

A look at the Morphling FlavOracle entries Playing Checkers with Superman

The Ferrett

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*What flies through air
Grows big to scare
And brushes your spells right off?*

*Two blue and three,
For control it's key,
It's Morph, Morph, Morph!*

*It's MOOO-rph! It's MOOO-rph!
Is there anything Morph can't do?
It's MOOO-rph! It's MOOO-rph!
It's not killing me, but you!*

*You're gonna hate the Morph!
Everyone hates a Morph!
You're gonna hate the Morph!*

*Morphling™: From Hasbro™!
- The Ferrett's suggested flavor text for Morphling*

A long time ago, I predicted that the [rules text on cards would become so complex and so cumbersome](#) that, eventually, the flavor text would be relegated to a downloadable text file. I was *joking*, people.

But when I saw the idea for the [FlavOracle](#) -- giving much-needed flavor text to older, rules-choked cards -- I really wanted to see what sorts of entries the Magic community would come up with. So naturally, I volunteered myself to be one of the judges for the contest. (And here he is, hair and all, on my "damn site". I will now refrain from interjecting any further, but oh my, it is soooo tempting. - Aaron)

I love flavor text; it's what got me into **Magic** in the first place. Sure, the game itself was cool... But back in the days of *The Dark* and *Revised*, each card was a paper window into an alien world. There

was no back story back then -- all you had were strange and eerie, almost anthropological, descriptions of encounters with the creatures on the cards, like:

Some fiendish mage had created a horrifying wall of living flesh, patched together from a jumble of still-recognizable body parts. As we sought to hew our way through it, some unknown power healed the gaping wounds we cut, denying us passage.

[Living Wall]

And:

The intricate dynamics of Rundvelt Goblin affairs are often confused with anarchy. The chaos, however, is the chaos of a thundercloud, and direction will sporadically and violently appear. Pashalik Mons and his raiders are the thunderhead that leads in the storm.

[Mons's Goblin Raiders]

And these were descriptions for cards that *sucked*.

We figured that if there was such a wealth of information on Mons's Goblin Raiders, a generic 1/1 goblin, well... By God, the huge creatures like the Lord of the Pit must be *truly* legendary.

If you were paying attention to the flavor text, names were occasionally repeated, but it was something only the diehard fans would notice; sure, this "Urza" bloke seemed to come up a few times, and his mentor was some dude named Tocasias... Yet only those who watched the cards closely knew the mysteries of the Planeswalkers.

Back then, we'd sit around and drink beer late at nights, conjecturing on what kind of people these weirdos were. "Do you think Mishra uses union labor in his factories?" "For work *that* cheap? Hell, no!" "I think Mishra uses Oompa-Loompas." "Shut up, Phil."

Of course, now we've got books devoted to these suckers, and we not only know the story and ultimate fate of Urza, but we also know his height, his shoe size, his wife's favorite fabric, and what his cholesterol level was when he annihilated Tolaria. (The only thing we don't know about Urza is, why the heck did his sunglasses turn plains into mountains, anyway? What sorts of eye troubles was this man *having*? I mean, I've heard of retinal burn, but this is ridiculous....)

In any case, the FlavOracle seemed like an excellent way to give flavor text to old cards. Having edited more than my share of "I hate the new flavor text!" rants at [StarCityGames](#), I was curious to see what The Public At Large would contribute. Would there be tons of Shakespearean quotes? All goofy puns? Historical references? Perhaps a whole bunch of "I'm [expletive]" references sent in by our pals at Team Academy?

What surprised me was how similar a lot of the responses were, proving that great minds think alike. (Well, so do dumb minds, but you're all smart whippersnappers, aren't you?)

