

T

by James Lewder

THE MARVEL-PHILE

Creatures on the prowl

After the downfall of the EC-style horror comic of the 1950s, chock full of entertaining but gruesome deaths and decaying zombies with various body parts missing the comic-book industry scrambled for a less shocking type of monster to fill its rosters. So it was that magazines like *Strange Tales*, in the days before Doctor Strange and the Human Torch, and *Journey Into Mystery*, before the arrival of a certain hammer-toting thunder god, came to be home for creatures of astounding size and even more astounding names—monsters like Kraa the Unhuman; Sporr, the Thing That Could Not Die; Grottu, King of the Insects; and, of course, the ever-popular Fin Fang Foom.

These mammoth menaces proved so successful that Marvel launched two more comics in 1959 to showcase them—*Tales of Suspense* and *Tales to Astonish*. Soon, these books would become the stomping ground for super heroes like Iron Man, Ant-Man, and the Hulk. For a time in the early 1960s though, their pages trembled under the tread of giant feet and echoed with the clatter of crumbling buildings.

As you might suspect, these yarns share a great deal with the “guys-in-rubber-monster-suits” school of Japanese cinema, as well as the radiation-enlarged-insect movies of the 1950s. The standard story involves a gigantic creature either landing on earth if it’s an alien beastie, or being awakened by an overly inquisitive explorer or scientist if it’s a more local menace. After some prerequisite stomping of the landscape in New York or a small village in eastern Europe, the monster’s secret weakness is uncovered. That’s part of the Monster’s Guild by-laws, it seems: All monsters over 20’ tall must have a debilitating Achilles heel that allows the puny humans of Earth to defeat it. Under no circumstances, though, should this weakness be anything so obvious that it can be uncovered before said monster gets to crush some masonry and maybe even chuck around a car or two—after all, fair’s fair.

Monsters on the loose

Releasing a towering mass of scales, claws, and muscle into your MARVEL SUPER HEROES™ campaign every once in

a while provides a great change of pace to the standard super standoffs. Scenarios involving these titanic beasts can be resolved easily in a single game session; the typical plot noted above can be worked into any locale. Used creatively, these creatures can be a challenge to even the most powerful super teams.

In an extended campaign against a specific villain, a monster can play the important role of minion. If, for example, the Red Ghost wants to distract a nosy group of heroes who are hot on his trail, he might resurrect the Glop and set him on a rampage throughout eastern Europe. While the heroes save lives and prevent the Glop from crushing Ukraine even flatter than it already is, the Red Ghost

will be free to pursue his own nefarious plans.

A light touch is important when running adventures with creatures such as Zzutak and Groot, especially if you want the games to resemble the Lee-Kirby monster epics in the original comics. The evil beasties tend to threaten humans, but generally don’t go out of their way to kill them.

They will wipe out any tanks and planes the Army or Air Force tosses against them, but are never surprised when the soldiers escape from the burning wreckage. In fact, Marvel monsters are prone to enjoy the sight of fleeing humans. It gives them the chance to laugh maniacally and bellow such classic lines as: **“I am Googam—and I am power!!”** or **“Tremble, mortals, before the awesome might of Gomdulla!”**



Color by Steve Sullivan

GOMDULLA™

The Living Pharaoh

F	EX(20)	Health: 255
A	GD(10)	
S	MN(75)	Karma: 100
E	ShX(150)	
R	AM(50)	Resources: EX(20)
I	GD(10)	
P	IN(40)	Popularity: 0

POWERS:

Body armor: Gomdulla's skin, possibly in conjunction with the seemingly indestructible mummy wrappings he wears, grants him Amazing (50) protection from physical, Force, and Energy attacks.

Levitation: Gomdulla can levitate at will with Incredible (40) power.

Earth control: Though only able to affect stone, Gomdulla has Amazing (50) power in causing stones to move or even fly at his command.

Hibernation: When the stud on Gomdulla's right foot is pressed, he goes into a sort of suspended animation. During this time, he does not age. Any examinations (even psi-probes) conducted on the Living Pharaoh while he is hibernating will reveal nothing of his nature.

TALENTS: Gomdulla is fluent in at least two human languages: English and Egyptian (both ancient and modern).

CONTACTS: The Cult of Gomdulla remains as a very small organization throughout Egypt. It is particularly active outside the major cities. The members are drawn largely from the criminal population, but they are extremely loyal to the Living Pharaoh and provide him with substantial wealth.

