE ONE AND CALL ME IN THE MORNING

Both **Juzam Djinn** and **Serendib Efreet** shared the penalty of dealing a point of damage each upkeep to their controllers. Initially that drawback caused both of them to be discarded as completely trash cards, until players realized that maybe being able to regularly play a 5/5 creature on turn one (between five **Moxes**, a **Black Lotus**, and four **Dark Rituals**) wasn't such a bad idea. Suddenly these two began seeing play in a multitude of type one decks. And why not? After four attack phases with a Juzam, you've ended the game at 16-0. **Serendib** took a little more effort to get through a kill, but 3/4 evasion creatures for three mana aren't easy to defend against. Plus, since both creatures were out of **Lightning Bolt** range, your opponent would either have to use dual burn spells to kill them, or use a **Sword to Plowshares** which would rejuvenate your life.

**Nettletooth** and **Fledgling Djinn**s both carried on the strict tradition of this drawback, with **Kookus** (a Djinn!) and **Benthic Djinn** converting the cost to



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a more severe level. None of those cards came close to having the impact of the original two, however, with **Serendib Efreet** being preemptively banned from the very onset of the Extended format. In fact, it wasn't until **Wormfang Drake** in *Judgment* (with its own severe drawback) that Wizards finally printed a three casting cost 3/4 blue flyer again.

As for Juzam, he's been reincarnated a few times over the years, most notably as **Phyrexian Negator** and **Phyrexian Scuta**, with the former usurping Juzam's position of "fatty-of-choice" in most Type 1 black decks today. Over time, it became clear that the threat wasn't the 5/5 body as much as the ability to get that body into play on turn one or two with **Dark Ritual**. Once the mana accelerator left the Standard and Extended environments, large black monsters took their bow as well. Would Juzam even be a good Standard creature right now? It'd be interesting to see how he stacked up against **Wild Mongrel**, **Mystic Enforcer**, **Psychatog**, and **Spiritmonger**.

[SPECIAL BONUS: Juzam is not going to be in *Eighth Edition*.]

## A TALE OF TWO SERENDIBS



Mahamoti may have been the first Djinn ever, but **Serendib Djinn** was the most cost efficient 5/6 blue flyer of all. For a mere four mana investment, your return was a huge master of the skies. Its drawback, though, was the heftiest of all Djinn and Efreet kind—each turn you'd have to sacrifice a land, and if said land was an island, you'd be losing three life as well. And if for any reason you controlled no lands, away the Djinn went. That shortcoming made the **Serendib Djinn** particularly vulnerable to cards like **Armageddon**, plus made it *weaker* when combined with traditional mana acceleration. No dropping him on turn one with **Black Lotus** lest he go away the next turn with your sole land! Plus, this Djinn has two blue in its mana cost, so it's most likely that the land you'll be sacrificing to him will be an island, especially if it's **Tropical Island**, **Tundra**, **Underground Sea**, and **Volcanic Island**.

**Serendib Djinn** never saw extensive play, and certainly not as much as Cousin **Serendib Efreet**. A different mana-stifling Djinn played an integral part of dominant decks in *Mirage* Block Constructed, as well as Type 2 of that day. **Waterspout Djinn** lessened the burden of the Serendib by changing the cost from sacrifice to return, ensuring that at the least you'd have the same number of lands turn after turn instead of losing one should you have none in hand. Even though Waterspout was smaller, it won significantly more duels due to this small difference.

[SPECIAL BONUS: **Tropical Island**, **Tundra**, **Underground Sea**, and **Volcanic Island** will not be in *Eighth Edition*.]

## RABIAH MASQUES

*Arabian Nights* took place on the plane of Rabbiah (and not the more familiar plane of Dominaria). In Rabbiah, we were first exposed to the original Monger, **Iff-Biff Efreet**. Green isn't the color of flyers (that'd be white and blue, occasionally black, and rarely red with a dragon or two), so why not give green a sizeable efreet with a wee bit of a drawback: an opponent could kill it with enough green mana. Thus was born the first creature with an ability activatable by either player. Iff-Biff stood out as more of a peculiarity than a threat for years, with casual players combining him with **Earthbind** for a two-card "standing **Hurricane**." Green was by far the weakest color in Type 1, and this Efreet's self-destructive nature didn't win him many followers.

Enter the Mongers in *Mercadian Masques*. Born directly from the Iff-Biff, these five creatures immediately became favorites of players across the globe. Each was capable of garnering its controller massive advantage, but you'd have to build your deck in such a way that you could easily maneuver yourself into good "Mongering" position. **Wishmonger** became a part of tournament-winning Rebel decks. **Squallmonger**—the improved Iff-Biff—found itself in green beatdown decks, giving the color a way to deal damage directly to the opponent. **Scandalmonger** showed up in black/white board control decks. On the sidelines sat **Sailmonger** and **Warmonger**, the latter owing the most in common to Iff-Biff: unplayable because any opponent with enough mana could kill it.

If the art for Iff-Biff looks strangely familiar, its because the *Revised Serendib Efreet* card was accidentally reprinted with the Iff-Biff's illustration and frame.

[SPECIAL BONUS: In *Eighth Edition*, no card will be accidentally reprinted with the picture of **Iff-Biff Efreet**.]



