SAMPLE

The Guardian's Shadow: Pelesit

Malay Folklore, the Cricket Spirit, and the Tongue That Calls in the Dark

Aiden Nightfall

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Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1: What Is Pelesit? The Cricket Spirit of Malay Black Magic Explained

Chapter 2: The Origins and History of Pelesit

Chapter 3: The Creation — How a Pelesit Is Made

Chapter 4: The Powers and Abilities of Pelesit

Chapter 5: Pelesit in Malay Society and Culture

Chapter 6: How to Protect Yourself From Pelesit

Chapter 7: Pelesit in Modern Media and Global Culture

Chapter 8: The Moral Lessons of Pelesit

Chapter 10: Living with Pelesit: Tradition, Change, and the Future

Glossary

References

The Guardian's Shadow

This free sample contains the Introduction and Chapter 1. The complete book contains the full contents above.

Introduction

Listen. That chirping you hear at night — the one coming from the corner of the room, from the curtain, from somewhere you cannot quite locate — is it just a cricket? In the cities, yes. In the towns, probably. But in the kampungs, the villages where the old beliefs still live, the answer is not so simple. Because in Malay folklore, not every chirp in the dark is the sound of an insect. Some chirps are something else. Some chirps are the pelesit.

The pelesit is one of the most unsettling spirits in the Malay supernatural tradition, and it is easy to see why. It is small. It is familiar. It looks like something you would dismiss — a cricket, a grasshopper, a creature that belongs in a garden, not in a horror story. And that is exactly the point. The pelesit's power lies in its ordinariness. It does not appear as a terrifying demon or a screaming ghost. It appears as a cricket. It chirps like a cricket. It sits on your curtain like a cricket. And then, when you are asleep, it enters your mouth and begins to work.

The pelesit is a familiar spirit — a created being, bound to a human owner, used as a weapon of attack. It is most famous as the companion and advance guard of the polong, the bottled blood spirit that was the subject of the previous volume in this series. But the pelesit is far more than just the polong's scout. It has its own creation ritual, its own rules of ownership, its own independent uses, and its own dark place in the Malay cultural landscape. It deserves its own book.

This is the seventh volume in The Guardian's Shadow series, an educational guide to the supernatural entities of Southeast Asian folklore. As with every volume, the question is not "is it real?" but "what does this tradition teach us?" The pelesit tradition teaches us about the weaponisation of the dead — specifically, the dead bodies of children. It teaches us about gender in Malay spiritual practice — the pelesit is traditionally kept by women, while its male counterpart, the bajang, is kept by men. It teaches us about the economics of fear — the bomoh who sends a pelesit to attack a family, then charges them to cure the affliction he caused. And it teaches us about the thin line between the natural and the supernatural — the line between a cricket and a spirit, between a chirp and a signal, between an insect in your house and something that has been sent to find you.

The pelesit is the spirit you do not see coming, because it looks like something you would ignore. By the end of this book, you will not ignore it again.

Chapter 1: What Is Pelesit? The Cricket Spirit

of Malay Black Magic Explained

The word pelesit literally means "buzzer" — derived from the Malay root meaning to buzz, hum, or drone. It is an onomatopoeic name, a word that sounds like the thing it describes. The pelesit is named for the sound it makes: a chirping, buzzing, humming noise that resembles the call of a cricket or grasshopper. This is not incidental. The pelesit's name tells you exactly how it operates — through sound, through vibration, through a noise that seems natural but is not. The name itself is a warning: not every sound in the dark is what it seems.

The pelesit appears as a cricket or grasshopper. In most accounts, it is specifically a cricket — the house cricket that chirps in the corners of rooms and is familiar to every Malay household. Some sources describe it as a grasshopper, particularly one with a pointed head. The specific species is less important than the general form: the pelesit is an insect, small, common, and unremarkable.

This ordinariness is the pelesit's most dangerous feature. The pontianak arrives as a terrifyingly beautiful woman — you know something is wrong. The penanggalan arrives as a disembodied head with trailing organs — you know something is wrong. The pelesit arrives as a cricket. You do not know something is wrong. You might try to catch it. You might try to kill it. You might ignore it entirely. And any of those responses could be exactly what the pelesit's owner wants.

