# Forged in Failure, Reforged in Combo: A Strategic Deep Dive into the Iron Chain Archetype

## The Core Components - An Archetypal Autopsy

The "Iron Chain" archetype, first introduced in the 2008 set *Crossroads of Chaos*, represents a fascinating case study in game design, strategic identity, and player-driven evolution. Originally conceived with a muddled combination of strategies, the archetype was largely dismissed as a failure upon release. However, the unique properties of a few key members allowed it to be repurposed years later into a potent, albeit fragile, combo engine. To understand this transformation, one must first perform an autopsy of its core components, revealing the conflicting mechanics that defined its initial state.

### The Monsters

The monster lineup of the "Iron Chain" archetype is small and plagued by internal contradictions. Each member pulls the strategy in a different direction, creating a mechanical dissonance that prevents a cohesive game plan from forming.

* **Iron Chain Repairman:** A Level 4 EARTH Warrior, Repairman is arguably the most important card in the entire archetype, though not for its intended purpose. Its first effect allows it to Special Summon one Level 4 or lower "Iron Chain" monster from the Graveyard, but at the cost of being unable to attack that turn. Its second effect inflicts 300 damage to the opponent when it destroys a monster by battle. This immediately establishes a conflict: one of its primary functions requires forgoing battle, while the other can only be activated through battle.1
* **Iron Chain Coil:** The archetype's only Tuner monster, Coil is a Level 3 EARTH Machine. Its effect is a simple, once-per-turn boost, granting a selected "Iron Chain" monster 300 ATK and DEF. This effect is generally considered too slow and low-impact to be meaningful, relegating Coil to the role of a simple Tuner and, more importantly, a revival target for Repairman.1
* **Iron Chain Snake:** A Level 3 EARTH Reptile, Snake possesses a unique effect that allows it to equip itself to an opponent's monster, reducing its ATK and DEF by 800. When that monster is destroyed by battle, its controller must send cards from the top of their Deck to the Graveyard equal to the monster's original Level. This effect is central to the intended mill strategy but is critically flawed in the modern game, as it has no effect on Xyz and Link monsters, which do not have Levels.1
* **Iron Chain Blaster:** This Level 2 EARTH Warrior further muddies the archetype's strategy. Once per turn, it can send an "Iron Chain" monster from the field to the Graveyard to inflict 800 damage to the opponent. This introduces a direct burn strategy that competes for on-field resources with the mill and battle-oriented goals of the other members.1
* **Iron Chain Dragon:** The archetype's boss monster is a Level 6 EARTH Dragon Synchro. Its first effect allows it to banish all "Iron Chain" monsters from the player's Graveyard to gain 200 ATK for each, a temporary boost that lasts until the End Phase. Its second effect triggers when it inflicts battle damage, sending the top 3 cards of the opponent's Deck to the Graveyard. Here lies another severe contradiction: its power-up effect removes the very Graveyard resources that Iron Chain Repairman relies on for its revival effect, creating a powerful anti-synergy at the heart of the archetype.2

### The Spells

The archetype is supported by two Continuous Spell cards that attempt to unify its disparate elements under a mill-and-burn strategy, but they ultimately underscore the conflicting mechanics.

* **Poison Chain:** This spell allows the player to send cards from the top of the opponent's deck to the Graveyard, equal to the number of face-up "Iron Chain" monsters they control. However, this effect only activates during the End Phase and only if the player did not conduct an attack that turn. This directly supports Repairman's non-attacking revival effect but completely clashes with the battle-dependent effects of Repairman, Snake, and Dragon.3
* **Paralyzing Chain:** This card inflicts 300 damage to the opponent whenever a card is sent from their Deck to the Graveyard by a card effect. This provides a direct link between the milling and burning strategies but the damage output is often too low to constitute a viable win condition on its own.9

The collection of these cards reveals an archetype with a fractured identity. It simultaneously attempts to be a control-oriented Mill deck, a slow Burn deck, and an aggressive Beatdown deck. The activation conditions and resource management of these strategies are mutually exclusive, leading to a dysfunctional and incoherent whole. For instance, to use Poison Chain effectively, one must skip the Battle Phase, but to use Iron Chain Dragon's primary mill effect, one must enter the Battle Phase and successfully inflict damage. To use Iron Chain Repairman's revival, monsters must be in the Graveyard, but to power up Iron Chain Dragon, those same monsters must be banished. This fundamental design conflict is the primary reason for the archetype's initial failure.1

