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# The Standout Enchantments

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Of all the cards in **Magic: The Gathering**, the most maligned card type is the Enchant Creature. I can't say they don't deserve the bad rap; creature enchantments fundamentally share a number of weaknesses. To begin with, you need to have a creature in play in order to even cast an Enchant Creature. Then, the enchanted creature stands to lose you card advantage should it be destroyed, bounced, or otherwise removed from the board. Even defensively oriented spells such as **Pacifism** and **Gaseous Form** give your opponent the option to bring their enchanted creature back to full usefulness, through either bounce or enchantment removal. With the deficiencies of needing a target, losing card economy, and giving your opponent options, why would one ever choose to play this type of spell? Because some of them are so powerful in effect that they simply cannot be ignored. This week I'm taking a look back at what I consider the ten most powerful Enchant Creature spells ever printed.

All of the following enchantments contain Paralyze, Giant Strength, Emphyrial Armor, Control Magic, Rancor one or more of three themes: card advantage, temporal advantage, and beatdown. Card advantage comes from those few rare Enchant Creatures which have the potential to put you ahead of your opponent on card count. The temporal advantage enchantments slow down your opponent's game plan considerably, or speed your own up. Lastly, beatdown creature enchantments are so efficiently brutal at powerful up your own creatures, that they simply cannot be ignored. Even the risk of being on the negative end of a two for one trade shouldn't deter you from employing these weapons in your deck's arsenal.

I have included decklists from high-level events to back up my choices a little bit, and to show that Enchant Creatures can have an impact even in the most rigorous environments.

And without further ado, on to the list!

## #10: Paralyze (Temporal)

Black kills creatures more efficiently than any other color in **Magic**. Except for other black creatures. You see, one of the outlined failings of black lies in its inability to really kill the undead. How can you **Terror** something which isn't alive to feel fear? Can you use **Dark Banishing**, fuelled by unholy energies, to send a spirit of the nether world back to where it already is? **Paralyze** circumvents this issue at a very handy cost of a single black mana. Until your opponent musters four mana, you've effectively neutralized one of their creatures. Back in the day, this practically was the entire game, as you could remove a blocker right before you sent in a creature with **Hatred** for the kill. Did your opponent use **Dark Ritual** to drop a first turn **Hypnotic Specter** on the board? No problems, just tap that swamp and keep the discard away for a few turns. Moreover, **Terror** costs two mana, which gives your enemy a turn to employ their mana acceleration from **Llanowar Elves** and **Birds of Paradise**. Enchanting their mana producers with **Paralyze** renders any benefits gained from these creatures completely moot. In short, it kicks a creature, keeps it down, and makes you pay a fee to use it.

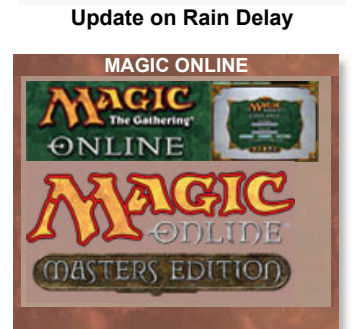
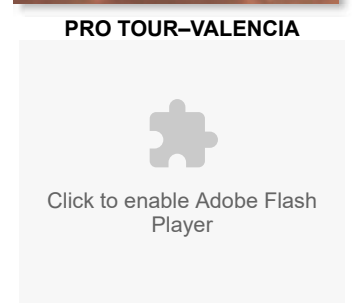
Because Suicide Black decks are generally very, very fast, they can make the most use out of the temporal advantage **Paralyze** grants.