Old villagers in Malay kampungs would warn their children never to catch or kill grasshoppers that fly into the house at night. The reasoning was simple: you cannot tell the difference between an ordinary grasshopper and a pelesit. The pelesit's disguise is perfect — it does not glow, it does not change shape, it does not behave unnaturally (until it chooses to). The only tell, according to some accounts, is that the pelesit's chirp is different — softer, slower, almost whispering. But this is a subtle distinction that most people would not notice, especially at night, especially when they are not expecting it.

Like the polong, the pelesit is kept in a bottle when not in use. The bottle is its container, its home, and its prison. The owner stores the pelesit in the bottle, feeds it there, and releases it when sending it to attack. If the bottle is broken or the pelesit escapes, it becomes a wild spirit — uncontrolled, unowned, and dangerous to everyone, including its former owner.

The bottle is also where the pelesit can be trapped. Traditional healers, when attempting to deal with a pelesit attack, would try to capture the spirit in a bottle. If successful, the trapped pelesit could be heard making faint sounds

inside — described as whispers, cries, or a subdued chirping. The sound of a trapped pelesit in a bottle is one of the most distinctive auditory details in Malay folklore: a spirit reduced to a whisper, contained but not silent.

The pelesit is closely associated with another Malay familiar spirit: the bajang. The two are often described as male and female equivalents of the same concept. The bajang is always kept by a male owner, takes the form of a civet cat (musang), and is created from a stillborn child. The pelesit is traditionally kept by a female owner, takes the form of a cricket or grasshopper, and is created from the tongue of a dead first-born child. Both are familiar spirits, both are kept in containers, both are fed by their owners, and both can be used to attack enemies.

The gender division is significant and reflects broader patterns in Malay spiritual practice. Male practitioners (bomoh) were associated with certain types of spirits and rituals, while female practitioners (bomoh hitam, or "black bomoh") were associated with others. The bajang-pelesit pair represents the gendering of dark spiritual practice — the idea that men and women access different forms of supernatural power, and that these forms have different characteristics.

- Form — Pelesit: Cricket/grasshopper; Bajang: Civet cat (musang); Polong: Invisible (miniature woman); Toyol: Small child/toddler - Owner gender — Pelesit: Female (traditionally); Bajang: Male; Polong: Both; Toyol: Both - Created from — Pelesit: Dead first-born child's tongue; Bajang: Stillborn child; Polong: Murdered person's blood; Toyol: Dead foetus - Container — Pelesit: Bottle; Bajang: Bottle; Polong: Bottle; Toyol: Jar - Fed by — Pelesit: Blood from finger; Bajang: Eggs and milk; Polong: Blood from ring finger; Toyol: Milk, sweets, blood - Primary function — Pelesit: Scout/attack; Bajang: Attack (especially children); Polong: Possession; Toyol: Theft - Has companion? — Pelesit: Works with polong; Bajang: No; Polong: Works with pelesit; Toyol: No - Wild if released? — Pelesit: Yes; Bajang: Yes; Polong: Yes; Toyol: Yes

As the table shows, the pelesit occupies a specific niche in the Malay familiar spirit ecosystem. It is not the most powerful (the polong is), not the most economically useful (the toyol is), and not the most feared for children (the bajang is). But it is the most versatile — it can operate independently as an attacker, as a scout for the polong, as a tool for extortion, and as a wild threat when unowned. The pelesit's versatility is its defining characteristic.

The pelesit is a familiar spirit that appears as a cricket or grasshopper — an insect so common that its presence is never alarming. It is kept in a bottle by a female owner, fed with blood, and deployed as a scout, an attacker, or a companion to the more powerful polong. Its closest analogue is the bajang, its

male counterpart, and together they represent the gendered division of dark spiritual practice in traditional Malay society. The pelesit's danger lies not in its power but in its disguise — it is the weapon that looks like nothing at all.

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