



The Make-Shift Deck

Jay Moldenhauer-Salazar
House of Cards
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

A while ago, I wrote an [article](#) focusing on a “bad” rare: [Nantuko Shrine](#). The reader response was fairly overwhelming, and you all asked for more explorations of cards deemed less-than-stellar. You got it. Expect more “bad rare” articles from me in the future. Of course, be careful what you wish for...

I present to you: [Shifty Doppelganger](#).

“Whoah!” you’re saying, “Um, I meant a different rare. Isn’t there another one you can focus on?” Sorry bucko. You get [Shifty Doppelganger](#).

Why is [Shifty Doppelganger](#) so seemingly horrid? What makes it smell like a dead and rotting [Volrath’s Shapeshifter](#)? By my estimation, there are three reasons.



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1. WEIRD

First, the ability is weird. Ostensibly, the Doppelganger is meant to be a wee little harmless thing that at any moment can instantly transform into any wicked beast your planeswalker mind can envision. As an idea, that’s actually pretty cool. Unfortunately other cards have traveled this road and didn’t get very far; [Flash](#), [Metathran Aerostat](#), [Surprise Deployment](#)... these are also “bad” cards.

Still, the Doppelganger’s odd little ability isn’t the only thing keeping it out of decks. After all, [Show and Tell](#), [Illusionary Mask](#), and [Volrath’s Shapeshifter](#) perform similar tricks and see plenty of casual play. Instead, our little Shifty fellow suffers from a weird ability in combination with the next two disabilities.

2. FRAGILE

It’s hard enough to keep the Doppelganger alive since it is a 1/1. What really hurts, though, is the fact that if your creature somehow leaves play before the end of turn, your Doppelganger never comes back either. Again, given that it’s a [shapeshifter](#), that makes some thematic sense. But it means that the Doppelganger is just ripe for card disadvantage. Either it dies and you have huge uncastable creatures stuck in your hand, or your huge creature dies to a [Dark Banishing](#) and you have lost two pretty rares to a single common. Ick.

Because [Shifty Doppelganger](#) is weird and fragile, it has pretty much excluded itself from serious tournament decks. I still think it would get played a lot more in casual settings if not for the death knell...

3. OVERCOSTED

Let me say it plainly: It costs $5\text{ } \{ \}$ to pop a single card from your hand into play using the Doppelganger. By way of comparison, for one less mana I can reset the board with [Upheaval](#), draw four cards with [Opportunity](#), play [Mahamoti Djinn](#), or [Confiscate](#) any permanent.

I know, [Shifty Doppelganger](#) can come into play on turn 3, and be used on turn 4, which isn’t true for those other spells. And technically you can use its ability repeatedly for $3\text{ } \{ \}$ each time. But that is still a huge initial investment for something weird and fragile. If you want a more meaningful comparison, look at [Elvish Piper](#) that allows your creatures to stay in play.

In discussing the card with Randy, he admitted that [Shifty Doppelganger](#) was always meant for fun decks and that Development may have lowered the power-level a bit too much with that goal in mind. Luckily, we Underdogs are not preoccupied with silly things like power-level when it comes to deckbuilding.

So, before proceeding, I feel the need to warn those who are faint of heart: Building decks around [Shifty Doppelganger](#) means building decks that are weird. And fragile. And what you will be aiming towards is that one

time in five when you get to surprise the pants off of your friend by slapping a **Phyrexian Colossus** into play and win. I personally love decks like these, but you may be slightly more focused on winning than me.

With these caveats in mind, here are some deckbuilding considerations for our new Shifty friend:



- **Use big fatties with evasion**

Shifty Doppelganger mimics the function of **Sneak Attack** and **Dawn of the Dead** to a certain extent because it flashes an attack-minded creature into play for a turn. Like those other two cards, its effect is particularly amusing when the creatures are things that will end the game quickly. Use creatures that have a 6 or higher power and some sort of evasion (flying, trample, protection, etc.) and you have a great chance of your opponent's eyeballs popping onto the table. Popping eyeballs are funny.

Another reason to use fatties is that if your new creature dies unexpectedly, your Doppelganger is gone. Since huge creatures are inherently hard to kill, they help ensure that your shapeshifter will return to shift shapes in the future.

- **Use "comes-into-play" creatures**

One advantage **Shifty Doppelganger** has over **Dawn of the Dead** is that the creatures coming into play can be as effective defensively as offensively. **Dawn of the Dead** only allows critters on your turn; not so with the Doppelganger. Surprise blockers are welcome.

Both offensive and defensive strategies can be enhanced if your creatures have either come-into-play or leaves-play abilities. Pop a **Flametongue Kavu** down to kill two creatures. Slap a **Goblin Marshal** onto the table to neuter your opponent's all-out blitz. That's right: FEAR MY LITTLE SHIFTY DORK! Ha HA!

- **Use your graveyard**

An attractive feature of the Doppelganger's ability is that at end of turn, the creature goes to the graveyard. Be creative, then, in how you use your graveyard. Cards like **Exhume**, **Body Snatcher**, **Reincarnation**, and **Reya Dawnbringer** can grab those sacrificed creatures and bring them back for more fun. In addition, your cards may have threshold, or you may want to take full advantage of spells like **Grim Lavamancer** and **Spinning Darkness**. The possibilities abound, and there are more ways than ever to take advantage of a rapidly-filling graveyard.