HISTORY: In ancient Egypt, during the reign of the pharaohs, a powerful alien landed near the Nile river. This alien, known only as Gomdulla, set about terrorizing the small community around one of the lesser pyramids. While most of the Egyptians rejected Gomdulla's demands for wealth and power, some fell at the alien's feet, proclaiming him the true ruler of the Nile basin.

The alien's reign of terror lasted only a very short time. Freedom fighters infiltrated the Cult of Gomdulla centered in the lesser pyramid, which was unfinished at the time, and discovered his weakness—a stud on the top of his right foot. Pressing the stud immobilized the alien, sending him into deep hibernation.

It remains unclear when Gomdulla was fitted with the mummylike wrappings he wears in modern appearances. Perhaps they are common garb on his planet. It

seems more likely that the alien adopted the bandages upon reaching Egypt, intent on hiding his unearthly origins and exploiting the beliefs of the locals. It's also possible that, once they had defeated Gomdulla, the freedom fighters covered the pretender to the pharaoh's throne in the traditional funeral wrappings.

What is clear is Gomdulla was swathed in bandages when archaeologists uncovered him in the early part of the twentieth century. Presumably the wrappings had fused somehow with the alien's skin, for scientists were unable to discover the true nature of the 30'-tall mummy. Gomdulla was dismissed as a hoax by some, discussed as a true mystery by others; in the small museum in Egypt that was his home, however, Gomdulla soon became just another dusty fragment of history.

For at least 40 years, Gomdulla stood motionless in the museum. Finally, in the early 1960s, two small boys playing around the giant's feet fell against the stud and awoke the sleeping alien. Waiting for night to fall and the museum to empty, Gomdulla smashed through the museum's thick stone wall and escaped into the darkness.

It didn't take long for the giant to resurrect the Cult of Gomdulla in the backwater area of Egypt, and within weeks he had taken control of the pyramid once more. His agents began to gather treasure for the newly risen demigod. That Gomdulla, now called the Living Pharaoh, quickly gathered epithets like "the Cruel" and "the Merciless" are testament enough to the type of organization he was building.

The semi-secret Cult of Gomdulla soon came to the attention of Interpol, which assigned an agent to discover the identity of its leaders. The agent got quite a surprise when he found that the missing giant mummy was the cult's focus. In the battle that followed, the Interpol agent escaped death at the alien's hands thanks to the intervention of the cult's high priest. A descendant of the freedom fighters who had dealt with Gomdulla when he first landed in Egypt, the high priest was himself a spy for the forces aligned against the Living Pharaoh. He knew to press the stud hidden by the wrappings on the alien's foot, once again sending Gomdulla into hibernation.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES: Gomdulla is content with his guise as an Egyptian demigod and will do all he can to hide his extraterrestrial nature. He is cruel and quite a braggart. He will rarely confront foes without proclaiming dire fates for any who dare oppose him. Overly fond of showing off his powers, Gomdulla will never try to hide his strengths. His goals are simple: the collection of wealth and absolute power over as great an area as he can manage.

For modern-day campaigns, you might assume the following to be true: Since his defeat in the sixties, Gomdulla has been passed from Interpol to SHIELD to more mundane scientific operations, but no one has been able to uncover the alien's origin. The most prevalent theory supported by these groups claims that Gomdulla is some sort of renegade super-robot, though the alien technology that created him remains elusive. Some even posit Gomdulla is nothing more than a more advanced model of Rama-Tut's robot warriors. Gomdulla was recently returned to the Egyptian government, which considers the dormant "Living Pharaoh" a national treasure of sorts.

GROOT™

The Monster from Planet X

F	EX(20)	Health: 330
A	GD(10)	
S	ShY(200)	Karma: 120
E	UN(100)	
R	AM(50)	Resources: UN(100)
I	RM(30)	
P	IN(40)	Popularity: 0

POWERS:

Body armor: Groot's thick, barklike skin provides Remarkable (30) protection against physical, Force, and Energy attacks. This armor provides Groot no protection from attacks of normal-sized insects, such as ants or termites, which can easily penetrate the fibers and damage his pulpy interior. This vulnerability also includes characters who can shrink to the size of a small insect.

Flight: Groot can travel through space at Unearthly (100) speeds, during which time he is sheathed in a specialized force field that protects him from the rigors of outer space (no additional life support necessary). This force field provides no other protection and appears as a brilliant yellow luminescence, which sometimes surrounds Groot for days after he lands on a planet.

