

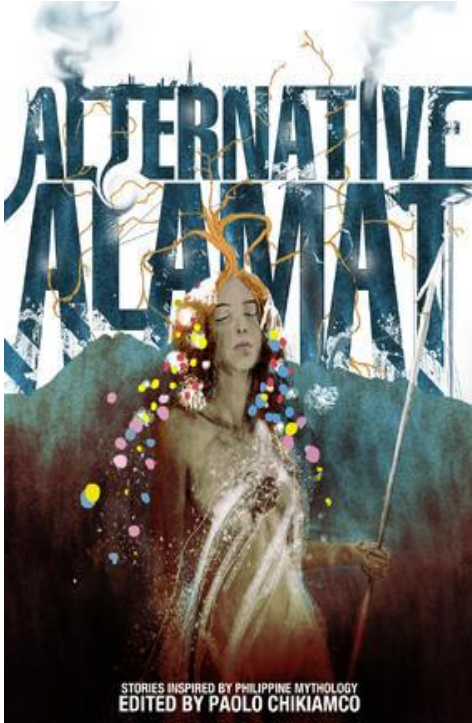


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14 December 2011 \* For Immediate Release

## **ALTERNATIVE ALAMAT**

### **An Anthology of Stories Inspired by Philippine Mythology**



Philippine mythology is full of images that ignite the imagination: gods of calamity and baldness, of cosmic time and lost things; the many-layered Skyworld, and weapons that fight their own battles; a ship that is pulled to paradise by a chain, and a giant crab that controls the tides... yet too few of these tales are known and read today. "Alternative Alamat" gathers eleven stories, by contemporary authors of Philippine fantasy, which make innovative use of elements of Philippine mythology. None of these stories are straight re-tellings of the old tales: they build on those stories, or question underlying assumptions; use ancient names as catalysts, or play within the spaces where the myths are silent. What you will find in common in these eleven stories is a love for the myths, epics, and legends which reflect us, contain us, call to us—and it is our hope that, in reading our stories, you may catch a glimpse, and develop a hunger, for those venerable tales.

"Alternative Alamat" also features a cover and interior illustrations by Mervin Malonzo, a short list of notable Philippine deities, and in-depth interviews with Professors Herminia Meñez Coben and Fernando N. Zialcita.

The digital edition of "Alternative Alamat", co-published by Flipside Digital Content, may now be purchased for US\$4.99 at the Amazon.com Kindle store (<http://amzn.to/vhQKYe>) and for PHP235.00 at Flipreads.com (<http://www.flipreads.com/book/alternative-alamat/>), and will soon be available at the Apple iTunes and Barnes & Noble Nook stores.

Attached as annexes to this press release are the following: (a) a montage of art from the interior illustrations; (b) the full introduction to the anthology; (c) the contributor and story introductions; (d) excerpts from the interviews.

For more information please feel free to visit the "Alternative Alamat" page on RocketKapre.com (<http://www.rocketkapre.com/2011/alternative-alamat/>). For any inquiries, please email us at [rocketkapre@gmail.com](mailto:rocketkapre@gmail.com)

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\* Continuing coverage and supplemental material (author interviews, new editions or versions) will be provided at <http://rocketkapre.com>



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A montage image from Mervin Malonzo, using elements from all eleven pieces of his interior art for the anthology. Mervin is the creator of the webcomic "Tabi Po", which may be found at <http://www.tabi-po.com/>



### Introduction

*“For the educated [Filipino] minority, Greek and Roman mythology is more familiar than their own. They can summon Apollo and Aphrodite or mentally wander around Olympus; but they are puzzled by Bagan and the seven levels of the Bukidnon sky-world. A vast area of our collective self, a self that is the product of generations of reflection upon life’s meaning, is thus submerged in darkness. In fact the ridges and valleys of this unexplored self continue to underlie our own view of the world, ‘modern’ though we are. A rediscovery of our myths unlocks this hidden continent.”*

- “The Soul Book” by Francisco Demetrio, Gilda Cordero – Fernando, and Fernando Zialcita

In one sense, to speak of Philippine mythology is to use a term of convenience. We are a nation of many indigenous cultures—numbering anywhere from sixty to over a



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hundred, depending on who you ask—with distinct oral traditions. This makes learning about our mythology somewhat more difficult than would be the case for other nations, but it also gives us a cumulative heritage that is rich and diverse.

There is a dual beauty to Philippine mythology: the stories that we know, and the stories that we don't. From the former we gain gods of calamity and baldness, of cosmic time and lost things; we gain the bloodthirsty Banna, the lustful Labaw Donggon, the immortal Mungan; we gain the many-layered Skyworld, and weapons that fight their own battles; we gain a ship that is pulled to paradise by a chain, and a giant crab that controls the tides. These are ideas and images which inspire.

And yet, the stories we don't know are just as fascinating. Philippine mythology is rife with those unfilled spaces that kindle the imagination, "those marginal regions named and labeled", as Michael Chabon once put it. In some cases, all we have are fragments of a longer tale (as in the case of the Ibalon). In others, all that remains are the names of the gods and their divine functions, beautiful names and evocative duties, leaving us to wonder about the tales they once populated.

