

THE MANANANGGAL MURDERS

KEEPER'S MYSTERY GUIDE

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Complexity: 6

Time and Place: The Apartments; Metro Manila, Philippines - July 20XX (Rainy Season)

Contact: Sister Theresa (she/her)

OMEN-CLASS MONSTERS, initial evidence suggests a Door of Power may be present in Manila, Philippines. Investigate the murders of the declining manananggal population. Former agent Sister Theresa of the Broken Crucifix has requested assistance, observation, and direct action. HARBINGER-CLASS MONSTER may be behind the murders, or encouraging violence and chaos from the shadows. Find the DOOR OF POWER and contain it before the Harbinger claims ASCENSION.

CONTENT WARNING: Human prejudice against monsters (especially aswang), smoking, alcohol, violent murders, insects/swarming insects, and body horror.

Pronunciation Guide

Manananggal: Mah-nuh-nuhng-GUL

Aswang: Uh-SWUNG

Maguindanaon: Mah-GIN-da-now-un



Description

Typhoons of unusual ferocity have battered the city of Manila. Poorer areas of the city frequently flood (blocked sewers will overflow and rain water is waist high), but people persevere and make do. As the Mystery plays out, remember to allude to the heavy rains, rumbling thunder, and sudden lightning storms. When it isn't raining, the air is hot and humid.

"The Apartments" was meant to be temporary housing for migrants in the 1960s. Generations have lived here, but things are slowly falling apart. Over the years, members of the monstrous population have moved here—most monsters have difficulty finding landlords who will accept them. The biggest monster population in the complex is the *manananggal*. Up to 10 are crammed into a single apartment that should normally house 1-2 people.

Manananggal can disguise themselves, passing as human. While they have many genders, humans often read them as being feminine. During the day they are sluggish, the warm Philippine sun usually putting them into a stupor. In the evening, they are much more active. At their most comfortable, the manananggal will open up their back and extend their bat-like wings (often stretching six feet across). If they're relaxed and feel safe, they will leave behind their lower body (waist down) in a secure location and fly off into the night to meet with friends and family.

A manananggal does not often feel safe. Myths of old describe manananggal devouring humans alive, especially pregnant women. This is not true, of course—a manananggal has a diet similar to that of humans. But the years have not been kind to the manananggal and they keep to themselves and hide their true nature from humans.

Because of their nocturnal tendencies, the manananggal often have careers that thrive on the night shift or odd hours—security, janitorial services, social media management, sex work, call centers, and work that is outsourced to the Philippines.

The manananggal are one of the oldest aswang, a Faction of monsters who once were politically powerful and owned much of the land. But that was a long time ago. Manananggal are long lived and only the very oldest remember such a time. Most elders don't live in places like the Apartments. Instead, younger generations live there. Despite the numerous attempts of the government to force the manananggal out to find housing elsewhere, the monsters are a strong community.

The murders started four weeks ago. At first, no foul play was suspected. Manananggal wouldn't come home and their lower half were found in their rooms, abandoned. But days passed and the upper halves were found, or what remained of them. It appears they were torn limb from limb, with some of their internal organs missing.

Beginning the Mystery

The Omens are flown directly to the site. They land on the roof of one of the aging residential buildings.

The sun has just set, and the city lights burn brightly on the horizon. Manananggal are waking up, most are getting ready to leave for work. The delicious smell of food fills the air, and the PCs can hear family members calling each other to eat breakfast in the distance.

It's raining hard and Sister Theresa is waiting alone. The wind pushes against her umbrella violently and her habit is caught in the wind, hiding most of her face.

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Establishing Questions

Ask each one to a different PC:

- ✱ **Sister Theresa** was once a human DIVISION agent, but she left the agency claiming to have found God. You know this is not true. Why did she really come back to the Philippines? Why are the two of you still close?
- ✱ **One of you** was once here years—if not decades—ago. How have things changed for the worse in recent years? Which of the manananggal is waiting for you, eager for a reunion?

