



Intruder Alert (Part 1 of 2)

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Building on a Budget
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hey everyone, and welcome back to Building on a Budget! Ever wanted an infinite supply of Elves and Saprolings? Stay tuned! For this week's column, I'm going to take a look at a rogue deck, built around **Intruder Alarm**, which recently finished in the Top 8 of a Pro Tour Qualifier. But before I get down to examining that deck and seeing how we can adapt it for a Building on a Budget, I want to talk to you, my readers, about the budget part of this column.

Since I've taken over Building on a Budget, I've had just a couple of simple rules that I follow for each and every week:

1. All decks are playtested/built using **Magic Online**.
2. All decks cost 30 tickets or less, using **Magic Online** prices.

Regarding #1: Building on a Budget is currently the only column on **magicthegathering.com** fully dedicated to using **Magic Online**. As a person who regularly works 50-80 hours a week (depending on whether or not I am traveling to work at a tournament that week), **Magic Online** is ideal for me—I can pick up a game at any time of the day (or night), I don't have to leave my house to play, and I can (almost) immediately find a new opponent once I've finished a game. I'm happy with all playtesting for Building on a Budget being done using **Magic Online**, the folks at Wizards are happy with all playtesting for Building on a Budget being done using **Magic Online**, and for the most part, the majority of people reading this column are happy with me doing playtesting using **Magic Online**.

Regarding #2: Here's the sticking point for many readers. Everyone who comes and reads this column has their own answer to the following question: "What makes a budget deck budget?" I've been writing this column for going on three calendar years now (2006, 2007, and 2008), and I've heard all sorts of answers:

- Question: What qualifies as a budget deck?
- Answers:
- "A deck with no rares"
 - "A deck with only commons"
 - "A deck that costs 30 tickets or less"
 - "A deck that costs 15 tickets or less"
 - "A deck that costs 5 tickets or less"
 - "A deck with only as many rares and uncommons as come in a theme deck"
 - "The cost of two theme decks"

I could keep going on and on here, but you get the general idea. The thing is, I've never really solicited the opinions of the readers regarding the budget limit in this column—mostly, I've gotten sporadic feedback through the forums and through e-mail. I'm not going to give my opinion here (I don't want to influence any else's comments or votes), but I want to hear what you have to say about the Building on a Budget ticket limit for each week's article. I'm going to do this in two ways: with a couple of polls, and by reading feedback in the forums of this article about why you think the ticket limit should be at a certain number (or just generally higher, lower or unchanged).

Please note, and I'm saying this up front—the results of these two polls will not immediately change the way that the budget on Building on a Budget operates. However, they *will* influence a decision about whether a change happens, so your votes (and comments especially) will matter greatly!

How should Budget be determined for this column?

- By a strict ticket count.
- By a strict limit on number of rares (under a certain ticket amount) and uncommons per deck.

Submit my Vote

What is the maximum cost, in tickets, of a budget deck?

- 30 Tickets
- 25 Tickets
- 20 Tickets
- 15 Tickets

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RULES

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Remember, your feedback is extremely valuable regarding the issue of budget! Be sure to chime into the forums this week with your opinion!

Meanwhile, I was at the Roanoke Pro Tour Qualifier at the Star City Game Center when I was shown the following Extended list. The deck looked like a ton of fun, and I was happy to see it make a Top 8 of a PTQ. Here's the list:

Indy Watson

7th Place - Virginia - Roanoke - 1/5 deck

Main Deck <i>60 cards</i>		Sideboard
4 Breeding Pool 10 Forest 2 Island 1 Pendelhaven 4 Yavimaya Coast <hr/> 21 lands 4 Birds of Paradise 4 Coiling Oracle 4 Essence Warden 4 Imperious Perfect 4 Llanowar Elves 4 Wren's Run Vanquisher <hr/> 24 creatures	4 Intruder Alarm 4 Remand 4 Sprout Swarm 3 Umezawa's Jitte <hr/> 15 other spells	3 Krosan Grip 4 Spell Snare 4 Tormod's Crypt 4 Trygon Predator <hr/> 15 sideboard cards

This deck is capable of going infinite (or arbitrarily large—remember, there is no infinity in **Magic**, only choosing an arbitrarily large number) in one of two ways:

1) By getting out **Intruder Alarm**, **Imperious Perfect** and **Llanowar Elves**. With **Intruder Alarm** in play, tap **Llanowar Elves** for $\{G\}$. Tap **Imperious Perfect** to put an Elf Warrior token into play. Once the Elf Warrior token comes into play, **Intruder Alarm** triggers, untapping **Llanowar Elves** and **Imperious Perfect**. Repeat this as many times as you'd like to have a gigantic army of 2/2 Elf Warrior tokens!