#### Table 1: Iron Chain Archetype Card Index

| Card Name | Card Type | Monster Details (Type/Attribute/Level) | ATK/DEF | Full Card Text |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Iron Chain Repairman** | Effect Monster | Warrior/EARTH/4 | 1600/1200 | When this card destroys a monster by battle and sends it to the Graveyard, inflict 300 damage to your opponent. Once per turn, you can Special Summon 1 Level 4 or lower "Iron Chain" monster from your Graveyard, except "Iron Chain Repairman". This card cannot attack the turn you activate this effect. |
| **Iron Chain Coil** | Tuner/Effect Monster | Machine/EARTH/3 | 1100/1600 | Once per turn, you can select 1 "Iron Chain" monster you control to have it gain 300 ATK and DEF as long as this card is face-up on the field. |
| **Iron Chain Snake** | Effect Monster | Reptile/EARTH/3 | 800/1200 | During your Main Phase, you can equip this card to 1 face-up monster your opponent controls. That monster loses 800 ATK and DEF. When it is destroyed by battle and sent to the Graveyard, its controller sends cards equal to its Level from the top of their Deck to the Graveyard. |
| **Iron Chain Blaster** | Effect Monster | Warrior/EARTH/2 | 1100/0 | Once per turn, you can send 1 "Iron Chain" monster you control to the Graveyard to inflict 800 damage to your opponent. |
| **Iron Chain Dragon** | Synchro/Effect Monster | Dragon/EARTH/6 | 2500/1300 | 1 Tuner + 1 or more non-Tuner monsters. You can remove from play all "Iron Chain" monsters from your Graveyard to have this card gain 200 ATK for each card removed, until the End Phase. When this card inflicts Battle Damage to your opponent, send the top 3 cards of your opponent's Deck to the Graveyard. |
| **Poison Chain** | Continuous Spell | N/A | N/A | During the End Phase of your turn, if you did not attack, you can make your opponent send cards equal to the number of face-up "Iron Chain" monsters you control from the top of their Deck to the Graveyard. |
| **Paralyzing Chain** | Continuous Spell | N/A | N/A | When a card(s) is sent from your opponent's Deck to the Graveyard by a card effect, inflict 300 damage to your opponent. |

## The Intended Strategy - A Fractured Blueprint

Analyzing the archetype's design reveals a blueprint for a strategy that, while conceptually interesting, is fundamentally flawed in its execution. The intended game plan appears to be a slow, grinding match where the "Iron Chain" player gradually depletes the opponent's deck and life points simultaneously.

### The Mill/Burn Hybrid Fallacy

The primary intended strategy revolves around establishing a board of "Iron Chain" monsters and using Poison Chain to mill the opponent's deck during the End Phase. This passive approach is meant to be supplemented by Paralyzing Chain, which converts each milled card into minor burn damage.12 In this context,

Iron Chain Repairman's revival effect is used to maintain board presence without attacking, and Iron Chain Snake acts as a form of disruption and supplemental milling.7

This strategy fails for several critical reasons. First, the number of cards milled per turn is exceptionally low, making it an unreliable win condition against any competent deck. Second, and more importantly, the strategy of sending cards to the opponent's Graveyard has become a significant liability in modern Yu-Gi-Oh!. The Graveyard is now widely treated as a secondary resource, and milling an opponent's cards often helps them by setting up their own powerful Graveyard effects.10 The minimal burn damage from

Paralyzing Chain is insufficient to offset this massive strategic disadvantage.2

### The Synchro Summoning Paradox

One of the most glaring design oversights is the archetype's inability to efficiently summon its own boss monster. Iron Chain Dragon is a Level 6 Synchro monster. The archetype's main non-Tuner is Iron Chain Repairman (Level 4), and its only in-archetype Tuner is Iron Chain Coil (Level 3). The sum of their levels is 7, making it impossible for the two to summon their own boss.1 This forces a player to use suboptimal pairings, such as

Repairman and the Level 2 Iron Chain Blaster, or to rely on non-archetypal monsters, which dilutes the deck's already weak synergy.2 This mathematical mismatch suggests a lack of careful consideration during the archetype's design phase.

### Strengths and (Overwhelming) Weaknesses

When evaluated as a self-contained archetype, its weaknesses far outweigh its strengths.