The Victims

- ✱ **Samantha Reyes** (she/her), a call center agent and aspiring novelist who had an on again off again relationship with Emily Santos
- ✱ **Lily Bautista** (she/her), a volunteer nurse and activist who was best friends with Mickey Yap
- ✱ **Gin** (he/him), a community leader and healer who was closest to Georgie

Contact: Sister Theresa (she/her)

Cheeky grin, knowing eyes, plump, wrinkled nun habit. Sister Theresa is in her late twenties, with dark skin and round features. She swears often and corrects herself quickly, murmuring apologies to God under her breath. She smells of cigarettes and whiskey and regularly offers the PCs a cigarette from a crumpled pack.

She quickly ushers the PCs in, walking down several flights of stairs. Most of the elevators are inoperable. The remaining few will often stop in between floors, taking hours to fix.

The apartment is humble and cramped. A crucifix, an old family photo in an ornate frame, a single newspaper clipping with a headline that hints at a secret DIVISION mission.

Sister Theresa offers whiskey, “taking out the good stuff for DIVISION guests,” but launches into describing what happened. She shares what little she knows about the murders and the state the bodies were found in.

Word of the murders hasn’t gotten out yet—Sister Theresa makes a small sign of the cross as thanks—the manananggal of the Apartments are still calm. But if the murders continue, she’ll have no choice but to warn everyone and try to convince them to leave. Most of the monsters have nowhere else to go. Leaving will not be an option for many.

Sister Theresa is a nun who serves the Church of the Broken Crucifix. All members of the Church—regardless of gender—are called Sisters, and most are human. A Sister is sent to areas of the city with large monster populations, especially if the monsters aren’t tolerated well by the humans nearby. In contrast, monsters like *diwata* and *duwende* get along with humans better, they are seen as more likable and useful to humans. Diwata and duwende also have an easier time disguising themselves and appearing human.

The Sisters of the Broken Crucifix serve as liaisons to humans and protectors of the monsters. Sister Theresa has been serving the community and leaders of the Apartments for some time.



People of Interest

SISTER DAX (he/they)

A nun of the Church of the Broken Crucifix. Perpetually tired. Has difficulty expressing positive emotions. Painfully clean nun habit. Pale. Young and eager to prove himself, Sister Dax was sent here when the Church learned of the murders. Like the other men of the Broken Crucifix, he assumes the title of “Sister” as he fulfills his duty. He is dedicated and wants to be useful.

He has a revolver strapped to his thigh and a holy sword hidden under their robes. They have a nervous habit of referring to the Sister’s Manual, which is disguised as a bible. Sister Theresa worries about Sister Dax often, saying they are “By the Bible” and need to “lighten up a little.”

QUOTE: *In section three paragraph six of the Protector Code, it is our holy duty to serve the community and maintain peace. I believe the social scripting in Appendix E should work nicely. Admittedly, I have not had much practice in its implementation.*



EMILY SANTOS (she/her)

A manananggal and call center agent. Shocking purple hair cut at odd angles, soft eyes that glow red in the dark, intricate tattoos. Short, with ruddy dark skin. Emily is friendly enough, but a socially awkward—she tends to default to her call center persona and professional scripting around strangers.

Emily had an on again and off again relationship with one of the victims, Samantha Reyes. She doesn’t know what happened to Sam. The last time they were together, there was an intense fight and Sam needed “space” and “time to think.”

QUOTE: *Gosh lovely weather we’re having, huh? Is there something I can help you with, someone I can refer you to? I have to check in on my girlfriend, I mean my friend, so I’ll need to end this call, I mean I have to go, bye, thank you!*



MICKEY YAP (he/him)

A manananggal and sex worker. Perfectly applied makeup in soft pastels, skin that glows pale blue in the dark, an easy and open smile. Mickey discovered one of the victims and believes the rest of the manananggal deserve to know. Sister Theresa has protected him and saved his life on numerous occasions, so he defers to her decision to keep things quiet, for now.

