

## Six Top 10 lists

# Best Instants of All Time

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Hello from the land of [StarCityGames.com](#)! It's been a while, but Aaron managed to wrest me away from the grasp of one Pete "Darth Junior" Hoefling in order for me to present to you, in an absolutely random fashion, the Top 50 Soldiers of all time.

Oh wait, I missed that week.

Ok, then here's the Top 50 Keyworded Cards of all time!

Hmmm. Aaron's informed me that I've missed the boat yet again. Perhaps if I moved a little faster I could get these articles in on time.

Perhaps if I moved as fast as an instant?

## SPEED MATTERS

"Instant" spells are my favorite type of card in **Magic: The Gathering**. Some of my favorite instants have been Necropotence (instantly win the game when it is played), Nevinyrral's Disk (instantly clear the board), and Squire (instantly have everyone in the room laugh at you). Of course, some cards have "Instant" on the type line. These are the types of instant spells I'm going to be talking about this theme week, and not just in any fashion.

I present to you the trickiest of tricks, the fastest of fast, and the most reactive of reactors. I present to you, oh favored reader, the Top 10 Instants in every color in **Magic**.

## MULTICOLORED CARDS

Coming in last out of the six colors we'll be discussing today, multicolored cards suffer from a lack of exposure in the **Magic** world. For the sake of this list, these cards include any instants which contain two (or more) different colors of mana somewhere in their costs.

### 10) Wax/Wane

This *Invasion* split card gave creature decks a bit of utility. It could be used as both a mini-Giant Growth (oxymoron alert!), or as a Demystify. Nothing like taking out that Saproling Burst while threatening that last two damage for the win.

## 9) Spite/Malice

I've always really liked the flavor of this card. You can either use it to counter a non-creature spell, or kill the creature you couldn't counter. It's only drawback came from the mana costs on both sides of the card: you either got the Hoodwink of countermagic or an overcosted Dark Banishing.

## 8) Simoon

Back in the days when people used to run a ton of one toughness utility creatures such as Birds of Paradise, Granger Guildmage, and Quirion Ranger, people began figuring out that Simoon was a one-sided Wrath of God against said creatures. And there was much rejoicing as Simoon came around for a second peek in *Invasion*.

## 7) Recoil

Boomerang without the card disadvantage. While Recoil never lived up to its fullest potential, it saw quite a bit of play in the days of Psychatog decks. What's not to love when bounce meets discard?

## 6) Lim-Dul's Vault

Vampiric Tutor costs a black mana and two life to set up one card. Lim-Dul's Vault costs a blue and a black mana and between zero and twenty life, and sets you up five cards. While that extra blue mana prohibits all decks from playing the Vault, some Trix decks found room for this powerful searcher back in the day.

## 5) Undermine

Add insult to injury. How many times have you seen someone sit at three life, unable to play a spell because they knew his opponent had an Undermine in his hand? Have you been on the receiving end of this? The giving end? I hate you 'Tog players. The end.

## 4) Ray of Revelation

While no cards with kicker made the list (Dismantling Blow narrowly missed), this flashback card has been the cat's meow for enchantment removal for quite some time. Easily discarded via cards like Wild Mongrel, easily searched for with Quiet Speculation, and a favorite target for Cunning Wish in Mirari's Wake decks to wreck opposing enchantments.

## 3) Absorb

White-blue went through a long period of doldrums, but Absorb shone as a bright spot in an otherwise dreary landscape. While Undermine usually sealed the deal, Absorb played the dual role of stopping a future threat, while staving off imminent death.

## 2) Terminate

Some say that Swords to Plowshares is the most efficient single-target creature kill spell in **Magichistory**. If that's the case, then Terminate comes in second, with the ability to spot-kill any creature that isn't pro-red, pro-black or untargetable.

## 1) Fire/Ice

We begin with split cards, we end with split cards. Individually these effects are marginal: but combined they form a card that was so good, many non-red blue base decks started playing red just to get it (plus Flametongue Kavu, to be perfectly fair). Enervate, meet Arc Lightning as an instant.



## GREEN

Last among the five colors for instant goodness, green relies more on creatures than spells to do its talking. Wild Mongrel and Silvus might smash face, but if you like having lots of tricks at your disposal then it's not easy being green.

