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Soldiering Through A Draft

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 Learning Curve
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Theme weeks are always tough for me. Soldier Week is such a broad topic and I wasn't sure as to how I would narrow it down. Then I noticed something. All week long I have been playing in *Onslaught*, *Legions* and *Scourge* drafts using packs that my friends had won during the prerelease weekend. Time and time again I found myself drafting Soldier decks (usually of the blue and white variety). I also noticed that I seemed to end up playing the U/W Soldier deck in Team Limited tournaments when it was just *Onslaught* and *Legions* and it is beginning to look like this will continue now that *Scourge* has been tossed into the mix.

There are a number of interesting card interactions that make the archetype tricky in addition to brutally fast. My favorite new card in this regard is *Pemmin's Aura*. Pemmin's has so many uses that I can't imagine listing all of them. One of the card's most important functions is in giving blue/white decks a way to remove a *Sparksmith*. (Note: They actually get a few out of *Scourge* including *Guilty Conscience* and *Frozen Solid*.) With one fewer pack of *Onslaught* appearing in a draft now, *Sparksmith* becomes less of a problem, which is a good thing since there are so many other uses for the "Morphling Enchantment", not the least of which is turning one of your guys into a *Morphling* and winning the game.



When it comes to drafting a Soldier deck, *Daru Stinger* is one of the pivotal cards. Often you will make a 4/4 Stinger and you have to decide whether to hold it back or attack with it on the next turn and risk a combat trick. Now you can enchant your Stinger with *Pemmin's Aura* and have a "machine gun" attacker. For every blue mana available you can untap and activate your Stinger making it almost impossible for your opponent to block. It is also nearly impossible for your opponent to attack since you can just untap and mow down their team. If they have a pump effect for one of their creatures you can just untap and shoot again in response. If they try to kill your guy... well... have you ever tried to kill a *Morphling*? Other than an *Edict* (Diabolic or otherwise) it wasn't happening with an island untapped. Of course, *Scourge* does introduce an *Edict* of sorts in *Wing Shards*.

Pemmin's Aura also serves as virtual Soldiers for a *Catapult Squad*. With three total Soldiers you can take down two creatures (if one of them is able to untap for \bullet). With four Soldiers and enough mana, you can muster at least three activations. *Pemmin's Aura* is clearly one of the better Limited cards in *Scourge* even with or without Soldiers. To be clear, I've seen someone pump his own *Timberwatch Elf* four times up to +12/+12, gave it flying and then got to 20 damage with the +X/-X aspect of the card. BUT -- it's **Soldier Week** and we'll be happy enchanting our *Daru Stinger*, dag-rabbit!



When I'm drafting *Scourge*, both *Dragon Scales* and *Daru Warchief* are high on my want list. Having a turn two, 2/3, doesn't-tap-to-attack-provoke dude is pretty good. What we're hoping for is enchanting the *Defblade Elite* from *Legions* with *Dragon Scales*, a lethal combination that is common in *Onslaught/Legions/Scourge* draft. It is almost impossible for your opponent to make any plays before turn five in the face of that opening. If they drop a morph you will kill it. They have to hope for the 3/3 on turn four or two guys on turn five. Of course you can also find a plethora of pumps: *Piety Charm*, *Astral Steel*, a cycled *Gempalm Avenger*, *Daru Encampment* - all of which will aid your Soldiers' cause.

Or you could have the *Daru Warchief*. Much has been made about the *Krosan Drover* and the excellent *Goblin Warchief* but I really like this Daru guy and I am always pleasantly surprised when he gets passed to me in a

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draft. He gives your Elite a boost on power and toughness and he makes all of your high end soldiers easier to cast and tougher to deal with. Your **Lowland Tracker** is now a 3/4 first-striker for four and your **Swooping Talon** is a ridiculous 3/8 for only five mana. I love **Cloudreach Cavalry** but hate it when I have him in my hand without a bird on the horizon. Suddenly he is a 2/3 for * that becomes an insane 4/5 flier if I could ever just draw one of my darned birds!



Which brings me to the fact that I am usually playing a lot of birds and thus my favorite hybrid tribe is clearly the Bird Soldier. I have taken **Ascending Aven** first pick over more cards than I am willing to admit to. There is no shortage of examples of this inter-species romance in *Scourge* including the protection from green **Coast Watcher** (no relation to the Reverend Toby Watcher). I'll even consider the protection from dragons - **Dragonstalker**. However, when it comes to protection, my favorite shield is the **Aven Liberator**. Not only is he a 2/3 flier but when you unmorph him he is a **Shelter** without the cantrip effect - unless you are playing with the **Aphetto Runecaster** in which case it is exactly like a **Shelter** except that it costs four, but I digress.

I've also noticed that many wizards sneak into my soldier decks in a draft. I have been known to play an **Echo Tracer** or two. I have definitely been seen with an **Aphetto Runecaster** over the past week or so. The other wizard I really like (that combos well with the **Runecaster**) is the **Raven Guild Initiate**. I had a draft the other day where my board was a faced down Initiate, the Runecaster, and an unamplified **Aven Warhawk**. The only non-land in my hand was a **Rush of Knowledge**, which I used to draw five cards (three of which were soldiers, birds or both). I passed the turn and when my opponent attacked I blocked two morphs with my morph and the **Aven Warhawk**. Once damage was on the stack I flipped up my Initiate, drew another soldier via the Runecaster, and returned the Warhawk to my hand. It made its triumphant return as a 6/6 on my next turn and I rode it to victory.

But since this is Soldier week, enough about the Wizards. My absolute favorite Soldier in the entire block enlisted in *Scourge*. I am talking about the block's long awaited fog effect, **Frontline Strategist**. The Strategist counteracts the "Falter" effects of **Dirge of Dread**, **Wave of Indifference**, **Choking Tethers**, etc. as long as the creatures attacking you are not Soldiers. That is a best case scenario for your opponent. If your Soldiers actually go into the red zone for a fight, the **Frontline Strategist** is positively devastating because all of your soldiers will be dealing damage while your opponent's do not. It is an amazing trick and a morphed guy with a single * available can serve as a powerful bluff that forces your opponent to either remove the morph or force your hand.

And that is the skinny when it comes to drafting Soldiers. Sorry there are no decklists this week (it is the curse of doing articles about Limited formats!). Had I been inspired sooner I would have kept a deck or two together to help illustrate. I'll make up for it next week though when we take a look at *Onslaught* Block Constructed and how we can integrate *Scourge* (and maybe an Island or two) into the winning decklists from PT: Venice.

Now, before I go, I wanted to share one letter I received from a participant at the *Scourge* Prerelease. I received a ton of letters and I will share more of them with you when the *Mirrodon* event approaches but if you read my [Primer](#) you will understand why this one could not wait!

Hey Brian,

I read your "Scourge prerelease primer" on MagicTheGathering.com. I have been a magic player for quite some time now, and your article made the prerelease sound, like, totally cool and it was. I had a splendid time.

Highlights:

2. Beating Gavin from Vancouver in Round 2. (brother of THE John from Vancouver, prerelease fan and Cunningham family ass-kicker according to MagicTheGathering.com)

1. Beating John from Vancouver! (THE John from Vancouver!) in round 4, putting me at 4-0 and boosting me to a triumphant 1st place finish.

Thanks Brian for writing that article and reminding me that no one kicks everyone in the Cunningham family's ass without receiving serious next-prerelease retribution.

Sincerely,

Jeff Cunningham

You're welcome, Jeff, and I'm glad that you had such a good time at the event!

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Brian David-Marshall has been involved in **Magic** since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is Top8Magic.com, the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.



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