- **Focus on card-drawing**

I mentioned earlier that the possibility for card-disadvantage with the Doppelganger is high. Decks with **Shifty Doppelganger** also run a great risk of either: a) A shapeshifter on the table with no creatures in hand, or b) big creatures in hand with no shapeshifter. For all of these reasons, card-drawing becomes pretty important in a deck built around the Doppelganger. If you can use card-drawing critters like **Jungle Barrier** or **Kavu Climber**, great. If you are using lots of graveyard effects, cards like **Fact or Fiction** and **Reviving Vapors** work well. However you do it, guard against the many ways that a **Shifty Doppelganger** deck can look unnecessarily silly.

- **Duplicate the effect**

Finally, there is no need to rely solely on **Shifty Doppelganger** to get your big creatures into play. As I mentioned, **Exhume** is a terrific addition to a Shifty deck. So is, believe it or not, **Retraced Image**. And you might as well use some of the earlier comparisons like **Volrath's Shapeshifter**, **Elvish Piper**, and **Dawn of the Dead**. The trick here is to balance your fattie-generation spells with the right number of fatties. Play around with this balance and see what happens.

Above all, remember the "Bad Rare Rule": If you can take the bad card out of the deck and make the deck better, you haven't successfully built around a bad card.

Before I get to my own wacky creations, here is a message for two segments of my House of Cards readership:

For you new or returning players, you'll notice no "lite" decks listed today. I know you value these decks highly, so I try every week to include at least one. When building around rares and/or fatties, however, lite decks are impossible. I have tried to make decks like the blue/black and blue/red decks affordable, and you can always substitute 2 of each basic land for the **painlands**. Keep in mind that I always intend for you to take the **IDEAS** and build what you can with what you own.

For you long-time casual players, you'll notice that the decks are again Type 2 as opposed to the Type 1 fare you use. Type 2 is my favorite format, but that's not the reason for excluding older cards. Most people, I've found,

don't have easy access to a lot of older cards. For every request for Extended decklists, I get ten for Type 2. I will continue to mix up the formats for my decks, but expect lots of Standard decks. Just as with the new players, I always intend for you to take the **IDEAS** and build what you can with what you own.

Enough caveats, sidebars and explanations! **Shifty Doppelganger** is feeling ignored!

-j

| Draw-No! Surprise! | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Blue Fatty Doppelganger deck | | |
| Main Deck 60 cards | | |
| 26 Island | 4 Shifty Doppelganger | 4 Opt |
| 26 lands | 4 Wall of Air | 4 Retraced Image |
| | 4 Thieving Magpie | 4 Persuasion |
| | 4 Mahamoti Djinn | 2 Repulse |
| | 4 Phyrexian Colossus | 14 other spells |
| | 20 creatures | |

| Shifty Angels | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Blue/White Angel/Doppelganger deck | | |
| Main Deck 60 cards | | |
| 4 Adarkar Wastes | 4 Shifty Doppelganger | 4 Careful Study |
| 4 Coastal Tower | 4 Angel of Mercy | 4 Breath of Life |
| 9 Island | 4 Phyrexian Colossus | 4 Reviving Vapors |
| 8 Plains | 3 Iridescent Angel | 3 Death or Glory |
| 25 lands | 3 Staunch Defenders | 1 Fact or Fiction |
| | 1 Reya Dawnbringer | 16 other spells |
| | 19 creatures | |

| Play | | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|
| Blue/black "187" Doppelganger deck | | |
| Main Deck 60 cards | | |
| 4 Salt Marsh | 4 Ravenous Rats | 4 Repulse |
| 2 Tainted Isle | 4 Phyrexian Rager | 4 Zombify |
| 12 Swamp | 4 Shifty Doppelganger | 8 other spells |
| 6 Island | 4 Gravedigger | |
| 24 lands | 4 Faceless Butcher | |
| | 4 Dakmor Lancer | |
| | 3 Cavern Harpy | |
| | 1 Mortivore | |
| | 28 creatures | |

| Size Matters | | |
|--|------------------------------|----------------|
| Blue/green Huge Monsters/Doppelganger deck | | |
| Main Deck 60 cards | | |
| 4 Yavimaya Coast | 4 Birds of Paradise | 0 other spells |
| 14 Forest | 4 Urborg Elf | |
| 6 Island | 4 Shifty Doppelganger | |
| 24 lands | 4 Elvish Piper | |
| | 4 Jungle Barrier | |
| | 4 Fungal Shambler | |
| | 4 Penumbra Wurm | |
| | 4 Thorn Elemental | |
| | 2 Quirion Elves | |
| | 2 Zoologist | |

36 creatures

5-Land, Shuffle

Blue/red Whirlpool Doppelganger deck



Main Deck 60 cards

4 Crosis's Catacombs
4 Shivan Reef
10 Island
7 Mountain

25 lands

4 Pitchstone Wall
4 Shifty Doppelganger
4 Whirlpool Warrior
4 Flametongue Kavu
4 Whirlpool Drake
3 Savage Firecat

23 creatures

4 Standstill
4 Fire/Ice
4 Repulse

12 other spells

Jay may be reached at houseofcards@wizards.com.



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