## 10) Krosan Reclamation

While it's not quite Gaea's Blessing, it does the job even better as an anti-reanimator card. Just wait for your opponent to target that pesky Symbiotic Wurm or Verdant Force in his graveyard with Zombify or Reanimate, and send that bad boy a-packing back into the deck. Also nifty in a certain Future Sight deck that another esteemed writer on this site swears by...

## 9) Constant Mists

Just three words. Fog with buyback. Prolong the game. Frustrate your opponent. Take no damage. Lose a land. Wash, rinse, repeat.

## **8) Reap**

What a funny little card! With just a few Lotus Petals, a Deathlace, and two of this goofy color hoser, you've just achieved infinite mana. People built Type 1 decks around this engine. People won Type 1 tournaments with this combo. Well, that was before Lotus Petal got restricted.

## **7) Bounty of the Hunt**

Stompy decks were running as few Forests as imaginable at one point, using Land Grant and pitch spells to fuel a quick assault of Wild Dogs, Ghazban Ogres, and Pouncing Jaguars. Bounty of the Hunt gave the deck a Giant Growth it could play for no mana, distributable how the caster saw fit among his team.

## **6) Naturalize**

When Wizards tweaked the color wheel, they gave the ability to destroy artifacts and enchantments to green. This paved the way for a reprint of Disenchant with a slightly different mana cost. And yay did the green mages rejoice, and boo did the white mages cry their sad little hearts out over Demystify.

## **5) Emerald Charm**

Before there was Naturalize, there was only Zuul. And thus, Emerald Charm was a handy solution to any global enchantments (for you younglings, those enchantments which don't enchant anything in particular, such as Form of the Dragon or Worship), a way to bring flyers down to earth, and a second use of a utility creature, all wrapped into one neat little charm.

## **4) Giant Growth**

Green's signature spell, Giant Growth has survived the transition from Alpha to today, made a visit in *Ice Age*, and been the subject of countless variants from Elvish Fury to Wirewood Pride. Ain't nothing like the real thing baby, and getting three extra power and toughness for one investment of mana seems like a good deal. Getting it at the time of your choosing, in order to save your creature during combat, from a direct damage spell, or to kill an opponent with an unblocked creature is gravy on the train.

## **3) Early Harvest**

A key component in many infinite mana combos, Early Harvest doesn't really have many other uses aside from harvesting said infinite mana. But boy, does it do the job well! Recently, Canadians have found a way to harvest (pun intended) this card to good effect in Mirari's Wake decks. Check out the Canadian Nationals coverage [on the Sideboard](#) for more details.

## **2) Crop Rotation**

So good, it's restricted in Type 1. Of course, maybe that was because people were using it to fetch the uber-broken Tolarian Academy. Tutors are powerful, and fetching the Academy, Strip Mine, and Library of Alexandria – straight into play, and in response to land destruction spells, is an ability not to be scoffed at.

## 1) Berserk

Recently unrestricted in Type 1, many a player has the story of how a friend of a friend died to a double Blood Lusted, triple Giant Growthed, Berserked Forked Scryb Sprites. In the history of **Magic**, this has never really happened. Don't believe anyone who will tell you otherwise, including Richard Garfield. Fine, maybe he's done it a few times. Fine, maybe it used to be a favorite deck of his. But who are you going to believe, me or the guy who invented this game?



## WHITE

While green's instants were all over the place, a lot of white's good instants are focused on removing things. White doesn't have a whole lot of great instants (the runner-up list was surprisingly short), but the good ones it does have pack quite the punch.

## 10) Exile

Removing non-white creatures from the game while gaining a bunch of life. That's Exile in a nutshell: good for scrubbing out Sengir, yet gentle enough to let lady Serra pass unharmed.

## 9) Reprisal

Removing those guys that thought they were large and in charge. That's Reprisal in a nutshell: good for sending Serra's Angel back to Serra's Sanctum, yet gentle enough to keep Jackal Pup coming back for more.

## 8) Honorable Passage

Keeping it real while letting that red player knows that he's gonna pay for that insult. That's Honorable Passage in a nutshell: good for making Jackal Pup bite the hand that feeds it, not so good for stopping your opponent's Memory Jar deck.

