THE AWAKENING

VOLUME ONE OF ALAMAT, A HISTORY OF THE AWAKENED

KADI SERAFICA

Building the world of *Alamat* is one of the greatest experiences I have ever had.

It is also the loneliest.

I dedicate this first installment to those who have been with me since the beginning; they who saw my amateur attempt at a parody of a game that turned into stories featuring Filipino Mythology; they who met Juan dela Krus in a different form.

And so, I dedicate this book to Miguel, Ency, Alex, Edz, Tin, and Jimuel.

And to my brother, Kin, who journeyed with me to the end of this book. My first critic, oftentimes my co-conspirator, and the one who keeps the stories grounded when my imagination goes out of hand.

The Awakening Volume One of Alamat, A History of the Awakened

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Kadi Serafica

It's almost morning, she thought. She stopped mid turn, dropping her head, her hands flopped on her sides. The money she won and the adventures of the night were a distant memory. She's been having these dreams that someone is watching her. But in these dreams, she is a different person. Older. Hauntingly beautiful. Whatever is supposed to happen will happen soon, she believed. Her destiny, as she privately calls it, is about to unfold. As the days passed, she became convinced that it will culminate tonight. *And yet…it's almost morning*.

A jeepney emblazoned with images of Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, and Spiderman on the side honked at her. Jessica Navarro raised her head to the driver, who showed her a painted rectangular sign that said "Heritage". The jeep was half occupied with the newly bathed, uniformed, and sleepy workers of Manila. The city was waking up for the next day. *Maybe destiny only happens in the movies.*

- Chapter 2, Born Better

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INTRODUCTION

Alamat, a History of the Awakened is an attempt to introduce our rich mythology and folklore to the next generation. I used to be a firm believer that mythology and folklore must be told true-to-form, that editing and reinterpreting will turn them into something else; not the mythology and folklore our ancestors believed in.

But during my studies, I realized these stories vary in places and time. A Bicolano from a hundred years ago imagined a different aswang compared to a Maranao who first met the creature through a *Shake, Rattle, and Roll* movie. We could say the same about deities. The Odin worshipped a thousand years ago differs vastly from what we envision him today. Abilities are stripped and added, names get combined, pantheons are whittled and remade. Legends evolve as the people who know them spread the tales, as they are accepted and remade into the image of a new culture.

That is why I attempted to create *Alamat*, to give these old gods modern takes for the contemporary reader, in the hopes that with introduction comes curiosity to look them up and read the stories as they originally were.

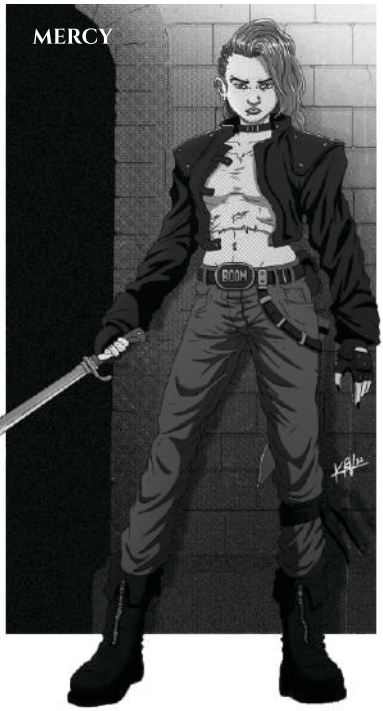
At the end of the day, mythologies and folklore are not just about the names of gods or how things came to be. These stories serve as a window to our distant ancestors, and a vehicle to bring us into the world as they saw it. These stories tell us what they believed in, what they valued the most, and who they were.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Alisa** - a millennial vlogger
- **Bacunaoa** - an ascendant, the first mangayaw
- **Bankakah** - an ascendant, mangayaw bodyguard
- **Big Boi** - a mangayaw, member of the 60th kampilan
- **Elias** - an ex-cult member
- **Haliya** - an ascendant mangayaw
- **Helsing -** a kampon ng kadiliman - aswang, member of the 60th kampilan
- **Isimud** - an ascendant datu

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Jamal Kabungsawan** - an ascendant datu, leader of the 18th Sword
- **Jessica Navarro** - a young datu
- **Joelius -** a millennial vlogger
- **Juan dela Krus** - a salat, leader of the 48th kampilan
- **Juni** - an ascendant salat, fortune teller
- **Lucrecia** - hotel caretaker
- **Maguimba** - an ascendant datu
- **Manuel Huras** - an ascendant, salat cult leader
- **Maymay** - a dead girl
- **Maynila** - the spirit embodiment of the city



DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Mercy** - a mangayaw, member of the 60th kampilan
- **Nanet Filemon** - famous TV personality
- **Ned** - a millennial vlogger
- **Piray** - an ascendant salat
- **Plywood** - a young boy
- **Pumbakhayon** - an ascendant, member of the 18th kampilan
- **Remar Capuso** - a young salat
- **Rylarth** - an ascendant kampon ng kadiliman - skinwalker
- **Saif Abdul Rashid** - an ascendant mangayaw, member of the 7th sword

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

- **Santiago Rivera V**- a datu, leader of the 60th kampilan
- **Saro** - an ascendant, the first salat
- **Teresito** - a taxi driver

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

- **Awakened** - human with special abilities
- **Binhi** - seat of an awakened's power
- **Bertudis -** families that produce awakened with reliability
- **Bloodline** - genetic lines that carry datu, kampon ng kadiliman, mangayaw, or salat
- **Datu** - an awakened who could influence thoughts, emotions, and memories
- **Mangayaw** - an awakened with supernatural strength, endurance, and speed
- **Salat** - an awakened who could control elements and talk to spirits
- **Kampon ng Kadiliman** - an awakened shapeshifter
- **Aswang** - a common kampon ng kadiliman branch in the Philippines
- **Bulong** - an umbrella term for datu abilities
- **Order of Knives aka Kampilan** - an organization of awakened
- **Sword aka (k)ampilan** - a unit within the Order of Knives
- **Pangayaw** - a hunt to the death
- **Ascendant** - an immortal awakened

"Each civilization has their own version but they tell essentially, the same story. My favorite version goes like this: on the seventh day before the creator took his rest, he challenged humanity to come find him. Those who will succeed, will gain a gift. Four succeeded and from us sprouted the race of the awakened."

- Saro, *First Salat*

We used to call them heroes, gods, and monsters. Now, we just call them Awakened, and they live among us. An organization of awakened, the Order of Knives, keeps them in check.

Here in the Philippines, we call them **Kampilan.**

CHAPTER 1

IN ARCADIA

Remar Capuso was six years old when he met his first dead spirit. She was seven and her bangs were recently cut. She wore a white Sunday dress and had the smell of candles on her. He, on the other hand, didn't know any better.

Remar found her crying outside the door of their small but clean bungalow home. She was pale and alone under a yawning moon. He leaned on the naked hollow block wall. His father, Diego, promised to smoothen it with cement and paint it blue when he gets some extra money. That was a couple of years ago.

Remar asked the dead girl with a smug, "Why are you crying?"

She stifled her tears, then looked around. She was chubby, with two missing front teeth, but her eyes were arresting.

His cheeks reddened. Remar felt himself descending through the rough, hollow block wall. "Did someone hurt you? Was it Ariel? We used to play together, but then he got bigger and became a bully. When he throws his cheese-smelling tsinelas, just duck and run. I told my Mom Almira, about it, but she hit my bottom with a ting-ting…" Remar regretted saying too much.

"I don't know Ariel. I just want to go home."

"Then you came to the right place!" Remar replied. "I'm familiar with every inch of this street. We'll find your home. Do you like Brick Game?! I have two of them. But the first one broke. Brownie chewed it and the next day, a friend of Tatay picked Brownie for a check-up. I wonder how it went."

She wiped her tears with the back of her chubby hand. She smiled mischievously, then changed the subject. "What's your name? I'm Maymay. When I grow up, I will become a singer. My dad promised me."

"I'm Remar. Everyone knows me here. Now, where do you live?"

She concentrated for a moment before answering, "Unit 108, C Jose Street, Malibay, Pasay City!" She pronounced it as 'wan ow eyt'.

"Ay, never heard of that before. I know this street, though. This is Matiaga Street. Maybe you live on the other side, near SSS. I go there to wait for a jeepney to class. I'm the first honor. Follow me!"

He grabbed her hands. They were cold and clammy. Remar tugged and Maymay followed. The two children ran past Aling Nena's sari-sari store, Mang Boy's eight cockfighting chickens in their green cages, Jensel's Drug Store where Remar's mother bought his vitamins, and the nameless carinderia that sold goat caldereta and pinapaitan that his father liked to eat when drinking with his buddies.

Maymay and Remar stopped at the edge of the road, the full moon above their only source of light. Although late, the street was busy with spent laborers stepping off buses from a hard day's work and hours-long traffic. Good thing no one could see him when he traveled while dreaming. Or else, Tita Nene, who was standing just a few meters beside them, wearing thick red lipstick and perfume that smelled like musky flowers, would scold him and tell his mother about it. Tita Nene was sort of famous around here; she dated a lot of men.

