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Welcome, four days late, to Soldier week! American patriotic spirit is running high, and this week kicked off with Memorial Day in the States, so there couldn't be a better time to honor Soldiers. Except that **Magic** Soldiers aren't quite the loyal, uniformed, defenders-of-freedom types. You know those movies where there's a guy in a paramilitary unit-some overly trained black ops commando who can kill a man using a spork from forty feet away-who goes rogue, and it takes the rest of the film for the rest of the military to track him down? Those are the kind of Soldiers we're playing with. And most of them, for reasons beyond my comprehension, are birds.

OK, "most" is a slight overstatement. Including *Scourge*, less than half of the Soldiers since *Odyssey* are Bird Soldiers. But more than 30 of them are, and that's plenty. How did this happen? What particularly military-like aspects of pigeons and cockatoos did the **Magic** creative team notice that steered them in this bird-brained direction? I can only imagine. Birds fly in formation, so that's something. Their sharp talons and beaks are built-in weapons. They're hatched from eggs, just like the top-secret race of supersoldiers bred in a concrete bunker 35 miles beneath Dubuque, Iowa. In my best impression of Mark Rosewater's writing style, let me recreate the conversation that led to the original Aven.

*Brian Tinsman: How about a bunch of Bird Soldiers?*

*Brady Dommermuth: OK.*

(I really need to work on my impression of Mark Rosewater's writing style.)

## New Recruits

There are some strong Soldier decks out there. New-style White Weenie, maybe a competitive Mobilization build-decks ready for tournaments. You won't see those here. Instead, I looked for interesting *Scourge* cards to spark interesting ideas.

The *Scourge* set brought some nifty new Soldiers with it. One of them is Aven Farseer, one of a cycle of cards that generates an effect when a face-down creature is turned face up. The blue one (Aphetto Runecaster) lets you draw a card, the black one (Fatal Mutation) destroys the creature, the red one (Bonethorn Valesk) deals damage, and the green one (Primal Whisperer) seems to have forgotten to get made. Oh well. Aven Farseer is a little flying creature that gets bigger each time anyone morphs a creature. It has a wonky synergy with Primal Whisperer, a green *Legions* creature that gets smaller each time anyone morphs a creature. That's not entirely accurate, I suppose; the Whisperer gets +2/+2 for each face-down creature in play. So bringing out a mystery critter pumps up your Whisperer, and flipping it over then pumps up your Farseer.


These are just two of the surprisingly many combat tricks included in a deck that has no non-creature spells. The combat math will be impossible for your opponent to accurately



calculate, because besides fiddling with the numbers of the Farseer and Whisperer, you can deal extra damage with Gravel Slinger, pump your Soldiers up even more with Tribal Forcemage, bestow first strike with Wingbeat Warrior, and create a one-sided Fog effect with Frontline Strategist. Other utility morph creatures make sure your opponent never knows what's coming. Nantuko Vigilante has a built-in Naturalize, and Whipcorder keeps your opponent's most fearsome threat in check. Proteus Machine, one of my absolute favorite *Scourge* cards, can throw off the math even more by flipping over-and becoming a Soldier-for free. So even if you have no mana available, you can surprise your opponent with an extra +1/+1 on your Farseer and an extra +1/+2 on the Proteus Machine (if you have Daru Warchief) that can help eradicate a creature (if you have Catapult Master). Lock & load.

## Camouflaged Army

Standard-legal Soldier deck



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**Main Deck**  
60 cards

<p>3 Brushland</p> <p>3 Daru Encampment</p> <p>5 Forest</p> <p>10 Plains</p> <p>3 Windswept Heath</p> <hr style="width: 100%; margin-top: 10px;"/> <p>24 lands</p>	<p>4 Aven Farseer</p> <p>2 Catapult Master</p> <p>2 Catapult Squad</p> <p>2 Daru Lancer</p> <p>2 Daru Warchief</p> <p>2 Frontline Strategist</p> <p>1 Grassland Crusader</p> <p>3 Gravel Slinger</p> <p>1 Liege of the Axe</p> <p>2 Nantuko Vigilante</p> <p>4 Primal Whisperer</p> <p>2 Proteus Machine</p> <p>3 Tribal Forcemage</p> <p>3 Whipcorder</p> <p>3 Wingbeat Warrior</p> <hr style="width: 100%; margin-top: 10px;"/> <p>36 creatures</p>	<hr style="width: 100%; margin-bottom: 10px;"/> <p>0 other spells</p>
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## Air Force

As long as so many Soldiers are also Birds, we might as well take advantage of it. Remember, the *Onslaught* set didn't have five rare creatures that cost 3CCC - it had six. We all know the Pit Fighter Legends, but their compadre gets far less attention. I'm talking about Aven Brigadier, which gives a hefty +2/+2 bonus to all other Bird Soldiers. With the fatty-friendly additions in *Scourge*, it just became easier to base a deck around Colonel Sanders (which is a wiseacre way to refer to Aven Brigadier. Keep up, people!)

