

Supernatural Creatures in Philippine Folklore

A short list of the supernatural creatures in Philippine folklore...

The scary stench of Halloween is now hanging in the air. Everywhere, we see faces of monsters, beasts, and other Halloween creatures. In the Philippines, it is a common belief that supernatural beings are working at large during this season. Their powers are greatest at this time, and hence, they are in their most evil facets.

The Philippine folklore is rich with mythical and supernatural creatures. It is not as popular as those in Western cultures since it is mostly composed of fragmented tales of horror and wonder. Nevertheless, it has influenced the lives of Filipinos that certain customs are being practiced so to appease these beings and to prevent them from terrorizing people. So which supernatural creatures Filipinos are most afraid of? What are their equivalents to other cultures? And how evil are they?

Many Filipino customs are influenced by their beliefs in various supernatural creatures. Say avoiding too much noise when near old trees so as not to disturb these unearthly beings, or beeping the vehicle when crossing bridges at nights as a permission from them. It may seem peculiar but these habits and more have become part of the way of life for many Filipinos, even for those living in the urban areas.

Aswang



Aswangs are the most feared mythical creature by the Filipinos. They are Filipino ghouls and shapeshifters. They are human-like by day but transform into monsters at night. They can change from human to an animal form like bat, bird, pig, cat, or black dog. The transformation can happen through their own will or through the use of foul concocted oil. They also have the ability to steal cadavers secretly and replace them with the trunk of a banana tree carved in the cadaver's likeness.

Aswangs wait by the roadsides, preying upon unsuspecting travelers. Some attacks houses to feed on sleeping people. It is said that human liver and heart are their favorite parts. Aswangs prefer pregnant women who are about to give birth. They love human fetus that they have developed the ability to track down pregnant women by the scent of their unborn child. Upon finding the house of a pregnant mother, the aswang positions itself on the roof and digs a hole through which it drops its long thin tongue to enter the woman's womb and feast on the fetus.



Since aswangs can take on a human image, it is hard to detect them in a crowd. However, there are many superstitions on how to deal with them. Firstly, it is said that you can determine if another human being is an aswang if you see your own reflection in their eyes as upside down. Also, the presence of an aswang can be revealed by using a bottle of special oil extracted from boiled and decanted coconut meat mixed with certain plant stems. When an aswang comes around, the oil will boil and will continue until the aswang has departed. Further, aswangs are afraid of salt, ginger, garlic, rosary, stingray's tails (*buntot pagi*) and shiny, sterling silver sword, and so these items can be used as defense weapons against them. These creatures cannot heal themselves, so an injury acquired as an aswang will remain when they revert back to human form.

The myth of Aswang is popular in the Visayas, particularly in the provinces of Capiz, Antique and Iloilo. The aswang is also known as *wakwak*, *tiktik*, *bal-bal*, *soc-soc*, and *yanggaw*.

Tiyanak



The **tiyanak** is another popular name in the Philippine folklore. Also known as *impakto*, it is a baby who died before receiving baptism rites. After its death, it goes into the Limbo, a certain place in Hell where unbaptized dead people fall into, and then transforms into an evil spirit. It returns to the mortal world as a goblin or a vampire-like creature, bound to eat living victims. A tiyanak can also be the offspring of a mortal woman and a demon, or an aborted fetus which comes to take vengeance on its mother.

Tiyanaks are mostly found in forests. Upon seeing a human, a tiyanak transforms into what appears to be a normal baby. When the unwary person comes near to comfort the child, it then changes back into its true

form. It develops sharp claws and fangs, and attacks its victim. The tiyanaks are thought to have the same vulnerability as the aswangs.

There are many versions of tiyanaks. In Mindoro, tiyanaks have the ability to fly, still in the form of a baby. In Pampanga, they are described as small, nut-brown people who float on air, rather than walk on ground.

White Lady



Dressed in white. Long hair. Beautiful face covered in blood. Woman floating on air...

Seen one? Well, you have just seen a White Lady. Along with other supernatural beings, White Ladies are often used as subjects to convey horror and mystery. These creatures are common among folks around the country, from the secluded barrios and towns up to the highly urbanized cities.

The most popular tale of White Lady is the one of Balete Drive in Quezon City. According to legends, the ghost of a long-haired woman in a white dress appears to taxi drivers doing the graveyard shift or to those solitary people driving by Balete drive in the wee hours of the morning. The woman appears in the rear view mirror for a split second. Some accidents on this road are blamed on the White Lady. It is believed that the White Lady is the ghost of a woman who died when her car crashed in Balete Drive.

Across the country, there are many versions and reported sightings of White Lady. Some White Ladies are ghosts of women victims of murder and heinous crimes, accidents, and other tragedy.