So just to give you an idea of what sorts of strange things over *nine hundred* of you folks sent in, let me break down the most common FlavOracle Morphling submissions --

-- but first, the ***First Official "You Win Nothing But A Mention In This Stupid Article" FlavOracle Awards!***

The "Most Excessive Editorial Sarcasm" Award:

*TEST: Morphling is the epitome of balance, fun, and excitement that **Magic** desperately needs these days.*

[Aaron Forsythe, editor@wizards.com]

The "Subtlety? What's That?" Award:

While no two survivors ever agree exactly what the Morphling looks like, they always agree that it kicked their ass.

[Andy Clautice]

The "Guess Which Format I Play?" Award:

"Pshaw! Just an upstart." -- Vesuvan Doppelganger

[Pierre DuPont]

The "Best Thinly-Veiled Comment On Netdeckers" Award:

Its only weakness is its master's stupidity.

[Jacob Bagha]

The "Best Non-Veiled Comment On Netdeckers" Award:

I'm rare, and everybody wants me. I suck.

[Brett Baumgarten]

The "WHAT?" Award:

Timmy learned in class today that Morphling resolved equals scant minus a bug plus droop minus a physician.

[Daniel Chad Hartley]

The "Best Pop Culture Reference With Regards To A Morphling" Award:

"I'm Bad Ash and you're Good Ash, you're a goody little two-shoes!" -- Bad Ash

[Jim Silva]

The "Second-Best Pop Culture Reference With Regards To A Morphling" Award:

I'm Spartacus! NO!....I'M Spartacus!

[Rob Dent]

The "Did He Really Think This Would Win?" Award:

"A shapeshifter is like a donut in many ways. You can make them both better by adding sprinkles....

Mmmm.... sprinkles" -- Homer Simpson

[James Lomas]

The "Best Humor That I Didn't Pick" Award:

"Death," the spirit pleaded, "you must tell me, who has taken my life?" The shrouded figure paused for a brief moment, before shrugging. "Good question."

[Kris Miller]

So what were the most popular categories of flavor text? The most popular category -- *by far* -- was mirror comments. People loved to make jokes about whether that one had a bigger butt, or how the mirror suddenly had a tail and horns, and so on. (I can't entirely dismiss the category; one of my final choices for your voting pleasure was an exceptionally well-written mirror pun.)

A scary number of people had a joke based on rk post's art that went, "Hey, wanna play checkers on my shoulder?" The first time I saw it, I thought it was unique. The second time, I had to check to make sure it wasn't a repeat entry. But the *fifth* time around...

Of all quotes, the most were attributed to Urza -- which is no surprise, since the Morphling comes from *Urza's Block*. What *did* surprise me was the landslide of quotes from the fiery Jaya Ballard, Task Mage, who was firmly entrenched in second place. About half of you seemed to believe that Jaya could take ol' Morphy in a fair fight, and the other half had Jaya fuming with frustration.

So anyway, what else showed up?

"Faster than a speeding bullet..."

38 people

By far the most popular pop culture reference, Morphling's informal pro nickname of "Superman" made it into a lot of submissions. Most of them were "It's a bird! It's a plane! It's...", but there were a significant number of people who changed "bird" to "ornithopter."

Fifteen zillion critters with flying in **Magic**, and people still love the Ornithopter. Go figure.

Other notable variations included...

"Faster than a speeding bullet, can jump tall buildings in a single bound, but most important of all, it cleans the kitchen," said Barrin. Hanna replied, "Yes, but does it leave the toilet seat down?"
[William Mees]

It's a bird! It's a pain!
[Paul Schaefer]

Unlike some people, the Morphling has no kryptonite.
[Job van der Zwan]

"Hans, quickly -- fetch the kryptonite!" -- Gurzzle Graz, archmagus
[Aaron Porath]

"Anything you can do, I can do better..."

17 people

Are they referencing *Sesame Street* or *Annie, Get Your Gun*? In any case, seventeen different people submitted the *exact same bit of flavor text*. At least the Superman references varied.

"So what *can't* it do?"

16 people

Also a favorite, most of these entries took the form of dialogues between Barrin and Urza. Interestingly, even though as far as I know the Morphling was not one of Urza's creations, about 80% of the entries seemed to give him credit for them anyway....

