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In a Bad Trance

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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

I may be finally ready to admit that my tendency to look for underused cards in any set is peculiar behavior. I can't help it; Cards that look like some R&D peyote vision intrigue me.

"Why'd they make *that* card," I think, scratching my chin. "There must be a reason. I mean, Development is a serious part of the set creation process now. And Wizards knows how important the rare slot is. So why that one? Are they taunting me? I bet they're taunting me. They think I'm stupid and can't see how cool it is. That must be it. I'll show them, and those people at the local shop who pick on me. Won't everyone be shocked when I bust out my deck and mop the floor with them using that card. Ha! I'm not stupid. I'm clever. I'm destined for greatness. They'll see. Every one of them. They'll all see..."



My thoughts become fairly incoherent and full of profanity at some point, but you get the gist. "Bad" rares are great. Sometimes they turn out to be truly undiscovered gems that make up powerful decks. More often, though, they just lead to quirky decks that make everyone laugh. Both outcomes are worth the mental cramps, at least for me. In addition, "bad" rares are usually easy to acquire in trades.

Today my focus is *Shaman's Trance*, which has some distinct differences from my earlier "bad rare" explorations. Whereas *Nantuko Shrine* gives both you and your opponent the [same resources](#), *Shifty Doppelganger* is [fragile and overcosted](#), and *Transcendence* is [expensive and dangerous](#), *Shaman's Trance* is... well...

Shaman's Trance is just lame most of the time.

Of course, it is that exact lameness which makes *Shaman's Trance* such an intriguing card for deckbuilding. And I suppose "lame" isn't a very specific way to describe the card's shortcomings. I think *Shaman's Trance* falls under the category of "bad rare" for two simple reasons:

SITUATIONAL

Probably the most glaring weakness of *Shaman's Trance* is that it will help you in very, very few situations. Your opponent needs cards in his graveyard. But not just any cards--they must be cards that can be played directly from the graveyard. And while it's cool that *Shaman's Trance* is an instant (although who can instantly go into a trance?), it doesn't let you play opposing cards at instant speed. So either your opponent has *instant* playable cards in the graveyard or you need to play *Shaman's Trance* on your turn.

Now, seriously: How many times in a game have you absolutely YEARNED to play an opposing *Engulfing Flames* for the low, low cost of $5\text{ }2\text{ }2$? Ah, but this brings us to the next problem...

OVERCOSTED

Even if you did want, or could find a way, to play cards from your opponent's graveyard, you need to be able to handle the cost of those spells in addition to the cost of *Shaman's Trance*. That means you can add $2\text{ }2$ to any flashback cost. If you play *Yawgmoth's Will*, for example, you need $2\text{ }4$ for the Will, then $2\text{ }2$ for the Trance, *then* the cost of the spell(s). If you have that much mana lying around at your disposal, aren't there cooler things you can do?

Shaman's Trance would have been truly compelling at the cost of 2 . Or maybe it could have been a cantrip to lessen the sting of its situational nature. Combined, however, these two drawbacks make for one hard-to-justify card.

That said, there are some ways to throw *Shaman's Trance* into a deck and pray for the best. Besides, if you want to play easy decks that will win a lot, use something brainless like *Rancor* or *Lightning Bolt*. "Bad" rares are challenging, and you look like you might need your frontal lobes tickled.

STRATEGY #1: FIND WAYS TO PLAY SPELLS FROM A GRAVEYARD

For those people who look at *Shaman's Trance* and raise an eyebrow, my bet is that they begin wracking their brains for cards which allow you to play spells

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directly from your graveyard. The most obvious choice is **Yawgmoth's Will**, and I agree that **Yawgmoth's Will** plus **Shaman's Trance** makes for some interesting options. In fact, if you have seven mana, the Will, the Trance, and there is a single **Dark Ritual** in your opponent's graveyard, then you can create an "infinite" mana loop (How? check out the [Judgment FAQ](#)).



The problem with **Yawgmoth's Will** is that it's banned in every format except Type 1. I've never played Type 1, but I have to believe that these neat Trance tricks are too slow for Vintage games. If you play in a casual group of friends where the Will is allowed, however, then **Shaman's Trance** is an interesting proposition indeed. For example, Bennie Smith clued *Infinite black mana... if the Ritual is in your opponent's graveyard*. **Obliterate**, **Squandered Resources**, **Yawgmoth's Will**, and **Fastbond** as a way of blowing up the world and then playing everyone's land for himself. Yes, Bennie is a very sick man.