* **Strengths:** The single most powerful aspect of the archetype is the revival effect of Iron Chain Repairman. Crucially, this effect lacks a "hard once per turn" clause, meaning if a player can summon multiple copies of Repairman or reuse a single copy's effect, it can be activated multiple times in one turn. This specific quality would later become the cornerstone of its competitive renaissance.1
* **Weaknesses:** The list of weaknesses is extensive. The archetype suffers from conflicting mechanics, resource anti-synergy (GY vs. banished), a low power ceiling, extreme vulnerability to modern game mechanics like Graveyard-centric strategies and non-Level monsters, and a near-total lack of internal searching or special summoning capabilities beyond what Repairman provides.1

The archetype's limited presence in retro formats like the Edison Format further illustrates its failings. It did not see play because the "Iron Chain" strategy was effective, but rather because its individual components were generic enough to be absorbed by other, more powerful strategies. Iron Chain Repairman, as a Level 4 EARTH Warrior, was searchable by the powerful Reinforcement of the Army, and Iron Chain Coil was a serviceable EARTH Tuner for generic Synchro plays.15 The path to making these cards viable was to abandon their archetypal identity and exploit their generic traits.

## The Unintended Application - Rise of the Link-Spam Engine

With the introduction of Master Rule 4 and the Link Summoning mechanic, the perception of "Iron Chain" changed dramatically. Player ingenuity repurposed the archetype from a failed casual strategy into a highly explosive, albeit linear, combo deck. This new strategy abandoned every "Iron Chain" card except for two, focusing entirely on exploiting the non-once-per-turn effect of Iron Chain Repairman to generate massive card advantage and build formidable end boards.

### The Linchpins - Repairman and Coil Revisited

In this new context, only two cards from the archetype matter, and their functions are stripped down to their most abusable elements.10

* **Iron Chain Repairman:** The entire combo revolves around the fact that its revival effect is not a hard once per turn. Its EARTH/Warrior typing is also critical, making it a target for powerful generic support cards like Reinforcement of the Army, Isolde, Two Tales of the Noble Knights, and the now-forbidden M-X-Saber Invoker.1
* **Iron Chain Coil:** Its role is simplified to being the perfect revival target. As a Level 3 Tuner, it can be sent from the Deck to the Graveyard by various effects and is the only valid, low-level target for Repairman's revival, making the loop consistent.10

### Searchers and Starters - Assembling the Combo

The modern "Iron Chain" deck is built around two categories of combo pieces: cards that place Iron Chain Coil in the Graveyard and cards that enable the summoning of a Rank 3 Xyz Monster to begin the main combo sequence.10

* **Graveyard Setup:** The most efficient way to prepare for Repairman's effect is to send Coil directly from the Deck to the Graveyard. Scrap Recycler and Mathematician are the premier cards for this role, as their effects trigger upon being Normal Summoned.10
* **Swarming for Rank 3:** The combo typically begins by summoning M-X-Saber Invoker, a Rank 3 Xyz Monster. This requires two Level 3 monsters on the field. Cards like Junk Forward, Kagemucha Knight, and Speedroid Terrortop can Special Summon themselves, providing the necessary materials to make Invoker, which then summons Repairman directly from the Deck.10

### The Combo Chains - Step-by-Step Execution

The following is a representative combo line from the MR4 era, demonstrating how these pieces interlink to create a powerful board. This sequence is ideal for visualization.

1. **The Opener:** Begin with two Level 3 monsters on the field. A common opening is Normal Summoning Scrap Recycler and Special Summoning Junk Forward. Activate Recycler's effect to send Iron Chain Coil from the Deck to the Graveyard.
2. **The First Invoker:** Overlay the two Level 3 monsters to Xyz Summon M-X-Saber Invoker.
3. **Summoning the Linchpin:** Activate Invoker's effect by detaching a material to Special Summon Iron Chain Repairman from the Deck.
4. **The First Loop:** Activate Repairman's effect to Special Summon Iron Chain Coil from the Graveyard.
5. **Isolde's Arrival:** Link Summon Isolde, Two Tales of the Noble Knights using Invoker and Repairman. On summon, Isolde's effect can search a Warrior monster (e.g., Black Luster Soldier - Envoy of the Beginning) for a follow-up play.
6. **Milling the Equips:** Activate Isolde's second effect, sending multiple Equip Spells from the Deck to the Graveyard (e.g., Divine Sword - Phoenix Blade) to Special Summon another Warrior, such as Kagemucha Knight, from the Deck.10
7. **The Second Invoker & Loop:** Overlay Coil and Kagemucha Knight to Xyz Summon a second M-X-Saber Invoker. Use its effect to summon a second Iron Chain Repairman, which in turn activates its effect to revive Coil once more.
8. **Power Tool Dragon:** Synchro Summon Power Tool Dragon using one Repairman and Coil. Activate its effect, revealing three copies of D.D.R. - Different Dimension Reincarnation from the Deck to add one to hand.10
9. **The Link Climb and D.D.R. Loop:** From this point, the player uses the remaining monsters to Link climb into powerful monsters like Summon Sorceress (now banned) and Firewall Dragon (pre-errata). The Divine Sword - Phoenix Blade in the Graveyard can banish two Warriors (like the used Repairmans) to add itself back to hand. The player then activates D.D.R., discarding Divine Sword to Special Summon a banished Repairman, who can then revive Coil again, extending the combo even further.10