Tikbalang

The **tikbalang** (also *tigbalang*, *tigbalan*, *tikbalan*, or *demon horse*) is a half-man and half-horse creature. It has the head and feet of a horse, and the body of a human. It usually appears on the night of full moon looking for a female prey and usually rapes the victim in order to bear its offspring. Tikbalangs are playful creatures and they usually make people imagine things that are not real, sometimes to the point that they become crazy.

Tikbalangs are believed to live in dark, sparsely populated, foliage-overgrown areas, specifically in bamboo or banana groves, atop balete trees, and even beneath bridges. According to legends, a pair of Tikbalangs is being wed when rain falls while the sun is shining.

Manananggal



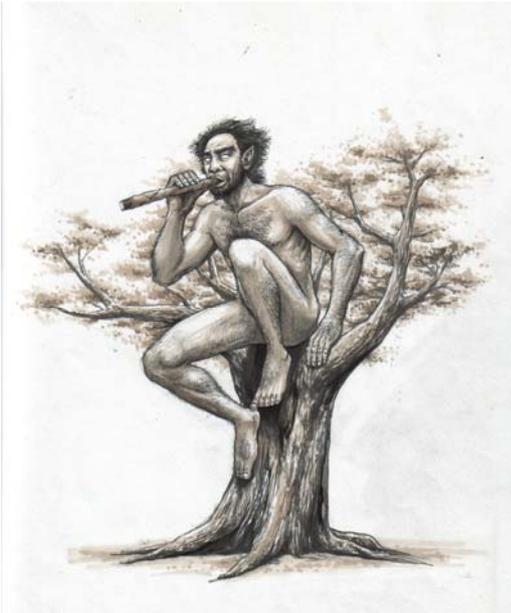
The Manananggal is a special type of aswang who has the ability to fly after separating itself from the lower half of its body. It resembles the Western vampire in being an evil, man-eating monster or witch. Its name is taken from the Filipino word “tanggal” which means to “to separate” or “to remove.” Most manananggals, like most aswangs, are females. It appears in human form during the day. At night, it finds an isolated place where she will leave her lower torso. It separates itself by will and its upper body flies, using bat-like wings, to hunt for victims.

Like other aswangs, the manananggal feeds on babies and fetuses from a mother’s womb. It uses its proboscis or long tongue to penetrate the woman’s navel and suck the blood from the unborn child. At other times, she seduces men with her beauty and lures them to a desolate place where she will eat him alive. She usually feasts on the insides like the heart, stomach, and liver.

The mananggal can be killed by sunlight if she remains in her monster form. This is why she must unite with her lower half before dawn. Hence, in order to destroy the manananggal, one must find her other half which she left behind. Salt, ash, or garlic must then be put on the exposed flesh since the creature is vulnerable to these items. This will prevent her from being combined again, and so when day breaks, she will be destroyed.



Kapre



Kapre is the Filipino equivalent of bigfoot from the West. It is a tree demon with more human characteristics. It is described as a dirty, dark giant (around 7 to 9 ft tall) who hides and lives within and atop large trees, particularly old trees such as balete (or banyan), acacia, or mango trees. This creature loves to smoke huge rolls of cigars or tobaccos. Unlike other supernatural beings, the kapre does not harm human; instead, it is a “friendly” creature who loves to fool around. It may make contact with people to offer friendship, or if it is attracted to a woman. It also play pranks to people and scares away little children playing at night. It is said that if you are stuck in a place and keep going around in circles, a kapre must have been playing with you. To escape the spell, you must wear your shirt inside-out.

Kapres are large hairy male creatures. The term is taken from the Arabic “*kaffir*”, meaning a non-believer in Islam. It was first used by early Arabs to refer to the tall non-Muslim Dravidians who were dark-skinned. It was later brought to the Philippines by the Spanish who had contacts with the Moors. The kapre is also known locally as *agta*.

Engkanto



Engkantos, or *engkantadas* (when referring to female creatures), are nature fairies and spirits. They are said to be angels who revolted with Lucifer against the Lord. When the angels of God drove them out of heaven, some fell on earth. Those who fell in the forest or thick woods and lived in trees are the engkantos. Hence they will possess some extraordinary powers but are limited. They are fair skinned, blond, with blue or green eyes, and far shorter or much taller than the average human. They are mostly beautiful, with so much grace and charm that they attract many people. The dwelling place of the engkanto may look like a large rock or trees but to their human friends, their house can appear as beautiful palaces. They also like to live in large trees like the balete where they can also put their belongings.

Engkantos are angered if harmed. They play pranks on full moons. In an engkanto hates you, you will become sick until he pities you. They like silent type of people who dress decently and who never swear.