**New Jersey Suicide (Standard)**  
 John Chinnock - Dojo "Decks To Beat" - August 1998

Main Deck		Sideboard
16 Swamp	4 Paralyze	4 Gloom
4 Wasteland	4 Cursed Scroll	4 Wall of Souls
	4 Dark Ritual	3 Reckless Spite
4 Carnophage	4 Sarcomancy	2 Spinning Darkness
4 Dauthi Slayer	4 Bad Moon	2 Forsaken Wastes
4 Dauthi Horror		
4 Erg Raiders		
4 Sewer Rats		

## #9: Sigil of Sleep (Temporal, Card Advantage)

Of the five colors, blue traditionally gets the most evasion creatures. Usually they take the form of flyers, but sometimes you have monsters which are utterly unblockable. While an **Escape Artist** or a **Metathran Soldier** might



not seem like the fastest route to victory, they afford certain perks when combined with Enchant Creature spells. Since they guarantee passage to your opponent's side of the board, slapping down a card like **Sigil of Sleep** gives you an **Unsummon** every turn in addition to a constant source of damage. That interaction produces a most frustrating situation for the person sitting across the table from you. Virtually any creature he attempts to get into play will be returned to his hand. Applied more traditionally to a flyer than a truly unblockable creature, the Sigil can combine with protected creatures such as **Weatherseed Faeries** and **Vodalian Zombies** to shut down entire creature-based decks.

The **Sigil of Sleep** comes with a quirky drawback, since you cannot choose whether or not to bounce a creature; you **MUST** do so. Suppose your opponent has only an **Avalanche Riders** in play; you might be reluctant to use your Sigiled creature to attack, since it will surely cost you a land. On the flipside, sometimes you'll be in a situation where you'd like to return your own comes-into-play creature using the Sigil. Combined with a "pinging" creature, like **Prodigal Sorcerer**, the Sigil can serve to make a **Flametongue Kavu** or **Man-o'-War** into a reusable source of entertainment.

In tournament play, the Sigil relies on there being creatures on BOTH sides of the table for it to be effective, and often the metagame isn't set up in such a way. Recently creature decks have been taking over Extended, and the Sigil started showing up in Miracle-Gro decks as a way to win the mirror match.

Main Deck		Sideboard
6 Island	2 Sigil of Sleep	2 Sigil of Sleep
4 Tropical Island	4 Force of Will	2 Back to Basics
	4 Daze	2 Misdirection
4 Manta Riders	2 Foil	3 Disrupt
4 Gaea's Skyfolk	4 Gush	2 Submerge
2 Lord of Atlantis	4 Opt	2 Annul
4 Quirion Dryad	4 Brainstorm	2 Emerald Charm
2 Waterfront Bouncer	4 Winter Orb	
	2 Curiosity	
	4 Land Grant	

## #8: Animate Dead (Temporal/Card Advantage)

**Animate Dead** has gone through so many template changes over the course of its existence that I'm going to have to break it down. Originally, it was an Enchant Dead Creature, which brought a card from either graveyard back into play at reduced power. This technically didn't ever work, since the creature ceased being 'dead' once it came into play. For a brief period, **Animate Dead** worked as a global enchantment which kept the reanimated creature in play. By the time *Fifth Edition* rolled around, the wording on **Animate Dead** was finalized. Now, the card functioned as an Enchantment, which transformed into an Enchant Creature once the creature it targeted came into play. Got it? Since it needs to continually stay aboard the creature spell, it's included on the list as the eighth most powerful Enchant Creature.

The greatest joy of **Animate Dead** (and its brethren **Dance of the Dead** and **Necromancy**) came from forcing your opponent to discard a large creature early (usually with a **Hymn to Tourach** or **Mind Twist**), and then reviving THEIR creature. There's no feeling in **Magic** like having a turn two 3/4 **Serra Angel** courtesy of your opponent's graveyard. Did your opponent use two **Lightning Bolts** to kill your **Juzam Djinn**? Simply tap two mana and bring him back at nearly full strength. Heck, why not just **Entomb** a **Verdant Force** and smile as your turn-two 6/7 starts pumping out 1/1 creatures before your opponent even knows what hit them?

BONUS TRIVIA: **Spirit of the Night** possessed protection from black because R&D didn't want him to be easily animated with **Animate Dead** and similar spells!

