

The beauty of payback SCS: Death Spark

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When Monty Ashley asked me to come up with a Single Card Strategy column for Type 1 week I have to admit to being a bit paralyzed with fear and uncertainty. *Type 1*? The format where Broken Things Happen™? I've played in maybe a half dozen Type 1 tournaments in my 10 years enjoying this game, with most of those occurring back when Type 1 was the only format. Back when I couldn't figure out why I kept losing with my awesome [Psychic Venomdeck](#).



In more recent years I've been impressed by the raw power and degeneracy that Type 1 decks regularly throw around, being able to witness a lot of it first hand here in Richmond Virginia. Richmond is home to a rather large contingent of serious Type 1 players, such as Shane Stoots, Jay Coffman, Darren Di Battista, and Josh Reynolds (and if I missed a few others, I apologize!).

I asked some of them what common or uncommon card they might like to see featured in Single Card Strategy, and I received a host of ideas. [Wall of Roots](#), [Elvish Spirit Guide](#), [Shoreline Ranger](#), [Isochron Scepter](#). Outside of the Scepter, the cards seemed a little too narrow for the Single Card treatment, and regarding the Scepter... well, let's just say I doubt anybody needs any help coming up with dozens of uses for *that* little gem!



Then over the weekend, in my mind's eye one of my all-time favorite cards stomped it's foot and waved for attention. A little uncommon from *Alliances* called **Death Spark**. I loved this card when it first came out. At the time I was enamored with some of the concepts presented in the very first Sligh decks. I had lots of Little Red Men that tended to die quite often to creature combat and removal spells. The beauty of **Death Spark** was its "payback" quality, effectively giving each of my creatures the ability to get in one last poke on their way to the graveyard. Things like this were heard a lot in my matches back then:

ME: Attack with my **Ironclaw Orc** and **Dragon Whelp**.

OPPONENT: I'll **Terror** the Whelp.

ME: In response I'll cast **Death Spark**, targeting you.

OPPONENT: Ouch.

Death Spark would hit the graveyard, and then a creature would nestle in right behind it, giving me back the Spark at the beginning of my next upkeep. That extra damage would certainly add up, and sometimes helped do that last little bit of damage needed to kill something big with a **Lightning Bolt** or **Orcish Artillery**.

My very first constructed tournament victory came from a deck with **Death Sparks**, circa February 1997, with this little number:

Mono-Red with Death Spark



Main Deck

60 cards

| | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4 Mishra's Factory | 2 Death Spark |
| 17 Mountain | 4 Incinerate |
| _____ | 1 Kaervek's Torch |
| 21 lands | 4 Lightning Bolt |

4 Pillage

- 2 Dragon Whelp
- 2 Dwarven Miner
- 4 Goblin Balloon Brigade
- 3 Goblin Tinkerer
- 3 Ironclaw Orcs
- 4 Orcish Artillery
- 4 Phyrexian War Beast
- 2 Storm Shaman

15 other spells

24 creatures



So, on the face of it, **Death Spark** complements any weenie strategy quite nicely as a recursive damage source. It wasn't until years later that I started thinking of using **Death Spark** purely for its recursive properties. Cards with the ability to return to your hand are fantastic little card-advantage engines. **Krovikan Horror**, **Squee**, **Hammer of Bogardan**, **Eternal Dragon**, **Shard Phoenix**, **Gigapede**, **Genesis**. Even **Grim Reminder**. And little ol' **Death Spark**, the redheaded stepchild of the bunch. You've got lots of engine choices, so what do you dress it up in? What should be your fiendish plan du jour?

Zombie Infestation leaps to mind. Making 2/2 creatures at instant speed for no mana and the simple cost of discarding two cards is obviously abusable in a deck full of recursion. And as you draw more recursive cards **Zombie Infestation** gets even more broken.



Another black enchantment that I almost never hear about is **Volrath's Dungeon**. This could fit right into a **Zombie Infestation** deck as a way to severely disrupt your opponent, setting him back several draws and possibly five life as well.

Black offers up some neo-recursive creatures old-school style that work particularly well with **Death Spark**. **Nether Shadow** and **Ashen Ghoul** are relatively fragile creatures that are bound to die quite frequently, giving you plenty of opportunity for "payback" pokes with **Death Spark**, all the while waiting for three more creatures to die so they can come back.

Alright, all these elements are obviously coalescing into a deck idea, so let me go ahead and present it. While far from being a "Lite" deck, this would be considerably cheaper to put together than a lot of Type 1 decks, and with the disruption and recursion it might have a fighting chance if you avoid the cheesy **Tormod's Crypts!**

Black/Red Recursion



Main Deck

60 cards

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 4 Badlands | 4 Cabal Therapy |
| 4 Bloodstained Mire | 4 Death Spark |
| 1 Mountain | 4 Duress |
| 1 Strip Mine | 2 Firestorm |
| 9 Swamp | 3 Volrath's Dungeon |
| 4 Wasteland | 4 Zombie Infestation |

23 lands

21 other spells

| |
|---------------------------------------|
| 4 Ashen Ghoul |
| 4 Krovikan Horror |
| 4 Nether Shadow |
| 4 Squee, Goblin Nabob |

16 creatures



If you have 'em, this deck could also benefit from Bazaars of Baghdad for some card drawing. When running this, don't forget that you can always just cast Horror, Spark or Squee if you need to, they don't have to be reserved for your engine only! I tossed a couple of **Firestorms** in here to help give you some defense against fast swarm decks like Suicide Black or Goblin Sligh, it probably wouldn't hurt to run another one or two in your sideboard. Depending on your environment it might not be a bad idea to run 3 **Firestorms** and cut a Dungeon to the sideboard.

So why not give **Death Spark** a shot? One point of damage isn't completely irrelevant in a format where **Goblin Welder**, **Quirion Ranger**, and **Birds of Paradise** see regular play, especially if it doesn't cost you a card. Sure, **Death Spark** probably won't be taking Type 1 by storm anytime soon, but it might take some people by surprise and sneak you a few wins, and sometimes that's plenty worth it.

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