Mickey has a huge crush on Sister Dax, but his charming overtures completely fly over the Sister’s head. Mickey often checks his phone to keep up with work—he has a few customers who pay for the “boyfriend experience” and he likes making them feel special.

QUOTE: *I can’t believe she’s gone. Lily was an absolute doll, just so lovely and charming. We were sisters, we shared everything. Clothes, boyfriends, everything. I miss her so much. She’d make fun of me for my crush on Sister Dax while still trying to help us get together anyway, you know?*



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ELDER URDUJA *(no pronouns)*

A manananggal and shaman. Soft-spoken, eyes that turn to coldest steel in the dark, wears Maguindanaon robes. Elder Urduja is one of the oldest manananggal in the Philippines, and age hangs heavily on stooped shoulders. But Elder Urduja is sharp and misses nothing, and can fight better than any other manananggal. It is said that Elder Urduja was once powerful in the ways of magic and ritual, but all was given up in a terrible battle against a human warlord.

The elder has a tense relationship with Sister Theresa and is clearly frustrated with DIVISION being called in. Sister Theresa and the Elder used to be partners, working hard to improve Human-Manananggal relations. But Elder Urduja has given up on humans ever accepting the manananggal, and instead would like to live in peace, away from humanity and its cruelty.

QUOTE: *You have your ways and we have ours. I would not tell you how to attend to your work, no matter how much it pains me to see you so determined to fail. No matter, at least DIVISION did not send human agents. There is enough time for you to change my mind and impress this humble old shaman.*

GEORGIE *(they/them)*

A duwende and the Apartment's Custodian. Coveralls stained with paint and oil, a voice that turns into rust in the dark, always crunching on candy. Olive skin. The duwende are almost as long lived as the manananggal, Georgie and Elder Urduja have been friends their entire lives. Georgie left behind their first name a long time ago, and they have adapted to modern times. Georgie is happy to play to the stereotype of duwende—hardworking, protective, nurturing.

Georgie was good friends with Gin, one of the manananggal victims. Gin was an old gambling and drinking buddy despite the fact that a hundred years ago they were mortal enemies.. Georgie won't talk about Gin or the state they found him in. If pressed, Georgie breaks into tears, unable to cope with the loss.

QUOTE: *Is there something I can get you? I'm sure Sister Theresa has only offered you whiskey and cigarettes. How about I put together a real meal for ya? Have you lot tried Adobo? I make the best in the Apartments, don't let anyone tell you otherwise.*



FRANKLYN WOLF *(he/him)*

Human. Aspiring celebrity backpacker. Laughs often and loudly, social media curated casual looks, doesn't understand personal space. Painfully sunburned. Franklyn is completely out of his depth at the Apartments and refuses to acknowledge it. He is determined to become a social media influencer through his sleek videos that feature "the road less traveled."

He came to the Philippines seeking poverty porn, and was disappointed to find it isn't as bad as he expected. Still, he's determined to find a story here and share all of the gory details online.

QUOTE: *Looking good champ! I'll follow along, take notes, get you heroes on video? I've heard rumors about you monsters, say, do you eat human food? Where are you REALLY from? I think it's important that your story gets told and I'm the person to do it! My followers will absolutely love this, how about we do a quick live stream huh?*

Locations of Interest

THE COMMUNE

The largest common area in the Apartments, the Commune is bustling with activity as they set up an impromptu karaoke night. *What evidence do you see that the Commune has been rebuilt numerous times? What is it sorely lacking?*

THE ROOF GARDEN

The Roof is packed with every imaginable plant that could be used for cooking, medicine, or anything practical. *What strange project has Sister Theresa been working on?*

THE CHAPEL

The Chapel doesn't look like anything one might expect. It's open air, full of beautiful flowers, with several cozy areas built for reflection and meditation. *What holy artifacts of the Broken Crucifix are stored away?*

THE ABANDONED APARTMENT

There is one apartment that has remained empty for decades. No one will move in. *What here makes your skin crawl but invites you to come closer?*



