

# The Power That is Equipment Search

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I actually want to start out with the poll question first this week:

**What best describes your personal experience playing with or against Equipment so far?**

- It is a lot of fun and very interesting.
- I'm generally okay with Equipment.
- It has its ups and downs.
- It is kind of annoying to deal with.
- I don't like what it does to games at all.
- I don't really play with or against it very often.

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## Lather, Rinse, Repeat



We've been having several discussions lately in the R&D pit about repeatable effects. How good should they be?

Imagine this scenario... You're playing a black weenie rush deck full of creatures with one toughness—Sewer Rats, Grimclaw Bats, Dauthi Horror, Ravenous Skirge, and so on. Your opponent takes some early hits then plays out an Archivist. Now he can—for no extra mana investment—draw one extra card per turn.

Whoop de do, right? Right. Yes, he put out a repeatable effect—and a powerful one at that—but it doesn't change your plan. You just keep on marching ahead with your black army. Maybe the extra cards will bail your opponent out, maybe not. What he's doing isn't directly interacting with what you're doing.

Now change the card your opponent plays from Archivist to Vulshok Sorcerer—another repeatable effect, and one that is arguably less powerful overall. But the Sorcerer absolutely wrecks you—it kills off your best creature each turn, slowly clearing the board as you fail to draw a threat each turn. Eventually nothing you can possibly draw will get you out of this situation (for the sake of argument your deck is *all creatures*). You'll have effectively lost the game even though you are still at 20 life and your opponent has played but one spell.

That moment where you start drawing cards and can't play them because they are powerless to affect the game feels *really bad*.

On the flip side of the argument, imagine that instead of the reusable Sorcerer, your opponent's deck contains slightly more powerful one-shot effects, like Arc Lightning. What happens now? The game plays out differently each time, and you still have a chance to win even if he demolishes your team by getting a 3-for-1 with a turn three Arc Lightning. Maybe he never draws a second one and you rebuild and overwhelm him. Maybe you only play out one creature at a time so he can't get card advantage against you. Or maybe he draws multiples and wrecks you over and over again. In any event, each game plays out slightly different from the last, even if the same cards were involved.

With one-shot effects, the game is changed drastically. No one's strategy becomes invalid and no one's draws become dead. That's what we call "good gameplay."

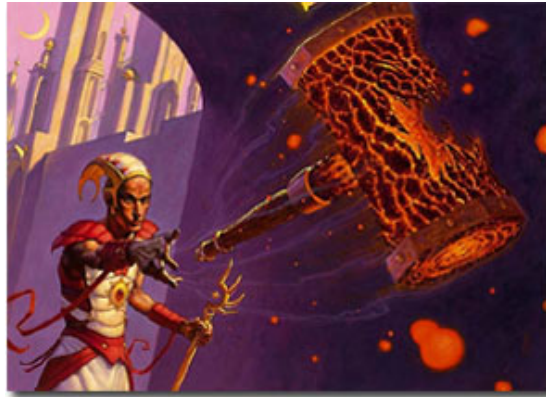
Of course, good gameplay is often trumped by the need and desire for good cards. Players love repeatable effects, and with good reason. They present threats and generate card advantage, both keys to winning games. Visara the Dreadful can wipe out every creature an opponent plays. Molder Slug does the same to artifacts. There are many decks out there—tournament-worthy or otherwise—that just "scoop" to these cards, as they invalidate everything the decks can hope to do.

As developers, we really want players' draw steps to matter, even in the late game when faced with one of these destructive card-advantage machines. We try to put answers into every environment that would let the problem cards be "solved" by any reasonable deck; in the examples at the beginning of this article, the player of the black deck could easily swap in a few cards that would deal with Vulshok Sorcerer, and the games would play better. No one wants to be "frozen out" of games by cards that are impossible to deal with. Staring at a hand of spells that are totally neutered by one card the opponent has out is a real downer. Usually you can adjust your deck to be better equipped to handle these things, but not always.\*

## Where Equipment Fits In

I'm getting to the theme, I promise.

