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So, Top-Down Week, huh? I wasn't sure what to make of this topic. Was there some sort of "Elves Gone Wild" flashing in the works? Would each of the columnists be receiving a new convertible for their efforts? Not yet (though they're probably saving the free cars for the end of the week, right?) No, "top down" refers to the process of starting a design with a high concept and then hammering out the details from there, rather than the normal design procedure, which is to work from the ground up.

The *Scourge* set is teeming with top-down designed cards. The most famous one is Form of the Dragon (the concept: what if the player turns into a dragon!), while others include Thundercloud Elemental and Nefashu. So the first way I'll be tackling Top-Down Week is to build a deck highlighting top-down cards.

Braggin' Time!

Let's pick out a top-down *Scourge* card. Hmm . . . what's a good one? Gosh, I don't know, how about . . . Pemmin's Aura? One of the cards that made a big splash at the *Scourge* Prerelease, this creature enchantment was known in development as "Morphling Suit." The concept: let's turn Joe Random Creature into Morphling! As I recall, Morphling seemed to have some reasonable popularity. Pemmin's Aura has built-in defense against the 2-for-1 card disadvantage that normally comes with a local enchantment because it can make the creature it's sitting on untargetable. Not only that, it can be used as blue creature destruction in a pinch: Slap it on your opponent's creature and give it +1/-1 as many times as it takes to get rid of it. But there's an even better reason I want to include it in a deck: I named it. Yes, I'm going to give credit where credit is due—to me!



Scourge was the first set since *Apocalypse* for which I wasn't involved in creating card names or flavor text. Pemmin's Aura was the only card whose name I made up. One day, from over the cubicle walls, the distinct sound of anagramming came wafting my way. Shocked and appalled that people would try to anagram stuff without me (I've constructed word puzzles that have been published in *The New York Times*, *Games Magazine*, and *Roseanne* . . . wait, scratch that last one), I raced over to the group. They explained that they were trying to come up with a name for "Morphling Suit" that somehow referenced the original Morphling. I nodded, turned around, and before I had walked all the way back to my desk, I had "Pemmin's Aura," an anagram of "I am Superman." I presented it to the team, and they were absolutely not impressed. "Who's Pemmin?" they wanted to know. I shrugged. "The guy who made the aura," I answered. They eventually warmed up to it when they fleshed out the

character of Pemmin, who turned out to be a wizard that survived the Sliver infestation of the Riptide Project and went on to invent an aura and say a lot of pithy, flavor-filled quotes.

That was fun. I normally don't have the "making of" stories that Mark R. and Randy do. Usually I'm just relegated to creating decks . . . oh, right, decks! I was building one of those! What would be neat to combo with Pemmin's Aura? How about Goblin Sharpshooter? Now *that's* a machine gun. One of the devastating things about the Sharpshooter is how frequently it untaps. Ramp that up and make it untargetable, and you've got one heck of a weapon.

Another nifty top-down card to add in is Frozen Solid. The concept: the enchanted creature is (guess what) frozen solid—it can't move, and if it's hit, it shatters like Robert Patrick in *T2*. Making a creature nice and fragile seems to go well with the Sharpshooter. One more top-down *Scourge* card fits in with both the Sharpshooter and Frozen Solid, and that's Extra Arms. The concept: well, take a guess. Put it together with some other creatures just begging to be Morphling-ized, and we've got a deck.



We Are Supermen 

Main Deck
60 cards

2 Forgotten Cave	1 Arcanis the Omnipotent	2 Extra Arms
10 Island	1 Bomb Squad	4 Frozen Solid
2 Lonely Sandbar	1 Cephalid Broker	4 Pemmin's Aura
10 Mountain	1 Disruptive Pitmage	4 Shock
24 lands	1 Dwarven Driller	2 Sleight of Hand
	4 Goblin Brigand	16 other spells
	2 Goblin Goon	
	4 Goblin Sharpshooter	
	2 Goblin Sledder	
	1 Kamahl, Pit Fighter	
	2 Siege-Gang Commander	
	20 creatures	

Urza's Dentistry

There's another way to handle Top-Down Week in this column—a way suggested by Mark Rosewater himself. Create decks using a top-down methodology. This is otherwise known as making theme decks. Just about all theme decks are created via a top-down design. You start with a grand concept, then figure out the details so the concept comes to life. Unfortunately, in a bit of poor planning on my part, I'm sandwiching this week's House of Cards between two weeks in which this column does nothing but highlight decks designed from the top down. All of the Rock n Roll decks were designed this way, as different people decided to create a Smash Mouth deck or a Radiohead deck (that's foreshadowing) and then figured out, card-by-card, how to do it. I could've copped out on this week entirely and just ran the second half of the Rock Decks this week, because they do fit thematically into Top-Down Week. But that would be depriving my loyal readers of my wit and insight, and let's face it—that's just not fair to you. Plus I didn't think of it in time.

