



Products
Gameplay
Rules
Help
Learn to Play
Fun Stuff

Daily Articles

Sat, Dec 21

Saturday School
Saturday School #9
What does an XX cost mean?
by Rune Horvik

Fri, Dec 20

Latest Developments
Out of the Shadows
Shining light on a troublesome mechanic
by Randy Buehler

Thu, Dec 19

House of Cards
Root for the Funky Fish
Two Tempest Merfolk make enchantments fun
by Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar

Wed, Dec 18

Uncommon Knowledge
Lost in the Tempest
Gems of the past, gems of the present
by Ben Bleiweiss

Tue, Dec 17

Serious Fun
The New Old School
Tempest and midlife crisis
by Anthony Alongi

Mon, Dec 16

Making Magic
In a Teapot
Mark recalls Tempest fondly
by Mark Rosewater

- MagicTheGathering.com**
Recent Content
 - Saturday School #9 Sat, Dec 21
 - Out of the Shadows Fri, Dec 20
 - Arcana: Squee's Resolve Fri, Dec 20
 - Tempest Storyboard Fri, Dec 20
 - Arcana: Dirty Medallions Thu, Dec 19
 - Root for the Funky Fish Thu, Dec 19

Making Magic
Monday, April 15, 2002

Some Enchanted Card Type



Mark Rosewater

Overcoming fundamental flaws

Welcome to Enchant Creature Week. Yes, this week is dedicated to the most controversial of card types. Loved by some, hated by others, the creature enchantment is many things to many people. Part of my job here in R&D is to understand why people love and hate things. So, let me start this week's column by exploring the two sides of the coin.

Before I begin, I would like to stress that I'm talking about positive creature enchantments that you use to enhance your own creatures. Enchantments that are used on your opponent's creatures, ranging from **Weakness** to **Persuasion**, are creature removal spells for all intents and purposes, and those can often be quite good.

Why Players Love Creature Enchantments

Creature enchantments are cool. Why? Because building things is cool. You start with a boring old creature, you throw on a couple of creature enchantments and voila, you have yourself a monster. Many players enjoy doing this. More than I first thought. How do I know this? Because I've been to the trenches -- in this case, something called the Deck Clinic.

Let me explain. At most big events thrown or attended by Wizards, we have something called Deck Clinic. This is where an employee (such as myself) or a professional player sits at a table and looks at decks of players who stand in line. We spend somewhere between five to fifteen minutes and explain how the person could improve their deck. After doing numerous Deck Clinics, I came up with a few little maxims I would use where appropriate. One of my favorites: "Here's a rule of thumb. You're going to want to make sure that your deck has more creatures than creature enchantments."

My second theory as to why creature enchantments are so beloved is that it gives the players a chance to be a creature designer. By mixing and matching creatures and creature enchantments, the player can make their own unique creation.

Why Players Hate Creature Enchantments

They suck.

Okay, I guess I could elaborate a bit more on this. Creature enchantments are, strategically speaking, a bad deal. The reason? Something called card advantage. In a nutshell, card advantage says that the player with the most cards (in hand and in play) wins. When one card can be used to destroy multiple other cards, this gains the first card's caster card advantage.

Creature enchantments by design help your opponent get card advantage. Why? Because when you put a creature enchantment on a creature, your opponent has the ability to destroy two cards



with a single creature destruction spell. Creature enchantments thus are anti-card advantage.

Building a Better Creature Enchantment

Creature enchantments are flavor-wise very cool, but power-wise very poor. What's a designer to do? One of our on-going quests here in R&D is to build a better creature enchantment (and then get the hell off the path to the doorway). How do we do this? I'm glad you asked.

Cantrips

The first approach is to offset the card disadvantage by making the creature enchantment not actually cost a card. The simplest way to do this is to make it a cantrip. Cantrips, for those unaware of the term, are cards that have you draw a card when you play them. The first one of these was *Krovikan Fetish* from *Ice Age*. To be honest, there's no real stand-outs in this category although random cards like *Traveler's Cloak* from *Invasion* have been fun. *Judgment* might change this.