Growth: Groot can alter his size by absorbing wood. His initial size will be Incredible (20' tall), and for each turn he is allowed to draw wooden objects into his body, he will grow one rank in height, up to Shift Y (50' tall). The process can be reversed, though no wood is expelled from his body in shrinking back to his starting height.

Plant control: Groot exerts Shift X (150) control over all trees and woody flora, a power that functions like the more common form of the *Animate objects* power. He can command timber to accelerate its growth, as well as move like animated servants. Trees will obey his commands without pause, despite biological limitations to the contrary (i.e., pines that walk around to do Groot's bidding will not die from lack of water, etc.).

Resistance to fire and heat: Groot, like all inhabitants of Planet X, has this power at the Remarkable (30) level.

TALENTS: From Planet X, Groot studied the Earth, giving him knowledge of English. He also has Amazing (50) talent in biology and Incredible (40) talent in space sciences.

HISTORY: Returning home from a party, Alice and Leslie Evans witnessed a strange glowing object crash on the outskirts of the small town in which they lived. Because it was late, they decided not to investigate. For the next few days, though, the weird occurrence plagued Leslie, despite his efforts to throw himself into his work as a research biologist.

Only when trees, fences, and other wooden objects began to disappear around town did Leslie give in to his suspicions and go out to investigate the crash site. In the forest, he discovered a glowing wooden giant, 20' tall and shaped roughly like a huge tree. This monstrous creature was absorbing all the wood he could gather—the trees, the missing fence, barrels, brooms, and even doghouses. And with each bit of wood he absorbed, the creature grew larger.

Evans rushed to warn the town, but it wasn't long before the alien, now 50' tall, lumbered out of the forest. He announced himself as Groot, monarch of Planet X and overlord of all timber in the galaxy. The plan he had come to institute was simple, but astounding: Groot would command the nearby trees to form a wall around the town, then expand their roots to weave a net beneath it. When that root-net was complete, Groot would order the trees to carry the town into space, out of the solar system, and into the waiting labs on Planet X, where the earthlings would provide ample test subjects for the alien scientists.

Though Groot never revealed how he could make the trees fly into space, the power he exhibited over the local pines and oaks seemed to prove he wasn't bluffing. Under the overlord's command, the trees surrounded the town and their roots started to grow into a net. The town tried to stop Groot—with bullets and even fire—but nothing worked.

Fortunately, Evans thought to confront Groot with a less obvious weapon. Whereas bullets could not penetrate the alien's bark and fire had no effect upon him whatsoever, the special termites Evans bred in his lab made short work of the 50' tree. With Groot gone, the town hailed Evans as a hero and started the long process of cleaning up after the rampaging flora.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES: Groot is extremely confident of his abilities—to the point of being smug and reckless. He will boastfully reveal his plans if given the

chance and won't shy away from direct conflict with heroes. If the battle begins to turn against him, though, he will quickly summon trees to fight for him.

Groot's plans for stealing a small town or village for scientific experiment on Planet X provide a great springboard for future adventures. Even though the overlord was defeated by Leslie Evans in the early 1960s, his successor on Planet X might come to Earth to kidnap another village. With all the resources of Planet X behind him, the new monarch might even be equipped with modified armor that cannot be breached by insects and other small weapons so easily.

ZZUTAK™

The Thing That Shouldn't Exist

F	AM(50)	Health: 404
A	PR(4)	
S	ShX(150)	Karma: 6
E	ShY(200)	
R	FB(2)	Resources: None
I	FB(2)	
P	FB(2)	Popularity: 0

POWERS:

Body armor: Zzutak's unusual nature grants him Monstrous protection from physical and Force attacks, as well as Class 1000 protection from cold, heat, fire, and corrosives.

Immortality: The Thing That Shouldn't Exist cannot be destroyed, only rendered immobile.

TALENTS: None.

HISTORY: When a tall, mysterious stranger arrived on the doorstep of comic-book artist Frank Johnson, little did he suspect he was dealing with the leader of a dangerous group of Aztec revolutionaries. The man claimed to be a fan of the monsters Johnson painted for comic books such as *Strange Tales*. To help the talented artist achieve true greatness, the stranger gave him a set of wondrous "three-dimensional" paints, intended to give his work a more lifelike quality.

The paints certainly proved to have incredible powers. Whatever Johnson depicted with the oils quickly moved away from the canvas and became real. Using the paints was not without its dangers, though, as the artist soon discovered. Viewing even the tiniest bit of enchanted paint caused Johnson to succumb to the subliminal suggestions the stranger had implanted in the weird gift.