2) With **Sprout Swarm** and **Intruder Alarm**. For each creature you have in play, you can reduce the cost of **Sprout Swarm** by one with convoke. If you have three creatures and three lands in play, you get to go infinite again. Tap all three creatures and two lands to play **Sprout Swarm** with buyback. This puts a 1/1 Saproling into play, and untaps your other three creatures. Play it again, this time tapping your original three creatures, your new Saproling, and your third land. Huzzah—another Fungus among us! Now that you've got five creatures in play, you can convoke the spell down to free, letting you make infinite (again, arbitrarily large) numbers of Saprolings.

Combine either of these with **Essence Warden** for a shot of infinite life, by the way.



Well, the core of this deck is definitely budget—it's **Intruder Alarm** (a 2 ticket rare), **Imperious Perfect** (found all over the place at two for a ticket), **Sprout Swarm** (a bulk common), and **Llanowar Elves** (easily found at four for a ticket). Here's a cost breakdown of the original version of the deck, as played by Indy Watson:

4 Breeding Pool: 14 each
 10 Forest: free
 2 Island: free
 1 Pendelhaven: 1.5 each
 4 Yavimaya Coast: 4.5 each
Land Total: 75.5

4 Birds of Paradise: 5 each
 4 Coiling Oracle: 0.1 each
 4 Essence Warden: 0.25 each
 4 Imperious Perfect: 0.5 each
 4 Llanowar Elves: 0.25 each
 4 Wren's Run Vanquisher: 0.5 each
Creature Total: 26.4

4 Intruder Alarm: 2 each
 4 Remand: 0.75 each
 4 Sprout Swarm: 0.1 each
 3 Umezawa's Jitte: 5 each
Spell Total: 26.4
Deck Total: 128.30 tickets

128.3 tickets is well beyond the budgetary limit of 30 tickets set by this column. Thankfully, the cards that contribute to this deck going over budget are all nonessentials—mana producers (for which there are budgetary substitutions), **Birds of Paradise** (and there are other one-drop common mana producers) and **Umezawa's Jitte** (which is unique, but not necessary for the combo).

Let's see what happens when we take out all of the higher-dollar cards from the deck.

Budget Extended Alarm 0		
Main Deck 43 cards		
10 Forest	4 Coiling Oracle	4 Intruder Alarm
2 Island	4 Essence Warden	4 Remand
12 lands	4 Imperious Perfect	3 Sprout Swarm
	4 Llanowar Elves	11 other spells
	4 Wren's Run Vanquisher	
	20 creatures	

Remove: 4 Breeding Pool (56), 1 Pendelhaven (1.5), 4 Yavimaya Coast (18), 4 Birds of Paradise (20), 3 Umezawa's Jitte (15)
New Total: 17.8 tickets

See, now we're talking—the entire core of the **Intruder Alarm / Imperious Perfect / Sprout Swarm** deck costs only 17.8 tickets, which leaves us a smooth 12.2 tickets to replace nine lands and seven spells.

I went through all of the Extended-legal cards available in blue, green, artifact, or land varieties, and wrote down budget cards which might be good additions for the deck. As it stands, the deck has one major problem—the need to have access to an untapped green mana turn one (for **Llanowar Elves** or elf-alike of some type), and an untapped blue mana on turn two (for **Remand** or for **Intruder Alarm**). This means that some common budgetary lands were not ideal for this deck (**Terramorphic Expanse**, **Simic Growth Chamber**) since I needed access to every mana possible during the opening turns, and needed access to both colors of mana.

