



Intruder Alert (Part 2 of 2)

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Building on a Budget
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hello everyone, and welcome back to Building on a Budget! [Last week](#) I built a budgetized version of an [Intruder Alarm](#) / infinite Elves and Saprolings deck, and played it in the casual room. In this week's article, we're going to explore the options for building a decent sideboard for this deck.

One of the greatest resources on [magicthegathering.com](#) is the [Magic Academy](#). The Magic Academy, spearheaded by then-editor of [magicthegathering.com](#) Ted Knutson, was designed to teach people all about the game of **Magic** from the ground up. The series was started by Ted, and soon taken over by Pro Tour Player Jeff Cunningham. Without hesitation, I say that Jeff's work on the **Magic Academy** was some of the most important writing ever done about **Magic**.

Jeff is a gifted writer and has a knack for making clear explanations about complicated subject matters. His articles, while designed to appeal to the newer player, have depth and content enough for even the most seasoned pro, even if it's just as a refresher. I knew, going into this article, that I would be building a sideboard so that I could take the Intruder Alert! deck into the competitive room for some best two-out-of-three matches. The first thing I did was go to the old archives of Jeff's column, and pull up the following three articles:

- [Introducing Sideboards](#)
- [What is the Metagame?](#)
- [Metagame Workshop](#)

I highly, highly recommend going to read those articles, whether it's right now or after you've finished this column. A lot of what I discuss today will be framing around the references Jeff makes in his articles (why invent the wheel again when someone's already done it for you?), and there is a lot of sound advice in those columns.

For those who are not familiar with more competitive **Magic**, here's a brief rundown for this article. Note that even if you're not looking to play competitively, there is a lot of important content in this column that can help you improve your deckbuilding skills with your local playgroup, so don't go running away screaming and covering your faces just yet!



In a competitive **Magic** match, you play best two-out-of-three games. A sideboard is a group of 15 cards (and it must be either exactly zero, or exactly 15—no more, no less) that you are allowed to swap for cards in your main deck between games 1 and 2 and between games 2 and 3 of your match. The sideboard generally contains one of three types of cards—cards which help you improve your deck against one specific match-up, cards which are generally good against a certain, broader strategy, or cards which can be fetched with Wish spells, such as [Glittering Wish](#) from *Future Sight* (in tournament play, the Wishes allow you to get cards from your sideboard, rather than from your entire collection).

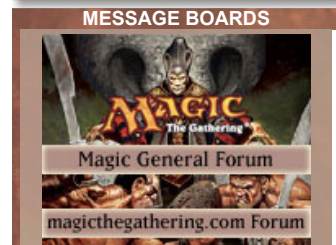
Let's take a look at the latest build of Intruder Alert!

Intruder Alert 2

Main Deck 60 cards		
4 Forbidden Orchard 14 Forest 5 Island <hr style="width: 80%; margin: 5px 0;"/> 23 lands	3 Boreal Druid 4 Essence Warden 4 Imperious Perfect 4 Llanowar Elves 3 Merfolk Looter 4 Wren's Run Vanquisher <hr style="width: 80%; margin: 5px 0;"/> 22 creatures	4 Intruder Alarm 4 Remand 4 Sprout Swarm 3 Utopia Sprawl <hr style="width: 80%; margin: 5px 0;"/> 15 other spells

Since we aren't running any Wish-type cards in the deck, our focus on building a sideboard will be to improve our deck against certain other decks, or against certain other broader strategies.

Here's the problem: How can you build your sideboard to battle other decks/strategies if you don't know those decks/strategies in the first place?



That's where the concept of the metagame comes into play. The term metagame means (as Jeff put it), "What everyone else is playing." The sideboard is where you put cards that are good against certain decks. However, if you don't know what decks you'll potentially be facing, how can you build a sideboard? You could blindly put in fifteen cards and hope for the best, but the more research (and reading) you do, the better prepared you can make your deck.

