



Sengir, Start to Finish

Aaron Forsythe
Latest Developments
 Friday, February 17, 2006



How many Scryb Sprites does it take to kill a first-striking Sengir Vampire in combat?

Classic stuff, that question. I hear it was on the first judge test ever issued. The answer? Twelve. The Vampire kills four of them straight off, and grows to 8/8 in the process. The other eight Sprites then gang up on the fanged one and crush him.

Sengir Vampire makes such a great focal point for that question because he is what we call *iconic*—a card that has transcended his abilities and numbers and become something greater in the minds of players. But how did he get there? And does he still have that “special something,” even in the eyes of today’s newer players?



Into Alpha

When Sengir Vampire was put into the very first Magic set as an uncommon alongside its lifelong nemesis Serra Angel and their persistent step-sibling Air Elemental, it set the bar quite high for uncommon fliers. But at the same time, it gave early players a good card that they could hope to acquire in multiples, as opposed to most of the rares, which were very difficult to track down in that early play environment.

There was something very sexy about that first Sengir Vampire. He had a great cost-power-ratio, a nifty top-down ability, and creepy art that burned itself into your brain. Plus, to the average fantasy role playing gamer that was migrating to Magic, vampires were about as cool as any creature could be. Everything clicked for Mr. Sengir.

On top of that, he was—at the time—a good card. And he stayed good for the entire time he remained in print, which was up through Fourth Edition. As Mike Flores chronicled, Sengir had a good working relationship with Necropotence, Dark Ritual, Hypnotic Specter, and Hymn to Tourach, which are arguably some of the most powerful Black cards of all time. It flew (which was more relevant than you might imagine), and it survived Lightnig Bolt and Hammer of Bogardan.

Maybe, you naysayers may point out, he was simply the best of a bad crop. Black was lacking in the semi-efficient fatties department (especially those without drawbacks) and the Vampire was the only card to fill that need. Maybe, maybe not. Juzam Djinn might have filled that role if he were legal. Ihsan's Shade did a bit of work as the fatty-of-choice in Necro decks, and even Nightmare was recruited to serve the finisher role for a period of time. But the fact that Nightmare has been legal in Standard literally forever and was passed over in favor of Sengir in the early days hints that Sengir actually had it going on.

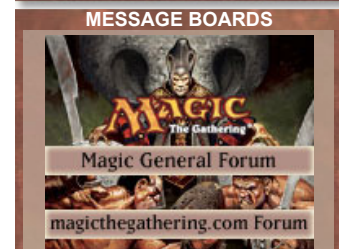
Building the Family

If “Sengir” and/or “Vampire” had cache, later cards tried to undermine it. Vampire Bats from Legends were underwhelming to say the least. As Matt Cavotta detailed, Homelands fleshed out the Sengir family with a bunch of forgettable cards. Irini and Veldrane are underpowered hosers. Castle Sengir sits atop my list of cards with awesome names that fail to deliver. Grandmother Sengir and Sengir Autocrat were at least quirky enough to be interesting, even if both were a bit underpowered. Baron Sengir was the bright shining hope of the lot—he was a cool card that remains fairly popular to this day. Sadly, his ability to regenerate Vampires affected all of one card—the original Sengir; he couldn't even regenerate his other family members from the same set.

Yet even with all of this dead weight dragging him down, Sengir Vampire remained one of the coolest creatures in the game.

Fifth Edition Farewell

Much has been said about the removal of Serra Angel from the Core Set in Fifth Edition due to power-level concerns—development's reasoning back then was that she set the bar too high for White five-mana creatures.



Less fuss was made about the removal of **Sengir Vampire** at the same time, and I'm not sure why. Maybe Serra had eclipsed Sengir as the cooler creature. Maybe Sengir was generally accepted as too powerful, whereas Serra was not. In any event, Sengir slunk off into the shadows, replaced by **Fallen Angel** as the marquis Core Set Black uncommon flyer.

Sengir retained his "coolness" even in the face of adversity. Along with his supposedly overpowered brother-in-arms **Erhnam Djinn**, he was reprinted (with new art) in the [Beatdown Box Set](#) in 2000. Those two aged brawlers were the poster children for that product—a foreshadowing of things to come during the upcoming *Odyssey* block.



Back on the Scene

Sengir's nemesis **Serra Angel** found herself back in the Core Set in *Seventh Edition* and Sengir was dismayed. But his chance came soon enough, as he was inserted into the *Torment* expansion as an iconic Black card that would help bolster that set's Black theme. The company quickly latched onto the return of Sengir as a significant event and made his comeback one of the big selling points of the set.

In retrospect, I think that was a mistake. Sengir was brought back in *Torment* and **Erhnam Djinn** in *Judgment* to much fanfare, all of which turned out to be relatively empty hype. We had tested the cards internally in the FFL only to find out that they no longer had the potential to impact the game in the same way that they did a decade before, yet we made a huge deal about their return, as if something significant were happening.

Some players got excited, some didn't. I imagine there were people that went out and acquired four Sengirs for their tournament decks, only to later find out that he no longer cut the mustard. It was, in many ways, a letdown.

That doesn't mean I don't think we should be bringing back old favorites, even when the world has passed them by. I like that **Clone** was reprinted in *Onslaught* and **Juggernaut** in *Darksteel*—mainly because we didn't treat them like earth-shaking events. We just let put them in the set as little trinkets—links to the past that may spark some interest in current players. What I think the "hard sell" of Sengir and Erhnam did was actually damage their nostalgic value by highlighting the fact that they were outgunned in today's environment.

Returning Home

There is exactly one card in *Ninth Edition* that refers to +1/+1 counters, and that card is **Sengir Vampire**. We slid him in where he belongs with little fanfare, alongside his old pals **Hypnotic Specter**, **Nightmare**, and **Will-o'-the-Wisp**, hoping that he would do for today's new players what he did for me and my generation—knock their socks off. Granted, our stance on complexity means he lives at rare now, so he doesn't pack quite as much punch. But he's still an awesome-looking, incredibly flavorful card that is hard not to like.

I just hope that in this age of Visaras and Kokushos flavor, art, and nostalgia are enough.

Last Week's Poll

When you started playing, where did you get land for your decks?		
Buying and opening tournament packs or starter decks	4964	35.5%
Friends gave it to me	3553	25.4%
Buying theme decks	3249	23.3%
Buying land from stores or dealers	1294	9.3%
Other	532	3.8%
Playing in limited events	373	2.7%
Total	13965	100.0%

This was a bizarre question that probably didn't give enough options to accurately let people convey how they got their land. Personally, I bought a lot of starter decks.

This Week's Poll:

Which of the following iconic creatures do you most readily associate with Magic: The Gathering?

- Erhnam Djinn
- Hurloon Minotaur
- Juzam Djinn
- Mahamoti Djinn
- Prodigal Sorcerer
- Sengir Vampire
- Serra Angel
- Shivan Dragon

[Submit my Vote](#)

*Aaron Forsythe was a professional **Magic** player and Internet columnist prior to leaving Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to join Wizards of the Coast. His first duty here was Content Manager of this very website, a job that required him to do actual work as opposed to playing games all the time. So when a position opened in R&D, he jumped at the chance. He is now director of **Magic** R&D, and still plays **Magic** in his free time when he's not busy playing **Magic**.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Aaron Forsythe](#) archive

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

© 1995-2008 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

