

CHRONICLES OF KUCHING

ADVENTURES OF YOUNG ALIA



By international best selling author
SAJEET SOUDAGAR

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Adventures of Young Alia

Sajeet Soudagar

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Welcome to Alia's World

Before you dive into Alia's adventure,
here's something to know:

This story takes place in **Sarawak**, on the island of **Borneo**,
in a real village called **Kampung Sapit**. You'll find thick
jungles, ancient legends, and cultures that are deeply
connected to the land.

Some of the words, foods, and traditions may feel new —
and that's part of the magic.

If you're curious about what's real, what's imagined, and
where it all comes from...

Flip to the back of the book for a special bonus section:

"Secrets Behind the Story: A Guide to Alia's World."

Enjoy the journey.
— Sajeet Soudagar

Contents

Prologue: The Story of I La Galigo.....	1
Chapter 1: New Friends	7
Chapter 2: The First Term	13
Chapter 3: The Scavenger Hunt.....	17
Chapter 4: Off to Kuching	31
Chapter 5: Tales of the Strange and Unseen	41
Chapter 6: Fear and festivity	51
Chapter 7: The Search Begins.....	59
Chapter 8: The Observer	65
Chapter 9: Into the Shadows.....	73
Chapter 10: The Watchers in the Dark	83
Chapter 11: Into the Unknown	91
Chapter 12: Deeper into the Dark.....	99
Chapter 13: The Hunter in the Dark.....	105
Chapter 14: Shadows on the Water	115
Chapter 15: Whispers in the Dark.....	121
Chapter 16: Shadows in the Bloodline.....	131
Chapter 17: The Hunter's Trail.....	141
Chapter 18: The Encroaching Shadows.....	147
Chapter 19: The Truth in the Shadows	153
Chapter 20: The Hidden Sanctuary.....	157

Chapter 21: The Prophecy of Shadows	151
Chapter 22: The Betrayal	167
Chapter 23: The Forbidden Village.....	175
Chapter 24: The Rescue Plan	181
Chapter 25: The Ritual Begins.....	187
Chapter 26: Breaking the Spell.....	193
Chapter 27: The Aftermath	201
Chapter 28: The Fall of the Cult	207
Chapter 29: The Journey Home	213
Chapter 30: The Secret They Kept.....	219
Epilogue: The Borneo Chronicle.....	224
Secrets Behind the Story	226
About the Author	229

PROLOGUE:

THE STORY OF I LA GALIGO

The soft glow of the bedside lamp lit up Alia Merican's room, casting shadows that danced gently across the walls. Ten-year-old Alia lay under her covers, her head resting on a pillow, her wide, curious eyes fixed on her father. Jeffrey Merican, a professor with a love for stories, sat beside her as he did every night. No matter how busy he was, he always made time for these bedtime moments—a chance to share not just tales, but lessons wrapped in ancient wisdom.

“Are you comfortable, sayang?” Jeffrey asked, adjusting his glasses and smiling warmly.

“Yes, Baba,” Alia said, pulling the blanket up to her chin. “What story are you telling me tonight?”

Jeffrey leaned back in his chair and chuckled. “Tonight's story is one I came across while working at the university. It's an epic—much older than any of your books. It's about a warrior named Sawerigading and his sister, We Tenriabeng. This tale comes from the Bugis people, a seafaring community with some of the most fascinating stories.”

“Bugis?” Alia's eyes lit up. “Aren't they the pirates you told me about before?”

Jeffrey nodded with a smile. “Yes, they were famous sailors, often mistaken for pirates. But they were also incredible storytellers, passing down tales that captured their history and beliefs. This one is part of *I La Galigo*, one of the longest stories ever written.”

“Longer than *Harry Potter*?” Alia asked, her voice filled with awe.

“Much longer,” Jeffrey replied. “But don't worry, I

won't tell you the whole thing. Just enough to spark your imagination."

He shifted in his chair and began, his tone taking on the rhythm of a storyteller. "Sawerigading wasn't just any man. He was born from a divine lineage."

