

The coolest deck you never heard of

Deconstructing Griffin Canyon

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I sat down to work on this article with my mind on the [recent announcements](#) about the Extendedformat. A new policy of set rotation means that come November 1st, when *Onslaught* enters sanctioned Constructed play, the Extended format will wave goodbye to *Fifth Edition*, *Ice Age*, *Homelands*, *Alliances*, *Mirage*, *Visions* and *Weatherlight*.

I pored over old tournament reports via [archive.org](#) looking for a classic Extended deck to deconstruct and possibly update, preferably a deck that would no longer be viable after the set rotation. It quickly became apparent that they are legion; whether it is [Pox](#) and [Stasis](#) losing their eponymous cards or more subtle changes to decks like [Oath of Druids](#) that loses the vital [Gaea's Blessing](#) with no replacement for it in sight.

In the end I decided not to feel bad for these decks. They have had their moment in the sun. Better to burn up and all that jazz. Instead I thought about all the decks that would get their moment of glory. I thought of one deck in particular and petitioned Aaron for an opportunity to share it with you. Maybe one or two of you will take it into your hearts as I have and give it some quality time in its last days. Think of it as "Decks That Weren't".

Anyone that knows me knows that I love to attack with my land. I'm not talking about [Mishra's Factories](#), [Treetop Villages](#), or [Stalking Stones](#). I'm talking about forests and islands and everything in between. It goes all the way back to the [Thelonite Druid](#) and continues all the way up to my recent attempts with [Natural Affinity](#) and [Life/Death](#). I'm not so dead set on basic lands either. I'm perfectly happy to kill you with a [Griffin Canyon](#).

The Grand Canyon



Main Deck

60 cards

2	Forest	1	Altar of Dementia
4	Griffin Canyon	4	Animate Land
5	Island	4	Counterspell
2	Plains	3	Crop Rotation
4	Savannah	4	Enlightened Tutor

4 Tropical Island	4 Force of Will
4 Tundra	4 Impulse
_____	3 Swords to Plowshares
25 lands	3 Teferi's Response
_____	1 Tithe
0 creatures	4 Unnatural Selection

	35 other spells



This is a combo deck capable of killing on turn three. What? You don't see the third turn kill? Let me walk you through an ideal hand.

Turn 1: Lay a [Tundra](#) and pass the turn. At the end of your opponent's turn, cast [Enlightened Tutor](#) and put an [Unnatural Selection](#) on the top of your deck.

Turn 2: Lay a [Griffin Canyon](#), play [Unnatural Selection](#) and pass the turn.

Turn 3: Play any green source of mana (say a [Savannah](#)) and cast [Animate Land](#) targeting your [Griffin Canyon](#). This will make your [Griffin Canyon](#) into a 3/3 creature with no creature type. Tap your [Tundra](#) for a mana and target your [Griffin Canyon](#) with [Unnatural Selection](#), turning it into a Griffin. Tap your [Griffin Canyon](#) to use its ability -- ☞: untap target Griffin and give it +1/+1 -- targeting itself. After it untaps, do it again and again and again. Pick some arbitrarily large number to make your Griffin and attack for the kill. If your opponent tries to do something mean, cast [Force of Will](#).

See? Third turn kill.

The Ingredients

Let's discuss some of lesser-known card in the deck and you can see how it all comes together. Cards like [Enlightened Tutor](#), [Force of Will](#), [Impulse](#), [Tithe](#), and [Counterspell](#) are all commonly seen in

Extended decks. A fair number of cards in this deck rarely see tournament play and warrant more discussion. We'll start with the [Griffin Canyon](#) itself.

Mirage, *Visions* and *Weatherlight* had more than their fair share of Griffins. They also had [Griffin Canyon](#) to support the theme. A rare land that taps for colorless mana, the Canyon also allows you to tap it to untap target Griffin, and give that Griffin +1/+1. The idea behind this deck is to make your [Griffin Canyon](#) a creature, give it the creature type Griffin and create an infinite loop where your [Griffin Canyon](#) can become as big as you want. It is important to remember that when you animate a land it will have summoning sickness if it was just played that turn. You must play your [Griffin Canyon](#) the turn before you are ready to go off if you plan on attacking. Also important, the [Griffin Canyon](#) will not have flying or evasion of any type so blockers are a problem. A little further down I'll show you two ways to deal with creatures that stand in the way of your victory.

