

Akroma, the Cabal, and green Kamahl! Preparing for the *Onslaught*

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Monday, September 23, 2002



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Think you know the continent of Otaria? Think again! The *Odyssey* block storyline focused mostly on the northern half of the continent. The southern half still stretches out unexplored, and that's where the *Onslaught* storyline comes in. With it comes a whole host of changes that makes this block feel entirely different from the last, despite the close geography.

There are still some common threads, of course. The biggest is the Cabal. Despite the events of *Torment* and *Judgment*, this sinister organization still controls most of the wealth on Otaria. Even though Chainer destroyed their original base of operations in *Torment*, evil can't be eliminated so easily. They simply moved to their southern city of Aphetto, constructing a Grand Coliseum to hold bigger and better pit fights than ever before.



Three important places in the Onslaught story: the Grand Coliseum, the Riptide Laboratory, and the Krosan Forest.

The Krosan Forest is also going to remain a major player in the events to come. With the **Mirari** driven into the ground deep within, Kamahl and the forest's inhabitants believe that the threat it poses is over. After all, without an intelligent hand to guide it and twist its power into something awful, what harm could it do? In fact, the **Mirari** *does* have an owner: the Krosan Forest. The mighty artifact has tapped into the vast raw green mana flowing through the forest, channeling it into raw magical power, power that has been making Krosa's inhabitants even more powerful, and more fierce, than ever before. In fact, pretty soon the forest won't be able to contain all the power, and it'll start spilling out into the rest of Otaria. But even that threat isn't the most terrible the continent will face.

The biggest difference between the two blocks that take place on Otaria is, of course, the presence of other species. The Cabal has decided to expand the pit fights to new levels of size and grandness. To do so, they'll need more spectators and fighters than a smallish continent like Otaria can provide. So they open their doors to the rest of Dominaria, and hordes of beings, desperate for a new form of

entertainment--or a new life--in this grim post-Apocalypse world, flood into Otaria. Many different tribes of elves settle together in the birch forest of Wirewood, while goblins find a nice home in the Skirk Ridge, nestled in the southern half of the Pardic Mountains. **Cephalid Empress Llawan** founds the Riptide Project, a secret research laboratory that attracts knowledge-hungry wizards from all over. The Southern Order, unlike its northern counterpart, is poor and desperate, their resources strained to the breaking point by wave after wave of needy refugees.

The key to the *Onslaught* block storyline is the same as the *Odyssey* block's: Kamahl. The barbarian warrior linked with the Krosan Forest in *Judgment*, becoming a powerful druid. But he still has much to do, and much to atone for. While under the **Mirari's** influence, he seriously wounded his sister, Jeska, in a fit of rage. He brought her to the Krosan Forest for healing, but instead, she was found and captured by mad dementia summoner **Braids**. She and her fellow Cabal cronies used dark magic to both heal **Jeska**, and transform her into a vicious pit-fighter named Phage. Phage has the power to rot organic material with her touch, similar to the Patriarch, and is utterly loyal to the Cabal.



Phage née Jeska shows up in the artwork of several Onslaught cards.

As a pit-fighter, she faced off against many opponents, including Ixidor, an illusionist, and his partner and beloved Nivea, who made their living betting on themselves in their battles. Unfortunately, their near-perfect record was broken by the cruelty and power of Phage. She killed Nivea, and when Ixidor was unable to pay off his bets, the Cabal left him to die deep within the great desert in the center of Otaria. There, Ixidor discovered that he had the power to make his illusions real, and created a vast realm, and subjects to rule over. But his grief, guilt, and despair also drove him utterly mad.



The angel Akroma appears throughout the set, here on Pacifism. One of his greatest creations is Akroma, an angelic warrior made in Nivea's image. She is completely loyal to her creator, and she

has only two goals: to protect Ixidor, and to destroy the person responsible for his misery: Phage. She will use her angelic appearance to influence whoever she can, especially members of the Southern Order, and coerce them into helping her in her quest. Her main obstacle is Kamahl, who is desperately trying to keep Phage alive long enough to find a way to turn her back into Jeska, and redeem the terrible mistake he made.

Now that you know something of the story, let me divert for a moment to more general matters. As you read the *Onslaught* block storyline, you may notice that card set and novel may not always be completely in sync. As I've explained previously, there's a gap in the schedules between novel writing and card creation that makes some of these differences almost inevitable. However, we're also trying to change the relationship between the novel and the cards. This link was closest during the *Weatherlight* Saga, especially during the *Tempest* block. However, this made the **Magic** creative team's job much harder, since they had to make sure continuity was rock solid. Did **Gerrard** have the cut in his lip in the same place in **Sadistic Glee** and any other card following that that depicted him? Were there enough key plot points in flavor text and art? More often than we were willing to accept, a plot point had to be crammed onto a card, making the overall concept weaker. In the end, we discovered that this was much too much work for too little payoff, so since *Odyssey*, we've been trying to present a world, maybe a few characters, and almost no plot. This way, those who are interested in the novels can pick them up and read them, and those who aren't can fill in the gaps for themselves. This follows a model used in *Antiquities* and *Fallen Empires* that players seem to enjoy, and is a lot easier on those who have to pay attention to continuity. This also lets the authors get a lot more creative with their stories. J. Robert King, who is writing the entire *Onslaught* trilogy, has a lot of weird things in store, things he couldn't have done under the previous model! So if, for example, a major character undergoes a physical change in the novel that isn't reflected in card art, don't worry too much about it. If you're uninterested in the storyline, it doesn't matter a bit. If you're an enthusiastic novel reader, you can be assured that you're simply seeing a snapshot of that character before the transformation. With this new outlook to **Magic** creative, we can try to address the interests of both types of players.



Before I finish, let me introduce you to two of our major characters in card form. Kamahl's new abilities reflect his new outlook on life. As the 4/3 Fist of Krosa, he's much harder and less battle-oriented than his previous red 6/1 incarnation, but still a force to be reckoned with. His power to animate lands and to cast the spell **Overrun** show his powerful link to nature, but also remind you that he's still a fighter at heart. Anyone who can send 4/4 trampling lands to attack is definitely not a tree-hugging wimp!



Ixidor, Reality Sculptor is as tricky as you'd expect. Since he has the ability to create anything he wishes, his card allows you to play with any creature with morph, regardless of color. It only makes sense that such a powerful creator should give you access to creatures like **Blistering Firecat** even if you're only playing with islands! And since he's so skilled at manipulating natural forces to create life, he offers a bonus to morph creatures that are face-down. One of the most interesting mechanics in the block is completely at your command with Ixidor on your side.

The war between these two men isn't just about Phage. It'll soon involve the rest of the continent, and bring about consequences neither of them could have ever imagined. And how will the magic building up in the Krosan Forest affect things? Follow the *Onslaught*, and you'll find out!

Send questions and comments to editor@wizards.com.