## **7) Orim's Chant**

Your opponent can't play spells. Your opponent can't attack. That's Orim's Chant in a nutshell: good for stopping an opponent in the middle of his combo while he has a bazillion mana floating and damned if he isn't going to take mana burn and die, but don't you just wish it was a cantrip?

## **6) Abeyance**

Your opponent can't play spells *and* you draw a card. That's Abeyance in a nutshell: great for letting you get your own combos off while getting you through your deck, not so good when your opponent can still cast Viashino Sandstalker and attack you that turn.

## **5) Waylay**

Much better when it could be played at the end of an opponent's turn, giving you a bunch of 2/2 hasted creatures for your next attack phase, but still a potent creature killer. That's Waylay in a nutshell: nerfed but still gigging Viashino Sandstalker since 1997, but not the best when you're stuck at one mana.

## **4) Tithe**

Got less land than your opponent? Why not get yourself two of your own for the price of one card/mana? That's Tithe in a nutshell: Thinning your deck and capable of getting the original dual lands, but what if you really need an enchantment instead of a land?

## **3) Enlightened Tutor**

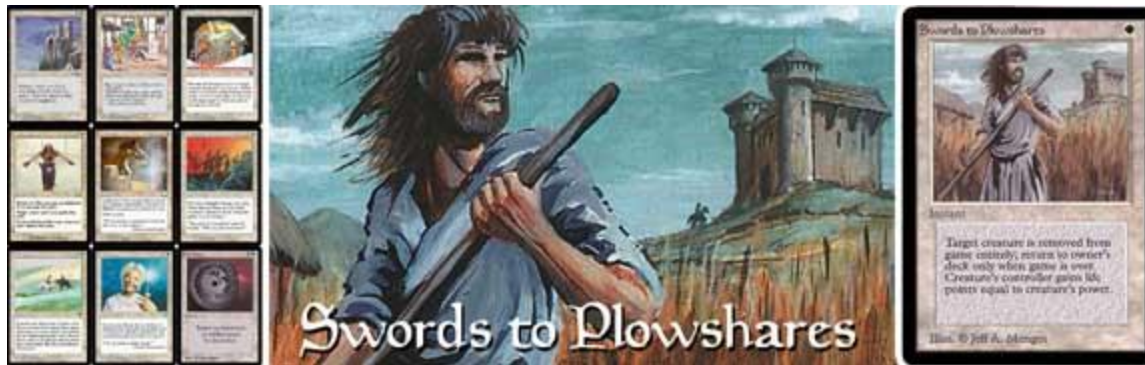
Want that Oath of Druids or Ensnaring Bridge *now*? That's Enlightened Tutor in a nutshell: the best in searching out those game-winning enchantments and artifacts, but not the best at stopping the ones your opponent has.

## **2) Disenchant**

Look kids, it's Naturalize on the list twice! That's Disenchant in a nutshell: it can kill virtually every problem card in virtually every format... except creatures.

## **1) Swords to Plowshares**

Just one mana kills 99.44% of the creatures in **Magic** with no muss and no fuss. That's Swords to Plowshares in a nutshell: the best single target removal spell in **Magic**, but sometimes you want to be the one gaining life... *(repeat loop)*



## RED

Red's best instants "blow things up real good." Of all the lists, this one is the most boring and repetitive. Sure, these spells get the job done—but at what price repetitiveness? For this section, I've made up my own imaginary flavor text for each card. Believe me, that's a lot better than saying "this does damage to your opponent" eight times and "boy, red really hates blue" twice. And believe me more, noone is in any threat of losing his job over in the Wizards creative text department.

### 10) Boil

*"Avast ye scurvies, we be havin' lobster for lunch... and dinner... and breakfast..."*

### 9) Pyrokinesis

*Just as Nebmai thought his opponent was all tapped out, he noticed the fireworks were just beginning.*

### 8) Firestorm

*"Hey look everyone! There's one for everybody!" –Ploob, goblin astronomer*

### 7) Shock

*This spell came as a shock to many.*

### 6) Price of Progress

*Man came to the cities, and the cities came back upon the men.*

### 5) Pyroblast/Red Elemental Blast

*"Them Merfolk's good eatins'!" –Krikaloo, dwarven cook*

#### **4) Urza's Rage**

*"Hey Bob, do we have any **Battletech** artwork left?" –Anonymous*

#### **3) Incinerate**

*Fahrenheit 451 for the body.*

#### **2) Fireblast**

*Kunzar was later found in a crater of decimated earth. His opponent wasn't as fortunate.*

#### **1) Lightning Bolt**

*"Take three and call me in the morning" –Grokk, ogre shaman*



### **BLACK**

Long have players feared the black mage. He commands the powers of the instant like no other, capable of summoning forth fearsome foes to do his bidding with supernatural speed, sending these minions to decimate the opponent in one fell swoop. From the grave, to the grave, so goes the black magic.

