



Statistics

AGL d8, SMT d8, SPR d10+, STR d6, VIG d8, PAR 6, TGH 7. PP 12. Wounds: 3/I*. Skills: Fighting d10, Intimidate d12, Notice d8, Stealth d10. Attacks: 1 bite for 1d8 + Ability Drain/Regeneration; 2 “tentacles” for 2d6 + Grapple; 1 Hair attack for Blinding. Special Abilities: Detach Head, Enthrall, Blood Drain, Fearless (immune to Fear and Intimidation), Immunity to Standard Weapons, Dematerialization. See below for all special attacks and abilities.

Description

A female demon from Southeast Asian mythology, a penanggalan is a terrifying vampire who was once a mortal woman. During daylight hours, the penanggalan appears as a normal human, often a young maiden or an old crone, but always with long, beautiful hair. As long as the sun is shining, she seems helpful and caring, and often befriends lost or lonely travelers. At night, however, she transforms into a monster, her teeth extending into needle-like fangs and her tongue elongating into a whip-like proboscis. Leaving her corporeal body behind, the penanggalan’s head separates from her shoulders, rising into the air and trailing a tentacular stream of viscera that is said to “twinkle” in the gloaming. It is this detached head that performs the creature’s nocturnal hunting, flying through the air and seeking out the blood of the living. By dawn, the head must return to the body, or the penanggalan dies. In order to do this, however, she must first shrink her dangling entrails in a tub of vinegar before sliding them back into her gutless body.

Feeding Habits

A penanggalan will drink the blood of any warm human, but prefers that of children and pregnant mothers. Indeed, this latter is of particular potency, and provides enough nourishment that the monster may go an additional week without feeding again. Some legends have the penanggalan sitting on top of the roof of a home where a birth is taking place, shrieking and inserting her tongue down through the home to lap up the spilled afterbirth; others have her actually materializing in the room and inserting her tongue directly into the mother’s vagina. Although some traditions associate a mysterious wasting disease to the touch of a penanggalan, this is actually caused by her ability to drain Attributes along with blood, and is described below.

Origins

There are numerous tales of how penanggalans came into being. Some believe they are the spirits of women who died during childbirth, others that they are wicked midwives who broke a religious convention. Some contend that penanggalans are self-created, the product of evil women making pacts with demonic entities, while others believe that the first penanggalan was a priestess who was cursed for her vanity. In any event, they are very rare creatures, and seem to replicate by standard vampiric methods—though only women are eligible to be converted into penanggalan.

Nomenclature

Although “penanggalan” (or sometimes “hantu penanggal”) is the creature’s Malaysian name, similar beings are known all across Southeast Asia. In the Philippines they are called the “manananggal,” in Bali the “leyak,” in Thailand the “krasue,” and in Cambodia the “ap.” There are even Native American myths that loosely describe the penanggalan, such as the Cheyenne “Rolling Head” or the “Flying Head” of the Iroquois. It should also be noted that the penanggalan is not undead, and is therefore not a true vampire, but should be considered more of a vampiric demon.

Special Attacks

- **Tentacles/Grapple:** A penanggalan’s “tentacles” are actually two ropes of viscera—usually her small and large intestines, but it occasionally becomes difficult to make out the details, and some species of penanggalan have been known to transfer muscle fiber, teeth, or even their esophagus into the mix. Dripping with corrosive juices, a successful tentacle attack inflicts 2d6 acid damage and requires the target to make an opposed Strength roll to break the grapple, otherwise all the monster’s physical attacks are at +1 per each fastened tentacle for the next round. This includes her biting and hair attack! The damage caused by this “acid” causes nasty, open sores that take twice the standard time to heal naturally, and require a TN-6 for any Healing rolls.

- **Bite/Drain & Regeneration:** In combat, the bite of a penanggalan is a vicious thing. Even if no damage is transferred through her opponent’s Toughness, a successful biting attack requires her target to make three separate Attribute rolls against TN-4: Spirit, Strength, and Vigor. Each failure results in the loss of 1 die of that particular Attribute, which is absorbed as an additional Wound Level for the penanggalan! This “drain & regeneration” may either restore lost Wound levels or add extra ones, increasing her potential Wounds past W3/I. If her victim has one of his Attributes reduced to zero, he falls immediately Incapacitated, and cannot be revived unless the penanggalan is slain. Additionally, a successful biting attack means she’s clamped on to her target, receiving a +2 on her biting attack roll for the next round. This is in addition to any bonuses conferred through a successful tentacle grapple. Fortunately, the Attribute loss is not permanent—unless the roll is a critical failure!—and the lost dice return after a restful night of sleep. Also, the penanggalan loses any extra wound levels upon returning to her body, starting each day with the standard W3/I.

- **Hair/Blindness:** An angry penanggalan may use her long hair to blind her victim. A successful “hair attack” does no damage, but inflicts a –2 penalty to her opponent’s Parry trait and a –4 penalty to any action that requires sight. These penalties last until the penanggalan’s next round, where she may redirect or renew her hair attack.