Thankfully, Wizards of the Coast has set up a page where the Top 8 decks from the Extended PTQ season are displayed each week. That page can be found [here](#). The winning decks for each of the reported qualifiers (which are the decks most likely to be in the competitive room for **Magic Online**) are Red-Green Aggro, Gaea's Might Get There (a deck centered around the domain mechanic from *Invasion*), Black-Green-White Doran, Dredge x2, and **Counterbalance / Sensei's Divining Top** control. Other popular decks that finished well include Mono-Blue Control (both with and without the Urzatron), and **Enduring Ideal / Solitary Confinement** decks. Two other decks that have been reported to have finished well since the last update are Affinity and Storm Combo.

The original sideboard for the **Intruder Alarm** deck, as built by Indy Watson, was as follows:

- 3 **Krosan Grip**
- 4 **Spell Snare**
- 4 **Tormod's Crypt**
- 4 **Trygon Predator**

Here's an explanation of each of these cards.

Tormod's Crypt is the most straightforward—it is there to battle Dredge decks. Dredge decks typically kill on the third turn (and sometimes on the second) by playing a **Putrid Imp**, pitching a card that can be dredged, and then following it up with massive card-drawing (**Breakthrough**, **Tolarian Winds**), **Narcomoebas**, **Ichorids**, and **Dread Returns**, combined with **Bridge from Below**. The main way to combat Dredge is to either have a way to remove their graveyard (**Tormod's Crypt**) or to have a way to sacrifice a creature to remove **Bridge from Below** from the game. Since **Intruder Alert!** doesn't have self-sacrificing creatures, **Tormod's Crypt** seems like the choice to battle Dredge, with some help against blue control decks that recur artifacts from their graveyard with **Academy Ruins**.

Krosan Grip is a way to battle against artifacts or enchantments. However, **Naturalize** is the same card as **Krosan Grip**, except for split second. How important is split second? Against Affinity, you'd usually want to have **Naturalize** (or even Hurkyl's **Recall** or **Oxidize**), as saving a mana (or a turn) is more important than split second. However, Affinity isn't one of the decks that had a good showing during the first week of PTQs. Instead, the relevant decks with artifacts and/or enchantments were **Counterbalance / Sensei's Divining Top** Control, Mono-Blue Control, and **Enduring Ideal** decks.

Against the first two of those decks, split second is invaluable. The **Counterbalance** player's strategy revolves around being able to stack their deck so that they can have any of the three cards on top of their deck be movable with **Divining Top** to counter a given spell. If you play **Krosan Grip**, your opponent can't respond by activating their Top—they either have to have a three mana-cost card on the top of their deck (because **Counterbalance** has a triggered ability that can still counter **Krosan Grip** if they're lucky), or you get to hit whatever artifact or enchantment you want. They also can't respond (if you target their Top) by putting it on top of their library—something they *could* do if you played **Naturalize**.

Split second also lets you stop **Engineered Explosives** from being set off, especially if it is set to zero, and you are trying to build up an army of **Sprout Swarm** tokens. **Krosan Grip** is not especially good against the **Enduring Ideal** deck though, because their plan is to put **Dovescape** into play, and **Dovescape** will still counter **Krosan Grip**, as **Dovescape** is a triggered ability.

This is where **Trygon Predator** comes into play. **Dovescape** stops you from resolving noncreature spells, but creatures are still fine. If you drop a Predator against the **Enduring Ideal** player, they either immediately need to get **Solitary Confinement** (to stop the Predator from dealing damage) or risk losing their entire board position—in essence, it forces them to set up their combo without having the parts in place to lock up their board (**Form of the Dragon**, **Dovescape**). A combination of **Krosan Grip** and **Trygon Predator** allows you to have a game against that deck.

Last, **Spell Snare**. Many decks put **Spell Snare** in their main deck, because there are a lot of crucial two-mana cost cards in the format that need to be stopped: **Tarmogoyf**, **Dark Confidant**, **Counterbalance**, **Arcbound Ravager**—these are all very powerful cards that fuel their respective strategies that can be stopped with **Spell Snare**. Some decks (Dredge, **Enduring Ideal**, Mono-Blue Control) aren't really bothered by **Spell Snare** at all, which leads it to be relegated to the sideboard.