### The Endboard - The Fruits of Labor

The goal of this extensive combo is to produce an endboard that is extremely difficult for the opponent to break. A typical board from this era could include a co-linked Tri-Gate Wizard, providing multiple instances of negation and banishing, alongside other disruptive monsters like Firewall Dragon for bouncing cards or Naturia Beast for negating spells.10 This demonstrates a complete strategic metamorphosis, turning a forgotten, dysfunctional archetype into a formidable "glass cannon" combo deck capable of competing with meta strategies of its time.

This transformation reveals that the combo deck's success is not due to the "Iron Chain" archetype itself, but rather in spite of it. The deck is more accurately described as a generic EARTH Warrior/Machine Link Spam strategy that uses Repairman and Coil as the most efficient looping engine available. The remaining key components—Isolde, Invoker, Power Tool Dragon, D.D.R.—are all powerful, generic cards. The "Iron Chain" name is merely a vestige, a label for the two cogs that make the larger machine run.

## External Synergies and Advanced Deck Building

The viability of the "Iron Chain" combo deck is entirely dependent on a suite of powerful, non-archetypal support cards and engines. Understanding these external synergies is crucial to constructing and piloting the deck effectively. The deck is not a singular archetype but a carefully assembled machine built from the best generic parts available.

### The Warrior Engine

The Warrior type provides the deck with unparalleled consistency and access to its key combo pieces.

* **Reinforcement of the Army:** As a staple in any Warrior-based strategy, this spell provides a direct search for Iron Chain Repairman or any of the Level 3 Warrior extenders, significantly increasing the deck's consistency.7
* **Isolde, Two Tales of the Noble Knights:** This Link-2 monster is the undisputed heart of the modern strategy. It serves as a searcher, a special summoner from the deck, and a tool to mill the necessary Equip Spells to the Graveyard, all of which are essential for the main combo line to function.10
* **Level 3 Warrior Extenders:** A critical mass of Level 3 Warriors that can be Special Summoned, such as Junk Forward, Kagemucha Knight, and Marauding Captain, is necessary to reliably summon the initial M-X-Saber Invoker that kicks off the entire sequence.7

### The Machine/EARTH Engine

The Machine and EARTH typings of the core combo pieces provide access to another set of powerful generic tools.

* **Scrap Recycler:** This EARTH Machine is the optimal Normal Summon for the deck, as it sends Iron Chain Coil directly to the Graveyard, immediately setting up the condition for Repairman's revival effect.10
* **M-X-Saber Invoker:** This Rank 3 EARTH Warrior Xyz monster was the most efficient method of summoning Iron Chain Repairman from the deck. Its status on the Forbidden & Limited List is a direct testament to its power in enabling combos like this one, and its prohibition significantly weakened this specific build.10
* **Generic EARTH Synchros:** The deck's composition of EARTH monsters, including an EARTH Tuner, allows for easy access to powerful floodgate monsters like Naturia Beast, which can single-handedly win games by negating all of the opponent's Spell Cards.14

### The Equip Spell Package

This suite of cards is included not for their effects while equipped, but for their utility as combo pieces to be milled by Isolde or searched by Power Tool Dragon.

* **D.D.R. - Different Dimension Reincarnation:** The primary target for Power Tool Dragon. It is used to revive an Iron Chain Repairman that was banished as a cost for Divine Sword - Phoenix Blade's effect, creating a repeatable loop.10
* **Divine Sword - Phoenix Blade:** This card is essential for its Graveyard effect. By banishing two Warrior monsters, it can be added back to the hand, providing free discard fodder for D.D.R. and enabling the revival loop.10
* **Symbol of Heritage & Overdone Burial:** These serve as additional revival spells that can be searched by Power Tool Dragon, providing redundancy and flexibility within the combo should D.D.R. be unavailable.10

