

Some Top Akroma, Angel of Wrath [Search]

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Welcome to Akroma Week from Swimming With Sharks!

Akroma won You Decide, an honor of no mean magnitude, doubtless borne on the nimble clicks of fatty-loving Power Gamers... But unlike many other expensive and enormous creatures, our belle du jour actually has quite the Constructed pedigree, one that even the most die-hard spikes can appreciate. Moreover, Akroma was singularly instrumental in the reformulation of **Magic's** rules, some ten years after its unveiling. This week, in honor of the sometimes angry, sometimes protective, Legendary Angel, Swimming With Sharks is going to revisit some key, influential, and money-hungry, Akroma-centric decks from the past couple of years on the Pro Tour.

23 March 2003 - Venice

We might as well start out with the most important match ever to feature Akroma, Angel of Wrath. This occurred at her debut tournament, not surprisingly Block Constructed; it was a match that not only featured two of the Pro Tour's all-time greats, but one that would change the very rules of **Magic: The Gathering**.

William Jensen		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
<i>60 cards</i>		
7 Forest	4 Akroma's Vengeance	1 Akroma, Angel of Wrath
7 Plains	4 Explosive Vegetation	4 Broodhatch Nantuko
4 Secluded Steppe		3 Demystify
4 Tranquil thicket	8 other spells	2 Gigapede
4 Windswept Heath		2 Oblation
		3 Pacifism
26 lands		15 sideboard cards
2 Akroma, Angel of Wrath		
2 Daru Sanctifier		
4 Exalted Angel		
4 Ravenous Baloth		
3 Silvos, Rogue Elemental		
4 Wall of Mulch		
3 Windborn Muse		
4 Wirewood Elf		
26 creatures		

Osyp Lebedowicz



Main Deck

60 cards

4 Forgotten Cave
9 Mountains
10 Plains
4 Secluded Steppe

27 lands

2 Daru Sanctifier
4 Exalted Angel
2 Gempalm Incinerator
2 Jareth, Leonine Titan

10 creatures

4 Akroma's Blessing
4 Akroma's Vengeance
4 Astral Slide
4 Lightning Rift
3 Renewed Faith
4 Starstorm

23 other spells

Sideboard

2 Akroma, Angel of Wrath
4 Avarax
3 Demystify
3 Disciple of Grace
2 Gempalm Incinerator
1 Oblation

15 sideboard cards

History tells us that Osyp "Joe Black" Lebedowicz was the eventual Pro Tour--Venice champion, and fans of the Tour will all remember his match against "Baby Huey" William Jensen... To the point that in some players' minds, that legendary conflict occurred in the *finals*, rather than the Top 4!

Huey's anti-Slide G/W deck was thought to be a huge favorite over Osyp's straightforward Astral Slide deck. In *Onslaught/Legions Constructed*, Osyp had no Eternal Dragon and no Wing Shards, so Huey's Silvos, Rogue Elemental was basically trump... and with Explosive Vegetation on his team, Jensen had the faster access to our lady of the hour as well. To top it all off, Huey played the high tech Oblation – a seldom seen card in Constructed – but one fairly well suited to answering the usually inexorable Angel of Wrath.

The chips were stacked high against Osyp going into game five. Jensen had him trumped on essentially every front, and the final game itself did not start off well. Before Osyp could stabilize, Billy had a flurry of rare threats that set the game 4 to 29 in Huey's favor before Osyp saw even a glimmer of hope (thanks, Exalted Angel!). Lebedowicz struggled but was able to hit Akroma mana... but Jensen answered her immediately with the aforementioned Oblation.




Now remember that Oblation does not quite *destroy* its target but just shuffle it back into a deck... Osyp, to the delight of the assembled crowds, if accounts are to be believed, ripped Akroma after Akroma thanks to the Oblation. One ate a Vengeance, but the other, unanswered, eventually took Joe Black to the finals.


Here's where the rules change comes in: Despite playing an Explosive Vegetation, Huey was "stuck" on lands and had two Akromas in his hand that he could not cast once he got to eight. It was thought by most that the arbitrary nature of the original Legend Rule (that because Osyp had Akroma in play Baby Huey couldn't play his) cost Huey the title. Among other factors, this fight (which was decided by a third Akroma in a deck with only two copies of Akroma - which were in the sideboard, mind you - rushing by two other on-looking Akromas), was a key reason why we have the Legend Rule we have today. Had Billy been allowed to play his Akroma to trade with the one Osyp was using to bash him (with a second one back for the next turn's probably lethal swing), he would likely have gone to the finals in Osyp's stead and we might have seen Jensen a Pro Tour Champion several months before his eventual crowning in Boston come September 2003.