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Keys of the Apocalypse

- ✿ pamphlets announcing new “human friendly” condominiums, the address circled in red
- ✿ a cheap disguise, which only bears a passing resemblance to one of the victims
- ✿ evidence of a secret life, hidden away
- ✿ a smashed cell phone, full of desperate and angry text messages
- ✿ a wedding dress, cut in half at the waist
- ✿ an obscene amount of money, torn into small pieces and laid out in an odd pattern
- ✿ graffiti on the wall, announcing both redemption and punishment
- ✿ a threatening letter, words turning into incomprehensible sigils and runes
- ✿ an infestation of insects, clicking and hissing, leaving blood and gore in their wake
- ✿ an ancient and sacred manananggal relic, defaced and broken
- ✿ a manila envelope filled with black and white photographs of different manananggal residents, all taken with a telephoto lens
- ✿ a collection of manananggal hair and nails, carefully tagged and preserved
- ✿ an old set of rusty keys, each inscribed in baybayin, an ancient writing system once used in the Philippines
- ✿ a mirror that splits your reflection in half, one half moves of its own accord and speaks with a strange voice no one can recognize
- ✿ a psychic vision, a manananggal screams “please, I won’t tell anyone, I swear it”
- ✿ manananggal salt, it’s a human myth that pouring salt on the lower half of a manananggal’s body will make the manananggal unable to rejoin both halves. However, there is a “salt” that can be made from the hair of the manananggal, but it’s a difficult and dangerous process. It’s extremely poisonous to all beings
- ✿ a dagger with a blood red blade, sharp enough to cut through air and sound
- ✿ a heavy book, when read, it begins to unwrite itself, change its own text, or whisper its words in a soft and sinister voice
- ✿ a small and crooked shrine, to a forgotten god of pain and violence who destroyed their own name
- ✿ several jars full of manananggal fetuses, they move and reach out with small bat wings, eyes never opening

Facets

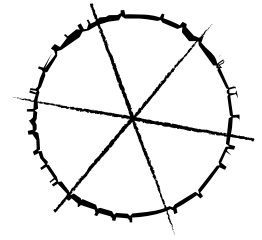
- ✿ Murder Victims
- ✿ The Decline of the Manananggal
- ✿ The Harbinger
- ✿ The Door of Power

Doomsday Clock (ticks: 6)

MOMENT

The remnants of wings, displayed in glory. They are larger than life, a wingspan that stretches across several feet.

- ✿ Who sees them?
- ✿ Who is changed by them?



INTRIGUE

A figure covered in black veils, a shaking hand reaching out to answer a prayer. A smile that bears no mirth, a single whisper, “You will be the first to bear my wings. What will you give in exchange, my love?”

- ✿ Who has the Harbinger given power to?
- ✿ How will this servant stalk or harass the PCs?

EVENT

One of the victims returns, but they are changed. They are violent, desperate, their memories fragmented. They bear evidence of the Harbinger’s rituals, and they whisper incomplete truths of what waits behind Doom’s Door.

- ✿ How can one of the PCs incapacitate the victim without violence?
- ✿ Who or what took their memories?

MOMENT

The cheap paint and stained wallpaper inside the apartments peels away slowly, as if removed by an invisible hand. Secrets and prayers are written in a strange and desperate language.

- ✿ How are the secrets related to the PCs?
- ✿ What comes to life from inside the walls?

INTRIGUE

From beneath the veil are too many mouths, too many hands, too many wings. A symphony of discordant voices growl a forbidden prayer. A meek voice in the corner asks, “My liege, is this truly what you want?”

- ✿ Who doubts the plans of the Harbinger?
- ✿ How will the Omens learn that a ritual has begun?

THE DOOR OPENS

The wind howls and the sound of a great many wings fill the air. The smell of blood is overwhelming, and soon there are the screams of the innocent. The Harbinger has unlocked the ancient Door of Power.

- ✿ When the door opens, how are the manananggal affected?
- ✿ What power or wisdom does the Harbinger take from beyond the door?