"Divine lineage?" Alia interrupted, tilting her head. "What does that mean?"

"It means his ancestors were believed to be connected to the gods," Jeffrey explained. "They weren't ordinary people—they had powers and responsibilities that linked them to the heavens."

"Like Hercules?" Alia asked, her face lighting up with recognition.

Jeffrey smiled. "Exactly. And Sawerigading had a twin sister, We Tenriabeng, who was equally extraordinary. While he became a warrior and leader, she was drawn to the spiritual world. People believed she could communicate with the gods and understand their will."

"That's so cool!" Alia exclaimed. "A warrior brother and a sister who can talk to the gods."

Jeffrey nodded. "Their story begins with a prophecy—a warning from the heavens. It said that Sawerigading would achieve greatness, but his path would be full of challenges. We Tenriabeng was crucial to his destiny, but their lives took very different directions. She chose a life of spirituality, acting as a bridge between gods and mortals. Sawerigading, however, became a warrior, a sailor, and a leader, determined to conquer the world."

Alia leaned forward. "So, he had a lot of adventures?"

"Oh, more than you can imagine," Jeffrey said with a grin. "But let's start with one of the most important moments in his life. When Sawerigading grew older, the gods sent him a message. They told him he had to marry someone who could balance his divine heritage with the needs of the earthly world."

"Did he?" Alia asked eagerly.

Jeffrey sighed. "At first, no. He refused. Sawerigading believed no one was worthy of him. He thought that as



someone chosen by the heavens, no ordinary person could be his equal.”

“That’s so arrogant!” Alia frowned.

“It was,” Jeffrey agreed. “And he paid the price. His refusal brought misfortune, not just to him, but to his people. It wasn’t until he met I We Cudai—a woman who was as strong and smart as he was—that he began to change.”

“What happened?” Alia’s voice was almost a whisper.

“Sawerigading rejected her at first, thinking she was beneath him. But fate has a way of humbling even the greatest heroes. His arrogance led him into many battles and journeys—across stormy seas, into dangerous forests, and even to the gates of the heavens. Each challenge taught him a lesson. He learned that strength wasn’t enough, and greatness came from humility, respect, and working with others.”

Alia smiled. "So, he finally realized she was his equal?"

Jeffrey nodded. "Yes. After years of trials, he returned to I We Cudai and asked for her forgiveness. Their union wasn't just about love—it was about balance. Together, they fulfilled the prophecy, bringing peace to their people and strengthening the bond between the heavens and the earth."

Alia thought for a moment before asking, "What about We Tenriabeng? What happened to her?"

Jeffrey's voice softened. "She disappeared early in the story. Before leaving, she gave her own prophecy. She said she would return one day, reborn in another life. Her return could bring great fortune or great calamity, depending on how people treated her."

"Reborn?" Alia's eyes widened. "You mean like... reincarnation?"

"Exactly," Jeffrey said. "She would carry certain signs—marks and traits that proved who she was. Over the centuries, many people have searched for her, hoping to find her and fulfill her prophecy," Jeffrey explained, his voice taking on a mysterious tone.

Alia tilted her head, her curiosity piqued. "What kind of signs, Baba? Did the story say what they were?"

Jeffrey adjusted his glasses thoughtfully, a small smile playing on his lips. "Yes, the story does mention a few. It's said that We Tenriabeng's reincarnation would bear a crescent-shaped scar on her wrist—one that glows faintly in the moonlight. Some believe this mark represents her connection to the heavens, a reminder of her divine origin."

Alia's eyes widened. "A glowing scar? That's amazing! Anything else?"

Jeffrey nodded. "There are also tales of her having a peculiar birthmark shaped like a star, often found on her back or shoulder. It's said to symbolize her role as a guiding light for humanity, someone destined to lead others toward balance and understanding."

Alia leaned forward, hanging onto every word. "Wow. A scar and a birthmark. Is that all?"