Equipment in general falls into the category of powerful, reusable effect. The playable ones all have a way of becoming the focus of the game, even if they don't do anything other than alter power and toughness. Every monster you summon is at least 1.8 times more awesome with a Bonesplitter or Vulshok Morningstar in play.



The top-level equipment—think Sword of Fire and Ice—borders on the kind of repetitive destructive effect I was talking about before. While many decks can just block the equipped creature or destroy the Sword, many games are won by a huge attacker simultaneously generating wads of card advantage and nullifying the opponent's draws.

When Equipment first showed up in *Mirrodin*, they weren't particularly hard to deal with. As artifacts were the main thrust of the block, most decks had a way to destroy, counter, or steal problem Equipment, so it was hard to gauge its power-level fairly at that point.

As *Kamigawa* block has come together, we finally get a chance to see Equipment in a world where it isn't so easy to get rid of. And it turns out to be really, really good. If you've played a decent amount of *Kamigawa* limited, you've undoubtedly seen games decided by uncommon equipment like Shuriken or No-Dachi. These cards, because of their hard-to-remove nature, don't play at all like Auras such as Psionic Gift or Armadillo Cloak, but are instead similar to their non-Equipment ancestors—game-altering artifacts like Power Matrix, Belbe's Armor, and Fodder Cannon. Each of those artifacts was a first-pick wrecking ball in their respective environments, and Equipment is merely the newest incarnation of that type of effect.

## Is There an Elephant in the Room?

Hmmm.... A development article about Equipment... The *Kamigawa* Block Constructed PTQ season is in full swing... Is there an elephant in the room?

I could go into detail about how in the world Umezawa's Jitte ever saw print, but I doubt it would make many people happy. Just go back and reread all the articles I wrote about Skullclamp and replace some words. Seriously. We're slow learners around here sometimes. I could make some kind

of promise about never doing it again, but would you really believe me? We'll certainly try to never do it again, if that helps.

In any event, Jitte encompasses just about everything bad about reusable effects. It's cheap, it's colorless, and it wipes out everything your opponent has done to this point and renders ineffective most of what he plans to do in the future. Too often your opponent plays and equips a Jitte on turn four, attacks, kills your creatures, and you're left holding a hand of cards that might as well be blank. It destroys hope. Horrible. Even decks without creatures need to answer the Jitte quickly, as it is essentially +4/+4 with a one-turn delay.

In general, we don't want these kinds of effects, and we certainly don't like them on cards that cost two colorless mana. If the card was 4 to play and 4 to equip, maybe we'd have something close to fair—you know, something you'd have to put some amount of effort into using.



That said, Jitte isn't going anywhere. The Block metagame is actually decent, even once you factor in the number of decks that Jitte renders unplayable. There are several different decks that use Jitte, and from time to time the dominant deck doesn't play it at all. Plus the season ends in a few weeks. The card hasn't been a problem in Standard at all, really (as Skullclamp was), and hopefully that will continue to be the case once *Ravnica* is released.

## The Future?

We'll keep making reusable effects, including ones that directly affect your opponent's cards—after all, some of the most iconic and memorable cards in the game are from that category, including Tradewind Rider, Masticore, and Avatar of Woe. The key is finding the exact right level for the effect such that it is still powerful, yet allows the game to progress for those on the receiving end of their punishing effects.

Equipment is certainly included in this, especially now that we understand their impact on post-*Mirrodin* environments. I promise there will be some impressive ones in the future—they just won't be as easy as the Jitte.

## Last Week's Poll:

Do you like <i>Ninth Edition</i> more or less than <i>Eighth</i> ?		
More	9590	77.4%
About the same	1875	15.1%
Less	923	7.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>12388</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Great stuff. We thought we were improving the Core Set, and it pleases me to see that we've succeeded, at least in the eyes of my readers.

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\*: Sometimes we want reusable cards like these to keep players "honest." Eastern Paladin, for example, is a good metagame hoser if mono-green creature decks start dominating. Green players would have to adapt to the presence of Paladins in the field by adding another color or a card like Pithing Needle to compensate.