After the Will, pickings get slim. **Yawgmoth's Agenda** would be perfect if not for that pesky "one spell per turn" clause.

STRATEGY #2: COUNT ON FLASHBACK CARDS

Another strategy is to make a deck for a format in which the graveyard is king. This format, not surprisingly, is **Odyssey Block Constructed**. In OBC, you can be sure that flashback cards will be used constantly, which makes **Shaman's Trance** automatically less situational.

In OBC, **Shaman's Trance** has the additional benefit of acting as an **Orim's Chant** against many decks. Even if you decide not to play opposing spells from a graveyard, you can play **Shaman's Trance** during your opponent's upkeep to prevent her from doing so. This might just save you facing a 6/6 Wurm token on turn 4.

You can also count on some graveyard trickiness in Standard. But as you open up the potential card pool to more and more sets without flashback, you have less and less chance of actually facing flashback spells. I know this is obvious, but I feel the need to point it out.

STRATEGY #3: STEAL EVERYTHING

Finally, and my personal favorite, rather than use **Shaman's Trance** as the centerpiece of a deck, use it as part of a whole "steal your stuff" theme. **Spelljack** is perfect for a deck like this, as are **Planeswalker's Mischief**, **Desertion**, **Bribery**, and **Grinning Totem**. Sometimes **Shaman's Trance** will be useless in a "stealing" deck, but your opponent will be so bewildered looking at his own cards killing him that the Trance will largely go unnoticed.



Cards like these give you the right mana for playing opponents' spells.

The Standard one uses **Traumatize** and **Cephalid Broker** with the theory "there is a flashback card in your library SOMEWHERE, bucko" with milling as a backup strategy. The Extended deck, meanwhile, is your basic "stealing" fare.

All three are weird decks, but they may inspire you to pursue other Trance-like territory. Make no mistake: **Shaman's Trance** is very, very difficult to successfully build a deck around. But this challenge is all the more satisfying when your deck actually works. Have fun with it, and do something I would never even dream possible.

Next week: An alternate lifestyle.


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However you use **Shaman's Trance**, if you are counting on playing opposing spells then you need the mana to play those cards. **Fellwar Stone**, **Quirion Explorer**, **Birds of Paradise**, **City of Brass**, or just cards like **Harrow** can give you access to the colors you need. The other bonus of these cards is that they act as mana acceleration, because **Shaman's Trance** decks will universally need a ton of mana.

Below are three stabs of mine at using **Shaman's Trance** in a deck. The most interesting of the bunch is the OBC deck, which looks to build hordes and hordes of mana for either **Shaman's Trance**, **Crush of Wurms**, or **Time Stretch**. Thanks to Gianpaolo "GP" Baglione for providing the initial inspiration here.

The Standard and Extended decks are fairly similar:

The Big Bewildering Boom
OBC Shaman's Trance deck



Main Deck

12 Forest	4 Diligent Farmhand	4 Catalyst Stone
6 Mountain	4 creatures	4 Moment's Peace
3 Island		4 Recoup
2 Swamp		4 Deep Reconnaissance
1 Plains		4 Far Wanderings
		4 Shaman's Trance
24 lands		3 Traumatize
		3 Crush of Wurms
		2 Time Stretch
		32 other spells

Please Own Call of the Herd		
Type 2 Shaman's Trance deck 		
Main Deck 60 cards		
10 Island	4 Birds of Paradise	4 Plagiarize
6 Forest	4 Quirion Elves	4 Traumatize
4 City of Brass	4 Quirion Explorer	4 Spelljack
4 Yavimaya Coast	4 Cephalid Broker	3 Shaman's Trance
2 Shivan Oasis	16 creatures	3 Planeswalker's Mischief
26 lands		18 other spells

Mine, Mine, Mine!		
Extended Shaman's Trance deck 		
Main Deck 60 cards		
7 Forest	4 Birds of Paradise	4 Whispers of the Muse
4 Island	4 Quirion Explorer	4 Rampant Growth
1 Mountain	2 Scrivener	4 Shaman's Trance
4 City of Brass	10 creatures	4 Grinning Totem
4 Shivan Oasis		4 Spelljack
4 Yavimaya Coast		2 Recoup
24 lands		2 Harrow
		2 Planeswalker's Mischief
		26 other spells

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