"Not quite," Jeffrey said, his smile widening. "The most

intriguing sign is less physical and more... spiritual. The legends say that We Tenriabeng's reincarnation would possess an unexplainable sense of calm and wisdom, even as a child. People would feel drawn to her without knowing why, as if she carried an invisible light that brought comfort and clarity."

Alia's brow furrowed with fascination. "So, she wouldn't just look special; she'd feel special to people too?"

"Exactly," Jeffrey confirmed. "It's not just about what's on the outside. Her presence, her aura, would be unmistakable to those who believed in the prophecy. They'd sense something extraordinary about her, even if they couldn't explain it."

Alia pondered for a moment before asking, "Did anyone ever find her? Did they know it was her?"

Jeffrey shook his head. "The stories don't say for sure. Over the centuries, there have been many claims. Some said they found her, others said she hadn't returned yet. But the truth is, no one knows. That's part of the mystery, Alia. People have spent lifetimes searching, not just for her but for the meaning she represents."

"What does she represent?" Alia asked softly.

Jeffrey's expression turned thoughtful. "She represents hope, balance, and the idea that even in times of chaos, there's a chance for harmony. Her signs remind us that greatness isn't always loud or obvious. Sometimes, it's quiet and steady, like a light guiding us through the dark."

Alia nodded slowly, her mind spinning with the possibilities. "Do you think someone like her could really exist, Baba?"

Jeffrey smiled, reaching out to gently ruffle her hair. "I think the world is full of extraordinary people, Alia. And sometimes, it's not about whether the stories are true. It's about what we choose to learn from them."

Jeffrey continued. "Perhaps. But the story isn't just about finding her. It's about understanding the lessons within. Like Sawerigading, we all have challenges to face. And like We Tenriabeng, we all have something special to offer, if only we're brave enough to show it."

Alia traced the edge of her blanket thoughtfully. "So, it's

about the journey, not just the ending.”

“Exactly,” Jeffrey said, his voice warm with pride. “And remember, sayang, your journey is just beginning. You may not fight battles or fulfill prophecies, but the choices you make and the lessons you learn will shape who you are.”

Alia grinned. “Maybe one day, I’ll have my own adventure.”

Jeffrey’s eyes twinkled. “I’m sure you will. And when you do, remember this—greatness isn’t about being perfect. It’s about being brave enough to keep going, even when the path is unclear.”

As Jeffrey tucked her in and turned off the lamp, Alia’s mind buzzed with images of warriors, prophecies, and the lessons her father had shared. She drifted off to sleep, her dreams filled with stormy seas, mystical forests, and the steady voice of her father, guiding her toward her own journey.

CHAPTER 1:

NEW FRIENDS

The canteen buzzed with life, its long rows of plastic tables and sturdy, well-worn chairs crowded with chattering students. The air smelled faintly of Mee Goreng and Soy sauce, mingling with the sweet aroma of syrupy drinks. Overhead fans spun lazily, failing to do much against the midday heat. The walls were decorated with colourful posters about healthy eating and upcoming school events, their edges curling slightly from humidity. The clatter of trays and the scrape of chairs on the tile floor formed a chaotic symphony that filled the large, echoing space.

But to Nino, it all blurred into a dull roar, like waves crashing against her ears. She felt like an outsider, standing on the edge of a world she didn't belong to. Her thick glasses slid down her nose as she glanced around, looking for a place to sit. Groups of students were clustered together, their conversations and laughter flowing like they'd known each other forever. Her stomach churned as she spotted a group of girls giggling at their table. Back in Kuching, she would have been the one laughing with her friends, swapping stories about books or their favourite TV shows. The smell of the food here was different too—no comforting aroma of laksa, just the faint grease of fried noodles and rice from the cafeteria line. Here, in Kuala Lumpur, everything felt foreign.

A quick burst of laughter nearby made her look up. At a table near the centre of the canteen, a group of girls sat huddled together like queens holding court. Their trays were pushed aside, their food half-eaten, as they whispered and giggled. The tall girl who stood up had an air of authority about her, and the others seemed to feed off her confidence, laughing at

her every word. Their table was strategically placed near the canteen's entrance, ensuring they saw everyone who walked in. She moved toward Nino with the kind of confidence that made others step aside. Her long ponytail swished behind her like a banner.