Remar kept his eyes on the road and his breathing as silent as possible until Tita Nene got into a taxi.

"Do you live nearby?" he asked Maymay as a bus stopped in front of them. A couple disembarked and passed through Remar.

"Wow! Remar, maysa-demonyo ka?" Maymay asked.

"What does that mean?"

Maymay thought long and hard. She blew on her bangs. "I don't know. I was watching TV once and Nanay turned it off because I was watching Herbert Bautista trapped in a grotto with a beautiful woman who lives in the forest. She said, "maysa-demonyo 'yan anak!"

"Maybe not," Remar answered. "I told my mom that I travel when I dream, and she said that she will call Mang Jerry. He knows a tagatawas in Maginhawa, but I don't think I'm sick. Anyway, do you know this place? How did you even get here?"

Maymay inspected the buildings around. A hospital on the right and EDSA a very long way to the left. She shook her head and said, "I didn't ride a bus. I just found myself in your street. Like I was asleep and then I woke up here."

Remar scratched his thick head of hair. He doesn't have lice when dreaming. "We could go to Kabila! I know someone who likes to answer questions, but he gets angry when I ask him the answers to my assignment."

Maymay grinned. Remar grabbed her hand again and ran. They galloped on the sidewalk towards EDSA. When Remar Capuso could not recognize the buildings anymore, their tiny feet lifted off the ground. The children laughed as they soared. They followed bats gliding over the city. They passed through a helicopter covering the traffic, stepped on clouds surrounded by starlight, then left this world.

"Maymay, why is your hand cold?" he finally asked.

"Ewan. Everything feels cold."

"I enjoy holding your hand, even if it's cold."

Maymay grinned, her bangs move with the wind. "Your hand feels warm. I wish I could fly like you, Remar."

"It's easy, but I could only do it when I sleep."

"If you're asleep, maybe I am too! When I wake up, I'll be at home. I wish we could go to Jollibee kasi very good ako sa assignment. Tito Jonas helped me. I stay with him when Nanay and Tatay are off to work."

"Since we are already flying, we could still go to Kabila. I want you to meet my friends there!" insisted Remar.

The children ascended past the darkness of space and into a place dotted with domed islands, each inhabited by one creature. The inhabitants all wore porcelain masks, but the images and the island varied.

Maymay pointed a chubby finger at one creature. It looked like a sleeping orange cat wearing a white mask painted with a whisker. "What is that?"

"Pusa. He's a denizen of Kabila. He tried to scratch me one time. Those on the left, like Pusa, are the masked animals. You could visit Ahas, but he mostly hisses. Baboy Ramo is sometimes angry. That one is my favorite, Aso. He likes to play, but he keeps telling me he already has a master. On the other side are the masked plants. They don't speak. Here on top are the masked places."

Remar guided Maymay towards a dirty looking one from a cluster. Unlike the animals, the masked places were humanoid with large, masked heads. Soon, they landed and bounced on the dome of the island. Remar knotted his brow and said, "That's odd." He pushed himself and Maymay inside the bubble. It vibrated as their spirits breached. The stink of air pollution greeted Maymay, but she somehow found herself at home. The enormous creature inside looked up as the

children descended to the asphalt ground.

The creature was hunched. It had hairs made of jeepney steel pipes. Its skin was concrete and littered with miniature malls and boulevards pricked with road signs. Small logos of Metro Manila cities peppered its hulking body. It wore a mask painted with an eight-pointed sun surrounded by three stars.

"This is Tandang Seludong," Remar introduced.

"Hrmm. Maynila," the creature bellowed, lumbering towards them.

"You said you're Seludong," Remar explained, scratching his head.

"Hrmm. I said that was my name a long time ago. Now, I'm Maynila. Why are you here again, child? Told you never to come back. But here you are again, even brought company."

Remar hugged a concrete leg of the creature. "Kasi nga, you're my favorite. You know a lot. When will it rain? Could you make it rain?! Signal number one, please!"

It shook its soot-covered metal hair. "No. Hrmm. You just want to skip classes again."

Remar giggled and climbed the towering creature with ease and sat on its head. Maymay watched with glee. It pointed at its flag painted mask and said, "Hrmm. Know what, you could help me decide on my new mask. I'm between a jeepney, Malacañang, and Luneta." A series of images appeared. Each one changed its physical form to suit the new mask.

"You should copy Aso! I like his face. He's nice, and he likes to play. His world is also better. It has chickens we could chase and lots of grass we could roll in. You have a smelly river, concrete everywhere, and your island always smells like smoke."

"He also doesn't sweep," motioned Maymay at the surrounding plastic bottles and empty shampoo sachets.

"Hrmm. I'm not a dog."