13 July 2003 - Detroit

With Jon Finkel largely on the sidelines during this time period, the title for "best player in North America" was a hotly contested rumble whose short list included both participants in the finals of 2003's Grand Prix--Detroit (and to be fair, the rest of the Top 8 was pretty saucy, with standouts like Joshua Ravitz, Alex Shvartsman, and Mark Herberholz also participating). The format was once again *Onslaught* Block Constructed, but this time the Akroma-packing duelists in question were former U.S. National Champion Eugene "Eugenius" Harvey and onetime Player of the Year Robert Maher, Jr. (a.k.a. "Bob the Bomber" a.k.a. "The Great One" or just "TGO"). Once again, it was a board control deck with Akroma, Angel of Wrath up against a R/W Astral Slide deck *sideboarding* Akroma... that had been designed by Osyp Lebedowicz.

Bob Maher 

	Main Deck <i>60 cards</i>	Sideboard
4 Forgotten Cave	4 Akroma's Vengeance	2 Decree of Annihilation
8 Mountain	3 Decree of Justice	1 Decree of Justice
11 Plains	4 Lightning Rift	2 Oblation
4 Secluded Steppe	3 Renewed Faith	4 Shock
<hr/>	4 Starstorm	2 Temple of the False God
27 lands	4 Wing Shards	4 Wipe Clean
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	22 other spells	15 sideboard cards
3 Akroma, Angel of Wrath		
4 Eternal Dragon		
4 Silver Knight		
<hr/>		
11 creatures		

Eugene Harvey 

	Main Deck <i>60 cards</i>	Sideboard
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4 Forgotten Cave
9 Mountain
8 Plains
4 Secluded Steppe
2 Temple of the False God

27 lands

3 Eternal Dragon
4 Exalted Angel
3 Gempalm Incinerator

10 creatures

4 Akroma's Vengeance
2 Astral Slide
1 Decree of Annihilation
2 Decree of Justice
4 Lightning Rift
4 Spark Spray
4 Starstorm
2 Wing Shards

23 other spells

2 Akroma, Angel of Wrath
3 Carbonize
1 Decree of Annihilation
2 Jareth, Leonine Titan
4 Silver Knight
2 Wing Shards
1 Wipe Clean

15 sideboard cards



Akroma, so instrumental in the preceding Pro Tour, was thought to be outmoded already once the summer season began. With Eternal Dragon demanding deck space as a combination of card drawing engine and finisher *and* Wing Shards presenting itself as a removal card actually capable of removing the eight mana Akroma from play (often at a profit, due to her haste), the girl of our dreams lost a great deal of popularity among the **Magic** masses.

Ignoring conventional wisdom, Brian Kowal (the American Go Anan) put together a R/W control deck that completely eschewed the archetype namesake "Astral Slide," instead opting for an unprecedented *three* Angels of Wrath in his initial sixty. This deck was piloted by the incomparable Maher past all manner of Goblins and Slide opponents, the sole deck challenging Osyp's "clear break" of the format, which put not just Harvey and Ravitz in the Top 8, but Tony Tsai in the Top 16 and Lebedowicz himself in the Top 32. Kowal's argument

was that even though Eternal Dragon and Wing Shards were clearly destined to be staples, Akroma remained "ridiculous," and anyway, by the time she was online, the opponent might not have Shards left to deal. The Angel of Wrath could go straight over an Eternal Dragon, and was, as always, a superb battler in any sort of Goblins or even Exalted Angel Red Zone situation.

Though she showed up in both games for Bob, and the second game for Eugene (his only opportunity to see her given the Lebedowicz configuration), Akroma was not particularly instrumental in the finals outcome, one which was mostly about Lightning Rifts and Decree of Annihilation. Nevertheless, Maher's Kowal-designed deck remains an important piece of Akroma history. After all, Kowal may not have thought that Astral Slide – the namesake of Harvey's deck, even if some copies had been removed between Venice and Detroit – was quite good enough to play, but he stuffed more copies of the Angel of Wrath into his *main* than most players ran at all. Those triple Angels would be about as many as we would see in any decks given the Legend Rule and the length of games until Extended and decks like the one showcased on...

31 October 2004

Up until this point, we have only looked at “fair” Akroma, Angel of Wrath decks. That is largely a product of the *Onslaught* Block environment, one which was purposefully engineered as a Counterspell-free experiment to see if giant monsters and interactive games might be viable and possible respectively given the absence of very fast permission or answers in general (R&D liked what they saw, which is why we don't have Counterspell in the Core Set today). In *Onslaught*, Explosive Vegetation passed for powerful mana acceleration, and besides crazy Goblins draws (sigh), having the biggest, meanest, creature in play was considered good, so casting an eight mana 6/6 was actually a reasonable way to win at “fair” **Magic**, because any non-Goblins games were, how shall we say, not particularly quick.