"Hey, new girl," the tall girl said, her voice dripping with mock sweetness. "Wah, nice glasses. You borrow from your grandma, is it?"

Heat crawled up Nino's neck and into her cheeks, making her wish she could disappear. Her hands tightened around the tray until it wobbled precariously, and her heart thumped against her ribs, so loud she was sure everyone could hear it. She tried to think of something to say, but the words wouldn't come. The group of girls at the table giggled, their laughter sharp and cutting.

"Leave me alone," Nino mumbled, her voice barely audible.

The tall girl leaned in, cupping her ear theatrically. "What's that? Speak louder, lah. Can't hear you, four-eyes."

Nino's eyes stung as she fought back tears. All she wanted was to disappear, to vanish into thin air.

"Oi! Why don't you leave her alone?"

The voice cut through the noise like a knife. Heads turned as a girl strode toward them, her curly braids bouncing with every step. Her chin was lifted high, and her eyes daring anyone to challenge her. The confidence in her voice was enough to quiet the giggles. She was a bit taller than Nino, her curly hair styled into neat braids that framed her fair, naturally blushed face. Her uniform, though the same as everyone else's, looked effortlessly chic, paired with a confident smile that could melt ice.

"Melina, go pick on someone your own size lah," the girl said, placing herself firmly between Nino and the bully. "Don't you have anything better to do?"

The tall girl—Melina—frowned. Her sharp eyes darted from the new girl to the confident one who had just intervened. "Whatever," she muttered, flipping her ponytail as she walked back to her table. Her group followed, still whispering but



keeping their distance.

The newcomer turned to Nino, her expression softening. “Don’t worry about her. She just likes to make trouble. Come, let’s find a seat.”

As Nino settled her tray on the table, her hands still trembling slightly from the encounter with Melina, Cidah gave her an encouraging smile. “Don’t let people like her get to you. They’re all talk, no substance. You’re better than that, okay?”

Nino nodded, her lips twitching into a small, grateful smile. “Thanks,” she said softly. “I’ve never been good at dealing with people like her.”

Cidah shrugged, leaning back in her seat. “You don’t have to. That’s what friends are for. And trust me, you’ve got one now.”

Before Nino could respond, another girl approached their table. Her ponytail was neatly tied, and her uniform was spotless, almost too perfect compared to the chaos of the canteen. “Hi,” she said with a warm smile. “Mind if I join you?”

“Of course! Have a seat,” Cidah said, motioning to the empty spot beside her. “I’m Cidah, and this is Nino.”

The new girl placed her tray on the table and sat down. “I’m Alia. I just moved here too.”

“Really?” Nino asked, her eyes brightening. “Where from?”

“Miri, in Sarawak,” Alia said. “My dad got a job at University Malaya, so we moved here last month.”

“Wait, you’re from Sarawak too?” Nino said, her voice rising with excitement. “I’m from Kuching!”

Alia’s eyes lit up. “No way! That’s amazing. I’ve never met someone from Kuching here before.”

“Same,” Nino said, the earlier tension in her shoulders melting away. “It’s so different here, isn’t it?”

“It really is,” Alia agreed. “I miss Miri so much sometimes—the quiet, the greenery. It’s not like that here.”

“Tell me about it,” Nino said, adjusting her glasses. “Everything here is so loud. It’s like... overwhelming, you know?”

Cidah laughed, her curls bouncing. “Well, welcome to KL. It’s chaos, but it grows on you. And hey, you’ve got me now. I’ll show you around.”

Nino and Alia exchanged smiles, the beginnings of a connection forming. “Thanks, Cidah,” Alia said. “It’s nice to feel like we’re not totally alone in all this.”

Cidah grinned. “Of course. Now, tell me—what do you two do for fun? What’s your thing?”

“I love reading,” Nino said immediately, her face lighting up. “Especially Harry Potter. I’ve read all the books, like, a hundred times.”