#### **10) Smother**

One of black's weaknesses is the inability to kill other black creatures. Smother removes this hindrance in exchange for the inability to kill late-game monsters. It matters not, for the ability to kill Psychatog and Wild Mongrel alike puts Smother firmly in the top ten black instants of all time.

#### **9) Entomb**

Usually tutor cards put the card tutored for in hand or *at* hand on the top of the library. Entomb sends any one card from your deck straight to the bin, where you can use reanimate effects to accelerate your board development. Even nastier when combined with a certain other black mana acceleration instant, an Animate Dead, and a Worldgorger Dragon.

## 8) Contagion

You'll notice that four of the five *Alliances* pitch spells make their respective top ten lists, and it's pretty fitting considering they are the ultimate instants: cards which can be played while you are completely tapped out, leaving your opponent guessing all the while. Contagion usually trades two cards (the Contagion plus another black card) for two creatures, which seems like a good deal to me for zero mana.

## 7) Terror

Trivia fact: Did you know Terror was originally supposed to be unable to kill walls? After all, who heard of a wall dropping dead of fright? And did you know that Terror's artwork is cropped sideways? And did you know that for two mana, you'd be hard pressed to find many other cards in **Magic** which kill as many creatures as Terror does?

## 6) Spinning Darkness

Here's that alternate cost mechanic again, but this time it's based upon the graveyard instead of pitching cards from your hand. While Spinning Darkness can't hit players, the bonus life it gives you while killing a creature essentially for free is priceless.

## 5) Demonic Consultation

Many players avoided this card early on, in fear of losing multiple copies of the named card within the top six of their decks, and then decking themselves. While this happened occasionally, more often than not the Consult acted as the ultimate Demonic Tutor, a one-mana instant which could fetch any card you needed out of your deck immediately.

## 4) Hatred

Black weenie decks owe a huge debt of gratitude to this instant, which gave shadow creatures on average an extra eighteen power on turn three (thanks again to a certain other instant/interrupt/mana source that I'll get to in a minute, promise!). Channel + Howl From Beyond never looked quite as good as Hatred + well, any unblocked creature as long as you were ahead on life.

## 3) Diabolic Edict

At first glance, Terror might look like a better card. After all, you get to choose which creature you kill with Terror, while your opponent chooses with Edict. However, Terror doesn't kill black creatures,

protection from black creatures, untargetable creatures, or artifact creatures. Diabolic Edict kills all of those, and at instant speed to boot.

## 2) Vampiric Tutor

You lose two life, you don't get the card right away, and you garner card disadvantage. On the other hand, you get to play this at the end of your opponent's turn (so you might as well get the card immediately), and you can get literally any card in your deck on the spot. A mainstay of combo decks and mono-black decks from the old Prosperity-Cadaverous Bloom decks to the modern day Alurencontraptions, with "Cocoa Pebbles" in between.

## 1) Dark Ritual

None of the above instants would be as powerful as they are without the existence of the best mana acceleration card on this side of Black Lotus. Dark Ritual allows black so many sick turn one plays, it isn't funny. Ritual-Necropotence. Ritual-Hypnotic Specter. Ritual-Duress-Hymn to Tourach. Ritual-Phyrexian Negator. Dark Ritual became so damaging to the design process of black spells that Wizards R&D phased it out of the main set, the DCI banned it from Extended, and players all across the world rejoiced or sobbed, depending on how much of a black mage each was at heart.



