

The Origins of Monsters...

and How Their Anime/Manga Counterparts Compare

The Spooky Season has arrived... so let's take a look at some classic and beloved monsters! Also, while we're at it, let's check out how faithfully (or unfaithfully) they were adapted into the popular media we call anime and manga.

I'm going to be saving the best for last – and by the best, I mean vampires.



Golem



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The golem is a fully animated being of artificial origin, one created by humans in the likeness of man. This strange creature stems from Jewish folklore. The word “golem” is Hebrew for “shapeless mass.” Despite the fact that a golem possesses no soul, it is still technically considered to be “alive,” a fact that clearly distinguishes it from the likes of robots or machines. Possessing supernatural strength and frightful power, these beings are invaluable tools put to good use by those who have the knowledge and ability needed to create them.

As it possesses no real mind of its own, the golem is inseparable from the will of its creator. That said, they follow their instructions quite literally to the letter, and their actions may not always reflect the creator’s true intent. While doing research on this particular aspect of the golem, I was reminded of something that one of my computer science professors liked to say back when I was in college. It was something along these lines: “The computer is powerful... but stupid.” The idea is that a computer does *exactly* what you tell it, carrying out your instructions in the most literal sense possible – even if your instructions do not properly reflect your true intent. The reason, of course, is that neither a computer nor a golem has the intelligence needed to determine whether what you’ve said (i.e. your instructions) is different from what you meant (i.e. your intent). In this way, a golem is a powerful tool whose unfortunate lack of intelligence can lead to serious miscommunications and disastrous consequences.

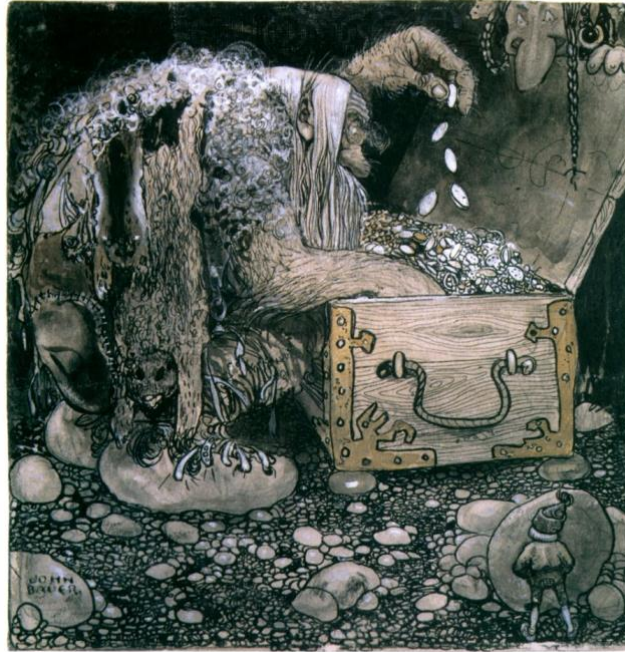
Anime Golem (*To Aru Majutsu no Index*)



A good example of a golem as depicted in anime is Ellis from *To Aru Majutsu no Index*. Ellis was created by magician Sherry Cromwell of the Anglican Church, who named it after her dear and deceased childhood friend. She controls it with a piece of chalk, scribbling instructions in a foreign language for Ellis to dutifully follow. Sherry's religion of choice makes this an obvious departure from the golem's origins in Jewish folklore, as it was well established that only powerful rabbis are capable of creating and controlling golems.

Another notable liberty that *To Aru* took with its golem is the fact that Ellis shifts to "automaton mode" after Sherry's chalk is destroyed in battle. As a golem has no mind or consciousness of its own, it's honestly a bit of a stretch to think that it could truly perform any action without instructions delivered to it directly from its creator.

Troll



The troll is a human-like, nature-dwelling creature that originated in Norse mythology. While it's been depicted in various ways over the course of time, its dangerous and bestial nature has become practically intrinsic to it – and as such, its hostile demeanor is a staple that contemporary authors very rarely stray from. This monster is quite a common sight in modern fantasy.

Almost everything about the troll – from its appearance to its demeanor to its habitat – changes drastically depending on the story or tale in question. In Norse mythology, these beings were declared to be unfriendly and unhelpful, taking up residence in remote places such as mountains, rocks, and caves. Later on, in Scandinavian folklore, their portrayal evolved quite a bit, and wildly varying descriptions of their look and feel began to emerge. In some cases, they were portrayed as simpleminded and hideous creatures, while other accounts depicted them as highly intelligent entities entirely indistinguishable from human beings.

Manga Troll (Berserk)



Readers looking for an example of how trolls are depicted in contemporary fiction need look no further than Kentaro Miura's beloved manga *Berserk*. Those familiar with the series are doubtlessly aware of its tendency to take everyday ideas and explore the darker side of them – and the way Miura opted to portray the troll is a perfect example of this. As this creature does not have a well-established look or feel – due in no small part to its highly inconsistent portrayal over the years – Miura was presented with a chance to take many creative liberties. That was an opportunity that he took full advantage of.

At surface level, his interpretation of the troll is not shockingly revolutionary – in fact, the traits and behaviors he settled on were ones that had already proven tried and true. All the same, he didn't hesitate to give this creature that signature *Berserk* twist. By intensifying the troll's preestablished negative qualities and worsening its already unpleasant connotations, he transformed a staple of the fantasy genre into a horrifying monstrosity unlike any other.

It's very difficult to point out any inconsistencies between Miura's version of the troll and its portrayal in mythology and folklore, as its depiction has been steadily mutating and evolving ever since its first inception. That said, I can confirm that this iteration of the creature we call the troll is one of the most repulsive and terrifying you could ever hope to find.

Vampire



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The vampire is an entity strongly associated with the idea of “evil,” heinous and vile by its very nature. It technically originated in folklore many centuries ago, though its earliest depictions were rather vague and did not match up well at all with the monster we know and love today. While the creatures described in these centuries-old accounts did feast on blood, their similarity to the modern vampire ended there – they were much closer to demons and spirits than the likes of Count Dracula.

As the notion of the vampire evolved over the centuries, it slowly began to resemble the now-beloved creature that haunts the pages and screens of the world today. Oddly enough, the contemporary vampire is almost always presented in the same way, regardless of where you look. It's a creature with pale skin and a slender physique – and more often than not, it's the very embodiment of sexiness.

Anime Vampire (Jojo's Bizarre Adventure)



The popular anime *Jojo's Bizarre Adventure* put an interesting spin on the modern vampire with its well-known antagonist Dio Brando. His highly muscular build marks an obvious departure from the vampire's trademark slim physique, although it's actually quite typical for *Jojo* – in fact, sometimes it feels as though almost every character in this series is as brawny as can be.

Another notable twist is the way in which Dio lost his humanity in the first place – the transformation was not brought on by the fangs of a fellow vampire, but rather by the blades of a mysterious stone mask. While this is atypical for a vampire in modern cinema and literature, it's not necessarily a departure from the way that the vampire was portrayed centuries ago. Back then, it was actually believed that humans could become vampires in a wide variety of ways – seemingly unrelated things such as untreated wounds and even the movements of domesticated animals purportedly posed a risk. Long story short, it was in no way limited to the classic “vampire bite” that's so commonly utilized by authors today.