“Me too!” Alia said, leaning forward. “But I’m more into mysteries—Enid Blyton, Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew. There’s just something about solving puzzles.”

“Okay, that’s a bit too smart for me,” Cidah said, laughing. “I mean, I read sometimes, but I’m more into Bollywood

movies. The drama, the songs, the clothes—I love it all.”

“That sounds fun too,” Nino said earnestly. “I’ve never watched a Bollywood movie, though.”

Cidah gasped theatrically. “What? Oh no, that’s unacceptable. We’re fixing that immediately.”

Alia chuckled. “And I bet you’ve never read Nancy Drew, have you?”

“Nope,” Cidah admitted with a grin. “But if you two promise to introduce me to your books, I’ll bring you into the world of Bollywood. Deal?”

“Deal,” Nino and Alia said in unison, their laughter mingling with the noise of the canteen.

Cidah reached into her pencil case and pulled out a small notebook. “Here’s an idea—why don’t we start a book-and-movie club? One week, we read something, and the next week, we watch something. That way, we get the best of both worlds.”

“That’s brilliant,” Alia said, her eyes sparkling. “I love it.”

“Me too,” Nino agreed. “It’ll give us something to look forward to.”

As the girls talked and laughed, Nino began to feel a warmth spreading through her chest. For the first time since arriving in KL, she felt like she belonged. But just as they were leaving the canteen, a voice called out.

“Hey, new girls!”

The three turned to see as Melina stood near the door, her arms crossed casually over her chest. A small bead of condensation slid down the side of the drink can in her hand, pooling onto the floor as she tilted it slightly. The flickering fluorescent light above her cast a faint shadow, amplifying the sharpness of her smirk. Her gaze lingered on the trio like a predator sizing up its prey before she turned and sauntered away, her footsteps echoing faintly in the now-quieting canteen.

“You think you’ll have Cidah with you all the time?” Melina stood near the door, her arms crossed and her smirk razor-sharp. Her voice was low, carrying just enough menace to make the chatter around them pause. Nino froze, clutching

her bag tightly, while Cidah and Alia exchanged quick, knowing glances. The tension in the air was thick enough to cut, but Melina just flipped her ponytail and sauntered off, leaving her words hanging like a storm cloud. Nino's heart sank, but before she could react, Alia placed a hand on her shoulder. "Ignore her," she said firmly. "She's not worth it."

Cidah nodded in agreement, her expression calm but watchful. "She's all talk."

The three walked away together, their steps steady, but Nino couldn't shake the feeling that Melina's words were a warning of challenges to come.

CHAPTER 2:
.....

THE FIRST TERM

The first few weeks of school blurred into a routine of classes, assemblies, and navigating the sprawling corridors of SMK Bukit Bangsar. For Alia, Nino, and Cidah, the initial awkwardness of new friendships had quickly turned into a comfortable rhythm. The trio spent their mornings sharing breakfast in the canteen, their afternoons exchanging stories, and their evenings texting about everything from homework to favorite books.

Despite the bustling hallways and noisy classrooms, the school felt strangely isolating for Nino. Being away from Kuching was harder than she'd expected. Her big glasses and shy demeanor often made her a target for teasing. Still, with Alia and Cidah by her side, the sting of feeling different was easier to bear.

"I hate this subject," Nino muttered during one particularly boring Science lesson, scribbling aimlessly in her notebook.

Cidah leaned over and whispered with a grin, "You're the only person I know who's read Harry Potter six times but hates studying plants."

Alia, seated behind them, stifled a laugh. "I don't think Nino hates plants. She just hates drawing them for the third time this week."

The teacher cleared her throat, and the three friends quickly went back to pretending to take notes.

After the bell rang, the girls spilled into the corridor along with the rest of the students, their chatter blending into the hum of lunchtime noise.

"Did you guys hear about the scavenger hunt at the end of the term?" Cidah asked as they made their way to the canteen.

Alia perked up. "A scavenger hunt? That sounds fun!"