## BLUE

Finishing off today's list, blue sits on top of the world as the best color of instants in all of **Magic: The Gathering**. For years, blue was defined as the color of trickery and nifty spells, and no spells are more tricky or nifty than instants. To give you an idea of how good blue instants are compared to other colors, blue would have over 50% of a "Top 50 Instants of All Time" list (and take six of the top ten slots). Blue was so much better than the other colors at playing spells on the opponent's turn that Aaron suggested I do this color-by-color instead of making this installment a straight Top 50. I agreed, but I can only put off the king for so long. Without further delay, the top 10 blue instants of all time.

## 10) Accumulated Knowledge/Arcane Denial/Boomerang/Brainstorm/Forbid/Force Spike/Gush/Impulse/Intuition/Stifle (Tie)

If I didn't mention all of these, I'd get a lot of hate mail. Let's just move onto number nine, shall we?

## 9) Capsize

Boomerang with buyback spelled frustration for many an opponent who was left with no permanents in play. Capsize gave blue the ability to remove any threat from the board (temporarily in most cases) over and over again, as an instant. Capsize plus Candelabra of Tawnos plus Tolarian Academy also meant infinite mana.

## 8) Misdirection

The weaker of the two free counterspells on this list, Misdirection has seen more play in Type 1 than it ever did in Type 2, Block, or Extended. It gives a tapped out player the ability to win counter wars, to redirect an ill-timed card-drawing spell, and generally plays havoc with the targets on the board.

## 7) Stroke of Genius

The kill card in many a combo deck, Stroke of Genius also doubles as an instant Braingeyser. Blue hates tapping out to draw cards, so Stroke gives them an easy out—just wait until the end of your opponent's turn, and give yourself a big ol' helping of X.

## 6) Fact or Fiction

The only divvy card that ended up being worth the cardboard it was printed on, Fact or Fiction became the best card-drawing card printed since a certain one mana instant from Alpha. The ability to draw three cards as an instant for four mana (or at least the best one or two of five) coupled with a certain Dr. Teeth made for one frustrating experience for the unlucky opponent who had to make piles which often foretold doom.

## 5) Cunning Wish

The wishes changed the way people played tournament **Magic** by making the sideboard an immediately accessible toolbox for the first game of a match. The best of them was Cunning Wish (followed closely by the sorceries Burning Wish and Living Wish), due to its nature as an instant. In response to anything that the opponent could play, the blue mage suddenly had not one, but fifteen different cards he could tutor for. Need that Counterspell? Just put one in the board and wish for it. Need to kill a creature? A single Swords to Plowshares in the sideboard will do. With Mirari, Cunning Wish could copy itself and get back another Cunning Wish plus a sideboard card, leading many games to end in a fury of Elephant and Spirit tokens via Mirari and its Wake.

## 4) Counterspell

Good old Counterspell. For UU, it stops anything in the game cold, give or take Obliterate, Urza's Rage, and a couple of other uncounterables. From the very beginning, players learned that an

opponent with two islands untapped meant the threat of a Counterspell loomed overhead. And this finished only fourth on the blue instants list!

### 3) Mana Drain

**Magic** has come a long way since Mana Drain saw print. I mean, I can understand that somewhere, someone designed this card thinking that often you would add X mana to your pool and not be able to use it, with mana burn ensuing. In reality, a second- or third-turn Mana Drain often fuelled Mahamoti Djinn, a huge Braingeyser, a game-ending Mind Twist, or any other number of ridiculously accelerated plays. Combine Dark Ritual and Counterspell into one card and you have this *Legend* powerhouse, which will be reprinted, and I paraphrase a quote, as soon as all of R&D dies in a fiery bus crash and Randy Buehler is left as the only man alive.

And I think even Randy's learned his lesson about blue.

### 2) Force of Will

The best countermagic of all time came out of *Alliances*. The biggest, and I mean biggest weakness of blue was being vulnerable while tapped out. A blue mage with no mana untapped was at the mercy of his opponent. That was it: feel free to Armageddon/Channel-Fireball/whatever, and your opponent of the Islands couldn't do jack, diddly, or squat to stop you. Force of Will changed all this, giving blue a completely unfair defense. Sure, it cost them a card and a life point—but sometimes you just have to stop a spell right then and there. Now player didn't only fear a blue mage with two Islands untapped: they feared a blue mage with at least two cards in hand as well.

### 1) Ancestral Recall

One blue. Three cards. Any questions?



Agree or disagree? Feel free to make suggestions or post your own lists of instants on the [message boards](#).

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