Here are some superstitions practiced by many Filipinos with regards to engkantos:

- After the Angelus or when the evening has set, parents do not allow children to play outside the house since they may bump into engkantos or dil-ingon-nato (beings unlike us) which are already running around.
- Excuse yourself from engkantos when taking a bath in the river for they may inflict sickness on you.
- Say “tabi-tabi po” to make them know your presence, or else, something bad may happen.
- A lovely boy or girl should not stay long outside the house to avoid being taken by engkantos.
- Gathering orchids in the wild without permission will make you shed bitter tears for an enchantress might transform herself to a flower and will punish you for your wrong doing.
- Howling of dogs or cackling of hen means presence of engkantos.
- Don't laugh or point to a balete tree for there live fairies and enchantress.
- If you cut a balete tree, for if you do, you will be given death as a punishment for you have destroyed the place where the fairies and the enchantresses dwell.
- If a person was taken by an engkanto, beat drums near balete tree to recover lost persons.

Sigbin



Sigbin, *sigben*, or *zegben* is said to be another form of aswang. It has the appearance of a kangaroo, Tasmanian devil or a hornless goat but with spotty fur. It has very large ears which it can clap and a long, flexible tail that can be used as whip. It also has a wide mouth with large fangs. It walks backwards with its head lowered between its hind legs. This creature has the ability to become invisible, but its presence is still detectable by the nauseating odor it emits.

It is believed that the sigbin goes out at night to suck the blood of victims from their shadows. During Holy Week, the sigbin looks for children that it can kill for their heart which it uses as amulets. It is said that there are families known as *Sigbinan* or “owner of sigbin” who keep the creature in jars made of clay. As a return, the owner shall possess great fortune and have the power to control the sigbin.

In other parts of the country, the sigbin is known as *amamayong*. Other countries have urban legends of similar creatures known as chupacabra.

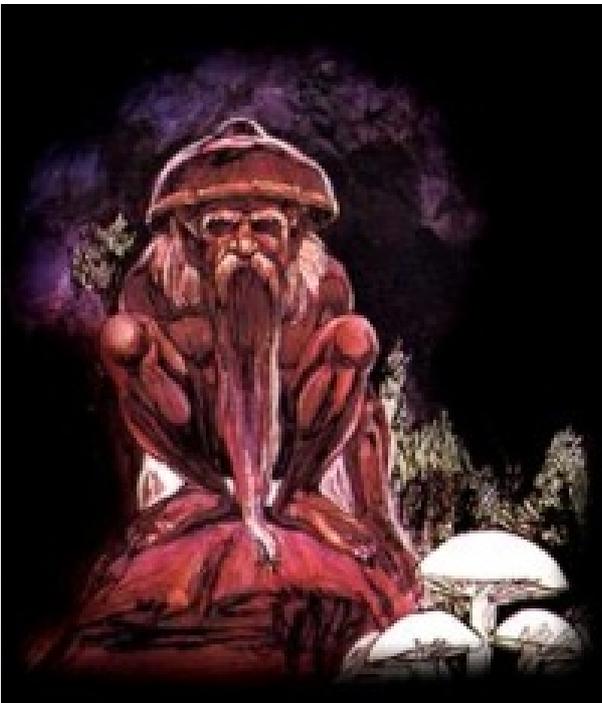
Multo



Multo is the Tagalog word for ghost. It comes from the Spanish word *muerto*, meaning “dead”. Multo are spirits of the deceased that remain in the living world to handle unfinished business, seek revenge, or search for a means to communicate with their loved ones. A multo may also be seeking a replacement so that it can live again.

Multo are not necessarily considered ‘bad’ spirits. In fact, most Multo are harmless; their interaction is limited to turning lights on and off or causing strange noises in the house. However, some Multo are malignant spirits that can cause harm. There are also Multo that haunt certain places, such as old buildings or churches. Common themes in ghost legends include the White Lady, the headless priest and the phantom hitchhiker.

Nuno sa Punso



A nuno or nuno sa punso is a dwarf-like creature or goblin in Philippine folklore which lives in an anthill or termite mound. The term “nuno sa punso” means ancestor or grandparent of the anthill. It is described as a small old man with a long beard. It is ill-tempered and easily gets angered. If someone disturbs, especially kicks, his mound, the nuno would put curse on that person. In effect, the offender would have swollen foot or pain on any part of his body, experience vomiting blood, urinate black liquid, inflict illness, and have excessive hair growth on the back.

An *albularyo*, or a Philippine practitioner of traditional medicine, can tell if a particular illness is caused by a nuno's curse through a ceremony known as *tawas*. The albularyo melts a piece of candle and using a spoon, it is poured into water. An image eventually forms, presumably resembling a nuno, which will be then interpreted by the albularyo. In order to be cured, the victim's family may give offerings to the nuno, such as fruits, drinks, food, and material objects, or the victim itself ask for the nuno's forgiveness.



Sources:

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