Alan Comer's Godzilla deck is one of the most famous "reanimator" decks ever:

Main Deck		Sideboard
4 City of Brass	4 Animate Dead	4 Pyroblast
3 Underground River	4 Dark Ritual	2 Hydroblast
3 Sulfurous Springs	2 Living Death	4 Dread of Night
2 Reflecting Pool	4 Necromancy	2 Disenchant
2 Undiscovered Paradise	4 Mana Leak	2 Tranquil Domain
4 Gemstone Mine	4 Firestorm	1 Extinction
1 Swamp		
1 Island		

4 Hidden Horror  
 4 Merfolk Traders  
 4 Verdant Force  
 3 Shivan Dragon  
 2 Sliver Queen  
 2 Necrosavant

## #7: Unholy Strength/Giant Strength/Unstable Mutation (Beatdown)

These are the beatdown trilogy of Enchant Creatures for their respective colors. Many players are familiar with a first turn **Dark Ritual/Unholy Strength/Erg Raiders** play, or a turn-one **Flying Men**/turn-two **Unstable Mutation** gambit. All three of these offer amazing speed, since essentially you have put an additional 2-power haste creature (averaged out for the Mutation) into play for one to two mana. While these types of cards definitely fall into the category of those Enchant Creatures which can lose you card advantage, they have the ability to end the game before long-term card parity matters.

Dave Price broke the metagame at Pro Tour - Los Angeles 1998 by using **Giant Strength** to enchant his **Jackal Pups** and goblins past **Cursed Scroll** range.

### Tempest Mono-Red (Block)

David Price - Winner - Pro Tour - Los Angeles 1998

#### Main Deck

16 Mountain  
 4 Wasteland  
 4 Canyon Wildcat  
 4 Fireslinger  
 4 Jackal Pup  
 4 Mogg Conscripts  
 4 Mogg Fanatic  
 4 Mogg Raider  
 2 Rathi Dragon  
 4 Giant Strength  
 4 Cursed Scroll  
 4 Kindle  
 2 Scalding Tongs

#### Sideboard

1 Apocalypse  
 2 Jinxed Idol  
 1 Rathi Dragon  
 2 Scalding Tongs  
 4 Shatter  
 4 Stone Rain  
 1 Torture Chamber

## #6: Pariah (Temporal, Card Advantage)

There are a few cards coming up on this list which allow you to win the game should they stay on the board more than a turn. **Pariah** operates on the principal that should it stay around, you can't lose. Enchant **Paladin en-Vec** with this puppy and watch a red player visibly squirm and pray for a **Cursed Scroll**. What prayer do green decks have when suddenly they are faced with **Cho-Manno**, **Revolutionary** who suddenly decides to take them *all* for the team? Few cards in **Magic** can hose entire deck types, and **Pariah** fits this category for *multiple* strategies. Best of all, you're not limited to enchanting your own creatures with **Pariah**. It doubles as creature removal, since you can 'considerately' enhance an opposing **Spiritmonger** with this card. What's your opponent going to do, keep regenerating his beast while you continue to be invulnerable to damage?

Stephen McArthur made the Top 8 of US Nationals in 1999 with a full set of **Pariahs** in his sideboard, but Japan's Momose Kazuyuki duplicated the feat at APAC Championships that year with three of them in his main deck.

### White Weenie (Standard)

Momose Kazuyuki - Top 8 - APAC Championship 1999

#### Main Deck

18 Plains  
 3 City of Traitors  
 4 Mother of Runes  
 4 Soltari Priest  
 4 Soltari Monk  
 4 Warrior en-Kor  
 3 Ticking Gnomes  
 2 Soltari Visionary  
 2 Masticore  
 3 Pariah  
 3 Armageddon  
 4 Cataclysm  
 3 Crusade  
 3 Disenchant

#### Sideboard

1 Pariah  
 1 Armageddon  
 2 Erase  
 3 Glorious Anthem  
 3 Humility  
 3 Thran Foundry  
 2 Worship

## #5: Curiosity (Card Advantage)

Every positive belief I had about **Sigil of Sleep** applies to its more powerful cousin, **Curiosity**. **Jayemdae Tome** never came this cheaply before! For a piddling single blue mana, you've just made **Manta Riders** into a 1/1 flying card-drawing machine. If this Enchant Creature had cost any more mana, it would have been negligible. At present cost, it fuels many a counter-happy merfolk deck. Card economy lost through **Force of Will** and **Foil** are easily regained through attacking repeatedly with a Curiosited critter.

