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It's hard to pinpoint the brokenest card in *Darksteel*. I mean, have you seen the set? (Don't answer that.) There are so many crazy and/or huge and/or undercosted and/or unkillable and/or otherwise cool cards that it's hard to believe the best one of all just might be an innocuous 1-mana uncommon Equipment. But it might be. Time will tell.

That's right, an Equipment! I've heard people wondering out loud whether Equipment was a one-shot deal. Nope, it's a part of the game now, just like other new card subtypes introduced after Alpha such as Enchant Wor--well, let's just say you can expect more Equipment.

So what does this puppy do? You've all figured out by now that Skullclamp clamps skulls. But what does that mean exactly? Take a look:



As you can see, jacking into a creature's medulla oblongata makes the creature more aggressive, yet weakens it. I have expert testimony from prominent neurosurgeons assuring me that this is 100% accurate. They had to construct some similar devices and plug them into the brainpans of apes, squirrels, golems, and themselves to test this theory, but as page 1 of their report states, "Facts is facts." The other thing this fantasy-based and completely non-futuristic device does is collect the creature's thoughts when it dies. Add the accumulated knowledge of a spider's lifetime to your own, and you get smarter... by two whole cards!

What is Skullclamp good with? Yotian Soldier.

On its own, a Yotian Soldier can plink away for some damage sometimes while holding off a small attacker. Put the Clamp on it and it becomes a nearly unblockable 2/3 guy that will also deter an

army from attacking. I've played **Magic** before, so I know that your opponent does not want to give you two cards. A Clamped Yotian Soldier is a mini Browbeat-on-a-stick: When you send it in, your opponent has to choose whether to take damage or give you cards. Either way, you're happy! Even if the Soldier is taken down, the cards you get in return probably contain another creature to Clamp up. On defense, a Clamped 2/3 will probably off a 6/6 for quite some time. These situations are fun because every move your opponent makes is wrong.

What is Skullclamp good with? Goblin Brigand & Cinder Wall.

You don't need a nontapping creature like Yotian Soldier to get the most out of Skullclamp. The equip cost is only 1 mana, so moving it around is a snap! Equip an attacker and charge in. After combat, equip an untapped creature for defense. These creatures are practically un-Terrorable too: Why would your opponent want to hand you 3-for-1 card advantage?

Any Blocks?

Standard-legal Skullclamp deck

This deck has no answer to Worship, and very few answers to Circle of Protection: Red. So you'll just have to smash face before any nasty enchantments like that come into play!

What is Skullclamp good with? Your opponent's Wrath of God.

Darksteel seems to have a subtheme running through it of "Let's hose Wrath!" I can't get into too many details this early, but you should be seeing this topic again in two weeks. With a Skullclamped creature, your recovery from a board-sweeper is hastened by a couple of cards, meaning that your opponent will be more reluctant to cast that Wrath. It just doesn't pack the same wallop when the person on the wrong end of it is instantly rewarded.

What is Skullclamp good with? Birds of Paradise.

Up to now, I've described Skullclamp as an excellent piece of Equipment that can enhance your combat step by making your creatures more dangerous and more resilient. Here's where it turns from useful to sick. Imagine this creature:

Birds of Crazyness

G

Flying

: Add one mana of any color to your mana pool.

1, Sacrifice Birds of Crazyness: Draw 2 cards.

0/1



That's what you've got now. When you equip a 1-toughness creature with Skullclamp, the Clamp immediately sends it to the graveyard... and since it was equipped when it bought the farm, the Clamp's ability triggers and you draw a pair of cards. Now you can recycle your weenies for twice the card investment! Now green has a card-drawing engine! (And so do white and red.) Weenie decks come out of the gates with guns a-blazin', but if they don't win with their initial push, they almost always peter out. Once the opponent stabilizes or clears the board, the weenie deck has no ammo left. Not anymore. Skullclamp is the kind of comeback tool that weenie players--er, I mean players with weenie decks--have sought for ten years.

ElfClamp

Standard-legal Skullclamp deck

In the early going, swing with your Elves. Later on, Clamp the Elves until you find something meaty. Aaron Forsythe, looking over my shoulder, suggests that Maro would be a fine addition to the deck since you'll be keeping your hand full.

What is Skullclamp good with? Solemn Simulacrum.

With one Skullclamp, this critter is a 3/1 that, when destroyed, gains you three cards. With two Skullclamps, you can Clamp it to death to draw five cards! But come on, how likely is that? To draw half your Skullclamps, you'd have to be playing with some sort of card-drawing... hmmmmmm...

What is Skullclamp good with? Wizard Replica.

The equivalent of blowing up two of your opponent's lands. Your opponent does NOT want to let you counter a spell while drawing two cards--and meanwhile, you've got a 2/2 flyer.

What is Skullclamp good with? Bottle Gnomes.

Sac it for 3 life and two cards.

What is Skullclamp good with? Myr Retriever.

Clamp it to get three cards total (including those Bottle Gnomes you just put in your graveyard, perhaps).

What is Skullclamp good with? Carrion Feeder.

As long as you're sacrificing creatures to feed it...

What is Skullclamp good with? Just about everything!

Until next week, enjoy your Clamp dreams.

Mark

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