

THE MARVEL®-PHILE

by James Lowder

Monsters on the loose—again!

In their heyday, giant monsters dominated eight titles published by Atlas comics—the company that would mutate into the Marvel house of super heroes we know today. Beginning in late 1958, *Xom*, *Monstrosos*, *Fin Fang Foom*, *Gorgilla*, *Gorgolla*, and all their gargantuan pals rumbled through the pages of *Amazing Adventures*, *Amazing Adult Fantasy*, *Journey into Mystery*, *Strange Tales*, *Tales of Suspense*, *Tales to Astonish*, and *World of Fantasy*. Rendered with skill and excitement by Jack Kirby, these behemoths spent their brief lives spreading gleeful chaos and shouting threats that usually ended with multiple exclamation points.

The publication of *Fantastic Four* #1 in August, 1961 signaled the beginning of the end for the Marvel monster corps. After that momentous event, super heroes began to usurp the comic-book spotlight from the behemoths. But that isn't to say the monsters disappeared from the MARVEL UNIVERSE™ quietly or even quickly. The real center of attention on the cover of *FF* #1 is the Mole Man's gargantuan minion, not the fledgling super-team. And in the course of that same first issue, the *FF* journey to Monster Isle to battle the Mole Man and his monster horde. Over the next few years, the *Fantastic Four* would be pitted against foes that would most certainly be at home in a monster comic: Giganto, the whalelike beast the Sub-Mariner commands against the surface world; the Mad Thinker's weird, faceless android (who looks a lot like the aliens from "A Martian Walks Among Us"), the huge "Monster from Mars" statue animated by the Miracle Man; and even the shape-shifting Skrulls, who share powers with the Kirby-creature from the story "What was X, the Thing that Lived?"

The Marvel monsters made their presence felt in other early super-hero titles as well: Don Blake is fleeing Gorr and the Stone Men of Saturn when he discovers the hammer of Thor in *Journey into Mystery* #83. The Hulk and the Thing resemble other beasts from the pre-hero monster comics. Even the names of some

early villains—Giganto and Dormammu, for example—sound a lot like those of the creatures that rampaged through the old Atlas titles. So if you scoff at the idea of introducing such monsters as Goom, Diablo, and Sporr into your MARVEL SUPER-HEROES™ (MSH) game campaign, keep their origins and their influence in mind. If one of these battling behemoths was

good enough to steal the cover of *FF* #1 from Reed Richards and crew, they're good enough to toss around tanks—and heroes—in your campaign, too.

Groot update

In the previous "creature-feature" installment of the MARVEL®-Phile (*DRAGON*® issue #186), I noted that Groot was defeat-



Color by Steve Sullivan

ed in the early 1960s by scientist Leslie Evans. That wasn't the last time the tree tyrant from Planet X threatened Earth, though. Groot—or, more precisely, an exact replica of the power-mad alien—battled the Hulk in 1976. Xemnu the Living Titan recreated Groot and five other long-forgotten monsters, then sent them one by one to destroy the green gladiator. Unsurprisingly, the Hulk made short work of the Groot-replica, ultimately battering the monster to splinters. In this battle, Groot used his plant-control ability to ensnare the Hulk, and his body armor shielded him for a time from the hero's blows. Groot also exhibited a power he did not utilize in his first appearance: the ability to fire thorns from his hands. Since Xemnu claimed to have recreated Groot without modifications, this power should be added to the tree tyrant's already impressive list:

Projectile missile: Groot can fire volleys of wooden darts from either hand. The 3-inch-long darts—known as Groot's Invincible Thorns—have Excellent (20) accuracy, a range of one area, and do Excellent (20) Shooting damage. Groot can launch Invincible Thorns from only one hand at a time. He may fire four volleys of missiles in any 24-hour period.

GROGG™

The Nightmare Creature from the Black Pit

F AM (50)	Health: 240
A IN (40)	
S AM (50)	Karma: 8
E UN (100)	
R FB (2)	Resources: None
I PR (4)	
P FB (2)	Popularity: 0 (-10 in eastern Europe)

POWERS:

Body armor: Grogg's thick, leathery skin provides protection of Remarkable (30) power versus physical and Force attacks.

Combat tail: The Nightmare Creature's spiky tail isn't useful for climbing, but may be used in combat for Monstrous (75) damage. It also serves as a rudder during flight.