One-drop mana creatures: **Elves of Deep Shadow**, **Wild Cantor**, **Boreal Druid**
 Countermagic: **Mana Leak**, **Spell Snare**

Card-drawing creatures that work well with **Intruder Alarm**: **Lore Broker**, **Merfolk Looter**, **Thought Courier**

Mana-acceleration: **Edge of Autumn**, **Elvish Guidance**, **Fertile Ground**, **Rampant Growth**, **Sakura-Tribe Elder**, **Search for Tomorrow**, **Utopia Sprawl**

Multi-colored lands: **Forbidden Orchard**, **Grand Coliseum**, **Tendo Ice Bridge**

Misc: **Joiner Adept**, **Wirewood Channeler**, **Wirewood Hivemaster**, **Wirewood Symbiote**, **Elvish Pioneer**, **Krosan Restorer**, **Terramorphic Expanse**, **Simic Signet**, **Simic Growth Chamber**, **Shapesharer**, **Ponder**, **Springleaf Drum**, **Vivid Lands**, **Paradise Mantle**.

Overkill combo cards: **Epic Struggle**, **Blasting Station**

I considered putting in either **Epic Struggle** or **Blasting Station**, because both allowed me the option to win without attacking, but I decided that, if I had twenty 2/2 Elf Warriors in play, I wouldn't really need to have to have another card in play to win that game. **Blasting Station** is still a serious consideration to add to the deck, just because it gives the deck a way to deal with some problem creatures running around Extended (**Ichorid**, **Dark Confidant**).



I decided to go with **Forbidden Orchard** as my first replacement land, because A) I found them relatively cheaply (1.5 tickets each) and B) they put a 1/1 creature into play under my opponent's control, which triggers **Intruder Alarm**. This means that I can potentially go off a turn earlier with **Sprout Swarm**, provided I have a mana-producing Elf in play (tap the Elf for mana, untap it after the **Intruder Alarm** trigger from the Orchard, then use it to convoke for another mana—double dip!). For the other lands, I put in basic **Islands** and **Forests**. And while I couldn't replace **Jitte** with an offensively minded card, I did decide to focus more on mana acceleration, by putting both **Boreal Druid** and **Utopia Sprawl** into the deck—the **Sprawl** to give me access to blue mana on turn two, and the **Druid** for sheer acceleration (and to have another Elf for the **Wren's Run Vanquishers**).

Here's how the deck ended up:

Intruder Alert 1		
Main Deck 60 cards		
4 Forbidden Orchard	4 Boreal Druid	4 Intruder Alarm
13 Forest	4 Coiling Oracle	4 Remand
4 Island	4 Essence Warden	4 Sprout Swarm
21 lands	4 Imperious Perfect	3 Utopia Sprawl
	4 Llanowar Elves	15 other spells
	4 Wren's Run Vanquisher	
	24 creatures	

In: 4 **Forbidden Orchard** (6), 4 **Boreal Druid** (1), 3 **Utopia Sprawl** (.3), 3 **Forest**, 2 **Island**
New Cost: 25.1

For those who have been reading for a while, you know that I hate facing PTQ-level decks in the casual play room. However, this deck had a pretty shaky mana base compared to running nearly a hundred tickets worth of fancy-pants lands, and I wasn't sure how to play all of the nuances of the deck, or if I wanted to build a sideboard to take it to the tournament practice room. So, I put the following disclaimer on every match I played (and I created all of the matches):

Match note: This is a Budgetized Competitive PTQ Deck
In-room chat: Ext, Budgetized Competitive PTQ Deck

This way, whoever decided to play against me knew exactly what they were getting into, and I wasn't just trolling the room looking to smash people over the head with my PTQ-winning deck du jour (as a note, this deck lost in the quarterfinals in its original form).

Game 1: CahPahkah (Mono-Blue Faeries)

I get a first-turn **Utopia Sprawl** on a **Forest**, naming blue, and land a second-turn **Coiling Oracle** (getting **Sprout Swarm**), but see **Llanowar Elves** hit by **Suttering Sprite**. My third-turn **Imperious Perfect** is hit by **Whirlpool Whelm**, and my **Wren's Run Vanquisher** is hit by another **Suttering Sprite**. I land back-to-back **Intruder Alarms** and a **Boreal Druid**, with double **Forbidden Orchard** out. He taps out for **Scion of Oona** at end of turn, and I tap **Boreal Druid** for colorless, untap it, tap it for colorless, untap it, tap my **Forbidden Orchard** for green, tap my **Druid** twice more, play **Sprout Swarm** with **Buyback**, tap my **Druid** twice, tap my other **Orchard** for green, tap my **Druid** twice, cast **Sprout Swarm** with **Buyback**, and go infinite. CahPahkah concedes.