For those who don't necessarily want to play with evasion creatures, there's **Sleeper's Robe**. If you just plain don't like attacking, you might want to try out the slightly expensive **Quicksilver Dagger**.

**Curiosity** shows up in the Miracle-Gro deck I listed above, but its "real" home is in merfolk decks like this one:



Main Deck		Sideboard
18 Island	3 Curiosity	4 Back to Basics
4 Wasteland	4 Force of Will	1 Winter Orb
	4 Counterspell	2 Annul
4 Lord of Atlantis	2 Annul	4 Chill
4 Manta Riders	1 Forbid	4 Hydroblast
4 Merfolk Traders	3 Winter Orb	
4 Suq'ata Firewalker		
3 Waterspout Djinn		
2 Sandbar Merfolk		

## #4: Armadillo Cloak (Beatdown, Temporal)

Once upon a time there was a card called **Spirit Link**. (Actually, there still is, but bear with me.) For years, players happily enchanted their creatures with **Spirit Link**, watching their life totals soar as their opponents' plummeted. In order to achieve such results, though, said players needed to summon forth rather large beasties to beat down with. This kept **Spirit Link** sitting in many a hand, waiting for the day on which it would spring forth and serve its purpose.

Many years later, Wizards decided that **Spirit Link** had seen its halcyon days in the past, and it was time for an update. So they grafted a green and a colorless mana to the casting cost, using one for a +2/+2 bonus and the other to grant trample. And Brian Kibler did think it was good at Pro Tour - Chicago 2000, and yea, did he beat down with his **Rith, the Awakener**, and yea, did he gain 8 life a turn. **River Boas** were becoming 4/3 trampling regenerating islandwalking monstrosities (with built-in **Spirit Link**) as early as turn three. Even yon powerless **Birds of Paradise** were remade as 2/3 flyers with benefits, and it was good.



Main Deck		Sideboard
8 Forest	4 Chimeric Idol	4 Armadillo Cloak
4 City of Brass	4 Armageddon	3 Tsabo's Decree
4 Brushland	3 Wax/Wane	3 Kavu Chameleon
4 Karplusan Forest		2 Flashfires
4 Rishadan Port		2 Simoon
		1 Obliterate
4 Birds of Paradise		
4 Llanowar Elves		
4 River Boa		
4 Blastoderm		
4 Ancient Hydra		
3 Jade Leech		
2 Rith, the Awakener		

## #3: Empyrial Armor (Beatdown)

In draft, the common **Empyrial Armor** ruined entire balance of a block. In constructed, **Empyrial Armor** exemplifies the most powerful "I win" creature enchantment ever printed. Unless there's a readily accessible answer in an immediate time frame, the game simply is over in three swings of a creature. Turn one **Plains**. Turn two **Plains**, **Soltari Priest**. Turn three **Plains**, **Empyrial Armor**, swing for 6. Next turn crush for 7. Next turn smash for 8. Good

game. Any warm body you can throw out there on turn one or two transforms into a minimum +4/+4 monstrosity on the third turn, with potential room for further growth. Although the Armor has the weakness of being tied to your current hand size, anyone who has ever played it (or faced it) will tell you that the ability to outright end a game before it's started far outweighs any potential powerlessness of this creature enchantment.

Matt Linde used the Armor on shadow creatures to become the US Champion in 1998:

White Weenie (Standard)		
Matt Linde - US National Champion - 1998		
Main Deck		Sideboard
17 Plains	4 Empyrial Armor	1 Afterlife
4 Soltari Monk	4 Cataclysm	3 Abeyance
4 Soltari Priest	4 Tithe	3 Aura of Silence
4 Soul Warden	3 Disenchant	1 Disenchant
4 Warrior en-Kor	1 Aura of Silence	1 Soltari Visionary
4 White Knight		2 Spirit Link
3 Paladin en-Vec		2 Tariff
3 Nomads en-Kor		2 Wrath of God
1 Soltari Visionary		

## #2: Control Magic (Temporal, Card Advantage)


Please repeat after me the everlasting mantra of the Blue Mage: "What's mine is mine, and what's yours is mine." No card typifies that dogma more than **Control Magic**, the original steal card. For a measly four mana you get the benefits of adding a creature to your army, and depriving your opponent of one of theirs. In order to deal with this turn of events, they must either bounce the creature, remove the Enchant Creature, or spend one (or more) cards killing the creature itself. You can use this enchantment to just remove a blocker, allowing your own hordes to swoop in for the kill.