Horns: The four largest horns atop Grogg's head are considered Edged Attack weapons, with a Material Strength Rank of Excellent (20). They do Remarkable (30) damage.

Fire generation: Grogg can breathe jets of flame from his nostrils. This flame does Monstrous (75) Energy damage against flammable targets, and Good (10) damage against nonflammable targets.

Flight: Grogg's wings allow him to fly at Unearthly (100) speeds in atmospheric conditions, but only at Typical (6) speeds through space.

Life support: The Nightmare Creature has this power at Shift Z (500). He can survive in hostile environments indefinitely without food, air, or water.

Hibernation: If Grogg is completely immobilized (buried under a collapsed skyscraper or frozen by some sort of high-tech device, for example), he goes into suspended animation. He will remain in this state, immune to the effects of aging, until an opportunity for escape arises (i.e., a bomb uncovers his resting place or someone turns off the device holding him motionless).

TALENTS: Gregg seems to comprehend most human languages, though only at a very basic level. However, he has never expressed himself in anything other than grunts and roars.

CONTACTS: None.

HISTORY: In April, 1961, the leaders of a small dictatorship in central Europe stayed freedom-fighter Michael Kozlov's execution when they realized he was also a talented physicist. Kozlov was then put under the watchful eye of Colonel Karl Vorcutsky and sent off to a secret nuclear test sight in Asia. There, it was hoped, Kozlov would aid the dictator's troops in conducting underground bomb tests. While the soldiers were setting up the bomb site, a group of locals came to plead with Vorcutsky. They claimed that any explosion would awaken Grogg, a beast that slept below the ground near their village. Vorcutsky dismissed the claims as superstition and, surprisingly, Kozlov agreed with him. This sudden callousness quieted the colonel's suspicions about the physicist's loyalty. Vorcutsky's trust would soon prove misplaced.

The explosion did uncover Grogg, the Nightmare Creature from the Black Pit, and the huge beast immediately turned his attention to flattening the locals' village. A tribal chief braved the monster's wrath to explain that the soldiers had disturbed Grogg's slumber, not the farmers he was stomping into dust. Vorcutsky and his men tried to flee in a jet, but Grogg took to the air in pursuit and forced them to crash-land in the mountains. Trapped in a cave by the seemingly tireless gargantua, the few remaining soldiers quickly grew desperate. Vorcutsky ordered Kozlov out of the cave, hoping that this sacrifice would appease the Nightmare Creature. But when Grogg attacked, Kozlov blinded him with a cleverly created smoke screen and escaped.

Dr. Kozlov was rescued from the mountain by a passing American plane, but few believed his fantastic story when he tried to tell it. From the start Kozlov had known

the stories about Gregg were true. ago, he'd learned that the Great Wall of China had been built to repel dragon creatures such as Grogg. The villagers' tale told him that just such a dragon was in hibernation near the test site. In encouraging Vorcutsky to proceed with the tomb test, Kozlov had hoped to unleash the monster so that it could spread terror behind the Iron Curtain. He succeeded, but little did he suspect that he would again cross paths with the Nightmare Creature from the Black Pit. Some time after his arrival in the United States, Kozlov was sent on a reconnaissance mission back to his home country. The physicist-turned-spy soon joined forces with Ivan Grotsky, a tyranny-hating farmer, and the two traveled north to learn the purpose of a secret army base. They encountered Grogg near the base, but what they uncovered at the secret installation was even more frightening—the military had constructed a huge rocket, which they intended to launch to Mars. On the red planet, the soldiers would construct a base and threaten the free nations of the world with nuclear missiles if they did not accede to their government's demands. Again Kozlov turned the dictatorship's scientific striving against them. As Ivan created a diversion, Kozlov lured Grogg into the rocket and launched it to Mars. Kozlov knew that he could not stop the government's plans to send an army to Mars, but with a vengeance-craving Nightmare Creature awaiting the soldiers on the red planet, they would find building any base rather difficult.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES: Grogg is not the brightest of beasts and is motivated almost purely by a lust for vengeance. He will attack the most obvious cause for his discomfort at any given moment—which often means whomever or whatever is closest. Though no one has spotted him since the early 1960s, Grogg is probably still loitering on Mars, looking for someone to stomp. He could easily be turned against the United States if someone bothered to visit Mars and convince the Nightmare Creature from the Black Pit that he was duped by an American spy.

