



Mythical Creatures of the Philippines

Truth or Fiction?

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Many Westerners know about the myriad of mythical creatures that inhabit Philippine folklore and myth. Sharing some of its origins from stories and tales brought by pre-Spanish settlers, others were adopted from cultural interactions with other Asian neighbors. Passed on from generation to generation, they have been assimilated into the country's local customs, stories and beliefs. Even today, many Philippine locals ardently believe in the existence of these mythical creatures. Transcending and evolving to suit Filipino culture, each mythical creature of the Philippines has its own unique qualities. Here are only some of them:

Aswang or Asuang

In human form during the day, they turn into vampire-like creatures as darkness falls. These "shape shifters" can transform themselves into large animals usually that of a black dog, pig or bull. They prefer to prey on children and the old because they are weaker but will also attack single unguarded individuals. They eat the guts or inner organs (heart and liver) of their victims.

Manananggal

Although literally means "to take" in Filipino, it describes the way that these creatures are able to "detach" its upper torso with that of its waist and lower extremities. A beautiful female by day, they apply a special oil to their bodies (sometimes with a chant) to undergo the transformation. Fangs, claws and bat like wings will grow until the whole upper torso, with guts hanging out, is detached from the lower body. Setting down on rooftops, they will look for holes where they can insert their tongue. They prey on unborn fetuses. Their tongue changes into a long hollow tube that can pierce the pregnant belly and suck the fetus out. They select and befriend their victims during the day. And find the aroma of pregnant women irresistible. Previously, many miscarriages had been attributed to their attacks.

Duwende

Dwarves which are of two types, white (good) and black (bad). They live on the base of trees and termite mounds. If their homes are disturbed or destroyed they take revenge by giving bad luck, lingering illness or even death. White dwarves when treated with respect and kindness bring good luck and treasures. Sometimes a dwarf prince/princess may fall in love with a human and bring their spirit to their underground kingdom. Psychological disorders and retardation are often blamed on dwarves.

Kapre

This black hairy giant likes to sit on a branch of a Balite tree and smoke his big cigar. They have big eyes, sharp teeth, long fingernails and huge trunk like legs. Appearing usually at midnight, they scare the wits out of hapless travelers and are often harmless.

Tikbalang

This malevolent creature has the head and lower body of a horse and the torso of a man. They often scare or play tricks with travelers by getting them lost. They will even attempt to trick young maidens to marry them.

Mangkukulam/Mangbabarang

A witch that uses "black magic" to do harm to others, usually for profit or revenge. Using spells, incantations and curses they can cause pain, sickness and even death. They can make potions to kill or to fall in love. Using voodoo-like dolls, they cause unbearable pain to their victims by inserting pins/needles to the different parts of the dolls' body. They can also use insects and other small creatures to invade the different orifices of the body. The nemesis of the "Mangkukulam" is the "Albularyo" or healer who uses his powers for good.

Engkanto

"Enchanted ones" are invisible ethereal beings from a different reality. They are able to see us and oftentimes take offense when we unknowingly bump into them. They can also cause discomfort and sickness. Tall, white and beautiful they are likened to "elves" in western culture who also have pointed ears.

Tiyanak

Aborted or dead fetuses buried without being baptized. Their bodies are inhabited and used by demonic spirits. They have very sharp teeth, long fingernails and very black skin. They lure their victims by imitating the cries of an abandoned infant. They eat the inner organs and drink the blood of their victims.

Told by countless storytellers ages ago, these mystical creatures continue to thrive in the Filipinos' imagination. Fueled by the belief in the supernatural and handed down traditions, stories of encounters with these mystical creatures will continue to prevail.

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