Maymay chimed in, "You could wear a Sailor Moon mask! I have one just like that!"

"Hrmm. I am the spirit of Maynila... I need a face that matches what I am."

The children thought long and hard. "I give up," Remar said. He hovered towards Maynila's cheeks. He tapped it with a knuckle. It was cold and smooth like stoneware. "What is this made of? Maymay, let's get it off him!"

Maymay floated and grabbed Maynila's mask just under the chin while Remar pulled at the side of the temple. He didn't find an ear.

"The mask is my face. Hrmm. There is nothing to remove," it said, moving around. Maymay and Remar swiveled with the mask.

"I could draw something on it! A kubo with a mountain and the sun rising..." suggested the boy.

"And rice fields and birds!" added Maymay.

"Definitely not."

"Then make it rain... I haven't finished my assignment. Sige na."

"Hrmm. Not my problem. If you came here to pester me with your assignment again, better leave me."

Remar floated away. "You said we're friends! You promised to help me if I asked."

"Hrmm. I did, but I meant a different kind of help. You will understand when you grow up."

"Okay. Then could you help my friend get back home?" Remar asked.

One strand of Maynila's pipe hair coiled around Remar, and the creature gingerly put him down. It lifted Maymay and inspected her with a gigantic eye. "Hrmm. You don't belong here, child."

"It's okay. She's a friend, Maynila," Remar piped in.

Maynila spoke with an unusual kindness to the boy. “Hrmm. Remar, you don’t know what a ghost is, do you? Unusual. Tomorrow, I will teach you all about them, but for now, I need you to go home. I will help your friend find the light.”

A single tear fell from Maymay’s eye down to her chubby cheeks. “Am I dea…”

“Could we play first?!” Remar cut Maymay before she could finish her question. “I want to follow the cat-sized rats to the imburnal, or sit beside people singing ‘Anak ng Pasig’ while traversing the river. Maymay will surely enjoy it!” Remar pleaded.

“If she stays too long, she may not find the light. Hrmm, she won’t be able to go home. Now, say your goodbyes.”

The girl wiped her tear then beamed at him. “That’s okay, Remar! I enjoyed flying with you! Don’t worry, I will find Matiaga Street again and we could play for real!”

Remar started sobbing. “You’re lying!”

Maynila gently wiped his face with a strand of steel pipe hair. He tickled Remar with another pipe. “Tatawa na ‘yan. Hrmm.”

Maymay attacked Remar’s other underarm. The boy tightened his mouth and tried to cover his sides. It was too much. He burst into a hearty laugh. Maynila caressed his head and gently threw him out of the domed plane. Remar laughed as it hurled him back to Matiaga Street and into his body.

* * *

Remar Capuso checked the wall clock in the common bedroom. It was eleven at night. His father should be on his way home from work. Shadows played on the wall from the light of the TV in the sala. He stumbled out of the banig and yellow mosquito net, then went to the

living room. Half-awake, he found Almira, his mother, folding a bucket full of freshly dried laundry in front of a barely audible TV.

Almira hurriedly looked for the remote, couldn't find it, so she dropped the laundry and pressed the off button on the large TV itself that was held together by cement glue and packaging tape. "Remar, anak. How long have you been there?"

"Just woke up. Visited Maynila..."

"Tange, we live in Manila. Go back to sleep. You have class tomorrow."

"Ayaw," he said and then sat on the wooden sofa while rubbing his eyes to fully wake up. He accidentally sat on the remote, shrugged, and turned on the TV.

Almira's eyes bulged. "Turn it off..."

Young Remar saw a woman in her 30s wailing. She had a white bandana tied on her head. A man, presumably the father, had his arms around her. The young mother wailed on the camera, "Putangina mo, Jonas! Why did you do that to my baby girl?!"

The news channel cut the scene. The next scene showed the same parents placing a live, yellow chick on the glass of an opened coffin. It pecked on a small pile of bigas. A couple of family pictures hang inside the casket door. They were all smiling when the pictures were taken. They seemed so happy.

The news reporter started speaking, but Remar was too sleepy to understand any of it. The camera zoomed in on the chick. It was bright yellow. Innocent. Barely lived its life. Lying under the feeding chick, obscured by the moist glass, was a child wearing a white Sunday dress. Her bangs were recently cut... It was Maymay.

- Five pages of a typewritten, back-to-back story on letter-sized paper circa 1990s. Inserted between the pages of F. Landa Jocano's *Outline of Philippine Mythology*. Discovered in August 2021 at the Miguel de Benavides Library. Currently in the possession of Juan dela Krus, 48th Sword of the Order of Knives.

END OF TEASER

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