Johnson found himself setting off for Mexico, very much against his will. He trekked for quite some time into the Sierra Madre Mountains. In a remote valley there, he came upon a perfectly preserved Aztec temple—and the stranger who had



first given him the paints. It was only then that he learned the reason he had received the dangerous present.

The stranger, like all the residents of the valley, was a descendant of a group of Aztecs that had fled the Spanish conquistadors. The Aztecs managed to hide in the valley for centuries, maintaining their culture. In that time, they worked to perfect the three-dimensional paints. With the paints—and the help of a talented fantasy artist like Johnson—the Aztecs hoped to create an army of monsters, then sweep out of the valley and retake Mexico.

Though he tried to fight the lure of the paints, Johnson was compelled to complete the first stage of the revolutionaries' plan: a painting of Zzutak, the Thing That Shouldn't Exist. As with the other, less fantastic objects Johnson had created with the paints, Zzutak stepped away from the canvas as a living thing. A creature of great size and strength, Zzutak was at the command of the leader of the Aztecs. And as the Thing That Shouldn't Exist was put to work sealing the valley so the monster army could be created in complete secrecy, Johnson started painting another beast.

The artist knew he was the only person who could prevent the death and destruction a monster army would bring down upon Mexico. With little more than hope driving him on, Johnson began to chant softly to the creature he was painting: "Zzutak is your enemy—you must destroy him!" The desperate ploy worked. When the second monster stepped from the canvas, it immediately set upon Zzutak. Locked in combat, the evenly matched foes moved into the Aztec temple. Their brawl brought the ancient structure crashing down around them, burying them both beneath tons of stone and earth. Unable to move the rubble, caught in unending conflict with his equally powerful foe, Zzutak was trapped.

In the collapse of the temple, a stone struck the Aztec elder, wiping out his memory of the planned overthrow of Mexico. Deprived of their temple, their leader, and their monster army, the other revolutionaries wandered out of the valley, defeated. Before leaving, Johnson destroyed the remaining paints.

On returning to New York, Johnson tried to sell a mundane rendering of Zzutak to

the editor of *Strange Tales*. Though he balked at the creature, which was just too fantastic to be believable, the editor allowed the artist to finish the painting. If the numbering of the comic universe's *Strange Tales* runs parallel to that in the real world, Johnson's rendition of Zzutak, the Thing That Shouldn't Exist, appeared on *Strange Tales* #88, released in 1961.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES: Zzutak is a slow-moving, awkward, and almost-mindless pawn of the person in control of the Aztec revolutionaries who first created the mystic paints. He will do as his master commands, but will fight savagely to protect himself even without someone directing him.

Many possibilities exist for working Zzutak into campaign play. A villain could revive the fanatic Aztec organization that first created the mystic paints and the monster. Rescuing the somewhat hapless beast from the ruins of the Aztec temple should prove relatively easy for any evildoer with access to money or construction equipment.

Though Johnson destroyed the paints the Aztec high priest gave him, the formula for the fantastic three-dimensional paints surely exist somewhere in the hidden valley. Without the guidance of the Aztec high priest, the paints confer the Animate Drawings power to the user at Amazing (50) intensity. The person possessing the paints can only animate objects that he can draw.

Where more monsters dwell

Looking for more inspiration? The original comics featuring the Stan Lee-scripted, Jack Kirby-rendered monster bashes cost quite a bit these days on the comic book back-issue market. However many of the reprint titles Marvel issued in the 1970s are still affordable, if you can find them. Titles like *Monsters on the Prowl*, *Creatures on the Loose*, and *Where Monsters Dwell* can often be spied in bargain bins at comic shops. Recently Marvel released a trade paperback called *Monster Masterworks*, that collects some of the best creature feature stories and sports a great Walt Simonson cover.

On the film front, any of the giant insect flicks of the 1950s—*Them!*, *Beginning of the End*, or *Tarantula*, to name a few—as well as American creature stomps like *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* or *Q*, can provide great material for monster-based adventures. The Japanese Godzilla series, especially the multi-beastie epic *Destroy All Monsters*, should serve as primary inspirations. For the best in super-hero/monster clashes, though, you can't beat any of the myriad incarnations of Ultraman. For more than two decades, this Japanese hero has been saving the Earth from just the sorts of menaces you're about to unleash upon your campaign world.