That said, just look at Akroma's card: her art, her overcrowded text box, her statistics. Sure, you can pay the eight and take her out in public. She is very charismatic and can pass for positively *angelic*... but despite the White mana symbols in her upper right hand corner, *that's not the kind of girl Akroma is at all*, not really. She quite frankly doesn't need you to take her out to dinner before you get her in play (and she's quite the fatty already) and what little she is wearing is already bedecked in jewels, so she isn't really that impressed with your eight mana displays of resource allocation.

Akroma is what your mommy probably calls “a fast woman” (just check out the haste, incongruous with her much discussed eight mana price tag)... meaning in no uncertain terms that *she is only at her best in the hands of a bad boy*.

Gadiel Szleifer		
Main Deck		Sideboard
	60 cards	
2 Island	4 Brainstorm	1 Cranial Extraction
4 Polluted Delta	4 Cabal Therapy	1 Echoing Truth
6 Swamp	4 Careful Study	1 Energy Field
4 Underground River	4 Chrome Mox	1 Energy Flux
	3 Duress	2 Gilded Drake
16 lands	4 Exhume	3 Phyrexian Negator
	4 Reanimate	2 Show and Tell
4 Akroma, Angel of Wrath	1 Show and Tell	4 Smother
4 Putrid Imp	1 Sickening Dreams	15 sideboard cards
3 Rorix Bladewing	4 Vampiric Tutor	
11 creatures	33 other spells	

Before his first place finish in Philadelphia, Gadiel Szliefer had a warm-up Constructed Top 8 in Columbus. Unlike the victories by Osyp and Maher, Gadiel's Akroma-centric deck was completely

unfair, and he had no interest in ever tapping a Temple of the False God along with six other lands in order to get her into play or waiting past the first turn or two before making a proactive play; in fact, few if any manageable games should ever have gotten to that point... They interested the Philadelphia champion not at all.

Gadiel's *unfair* plan for getting Akroma into play involved using Vampiric Tutor, Careful Study, and Brainstorm to sculpt a perfect position and then immediately run Exhume or Reanimate to get her into play *and swinging*. The beauty of this deck was that Gadiel could set up these positions very quickly... In many games he could even be attacking with it *on turn 1*. Turn 1 Careful Study pitching Akroma... Oh my, what a fine hand I am left with! No wonder those Wild Mongrel players love this card so... Let's see, Chrome Mox, Reanimate, six ya... Your [first] turn!

The neat thing about Akroma in this context is how Gadiel's deck shows the versatility with which she can be exploited. In a slower, cycling-oriented, format paying full price for our favorite fat chick was quite reasonable, because everyone was paying retail and she was basically the best once she was in play. Small cheats like Explosive Vegetation or Temple of the False God could be utilized, but they were by no means compulsory. At the same time, as a *body*, once in play, Akroma's vigor could not go unnoticed in even a format full of Mind's Desires and AEther Vials. For an unfair deck capable of supporting her with Duress and Cabal Therapy, the Angel of Wrath was a fine racer, often winning in three swings with help from a Putrid Imp or perhaps *the opponent's* Polluted Delta.

"Hell hath no fury..."

I would also have liked to talk about Brian Kibler's G/W deck from the Top 8 of the 2004 US National Championships... But sadly Brian took out the three copies of Akroma the night before and replaced her with Decree of Justice, so that wouldn't have made any sense at all.

Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
4 Elfhame Palace	4 Akroma's Vengeance	2 Darksteel Colossus
3 Forest	3 Decree of Justice	2 Duplicant
12 Plains	2 Gilded Light	2 Mindslaver
4 Temple of the False God	4 Oxidize	4 Purge
4 Windswept Heath	4 Pulse of the Fields	2 Reap and Sow
27 lands	4 Renewed Faith	3 Tooth and Nail
	4 Wing Shards	15 sideboard cards
	4 Wrath of God	
4 Eternal Dragon	29 other spells	
4 creatures		

That said, Kibler's deck, like all of those in the first part of this article, packed the full complement of Akroma's Vengeance despite no longer being involved in a contest of *Onslaught* Block decks. Akroma's Vengeance was of course the staple Wrath of God-stand in for its Block, but the card

translated to Standard with uncommon relevance for a Block replacement due to the next set's eventually banned cadre of Seat of the Synod, Ancient Den & co. Pairing Armageddon with Wrath of God for *just one matchup* was incredibly poignant because, as we all know, all anyone played for that period of time were decks full of Arcbound Ravagers. Because of this, Akroma's Vengeance, the six-mana sweeper, remains a popular option in Extended, land of the Ichorids and fourth turn kills, as a mite of Affinity insurance years after the Standard rotation of *Mirrodin* Block.

Next week we will turn our attentions to a very different Block Constructed format, and a unique one in Pro Tour history (to date anyway), as we examine the aftermath and limits of this weekend's Pro Tour Charleston! Check back to **magicthegathering.com** this weekend for updates, feature matches, and Randy Buehler and Brian David-Marshall on the microphones.



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