I love the landcyclers. I shouldn't, really. The mechanic takes one of the defining elements of green and gives it to all the other colors. "Here, other colors," it says, "have an instant, nearly uncounterable, colorless Rampant Growth that's attached to a giant creature for good measure." It's weird, but I can quickly get used to it. In a Bird Soldier deck that features blue and white creatures, it helps that the only islandcyclers printed happens to be a Bird Soldier and one of the two plainscyclers

is also a Soldier. Some other *Scourge* goodies that fit into this deck are Daru Warchief, which makes every creature—including the Brigadier—cheaper and bigger, Dragon Scales, which has 11 ways to pop out of the graveyard and is especially nice on Swooping Talon, and Rush of Knowledge.

Why include an Aven Envoy? I couldn't resist. Although it hardly interacts well with Rush of Knowledge, if you have a Brigadier and a Warchief on the table, the Envoy is a 1-mana 3/6 flying creature. You can't help but savor the look on your opponent's face when Aven Envoy delivers the death blow.



## Brigadier Brigade

Standard-legal Bird Soldier deck



### Main Deck

60 cards

2 Daru Encampment

7 Island

13 Plains

2 Seaside Haven

24 lands

4 Aven Brigadier

2 Aven Cloudchaser

1 Aven Envoy

2 Aven Warhawk

3 Daru Warchief

3 Noble Templar

2 Phantom Flock

3 Shoreline Ranger

3 Skywing Aven

4 Soulcatcher

1 Swooping Talon

28 creatures

4 Aether Burst

2 Dragon Scales

2 Rush of Knowledge

8 other spells

I really wanted to make that deck Lite (in other words, containing no rare cards), but it's kinda hard to base a Lite deck around Aven Brigadier. For what it's worth, all the rest of the cards are common or uncommon. Call it Slitely Lite.

## What're the Soldiers Doin' in the Mess Hall?

Goblin'. How I wound up making a Goblin deck for Soldier week is about as convoluted as that joke. I decided I wanted to highlight Decree of Justice, an eye-popping Soldier card from *Scourge*. Never

mind that it makes multiple Angels (which is nuts by itself), but for X2W, you get X Soldier tokens plus a card at the end of your opponent's turn. Now that's a recruitment drive! I realized that worked even better with a Sunstrike Legionnaire in play because you would create X tokens, tap X creatures, and then be all set to attack.

Sunstrike Legionnaire naturally reminds me of Goblin Sharpshooter, which has a similar but opposite untap condition. All three cards brought to mind Siege-Gang Commander, a *Scourge* Goblin that creates token creatures (which powers up the Legionnaire) and kills those same creatures (which powers up the Sharpshooter). All four cards brought to mind the *Apocalypse* enchantment Goblin Trenches, which creates Goblin Soldier tokens! I was already having synergy overload before adding Goblin Legionnaire (another Goblin Soldier), Mobilization (another token generator with a Soldier bonus), and Keldon Necropolis (another way to sacrifice your tokens for damage).



## Expendable Troops

Online Extended-legal Goblin Soldier deck



### Main Deck

60 cards

4 Battlefield Forge	2 Gempalm Incinerator	2 Decree of Justice
2 Keldon Necropolis	3 Goblin Goon	2 Disenchant
12 Mountain	4 Goblin Legionnaire	3 Goblin Trenches
8 Plains	2 Goblin Prospector	2 Mobilization
26 lands	4 Goblin Sharpshooter	9 other spells
	2 Goblin Sledder	
	4 Siege-Gang Commander	
	4 Sunstrike Legionnaire	
	25 creatures	

I normally don't venture outside the realm of Standard-legal cards, but how could I build a Goblin Soldier deck without those *Apocalypse* cards? Until next week, have fun with Soldiers.

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