As an extra bonus, I plan to tell a little story each section to give you some behind the scenes stories about the creation of creature enchantments. For cantrips, I thought I'd talk about the creation of *Sisay's Ingenuity* from *Planeshift*. I've always been a big fan of color changing (and yes, I've played all five *Laces* at one point or another), so in the *Invasion* block, which had a sub-theme of color matters, I tried hard to make as many color altering cards as possible. One of them was a creature enchantment that allowed the enchanted creature to change the color of creatures. The original card was:

[Mark's Color Cloak]

U

Enchant Creature

Enchanted creature has "T: Target creature becomes the color of your choice until end of turn."

Everyone liked the idea of the card but it proved to be pretty weak. The development team added a little mana and made it a cantrip. It was still bad. So they changed the activation from a tap to a single blue mana. This allowed the enchantment to be activated multiple times. All of a sudden, the card was a little too good. So the activation cost was raised to . In the end, the card saw play in limited. With 20/20 hindsight, I think the card could have had an activation of .

Bigger Is Better

Another technique is to have the creature enchantment really beef up the creature. The idea behind this plan is to make the creature so big that it does lots of damage before the opponent can find his creature destruction spell. In addition, by being beefed up, it reduces the number of spells able to destroy it (as an example, direct damage gets much worse). The first enchantment in this category was *Divine Transformation* from *Legends*. But the most successful use of this technique was the embraces from *Urza's Saga* (*Serra's Embrace*, *Zephid's Embrace*, *Vampiric Embrace*, *Shiv's Embrace*, *Gaea's Embrace*).

The story for this category has to do with the creation of the embraces during the development of *Urza's Saga*. The embraces were known in design as the "Make Me a _____" enchantments. Each enchantment was designed to turn you into a famous creature of the past. The white enchantment was called "Make Me a Serra." The black enchantment was "Make Me a Sengir." The red enchantment was "Make Me a Shivan." And the green enchantment was "Make Me a Force (of Nature)." But what about the blue one? Aha, that was a problem. There was no big blue creature that worked for this cycle. So how did we solve this problem. We put the big creature -- *Zephid* -- in *Urza's Saga* along with the embraces. Thus, the blue one became "Make Me a Zephid."

If It Dies

The next category tries to make up for card disadvantage by giving you an effect when the enchanted creature dies. Technically, the first card in this category was *Puppet Master* from *Legends*, but I feel *Casting of Bones* and *False Demise* from *Alliances* are the more appropriate innovators. The MVP from this category was probably *Pattern of Rebirth* from



Kill it. I dare ya.

graveyard from play. This is actually just a subset of the previous category, but it made enough of a splash that I felt it deserved its own mention. The mechanic was introduced in *Urza's Saga* (on cards such as **Brilliant Halo** and **Despondency**). But it was the next set, *Urza's Legacy* that held the star of this mechanic, **Rancor**, which will be remembered as one of the few positive creature enchantments to see constructed play.

The story for this category was told recently on this site. A few weeks ago Bill Rose, the head of R&D answered an "Ask Wizards" about Rancor. You see, ever since **Rancor** was released, there's been a rumor that R&D actually meant to print **Rancor** at 2U but due to a layout snafu, got priced at 1U . Bill's response:

A: From **Bill Rose**, head of Research & Development:
 "The short answer is: I don't know. No one will ever know.

"As I recall, **Rancor** originally was 2U , and it didn't have the 'deathback' mechanic, meaning it wouldn't return to your hand. In an effort to make some tournament-quality creature enchantments, Rancor's cost was lowered to 1U . Then the deathback mechanic was added. After that, the **Magic** developers disagree on what happened. There was a debate about **Rancor**'s cost. The group who wanted **Rancor** costed at 1U argued at it would be good, but not broken. The ' 2U ' group believes they won and **Rancor** was published as the development team wanted. The ' 2U ' group believes they won, but that the lead developer forgot to change the file sent to typesetting.

"Given the choice between 1U and 2U , I would cost **Rancor** at 1U . But given a time machine, I would cost it at 1U ."

A day after this "Ask Wizards" question was posted, I was visited by Mike Elliott, the lead designer of *Urza's Legacy* and one of its developers. Mike asked if he could rebut Bill's answer. (Mike, you see, remembered the whole thing differently.) I said sure. "Send a letter to 'Ask Wizards' and you can reply to it yourself."

You have to understand that I was dead serious. So, I'm publicly calling Mike out. Hey Mike, write the letter! We'll see what happens.

Enchantment Sacs for Effect

In a related category are cards that can be sacrificed for an effect. This way if your enchantment (or the creature it enchants) is about to be destroyed, you get another use out of the card. The first example of this mechanic was **Thrull Retainer** from *Fallen Empires*. **Fire Whip** from *Weatherlight* is probably the card in this category that saw the most play.