#### Table 2: Sample "Iron Chain" Link Combo Decklist (MR4 Era)

| Category | Card Name | Quantity | Justification |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Iron Chain Engine** | Iron Chain Repairman | 3 | The core combo piece; its non-HOPT revival effect is the deck's engine. |
|  | Iron Chain Coil | 3 | The primary and only revival target for Repairman; essential for loops and Synchro plays. |
| **Starters/Extenders** | Scrap Recycler | 3 | Best Normal Summon; sends Coil from Deck to GY. |
|  | Mathematician | 2 | Alternative to Scrap Recycler for GY setup. |
|  | Junk Forward | 3 | Level 3 Warrior extender for making Rank 3 Xyz monsters. |
|  | Kagemucha Knight | 3 | Another key Level 3 Warrior extender. |
|  | Speedroid Terrortop | 1 | A powerful one-card Rank 3 enabler (Limited). |
| **Equip Spell Package** | D.D.R. - Different Dimension Reincarnation | 3 | Primary revival spell searched by Power Tool Dragon. |
|  | Divine Sword - Phoenix Blade | 1 | Key for the D.D.R. loop; only one is needed as it is milled by Isolde. |
|  | Symbol of Heritage | 1 | Secondary revival spell for Power Tool Dragon (Limited). |
|  | Overdone Burial | 1 | Tertiary revival spell for Power Tool Dragon. |
|  | Moon Mirror Shield | 1 | Fodder for Isolde's mill effect. |
|  | Horn of the Unicorn | 1 | Fodder for Isolde's mill effect. |
| **Spells/Hand Traps** | Reinforcement of the Army | 1 | Searches almost any monster in the deck (Limited). |
|  | Soul Charge | 1 | Powerful extender for swarming the field (Limited/Forbidden). |
|  | Ash Blossom & Joyous Spring | 3 | Generic disruption that can also be used as a Level 3 Tuner in emergencies. |
|  | Effect Veiler | 3 | Generic disruption. |
| **Extra Deck** | M-X-Saber Invoker | 2 | Summons Repairman from the Deck (now Forbidden). |
|  | Power Tool Dragon | 2 | Searches the key Equip Spells to extend combos. |
|  | Naturia Beast | 1 | Powerful floodgate against Spell-heavy decks. |
|  | Isolde, Two Tales of the Noble Knights | 1 | The central Link monster that enables the entire strategy. |
|  | Summon Sorceress | 1 | A powerful Link extender (now Forbidden). |
|  | Firewall Dragon | 2 | The ultimate combo extender and board controller (pre-errata). |
|  | Tri-Gate Wizard | 1 | The primary endboard boss monster for negation and removal. |
|  | Proxy Dragon | 3 | Generic Link-2 used for Link climbing with tokens. |
|  | Number 42: Tomahawk | 1 | Generates tokens for massive Link plays. |

## Conclusion - The Dual Legacy of the Iron Chain

The history of the "Iron Chain" archetype is a story of two vastly different identities. It stands as a testament to both the pitfalls of unfocused card design and the boundless ingenuity of the player base. Its legacy is not singular but dual, defined equally by its initial, comprehensive failure and its later, unintended success.

### A Study in Contrasts

The first identity of "Iron Chain" is that of an archetypal failure. Released in the early Synchro era, its cards were a jumble of conflicting strategies—mill, burn, and beatdown—that actively worked against one another. Plagued by anti-synergistic resource management, paradoxical summoning conditions, and a low overall power level, the archetype was correctly identified by players as one of the worst in the game and faded into obscurity.1

Its second identity emerged years later, born from the crucible of a new game mechanic. The introduction of Link Summoning and, critically, powerful generic support like Isolde, Two Tales of the Noble Knights, allowed players to re-examine old cards. They discovered that the lack of a "hard once per turn" clause on Iron Chain Repairman's effect made it a uniquely exploitable engine. In this new form, the archetype was stripped down to just two cards, Repairman and Coil, which served as the fuel for a complex, generic Link-spam combo deck capable of producing oppressive end boards.10

### A Lesson in Card Design

The "Iron Chain" archetype serves as a valuable lesson in the principles of game design. It demonstrates how a single line of text—or in this case, the absence of the now-standard clause "You can only use this effect of 'Card Name' once per turn"—can completely redefine a card's potential, elevating it from a forgotten piece of a failed strategy to the linchpin of a powerful engine. Furthermore, it highlights the inherent weakness of archetypes that lack a clear, focused win condition. In a game that consistently rewards specialization and synergy, the attempt to pursue multiple, conflicting strategies simultaneously is a recipe for failure.

### Final Verdict

Ultimately, "Iron Chain" cannot be classified as a "good" archetype in the traditional sense. Its intended strategy is unviable, and its cards are, with two exceptions, functionally useless. However, it is one of the most compelling examples of how the Yu-Gi-Oh! TCG is a dynamic system where the value of a card is not fixed but is constantly re-evaluated in the context of new mechanics and new support. The legacy of "Iron Chain" is not written by its own members, but by how one of its broken pieces was used as a key to unlock the immense power of other, unrelated cards, forging a potent strategy from the remnants of a failed design.

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