"It's a...", "What the....", and "Run away!"

12 people

Poor Hans took quite the beating in this category.... After narrowly avoiding the Lhurgoyf and being pummeled by the Revenant, readers decided that the Morphling just *had* to have a taste of the eternally-doomed Hans.

"Ach, Hans, run! It's the Lhurg... it's the Force of Na.... it's the... dammit, just run!"
[Flo LeBlanc]

Also, Michael Young neatly combined the Superman and the What Is It? References in one fell swoop:

"It's a bird! It's a plane! It's a... Aw, heck, I give up." -- confused scout
[Michael Young]

Although the confused scout should really have been -- you guessed it -- Hans.

Last Words

10 people

Sick of the beatings they've endured at the blue beastie, lots of people crafted epitaphs for their flavor texts....

"It is coming for me. Sometimes I can almost hear--"
A red mage's diary, last entry.
[Nikola Udiljak]

"I win."

9 people

Considering that this is pretty much what you're saying when Morphling resolves, a lot of happy campers just decided to make it the flavor text and be done with it. My favorite (and most appropriate) quote?

"I win." --Ertai, wizard apprentice
[Billy Spaniel]

"Broken" puns

7 people

Based on the widespread agreement that Morphling is probably the most overpowered creature ever, a significant minority of people made puns that hinted at the Morphling's unstoppable nature....

It stopped for a moment, and saw itself in the shattered mirror.
"Why do I look so broken?" it said.
[Waylon Ballenger]

To say that they are two broken halves of one person would be appropriate.
[Michael Porter]

Checkers, anyone?

Out of game jokes

Too many to count.

Tap your--

No.

Earthquake for--

No.

Dark Banish--

No.

...I'll concede.

Yes.

[Andre Garcia]

Only lacks: U: Morphling makes your bed.

[Ramon]

"SWEET! What's my ability say?" "DUDE! What's my ability say?" "SWEEET!!! What's my ability say!?!?"

[Daniel Stahl]

"Let me get this straight; they banned Savannah Lions and River Merfolk, but not this?" -- Yoon Lee, Extended Newbie

[Yoon Lee]

"Well, that's game." -- Every opponent since Urza's Saga

[Andy]

Anyway, that brings us to the actual contenders, as selected by myself and Daniel Crane (and then further whittled down by **Magic** continuity people). Here they are:

- "I stand alone in this crowd of possibilities as the skeleton key."
- Some reflections aren't confined to a mirror.
- "I've seen my reflection before," remarked Urza. "Only once has it seen me."
- "The only limitation one truly has is one's own preconceived notions. I have no such things, and, as such, no limitations."
- It took a while to confirm the actuality of the Morphling. Many fights broke out over different villagers' descriptions of the "changing beast."
- Many researchers believe that evolution is a long, slow process. In the Morphling's case, it is not.
- "But Urza," Barrin interjected, "it is the poor student who does not exceed his master." Urza responded grimly, "That is what I am afraid of."
- Morphlings were fond of embarrassing fashion-conscious planeswalkers by "wearing" identical outfits at parties.
- Although this replacement for Xantcha had no heartstone, Urza gave it so much more.
- It's not that you won't see it coming. It's that you won't know you did.

Pick your favorite, and then [click here to vote](#) for which one will end up as a permanent fixture in the FlavOracle. We'll review the Chaos Orb submissions sometime in the near future, but the big news is that tomorrow the FlavOracle will be retrofitted to allow submissions for *real Eighth Edition cards*.
Signing off,

The Ferrett

*The Ferrett is the editor and webmaster of [StarCityGames.com](#), a high-profile **Magic** website. He also claims to be more popular than Anthony Alongi, but we all know that isn't possible. The Ferrett may be reached at TheFerrett@TheFerrett.com when he isn't busy playing Dance Dance Revolution.*