TABOO™

The Thing from the Murky Swamp

F IN (40)	Health: 290
A MN (75)	
S UN (100)	Karma: 46
E MN (75)	
R GD (10)	Resources: None
I TY (6)	
P RM (30)	Popularity: 0

POWERS:

Life support: Taboo has this power at Shift Z (500). He can survive in hostile environments indefinitely without requiring food, air, or water.

Flight: Taboo can travel through space at Shift X (150) speeds. In atmospheric conditions, he travels at Monstrous (75) speeds.

Telepathy: Taboo communicates through the use of his telepathic ability, which has the rank of Excellent (20) in sending thoughts, but only Good (10) in reading the surface thoughts of those he communicates with.

Plasticity: Taboo's mudlike body gives him the following powers at Unearthly (100) intensity:

—Body armor that provides Unearthly (100) protection against physical and Force attacks.

—Taboo can also hide in swampy or muddy areas with Unearthly (100) ability. Characters must make an Intuition FEAT roll versus this rank to detect Taboo.

Mud-slinging: Taboo can throw blobs of his own mudlike body with Amazing (50) accuracy, up to two areas. The mud acts as a Grappling attack of Monstrous (75) strength. The mud hardens to rocklike consistency within five seconds (Material Strength Rank of Incredible (40)). Taboo has also been known to simply slap the mud on a target during a brawl rather than throw it.

Immortality: Taboo cannot be killed. If his Endurance reaches Shift 0, additional damage will simply blow his malleable body into a number of smaller parts (one part for each point of damage that gets past his body armor). These separate pieces of ooze have Reason and Intuition of Feeble (2); an Endurance of Good (10); and Fighting skill of Typical (6). They retain Taboo's original Agility, Strength, and Psyche. The separate parts will move as quickly as possible to reform Taboo.

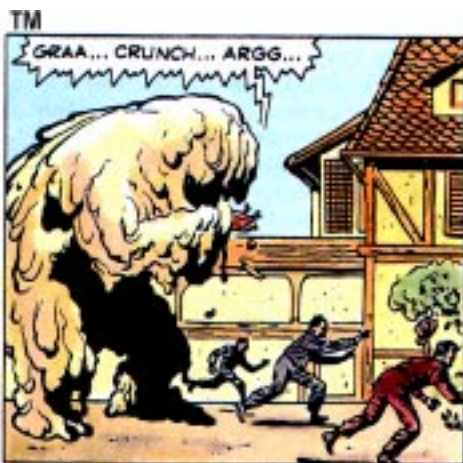
TALENTS: Taboo has enough acting talent to convince some people that his intentions are peaceful. He also possesses a good understanding of many human languages, including English and Portuguese, through his telepathy.

CONTACTS: Subsequent to Taboo's first encounter with Lewis Conrad, the monster had high-level contacts in the United Nations and the world's science community. These contacts became adversaries as soon as Taboo revealed his intentions regarding the Earth. Taboo has no friendly contacts on his home world, where they consider him deranged and dangerous. A Taboo-replica is a former ally of Xennu the Living Titan.

HISTORY: Lewis Conrad was an explorer and best-selling author of true-life adventure books. In the Amazon country of Brazil, he uncovered rumors of a "forbidden swamp," the domain of a "swamp demon" named Taboo. Conrad was skeptical, but went to investigate anyway. To the explorer's surprise, Taboo proved to be real, though he seemed to be anything but a demon. Through his telepathic powers, Taboo revealed that he was an alien whose spacecraft had crashed into the Brazilian swamp, napped by Earth's atmosphere,

he remained a prisoner of the Murky Swamp. Conrad, convinced of Taboo's sincerity, offered to muster the world to aid the stranded alien. The explorer journeyed to New York, where he addressed the United Nations. The world's scientific community quickly banded together and created a device that would aid Taboo in returning home. But when the Thing from the Murky Swamp was given the device, he revealed his true nature. Taboo's spaceship hadn't crash-landed. In fact, he didn't need a spaceship to travel the universe at