To prevent this column's decks from clashing with the decks from last week or next week, I came up with a theme that's the pure opposite of rock and roll: dentistry. I explained this concept to my friend Brian Young (that's a shout out, yo), and he said that rock music was the opposite of dentistry in the same way that ice cream was the opposite of Tuesday. I think he was making fun of me. *But he was exactly right.*




When creating a theme deck, the first thing to do is come up with a theme. Check. The next thing to do is to list all the cards you can think of that fit the theme. In the Standard card pool alone, my first pass yielded 124 possibilities. Some fit the dentist theme perfectly, like Reverse Damage (scrape off that tartar!) Others were a stretch, like Insist (my dentist *insists* that I floss) or Cabal Trainee (whose flavor text mentions fighting a "faceshredder"). Still others were so awful that they're not worth the embarrassment of rehashing them now. But as I was going through the cards, I made a note of *anything* that could be thematic, knowing that I'd make cuts later.

The third step is to whittle the card pool down to just the best cards. Keep the rest within easy reach for filling in holes once your final deck starts to take shape. Then, out of your top candidates, identify any themes, combos, and synergies that lend themselves to a deck. I found two decks in my cards, so I could have a dentist-on-dentist throwdown!

Smile!

The first deck was a blue-black construction that focused on Psychatog. I didn't automatically resort to our toothy little friend, but it just fit so perfectly with a deck that had a lot of cheap instants and sorceries to fill the graveyard. It also goes particularly well with Ensnaring Bridge. (Bridge! Get it? Ah, ask your parents.)

Tooth Decay 		
Main Deck		
<i>60 cards</i>		
12 Island	2 Cephalid Retainer	2 Careful Study
12 Swamp	2 Childhood Horror	2 Crown of Suspicion
-----	1 Grinning Demon	1 Decree of Pain
24 lands	1 Mirror Wall	1 Divert
	2 Painbringer	2 Ensnaring Bridge
	3 Psychatog	1 Extract
	2 Razortooth Rats	1 Head Games
	1 Wormfang Drake	2 Innocent Blood
	-----	1 Mistform Mask
	14 creatures	2 Peek
		1 Skulltap
		1 Throne of Bone
		2 Toxic Stench

- 1 Unhinge
- 2 Words of Wisdom

22 other spells

Tenuous connections, you say? Explaining them during a game is part of the fun! Crown of Suspicion is there for "crown," Divert made it in on the basis of its flavor text ("What's the fun of being a dentist if you can't mess with people's heads?"), Mistform Mask is a pretty good parallel for the nitrous oxide mask, Throne of Bone is the dentist's chair, Toxic Stench and Unhinge are art-based inclusions, and Words of Wisdom is clearly about wisdom teeth. Dentists often use retainers and mirrors, cause many childhood horrors, and the bad ones are aptly described as painbringers. (I hope my dentist isn't reading this!) When building this deck, flavor often trumped design, as I was more concerned with including as many thematic cards as possible than I was about building a killer deck. Where *you* strike that balance depends on how cutthroat your play group is.

What Big Teeth You Have

The second dentist deck quickly asserted itself as a Beast deck. Teeth are a spotlighted feature of many beasts (Krosan Tusker, Snapping Thragg, Chartooth Cougar), and I was delighted to discover the flavor text on Aether Charge.

Dentist's Nightmare



Main Deck

60 cards

12 Forest	3 Berserk Murlodont	3 Aether Charge
12 Mountain	3 Chartooth Cougar	1 Dragon Breath
<hr/>	2 Crested Craghorn	2 Dragon Fangs
24 lands	1 Dwarven Driller	1 Flaring Pain
	1 Goretusk Firebeast	2 Spitting Earth
	1 Kilnmouth Dragon	<hr/>
	2 Krosan Cloudscraper	9 other spells
	4 Krosan Tusker	
	1 Leery Fogbeast	
	1 Nantuko Mentor	
	1 Needleshot Gourna	
	2 Root Elemental	
	1 Sabretooth Tiger	
	1 Snapping Thragg	
	1 Spitting Gourna	
	2 Wild Mongrel	
	<hr/>	
	27 creatures	

More tenuous connections, you say? The Murlodont and the Fogbeast made it in on art: the former has possibly the best set of choppers ever, and the latter needs some braces ASAP. I could have built a whole deck around Beasts that bare their teeth, but that would've been pretty lame. Rather, I limited the art inclusions to the absolute best and the absolute worst. CRESTed Craghorn has a clear toothpaste preference, I believe you're familiar with a dentist's scraper (made you wince), the Mentor and the Elemental both reference a tooth's roots (the Mentor has a Zen take on tooth extraction in its flavor text), Novocain is delivered via a needle shot, and Spitting Gourna and Spitting Earth both take the "Rinse your mouth and spit" direction seriously. Wild Mongrel is, of course, the representation of the canine tooth. Those groans you're hearing yourself make are all part of the theme deck fun.



Until next week, have big ideas.

Mark

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