Already vulnerable to [Wasteland](#) and [Dust Bowl](#), your [Griffin Canyon](#) is susceptible to a whole new arsenal once you animate it. From [Swords to Plowshares](#) to [Violent Eruption](#), anything that can target a creature can now target your land as well. After you activate your [Griffin Canyon](#) the first time, your opponent only needs to do 3 damage to kill it before the ability of the Canyon resolves, creating some funny looking stacks if you have multiple [Griffin Canyon](#)s on the table. Having a second Canyon in play is often a good answer to a deck with damage based removal, but a better answer comes from Teferi. [Teferi's Response](#) counters target spell or ability that targets a land you control for 1U , and draws you two cards in the process. As if that wasn't a strong enough response, Teferi goes on to destroy the source of said ability. Normally relegated to the sideboard in anticipation of [Opposition](#) decks, the Response is definitely main-deck-worthy in this case. Once you destroy your opponent's [Tradewind Rider](#) and draw [Force of Will](#) and [Impulse](#), you too will be compelled to agree with Teferi.

[Animate Land](#) is pretty much self-explanatory. Few, if any, other cards in **Magic** have names that succinctly spell out exactly what they do. For G , [Animate Land](#) turns target land into a 3/3 creature until the end of the turn. If you play around with the deck you may find that you want to add one or two copies of [Verdant Touch](#), which turns target land into an 2/2 creature permanently and has buyback. The land animation component of this deck is the only part of the combo that you can't really tutor for, so you may want to up that component to six parts instead of four.

[Unnatural Selection](#) is a card I have liked since I drafted one at the prerelease tournament for *Apocalypse*. This sneaky little enchantment costs 1U and allows you to pay 1 to give target creature any creature type until the end of the turn. [Unnatural Selection](#) has seen sideboard use for mirror matches (including in the deck that won US Nationals). If there are two creatures in play with the same name you can make them both Legends, destroying one of them.

One way to deal with blocking creatures is to 'hide' your combo behind a [Crop Rotation](#). At a cost of G and the sacrifice of a land, this instant lets you search your library for *any* land and put it directly into play. An opponent with creatures will often attack you, confident that you cannot combo them out until you play a [Griffin Canyon](#) and a whole turn passes before it can be a threat to them. Given that window of opportunity, you can Crop Rotate for the Canyon at the end of his turn, untap and kill him with an impossibly large pseudo-Griffin. [Crop Rotation](#) also serves as a "counterspell" to [Wasteland](#) or [Dust Bowl](#). Once your land has been targeted for destruction, you can sacrifice it in response to rotate your crops, effectively countering that ability while either replacing that land or getting the land you need to go off.

Maindeck [Swords to Plowshares](#) is probably your most effective method of dealing with blockers.

But what about an opponent wise to your tricks, such as an opponent that always leaves a protection from white creature back to block no matter what? I say deck 'em! [Altar of Dementia](#) gives you another path to victory besides damage. This 2 mana cost artifact allows you to sacrifice a creature to force target player to put the top X cards of his library into the graveyard, where X is the

power of the sacrificed creature. With your [Griffin Canyons](#) getting as big as you want them to be, you should be able to put all of his cards in the graveyard, causing him to lose the game on his next draw step.

Of course, if he is playing [Gaea's Blessing](#), this is going to be an exercise in futility; the Blessing will trigger when put in the graveyard and he will essentially just plop his graveyard back down on top of where his deck used to be. I'm not saying winning with this deck will be easy.

I don't know how many tournament victories it has in it but the days to find out are dwindling. You will certainly have fun as your opponent tries to figure out what the heck you are doing with a [Griffin Canyon](#) in play with no Griffins in sight, or when you [Teferi's Response](#) his [Dust Bowl](#) after he's figured it out and its just too late.

I guess it is just my perverse nature to try and play with overlooked cards. Maybe next time I'll let you in on the [Chain Stasis](#) deck!

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