Special Abilities

- **Detach Head:** At nightfall, the head of the penanggalan undergoes the transformation described above. Any witnesses to this act must make a Fear Check. The detached head of a penanggalan may travel tirelessly through the air at approximate speeds of 20 miles per hour! However, by dawn the creature must shrink her entrails in vinegar and return to her body, or the creature is irrevocably slain. Indeed, some penanggalan are known to keep their headless bodies marinating in a tub of vinegar all night long as their head prowls for victims.

- **Enthrall:** Upon first encountering a human victim, a penanggalan may attempt to cast Enthrall—providing she controls the setting, and has not been surprised. This ability costs 4 Power Points. If her intended target is asleep, her attempt to Enthrall takes place in the victim's dreams, giving the penanggalan a +2 on her Spellcasting roll. The ability requires three full rounds for the penanggalan to “prepare” her victim, during which she must make her presence known very slowly—a quiet voice in the dark, a gleam of eyes, a silhouette of long, twisting hair... Upon the fourth round she reveals herself, matching her Spellcasting skill against the target's Spirit. If she fails this contested roll, the intended victim sees through her ruse, and may act as normal against her natural form. However, if the spell is successful, the penanggalan appears as a full-bodied woman with long flowing hair, impossibly beautiful and radiating an angelic sense of generosity. Her words are seductive and charming, and the target wishes to please and even obey her. She is the most generous lover, the most caring midwife, the perfect mother.

- **Blood Drain:** Once her target has been successfully Enthralled, the penanggalan feeds upon her victim, using her needle-sharp teeth, her moth-like tongue, and her probing viscera. A complete feeding requires ten minutes, and automatically drains one Wound level. In addition, like her biting attack, her feeding has the potential to drain Spirit, Strength, and Vigor as well. The target must roll each of these Attributes against TN-4, but unlike her biting attack, these rolls are conducted without the use of a Wild Die! A failure reduces that particular attribute by one die. These losses—including the Wound Level—may not be regained by any method save the death of the penanggalan, after which they return at the rate of one “feeding” per night of restful sleep. After absorbing her meal, the penanggalan leaves her victim peacefully asleep; in the morning he remembers only strange and uneasy dreams. As successive nights of feeding occur, the penanggalan's victim is less likely to resist her Enthrall power, and receives a cumulative -1 penalty on the Spellcasting vs. Spirit roll for each previous night of feeding. When one of his Abilities falls to zero, or after he's sustained a fourth Wound level, the victim dies. If the victim was male, he remains quite dead. However, a female victim may be transformed into a sister penanggalan if her maker immerses her corpse in a bath of vinegar for twenty-four hours and feeds her some of the penanggalan's own precious blood.

- **Dematerialization:** The head of a Penanggalan may dematerialize into a reddish mist, an ability that allows her to pass through most walls, seep down chimneys, or rise up from the cracks between floorboards. It also permits incredibly rapid travel, as the “red mist” may move at speeds up to 70 mph, and seems immune to the effects wind and weather. When in her dematerialized form, a penanggalan is invulnerable to physical attacks, but she cannot use any of her powers. A successful Dispel Arcana will force her to reconstitute herself. It requires 1 Power Point to dematerialize, and another 1 Power Point to transform back into her physical state.

Weaknesses

Strange Behavior

When in her quotidian form, a penanggalan has a difficult time making eye contact with humans, and often exhibits a strange predilection for blood. Although she radiates no innate magic, a penanggalan must make a Spirit roll to resist lapping up any freshly-spilled blood within her sight.

Thorns & Sharp Objects

A penanggalan is afraid of sharp objects, which have the potential to ensnare her trailing organs as she travels. Malaysian families wary of penanggalans may weave thorny plants into their window frames to keep them away, or even place spiky pineapples underneath their floorboards. Some birthing mothers have been known to keep scissors by their bedsides. Indeed, when faced with barriers or totems such as these, a penanggalan may be checked by a failed Spirit roll.

Headless Body

Of course, the greatest weakness of a penanggalan is her headless body, which may be dismembered, burned, or interred; all of which deny the roaming head a safe return and guarantee her destruction by dawn. However, the fearless vampire hunters must still contend with this severed head, which flies back to her body to defend it at the first sign of trouble! Therefore, the best protection against a penanggalan is to fill the empty cavities of her headless body with broken glass. This severs the psychic link between head and body, and denies the penanggalan's head her abilities to Enthrall, Dematerialize, and Drain Attributes.

Variations

There are many different “strains” of penanggalan across the world, each possessing a variation of the powers and abilities described above. Some are powerful and cunning sorceresses; others are barely sentient, and seem more like wild primitives. Some have been known to influence the weather; others have dominion over animals. Some cannot dematerialize into red mist, while others can control whether or not their head detaches at sunset. Some penanggalans may opt to keep male victims alive, draining their Spirit to zero and Enthralling them as permanent slaves. It is also whispered that some very old penanggalans may use the headless bodies of their progeny as well as their own original body; indeed, one Balinese legend speaks of a cult of sister leyak that nest in each other's bodies interchangeably!

Sources & Notes

Although the penanggalan is based on Malaysian and Filipino lore, the author is indebted to Stephen Hellman's “Penanggalan” entry in the classic *Fiend Folio*, published by TSR in 1981 and edited by Don Turnbull. The title image is taken from that book as well—long live Russ Nicholson! Additional material came from Wikipedia and J. Gordon Melton's *The Vampire Book*.

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