"It's not just fun; it's legendary," Cidah said, her eyes gleaming. "Every year, they set these insane challenges—physical and mental. People talk about it for weeks after."

Nino's enthusiasm waned slightly. "Wait. Physical challenges? Like running and climbing?"

"Don't worry, Nino," Alia teased. "You'll be fine. I'll be there to carry you if you collapse."

Nino groaned but smiled. "You better be serious about that."

As they reached the canteen, the trio found their usual table in the corner and settled in. The buzz of activity around them was almost comforting now, a backdrop to their growing friendship.

"So," Alia said, opening her packed lunch, "do you think Melina is joining the scavenger hunt?"

Cidah rolled her eyes. "She probably is. Anything to show off how great she thinks she is. But don't worry about her. We'll crush it together."

Nino hesitated, her fork halfway to her mouth. "Do you think she still holds a grudge about that first day in the canteen?"

Alia and Cidah exchanged a look. Melina had kept her distance for the most part, but every now and then, they caught her glaring at them from across the room.

"She's all bark and no bite," Cidah said dismissively. "Besides, we're not here to worry about her. We've got bigger things to think about—like how we're going to win that scavenger hunt."

The conversation shifted to strategy, with Alia suggesting a balance between physical and mental tasks, and Cidah vowing to outshine everyone in the more creative challenges. Nino mostly listened, nodding along but clearly nervous about the prospect of competing.

Later that day, during a free period, the girls found themselves in the school library. It was one of Alia's favorite places—quiet, organized, and full of endless possibilities.

"Have you ever solved a mystery, like in the books you

read?" Nino asked Alia as they flipped through pages of an old encyclopedia.

Alia smiled thoughtfully. "Not a real one, but my dad and I used to play these detective games when I was younger. He'd set up clues around the house, and I'd have to solve them to find the 'treasure.'"

"That sounds so fun," Nino said, her eyes lighting up. "Maybe you can teach me sometime."

"Sure," Alia replied, glancing at Cidah. "What about you? Ever solved a mystery?"

Cidah laughed. "The only mystery I've solved is figuring out where my dad hides the cookies. But I'm ready for any challenge if it means beating Melina and her gang."

The three girls burst into laughter, their voices echoing softly in the library's stillness.

As the weeks went by, they began to notice subtle changes in each other. Alia's natural curiosity and leadership started shining through, making her the unofficial planner of their group. Cidah's charm and flair for creativity became their secret weapon, while Nino, despite her self-doubt, began to show an unexpected resilience that surprised even herself.

By the time the end of the term approached, the scavenger hunt was all anyone could talk about. Posters went up in the hallways, and whispers of rumored tasks spread like wildfire.

"We're going to crush it," Cidah declared confidently as they walked home one afternoon.

Alia grinned. "With a team like ours, we can't lose."

Nino smiled nervously but said nothing, silently hoping they were right.

Little did they know, the scavenger hunt would be the beginning of something far bigger than they could have ever imagined—a challenge that would test not just their wits and teamwork, but their courage and loyalty as well.

CHRONICLES OF KUCHING

Adventures of Young Alia

Three girls.
One unexpected journey.
And a legend that refuses to stay buried.

When Alia joins her new friends Nino and Cidah on a trip to a remote village in the Sarawak highlands, she expects food, laughter, and time away from school. But the jungle has other plans.

Strange signs begin to appear.
Old stories start to feel too real.

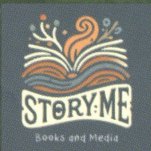
And what began as a celebration turns into something much more mysterious.

Rooted in Malaysian folklore and filled with friendship, suspense, and adventure, *Adventures of Young Alia – Chronicles of Kuching* is the first book in the *World of Alia Merican* – the unforgettable beginning of a girl who will one day uncover secrets, solve crimes, and challenge those who hide behind power.

Not all adventures are chosen.
Some find you.

"A pulse-racing tale of friendship and courage—where ancient legends collide with modern-day mysteries. Young readers will be hooked from the very first page."

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