The story for this category is how **Tattoo Ward** from *Odyssey* got its name. The art on **Tattoo Ward** was originally submitted for **Embolden**. It seemed a little weird that an instant was being portrayed as a magical tattoo. My opponent hurls a **Lightning Bolt** at my goblin, so I quickly run over and start applying a tattoo to it. "I have to do this quick, so it'll probably hurt."

Urza's Destiny. Numerous decks were built around this card. This is another category that benefits from *Judgment*.

The interesting design story in this category was the card **Bequeathal** from *Exodus*. This is an example of what I call a conceptual card. Sometimes in R&D we create a card because it tests a hypothesis. If creature enchantments are problematic because they cause card disadvantage, what if we create a creature enchantment that upon being destroyed replaced the two cards you just lost. It was an interesting idea that ultimately failed for a very basic reason. It didn't do anything. Sure it kept you from losing card advantage, but the card itself didn't enhance the creature in any way. Ah, you live, you learn.

Deathback

Deathback is the name for cards that return to your hand when they are put into the

On the other hand, a magical tattoo made a lot of sense for a creature enchantment. Plus, it seemed cool that the tattoo would disappear if the creature used the second ability. The card you originally know as **Tattoo Ward** was then known as Strength of Conviction and had the art that would end up on **Embolden**. Both cards felt like the mechanics worked with the art on the other card, so we swapped them. This, of course, forced us to change the name as we now had to explain the existence of the tattoo in the art.

Untargetability

Another popular technique is to create creature enchantments that keep the enchanted creature from being targeted. The idea here is that this keeps the enchantment's owner from being two-for-one because the enchanted creature is now a lot harder to destroy. This technique goes way back to *Legends* with the cards **Anti-Magic Aura** and **Spectral Cloak**.

Unfortunately, this technique had one gaping hole. The creature enchantment was still vulnerable. This always bugged me. So during *Mercadian Masques* design, I made what I felt was the fixed version: **Diplomatic Immunity**. It cried out "You can't target my creature and you can't target me, nyah nyah!"

This, by the way, is one of the greatest perks of being a **Magic** designer. Many players get occasionally irked by the non-existence of some effect they really want because it would work perfectly in some deck. When a **Magic** designer gets that feeling they just make the card and put it into the next set.

Flickering

The next category was a little something we tried in *Tempest* (on cards such as **Volrath's Curse** and **Crown of Flames**) and then brought back in *Invasion*. Flickering enchantments have the ability to be returned to their owner's hand for a cheap activation. The idea behind this is threefold. First, this ability allows players to save their creature enchantments if either the creature they enchant or they themselves are about to be destroyed. Second, the ability allows you to move the creature enchantment to a new creature if the need arises. And third, there exists cards, such as **Fugitive Druid** from *Tempest*, which can take advantage of the same spell being played over and over.

My story for this category is about **Flickering Ward** from *Tempest*. One of the hardest parts about doing design and development is that you're juggling so many balls in the air at once that sometimes you forget the simple things. Ben talked about our little mishap with **Sands of Time** in his [column last week](#) (we kind of forgot the little rule about artifacts turning off when tapped). Click on the link to **Flickering Ward** and see if you can find what we missed.

You're back? Did you catch it. Well, we didn't. What happens if you choose white? The creature now has protection from white and kicks off any white enchantments on it. Including **Flickering Ward**. Whoops! We forgot the old "This card's ability doesn't affect itself" text. We let it be for a while, but in the spring of 1999 the rules team finally issued errata for it:

As Flickering Ward comes into play, choose a color.
Enchanted creature has protection from the chosen color. *This effect doesn't remove Flickering Ward.*

Licids

Another *Tempest* take on the problem of creature enchantments being weak was the licids (such as **Leeching Licid** and **Quickening Licid**). How do you make creature enchantments better? How about letting them turn into creatures? The licids were one of those kinds of cards that polarized the audience. Some loved them and the others, well, didn't quite get them. I know for a fact that they caused the rules teams plenty of headaches.

The story for this category is about the creation of the licids, then called "lice." During *Tempest* design, Mike Elliott and I both played around with the same idea. What if we created creature enchantments that were also creatures? Mike's take on the licids is what they ended up being. My take was a bit simpler. My lice came into play as either a creature or a creature enchantment. For example, my blue lice was a 1/1 flier for **1** that could also come into play as a **Flight**.