all. He was on Earth to gather information about the world's scientific prowess. Now that he had the perfect example of Earth's technological might, he flew off, threatening to return at the head of a conquering army. Fortunately for the peoples of the Earth, the world leaders were not as gullible as Lewis Conrad. When Taboo got beyond Earth's atmosphere, the scientists detonated an H-bomb they had secreted inside the device. Taboo was blown into thousands of muddy blobs and scattered over the western hemisphere, but he did not die. Over the next few days, the separate, sentient pieces of the Thing from the Murky Swamp headed for New York City, specifically Central Park. There, Taboo was reborn. Resistance seemed futile. Taboo wrecked Manhattan and was on his way to stomping out all opposition in the city when a gigantic spacecraft appeared over New York. The Thing from the Murky Swamp welcomed the newcomers, fellow creatures from his planet, but they soon proved to be his enemies, not his allies. The spacefarers explained that they'd been searching for Taboo for ages, that he was ill and needed treatment for some undisclosed-though obviously mental-infirmity. Fortunately for Manhat-

tan, the gentle spacefarers repaired all damage done by Taboo before leaving with the renegade in their custody. In 1976, Xemnu the Living Titan recreated Taboo and five other long-forgotten monsters, then sent them one by one to battle the Hulk. The Taboo-replica fought the Hulk to a standstill, until the hero punched a hole in a riverbed, thus creating a powerful whirlpool that sucked the muck-creature into the earth.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES: Taboo is a dangerous adversary, not only because of his incredible powers, but because of his diseased mind. He is prone to scheming and will use human agents as frequently as possible to further his plans to conquer Earth. Despite his craftiness, though, Taboo is rather easy to fool (as the scientists did in secreting an H-bomb in the device). While the original Taboo was taken from Earth by his fellow spacefarers, the Taboo-replica remains. The Hulk defeated the ersatz Thing from the Murky Swamp, but the whirlpool the hero created could hardly have destroyed a creature that survived at the heart of an H-bomb explosion. If Xemnu regroups his "monster squad" any time in the future, Taboo will likely be the first monster he revives.

THE GLOP™

The Monster Without a Scary Appellation

F RM (30)	Health: 340
A GD (10)	
S Sh Y (200)	Karma: 70
E UN (100)	
R IN (40)	Resources: FE (2)
I EX (20)	
P GD (10)	Popularity: 0

POWERS:

Life support: In stone statue form, the Glop has this power at Shift Z (500). As a statue, the Glop is immobile, but is completely aware of his surroundings and can survive indefinitely without food, air, or water. Once he has been covered with his oozing, paintlike skin, he is subject to hunger and thirst.

Body armor: The Glop's weird, paintlike skin acts as body armor. This armor provides Incredible (40) protection against physical, Force, and Energy attacks. Understandably, the paintlike armor provides no protection from turpentine-based attacks.

TALENTS: As a scout observing humankind for possible conquest, the Glop has gained an understanding of his surroundings. Because the Glop was stationed in a remote Transylvanian keep, this knowledge is limited to what he has overheard about life in the village below the castle during his centuries-long watch. The Glop also has an understanding of a number of human languages, including English, Hungarian, and Romanian.

CONTACTS: The Glop is a scout from an alien race and supposedly has the support of that advanced civilization. However, since he does not possess the means to contact his home planet, his resources rate only at Feeble. If his allies ever return to Earth, the Glop's resources will immediately rise to the rank of Unearthly (100).

HISTORY: When a painter of apartments and furniture was approached by a strange old man to paint a statue, he balked. When the painter discovered that the statue was located in a Transylvanian castle, a great deal of money had to pass hands before he accepted the job. Still, the deal was made, and the painter traveled to the remote keep. The statue he painted—or rather covered in an oozing, paintlike substance—was huge and grotesque. But the painter followed the orders he'd been given, despite the monstrous appearance of the statue. He was trying to carry out his final command—leave the castle before midnight—when a tremor shook the castle and he was trapped beneath a fallen beam. And as the castle clock struck twelve, the hapless painter learned why the old man had wanted him to leave quickly after finishing the job: the statue came to life!

Fortunately, the painter managed to elude the Glop. But his escape also allowed the monster to turn his sights on the village below the keep. Starving after his long hibernation, the creature stormed



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down from the mountain in search of food. While the Glop rampaged through the town, the painter encountered the old man at the castle and demanded an explanation. The old guy admitted that he was a scientist. He discovered the statue and the paints in the castle, along with a parchment that revealed their unearthly origin and the method for reviving the alien beast. The scientist hoped to uncover the Glop's motives before the monster's "comrades" arrived to wake him themselves.