It's the sheer versatility and simple effectiveness of **Control Magic** that brings it to #2 on this list. The basic effect (gaining control of a creature) doesn't even begin to reflect the power of taking away an opponent's resource and making it your own. Wizards continues to print updates to **Control Magic** to this day, looking to balance the casting cost and drawbacks against the effectiveness of the steal. **Binding Grasp** traded a slight toughness boost and an easier casting cost for an upkeep cost. **Abduction** untapped the stolen creature (a weakness of the original) at the loss of card advantage when the creature died. **Treachery** improved upon the original design, allowing a full array of countermagic to back up the newly stolen creature. Finally, the original version was reprinted in *Odyssey* as **Persuasion**, with an added colorless mana in its casting cost.

The deck that won the very first Pro Tour used **Control Magic** as part of its hefty anti-creature arsenal.

Blue/White Control (Standard + "5-of Rule")		
Michael Loconto - Winner - Pro Tour 1 - New York 1996		
Main Deck		Sideboard
7 Plains	2 Control Magic	1 Control Magic
4 Island	4 Counterspell	2 Aeolipile
4 Adarkar Wastes	4 Swords to Plowshares	2 Circle of Protection: Red
4 Mishra's Factory	4 Wrath of God	1 Divine Offering
2 Svyelunite Temple	4 Disenchant	2 Hydroblast
1 Ruins of Trokair	3 Millstone	1 Jester's Cap
1 Wizards' School	2 Fountain of Youth	2 Sea Sprite
1 Strip Mine	2 Hallowed Ground	2 Serrated Arrows
	2 Icy Manipulator	2 Steal Artifact
2 Blinking Spirit	2 Land Tax	
	1 Balance	
	1 Deflection	
	1 Feldon's Cane	
	1 Ivory Tower	
	1 Jayemdae Tome	
	1 Recall	
	1 Zuran Orb	

## #1: Rancor (Beatdown)

If you didn't know this recurring Enchant Creature was going to top the list of the most powerful creature enchantments ever printed, then you've just started playing the game last month. **Rancor** takes the best elements of the cards explored in #7, and improves on their design. Not only do you get a 2-power boost for a single green mana, but trample gets added in for free. That alone would warrant this card a place in most green beatdown decks. The repeated recouping of Rancor relegates this enchantment to the realm of the truly broken. The greatest weakness of Enchant Creatures, as I've stated time and time again, comes on the premise that you're losing two cards once your enchanted creature leaves play. As long as you can get it to resolve, **Rancor** avoids this pitfall entirely due to its recursive nature. Tie the three elements of trample, a large offensive boost, and incessant returning, and put a price tag of  on it, and you've got an absolute winner which defines an entire archetype.

Remember that **Rancor** had to compete with some really crazy cards during its lifespan in Standard, like **Replenish**, **Yawgmoth's Bargain**, and **Tinker**. The fact that a creature enchantment could make an impact in such a high-powered environment is testament to its clout.



Main Deck		Sideboard
17 Forest	4 Rancor	3 Cursed Totem
3 Gaea's Cradle	4 Tangle Wire	2 Lumbering Satyr
2 Treetop Village	3 Giant Growth	4 Rushwood Legate
	3 Wild Might	3 Thran Foundry
2 Albino Troll		1 Thran Lens
4 Elvish Lyrist		2 Uktabi Orangutan
4 Pouncing Jaguar		
4 River Boa		
2 Uktabi Orangutan		
4 Vine Dryad		
4 Wild Dogs		

Do you agree? Disagree? Have your own opinion? Let it out on our [message boards](#).

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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](#), 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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