Record: 1-0

Game 2: 2goth4U (White-Green Enchantress)

I get first-turn **Utopia Sprawl**, followed by **Boreal Druid**, **Wren's Run Vanquisher**, **Intruder Alarm**, and **Imperious Perfect**. He plays **Utopia Vow** on my **Druid** and **Perfect**, and **Pacifism** on my **Vanquisher**, with a **Mesa Enchantress** in play. He then drops a **Yavimaya Enchantress** and puts **Battle Mastery** on his **Enchantress**, turning it into a huge double striker. For my end, I use the **Utopia Vow** to produce green, and make thirty 2/2 Elf tokens at the end of his turn. I win on my attack.

Record: 2-0

Game 3: Myrk Cordial (Green-Red Beatdown)

He gets 2 **Flamekin Bladewhirl**, but I get 2 **Wren's Run Vanquisher**. I knock him down to 2 life before he finally stabilizes with extra creatures to kill mine. I then drop **Intruder Alarm**, **Llanowar Elves**, and **Essence Warden**, and go infinite with **Sprout Swarm** after two turns, despite him dropping five more creatures (including a **Burning-Tree Shaman**, which is useless against this part of the combo).

Record: 3-0

Game 4: chowingho (White Weenie)

He gets first-turn **Icatian Javelineers**, second-turn **Icatian Javelineers**, third-turn **Glorious Anthem**, fourth-turn **Glorious Anthem**, fifth-turn **Serrated Arrows**. I get multiple **Forbidden Orchards**, and even though I **Remand** an **Anthem** and an **Arrows**, I'm facing down a horde of 3/3 creatures. I get double **Llanowar Elves** and double **Essence Warden**, and



manage to stick one of each. I get stuck at three mana after dropping **Intruder Alarm**, but if I had drawn a fourth mana source, I would have been able to go infinite.

Record: 3-1

Game 5: xytor (White Weenie)

I misclick and put a **Utopia Sprawl** on the **Forest** I use to tap for the Sprawl, instead of an untapped **Forest**. As a result, I play **Imperious Perfect** a turn late (after **Wren's Run Vanquisher**), which then lets him put **Faith's Fetters** on my Perfect (instead of me having a 2/2 in play), which keeps me from potentially winning a damage race on the ground versus in the air.

Record: 3-2

Even with that misclick last game, I still probably would have lost the match because I was forced to double-mulligan. In fact, over the course of five games, I ended up taking a whopping four mulligans—way too many to feel comfortable with. I decided that I was going to add more lands to the deck, and that I was going to take the deck into the competitive room. The first change I made was to take out the **Coiling Oracles**—I wasn't getting steady access to blue and green mana by turn two, so often it would be a dead card in my hand. The second change was to add in three **Merfolk Looters**—I don't have a way to get **Intruder Alarm** other than to just draw it, and being able to zoom through my deck with Looter would make getting key parts of my combo easier to get.

Intruder Alert 2			Main Deck 60 cards	
4 Forbidden Orchard	3 Boreal Druid	4 Intruder Alarm		
14 Forest	4 Essence Warden	4 Remand		
5 Island	4 Imperious Perfect	4 Sprout Swarm		
23 lands	4 Llanowar Elves	3 Utopia Sprawl		
	3 Merfolk Looter	15 other spells		
	4 Wren's Run Vanquisher			
	22 creatures			

Out: 4 **Coiling Oracle**, 1 **Boreal Druid**

In: 1 **Forest**, 1 **Island**, 3 **Merfolk Looter**

For next week's article, I'm going to talk a little bit more about the construction of the mana base, and talk about building a sideboard for the deck, along with taking the deck to play with the competitive players. See you all next week, and may you have infinite Elves, Saprolings, and comments in the forums about the definition of budget!

Ben

*Ben Bleiweiss has written about his obsession with **Magic: The Gathering** for over a decade. He's travelled the world because of **Magic**, both as a player and a writer. When not spending time playing **Magic**, writing about **Magic**, or thinking about **Magic**, Ben is employed by **StarCityGames.com**, where he works with **Magic** cards all day long. He lives with his wife in Virginia, and they sleep comfortably at night under their Orgg down comforter.*



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