Based on the **Intruder Alert** list, and the decks that have been popular so far, I'd want to make some changes to the sideboard strategy. I agree with **Tormod's Crypt** (since Dredge is so powerful) and with **Krosan Grip**, but I think I want to change the other eight sideboard cards. Let's take a closer look.



Many of the top decks run black mana for access to **Dark Confidant** and mana-efficient discard spells (**Duress**, **Thoughtseize**, **Cabal Therapy**). Because these decks have black mana, they also can sideboard **Engineered Plague** against your deck. **Engineered Plague** is a generally useful sideboard card, because it can randomly hose a variety of decks (Goblins, Elves) without specifically having to target any one. The Grips are especially important to battle sideboard hate and the metagame, so I would bump them up to a count of four.

(4 **Krosan Grip**, 4 **Tormod's Crypt**)

One card I initially dismissed for this deck was **Blasting Station**. I viewed it as a kill-more card, since infinite Elves or Saprolings seemed like a win condition in and of themselves. However, **Blasting Station** allows you to make your entire board of creatures into a way to stop **Bridge from Below** (especially since you have so many one-drop mana creatures that can ensure a turn-two blasting Station). **Blasting Station** also lets you battle against other aggressive decks (picking off creatures such as **Grim Lavamancer**, **Blistering Firecat**, **Eternal Witness**, **Birds of Paradise**, and **Dark Confidant**), and it allows you to sneak through a few extra points of damage if you are beating down with **Vanquishers** and going that route to victory.

(3 **Blasting Station**)

The last card I want to add to the deck is **Compost**. **Compost** lets you draw a card whenever a black card goes to an opponent's graveyard—from their hand, from in-play, or from their library. Against Dredge, **Compost** can let you draw a large portion of your deck in a single turn. Unless it's the one turn they go off with their combo, you are probably going to draw every card you need to stop their deck, and your own infinite combo as well. Against Doran decks, it gives you a way to battle through their discard (they **Duress** you, you draw a card. They **Thoughtseize** you, you draw a card), which can get you towards the combo pieces you need to win.

(4 **Compost**)

So in the end, my sideboard for this deck would be:

- 3 **Blasting Station**
- 4 **Compost**
- 4 **Krosan Grip**
- 4 **Tormod's Crypt**

I would keep my mind open for playing cards that target more specific decks if they emerge. For instance, if Affinity suddenly started winning again and showing up a lot, I would consider adding in Hurkyl's **Recall** (to remove almost their entire board) as a countermeasure. **Eyes of the Wisent** might be a good choice if mono-blue decks start dominating. For now, I would go with the fifteen cards listed, and see how they work out.

Many people, both in the forums of the last article and through e-mail, pointed out that **Dryad Arbor** is a good choice for the Intruder Alert! deck—it gives me another land that can untap creatures with **Intruder Alarm** in play, and can just take the spot of a normal **Forest**. Remember, though—**Dryad Arbor** is affected by summoning sickness (since it is a creature) and cannot be tapped for mana the turn it comes into play. This means that if I play **Dryad Arbor** on a given turn, I am behind a mana on my curve for that turn. It also means, though, that it can be untapped with **Intruder Alarm**, so I can have another green creature that can activate with **Imperious Perfect** to make infinite Elf tokens.

The Extended season lasts until March, so instead of immediately jumping into the competitive room and then walking away from this deck, I'm going to try things a little differently for Intruder Alert. Over the course of the next few weeks, I'm going to play a few matches a week with the deck, and continually tweak the main deck and sideboard. As a closing section to some articles, I'll give updates to the changes made to Intruder Alert, so you can follow along with me and see how the deck evolves over a longer period of time, instead of just over one to two weeks.

Next week: The results of the ticket-limit poll, the first few matches with **Intruder Alarm**, and a return of the most-evolved deck in Building on a Budget, by popular demand of those who love winning with extremely large stacks of cards. See you then!

*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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