The team realized that we couldn't do both versions of the lice so the team (myself, Mike, Charlie Catino and Richard Garfield) looked at both mechanics and chose one: mine. As the lead designer of the team I stepped in. I said that Mike's version was much more complex. I felt we would learn more by starting to play Mike's version. If they proved to complex, we could always fall

back to my simpler version. The team agreed so we playtested Mike's version. The rest of this story, of course, is a matter of history.

Work It From the Flip Side

Another way to improve creature enchantments is to make non-creature enchantment cards that reward a player for playing enchantments. The first example of this was **Verduran Enchantress** in Alpha. Another famous -- and purer -- example would be **Rabid Wombat** in *Legends*. As the father of a young daughter I've learned the valuable lesson that sometimes bribes get the job done (and with a lot less kicking and screaming), so sometimes we create cards that "bribe" you with extra incentives to play other cards.

One of the interesting things about designers is that we each have our own quirky preferences when designing cards. This category is one of my personal quirks. Over the years I have been responsible for numerous creature enchantment "helpers". This is most obvious during my design of *Urza's Destiny*. That set was rife with cards that helped encourage the play of creature enchantments (some obviously more than others), including **Fledgling Osprey**, **Metathran Elite**, **Tethered Griffin**, **Thran Golem**, and **Yavimaya Enchantress**.

Although to be fair, the set did have a higher than average amount of anti-enchantment cards as well.

Card Advantage

The final category is more of a catch-all. Some creature enchantments make up for card disadvantage by immediately granting you a useful effect. A good example of this type of card is *Exodus's* **Curiosity**.

Since you almost always get to draw a card the turn you play this enchantment, it tends to replace itself before your opponent can destroy it or the creature it enchants. From the second turn on, any benefit is just gravy. **Psionic Gift** from *Odyssey* is another example of a card in this category. Very often, you've used it to destroy a creature before your opponent can possibly react.

For this category, I thought I'd talk about why we changed the name of the **Psionic Gift** from **Hermetic Study**. When we repeat a card, we sometimes keep the name and sometimes change it. There are many reasons for this. If, for example, we make the slightest change to the card we always change the name. Often a name will tie into the story which no longer makes sense in a new set. And sometimes we learn that the old name just wasn't that good. This is the case with **Hermetic Study**.

What's wrong with it? Perhaps I can best answer this with a question. What does **Hermetic Study** mean? What's the definition of hermetic? According to the *Random House College Dictionary*, the first definition is "made airtight by fusion or sealing." You know, like "hermetically sealed." That's not the definition we're looking for. The second definition is "pertaining to or characteristic of occult science, especially alchemy." There we go. When you play **Hermetic Study**, you are granting your creature an insight into occult science.

While working on *Odyssey* names, I went around the office asking people to define "hermetic." Out of fifty plus people, none knew the definition I was looking for. Zero. As a writer, I like the occasional big word. But not on common cards and not one that less than one percent of our audience has any possibility of knowing. For that reason, we changed the name.

That's All Folks

Well, that, in two thousand words or so, is all I have to say on the topic of creature enchantments. As normal, if I've managed to hit a nerve or just inspired some idea, feel free to post your thoughts on [the thread](#) to this column.




Look out! Here comes the 22/15 black trampling regenerating fear doesn't-tap-to-attack monstrosity!

Join me next week when I'll explore one of the sillier sides of **Magic**.

Until then, may your enchanted creature defeat your opponent before he draws his creature destruction spell.

Mark Rosewater

Mark may be reached at makingmagic@wizards.com.

Discuss this article on the [message boards](#). 

MagicTheGathering.com Recent Content

- Saturday School #9 *Sat, Dec 21*
- Out of the Shadows *Fri, Dec 20*
- Arcana: Squee's Resolve *Fri, Dec 20*
- Tempest Storyboard *Fri, Dec 20*
- Arcana: Dirty Medallions *Thu, Dec 19*
- Root for the Funky Fish *Thu, Dec 19*
- Arcana: Not actually Tempest cards... *Wed, Dec 18*

Full Archive



© 1995-2002 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Wizards is headquartered in Renton, Washington, PO Box 707, Renton, WA 98057.](#)
[PRIVACY STATEMENT](#)