But here's the thing: when writers are inspired, when writers wonder, they write. This anthology is a product of that wonder and inspiration.

Within these pages, you won't find straight retellings of old tales—"alamat" is the Filipino word for "legend", and I've deliberately asked for stories that provide for "alternative" takes. Some stories build on what we know, or reexamine underlying assumptions. Others use names as catalysts, or play within the spaces where the myths are silent. What you will find in all these eleven stories, however, is a love for the myths, epics, and legends that reflect us, contain us, call to us.

In case the stories in this anthology whet your appetite for information about Philippine mythology, I've also included supplementary material in the form of interviews with experts in folklore and anthropology, as well as a rundown of notable Philippine gods and goddesses not featured in the anthology (interpreted visually by Mervin Malonzo in between the stories). This barely scratches the surface, of course, so you'll also find a brief survey of other resources at the end of the book.

"The gods," says Roberto Calasso in *Literature and the Gods*, "are fugitive guests of literature. They cross it with the trail of their names and are soon gone. Every time the writer sets down a word, he must fight to win them back." I hope that the stories in this volume will help to make them more frequent visitors.



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## **Story Introductions and Contributor Bios**

### **Ana's Little Pawnshop on Makiling St.**

Eliza Victoria

*Eliza Victoria was born in 1986. Her fiction and poetry have received prizes in the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature and the Philippines Free Press Literary Awards. For additional information, visit her at <http://sungazer.wordpress.com>.*

*Maria Makiling is one of the most popular figures in Philippine mythology, and she'll make more than one appearance in this anthology. However, in this story, she takes a back seat to one of the most obscure of our goddesses, who also happens to have one of the most intriguing dominions.*

### **Harinuo's Love Song**

Rochita Loenen-Ruiz

*Rochita Loenen-Ruiz attended the Clarion West Writer's Workshop in 2009 as the Octavia Butler Scholar. Her work has been published in print and online both abroad as well as in The Philippines. Some of the publications she has appeared in are: Weird Tales Magazine, Fantasy Magazine, Apex Magazine, and Philippine Speculative Fiction Anthology (second and fourth volumes). She has stories coming out in the Second Apex Book of World SF and Realms of Fantasy. She is currently working on a tribal sf novel.*

*The myth of the Sky Maiden appears, in one form or another, in many cultures around the world. However, like many myths, when one peels back the surface of the story, strips it of the distancing devices of archetype and tradition, there are horrors to be found within. This story explores that horror, while mixing Mangyan poetry with Ifugao culture.*

### **The Last Full Show**

Budjette Tan

*Budjette Tan is the writer and co-creator of the graphic novel "Trese". By day, he writes advertising copy for McCann Worldgroup. By night (or when his boss isn't looking), he writes comic book stories. He is one of the founding members of Alamat Comics.*



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*Initially an independently published series of photocopied comics, the Trese series has gone on to win the Philippines' National Book Award. Its heroine, Alexandra Trese, has become one of the most popular Philippine comic book characters in recent memory, a no-nonsense heroine who stands apart from many of her peers in the urban fantasy genre. This story is a rare glimpse at the softer side of Trese.*

### **The Alipin's Tale**

Raymond G. Falgui

*Raymond G. Falgui teaches at the University of the Philippines. His short stories have appeared in the Philippines Free Press, Philippines Graphic, and Playboy Philippines magazines, as well as the Likhaan, Philippine Speculative Fiction, and Digest of Philippine Genre Stories anthologies. His articles on gaming have appeared in Azagar's Book of Rituals and The Kobold Quarterly. He is also a self-proclaimed Luddite who last owned a cell phone some time in 2004.*

*Lapu-Lapu is the first "historical" Philippine hero, a chieftain who rejected and repelled a European force led by Ferdinand Magellan. While textual accounts of the "Battle of Mactan" survive, many of the details—including Lapu-Lapu's actual participation in the battle—have been lost to history, and the battle itself has been elevated to the level of myth. What would happen if we took things one step further?*

### **Keeper of My Sky**

Timothy James Dimacali

*Timothy James M. Dimacali has always been fascinated by the intersection of science and mythology. He is currently the Technology Editor of GMA News Online, but loves to play his violin every now and then. He has been a fellow for fiction at the annual Iligan National Writers Workshop and graduated with a degree in Creative Writing from the University of the Philippines.*

*The people of Panay tell the story of the god Tungkung Langit's eternal search for his wife, the goddess Alunsina. They speak of how Tungkung Langit scattered Alunsina's jewels in the sky in an effort to call her back to him; how her necklace became the stars; her comb, the moon; her crown, the sun. According to the old story, she never returned. Perhaps she had a good reason.*



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## Conquering Makiling

Mo Francisco

*Mo Francisco climbs and writes as much as she can. Her stories have come out in the Philippines Free Press, Philippines Graphic, Speculative Fiction IV and other publications. Her story "Jimmie" won 2nd place in the Philippines Free Press Literary Awards in 2009. She has climbed with both the Loyola and the UP Mountaineers. They have taught her that going days without a shower, sleeping on rocks and suffering limatik bites are worth the trouble when you stand on top of the world with a blanket of clouds below you, music blasting from an iPod and good friends beside you, their glasses raised. She has yet to encounter Maria on her climbs.*