The Glop returned to the keep at that moment, trapping the two humans inside. In a fit of *braggadocio*, the alien boasted that he was an advance scout from a warlike race, sent to Earth to spy on the inhabitants. In time, his fellows would arrive and revive him. Much to his chagrin, though, the humans had already done that and now his mission was ruined. As the Glop prepared to ground the meddling mortals into bone dust, the painter hit upon a desperate plan. He hurled a large can of turpentine at the Glop, which washed away the alien's oozing skin and returned him to his statuelike state once more. There wasn't time for congratulations, though. The villagers, enraged by the monster's attack (and toting torches and pitchforks, as outlined in the *Complete Transylvanian Peasants' Handbook*), stormed the castle and blew it up. The Glop and the unusual paints were buried beneath the shattered keep.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES: The Glop is short on subtlety, but long on rage. He will wade into a fight with little provocation, attempting to crush whatever obstacles the despised mortals set in his path. He is prone to throwing large objects, and Judges working him into a scenario should be familiar with the rules for Blunt Throwing attacks detailed in the *MSH Advanced Set's* Players' Book.

Since the castle's destruction in the early 1960s, no one has bothered to sift through the ruins to confirm the Glop's demise. Because the body was never seen, it would be safe to assume he survived somehow and is ready to be unleashed upon the hapless denizens of the MARVEL UNIVERSE once more. Moreover, the Glop's comrades have yet to make their appearance on Earth, so a scenario centering on their arrival would be a natural; explaining why these higher beings left an immobile scout/observer in an isolated Transylvanian castle is optional.

Rewriting history

In his search for foes worthy of battling the Hulk, Xemnu the Living Titan uncovered a conspiracy. The American government, Xemnu claimed, was covering up the multitudinous invasions that plagued the world in the late 1950s and early 1960s, blotting out the names of Diablo, Groot, and the Blip from the history books. I don't know about that, but scholars of the Marvel age of monsters should note that some of the towering titans have undergone subtle changes since their first appearances. For example, in his original outing, the Glop was known as the Glob. And the living alien statue on Easter Island was known as Thor, not Thorg. Apart from the trademark reasons, I suppose the name changes make some continuity sense too. "What's that?" says Spider-Man. "There's a battle in Central Park between Thor and Magneto? Or is that Thor and Magneto? And which Magneto is it, anyway—the guy with the bucket on his head or the old monster?"

The most interesting of these updates has resulted in the birth of a new hero, a guy who is still popping up in comics regularly: Doctor Druid. The origin of this occult master, printed in *Weird Wonder Tales* #19, is actually a slightly redrawn origin story for an old character named Dr. Droom! Then, two issues of *WWT* later, Dr. Druid tells a tale in which he discovers Gorgilla, the Monster of Midnight Mountain, but that, too, is a retouched story (with Dr. Droom's, er, Druids head replacing that of the tale's true hero, a blond scientist named Scotty). Hmmm.

Maybe Xemnu was right after all. Could Goom and his dreaded son Googam be working through the government to blot out the memories of their monstrous rivals? What about the Living Colossus and Fin Fang Foom? Why have they escaped this revision of history with reputations intact? I'd say it's time for you to mobilize all truth-loving heroes in your campaign so they can restore the real history of the MARVEL UNIVERSE—or at least slug it out with a giant slime beast or two.

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Beyond the Grave

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death. Vartha do share one personality trait: They are all highly motivated, even driven, whatever their purpose.

Summoning/controlling undead

The summoning and controlling of certain types of very powerful undead, particularly mummies, is a common theme in literature and movies. The DM may wish to allow evil (and some neutral) clerics to summon some kinds of special undead from afar, then control them. The power would require a special ceremony and would depend on the availability of the proper kind of undead. Finally, the cleric would have to maintain concentration to control the undead similar to a mage controlling an elemental.

It is suggested that the cleric gain the power only when his 1d20 roll to turn the appropriate kind of undead becomes less than 10. Some appropriate kinds of undead, and the clerical level at which they could be summoned and controlled, would be: skleros* (8), angreden (5), callicantzari* * (5), skotos* * (6), mummy (8), lesser colossus* * (8), vrykolakas* * * (8), vartha (9), ch'ing shih* * * (9), and ka (14).

* See "Out of the Shadows," in *DRAGON* issue #162.

* * See "The Ungrateful Dead" in *DRAGON* issue #138.

* * * See "Hearts of Darkness" in *DRAGON* issue #126.

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