## FLIP TO WIN

Red wildly flows in chaos, and the red pair from *Arabian Nights* relies on chance. **Mijae Djinn** and **Ydwen Efreet** both may or may not attack or defend depending on a flip of the coin. While neither saw a huge amount of play, the Ydwen (flip for defense) made more of an impact, since he could keep on swinging as a 3/6 attacker for a

mere three mana each turn with no drawbacks! You just had to think of him as a huge attacking wall that probably wouldn't block. Sure, these two guys created amazingly complex timing rules headaches in early **Magic**, but who doesn't love to play with coin flip cards? That explains **Fickle Efreet** from *Prophecy*.

In *Mirage*, another coin flip Efreet was printed, this time with no real drawback. **Frenetic Efreet** offered its controller a win-win situation when it came time to call "heads" or "tails"—either the Efreet phased out, only to reappear later to further taunt the opponent, or it would just die, which it was probably going to do anyway. By removing any negative drawback, a very powerful and popular card was created. The dearth of **Frenetic Efreet** decks during the *Mirage* era forced R&D away from making good coin-flip cards; the extra randomness involved detracts from the game, and the opportunities for cheating the flip were also a concern.

Ironically enough, the most played coin flip card from *Arabian Nights* ended up being **Bottle of Suleiman**, which creates a 5/5 flying Djinn token fifty percent of the time, against a potential five points of damage. Players built decks around **Circle of Protection: Artifacts** and **Argvian Archaeologist** to safely amass armies of Djinni.

[SPECIAL BONUS: There are no 🎲🎲🎲 cost creatures involving coin flips in *Eighth Edition*.]



## BROTHER, CAN I BORROW A MANA?



Unlike cousin Juzam, little **Junun Efreet** was the Efreet that couldn't. Smaller than the **Serendib** and requiring a noticeable mana-intensive upkeep, the Junun just didn't hack it compared to the other Djinni and Efreeti. The biggest strike against it was that it was a three-mana black creature that could not be successfully deployed via **Dark Ritual**, as its upkeep wouldn't be payable on turn two. Throw in the fact that it still died to **Lightning Bolt**, and was competing for deck slots with **Hypnotic Specter**, and it's easy to see why this little guy never cut the mustard.

Mana is a valuable resource in Magic, and players don't like spending it on creatures already in play, which is why most creatures with mana upkeep costs never caught on. **Vaporous Djinn** never showed up in any top-tier decks, even though the price for not paying the upkeep wasn't as drastic as killing itself, nor did **Drifting Djinn**. **Emberwilde Djinn** offered a payment of life instead of mana, but that was still too much to ask. **Uktabi Efreet** has been the only moderately successful mana-upkeep member of the family, though when I say moderately successful I mean barely.

## BLANK-A-GEDDON

I've saved the best for last. *Judgment* saw the return of what some consider the favorite green creature of all time, **Erhnam Djinn**. The Erhnam contained a very strange drawback—giving an opposing creature forestwalk—which could be worked around by playing non-forest lands, or by having no lands in play. The latter concept spawned one of the most enduring and endearing deck types of all time, Erhnam-**Armageddon** (or Erhnameddon). That deck nearly won the first Pro Tour for **Bertrand Lestree**, and has been attempted in nearly every format since by combining the large-green-creature-with-a-drawback of choice with the mass-land-destruction flavor of the month. Unfortunately, some of these replacements have been entirely less than inspired. Every set seemed to have encouraged an imitator, which include:

- *Mirage*: **Nettletooth Djinnageddon** (didn't work, damaged you too much)
- *Visions*: **Stampeding Wildebeestageddon** (partially worked, but creatures all returned to hand)
- *Weatherlight*: **Uktabi Efreetageddon** (yes, people really did try this, using mana creatures to pay the cumulative upkeep. No, it made no sense. No, it didn't work.)
- *Tempest*: **Dirtcow Wurmageddon** (cute, but didn't work, creature had the worst drawback of all, costing five mana)
- *Stronghold*: **Endangered Armadonageddon** (didn't work, couldn't play with mana creatures).
- *Exodus*: **Jackalope Herdageddon** (didn't work, Herd tended to disappear after Armageddon. Okay, no one really tried this one).



People finally gave up after over two years of trying when these decks just plain didn't work and combo decks featuring **Tolarian Academy** dominated the tournament scene, sparing us from creations such as **Erithizonahups** and **Emperor Crocatastrophe**. Ironically, Erhnam descendants from around this time finally broke into the tournament scene, most notably **Hunted Wumpus** and **Lumbering Satyr**.

So was it the Erhnam or the **Armageddon** which made Erhnageddon work? Would they even work in modern day **Magic**? We've got Erhnam around for the next two years, so at least half of that puzzle has the potential solution.

[SPECIAL BONUS: Bertrand Lestree will not be included in *Eighth Edition*. I don't think.]

Coming next week: Ben is at Worlds, and he's brought the "Big Draft Box" with him. What's inside the "Big Draft Box," and why is it so important to his mental health?

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Ben may be reached at [bleiweiss1@cox.net](mailto:bleiweiss1@cox.net).

*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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