*In myths, Maria Makiling is almost the prototypical nature goddess: caring, benevolent, always generous to men of humble origins. That generosity of spirit at times becomes an offering of her own heart, as Maria is often portrayed as taking human lovers. Yet perhaps in constructing such a romantic image of the goddess, we've left something out. This story uses a modern context to explore a more primal aspect of our most popular diwata.*

## The Sorceress Queen

Raissa Rivera Falgui

*Raissa Rivera Falgui is a writer of fiction for both children and adults. She has won several awards, including first place for Futuristic Fiction in the 2002 Palanca Awards and second place for short story for children in the 2002 and 2006 Palancas. A member of Kuwentista ng Mga Tsikiting (Kuting), her most recent published stories are for young people, in Tahanan Books' The Night Monkeys and UP Press's Bagets Anthology. She graduated from UP with a degree in Art Studies and is currently working towards an MA in Creative Writing. Over the years, she has worked in various institutions, as English teacher, writer, or editor. Among the most recent jobs she has had was one that required her to write about places she has never visited, including Mt. Malindig in Marinduque. Currently her main job, which she does not plan to give up, is looking after her daughter. She is married to an Ateneo English teacher, Joel Falgui.*

*The Marinduque myth of Maria Malindig is the type of story which leaves us with more questions than answers. In part, that's because of the almost casual mention of the great "Empire of Mu", a name which calls to mind James Churchward's lost continent in the Pacific. Yet primarily, it's because of the somewhat inconsistent characterization of Maria Malindig herself. How might a powerful queen truly react when confronted with an encroaching patriarchy? Let's find out.*



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## **Beneath The Acacia**

Celestine Trinidad

*Celestine Trinidad is a newly licensed physician who still tries to read and write as much as she can in her (now unfortunately very little) free time. Her stories have appeared in other publications such as Philippine Genre Stories, Philippine Speculative Fiction IV, Philippines Free Press, and Usok. Much to her own surprise, she won the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Award for Literature in 2008 for her short story for children "The Storyteller and the Giant".*

*Maria Sinukuan, guardian of Arayat, is one of the mountain goddesses, like the more famous Maria Makiling. Unlike her counterpart from Makiling, however, Maria Sinukuan is much less generous with her affections—"Sinukuan" means "Unconquerable", and she frequently uses her wits to extricate herself from unwanted suitors. In this young adult tale, Maria—along with a particularly persistent suitor—gets to apply her wit in another way, in order to solve a mystery.*

## **Offerings to Aman Sinaya**

Andrei Tupaz

*Andrei Tupaz is working on two other short stories based on Philippine myths. He believes he'll finish both before the end of 2011 as long as, fingers crossed, he doesn't fall into a perpetual redraft hole, or allow himself to be consumed by his interests: cooking, programming, and the Internet. He and his wife are based in New Zealand.*

*Since the Philippines is an archipelago, it's easy to understand why the deities of the sea would be so important. Aman Sinaya was the Tagalog goddess of the sea, and protector of fishermen... protector, that is, if the fishermen would make an offering to her of their first catch. But as times change, so too does the nature of what is offered...*

## **Balat, Buwan, Ngalan**

**(A Myth for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century)**

David Hontiveros

*David Hontiveros was a National Book Award Finalist for Best Comic Book in 1997 for Dhampyr (drawn by Oliver Pulumbarit), and a 2002 Palanca Award Winner (2nd Place in Future Fiction- English Category) for his short story, "Kaming Mga Seroks." He has three horror/dark fantasy novellas out under the Penumbra imprint, published by Visprint, as well as a digital novel, Pelicula, from Bronze Age Media. His on-going comic*





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*book series, Bathala: Apokalypsis, is also available digitally from Flipside. He has had his short fiction, film reviews, articles, and comics appear in several Philippine publications. He has recently adapted Bret Harte (no, not the wrestler) and Edgar Allan Poe (twice!) into comic book form for Graphic Classics. He may be observed online at [fiveleggediguana.blogspot.com](http://fiveleggediguana.blogspot.com) (where he blathers on about film) and [davidhontiveros.com](http://davidhontiveros.com) (where assorted bits of his work are housed). He would like to humbly dedicate the story to his four current grandspawn, in chronological order: Gray, Mischa, Chloe, and Sophia, who will keep the flames of his family history burning on, down through the years.*

*While the Philippines is home to distinct cultural groups, a certain amount of cultural cross-pollination did take place. The results are myths which are variations of the same themes, and characters which appear in more than one culture, or who bear the same name but with an altered form. But, as David says of this story, there is power in words and there is truth in myth. If these characters did exist... which version would be true? Would it matter?*

**“A Door Opens: The Beginning of the Fall of the Ispancialo-in-Hinirang (Emprensa Press: 2007)”**

Dean Francis Alfar

*Dean Francis Alfar is a leading advocate of speculative fiction in the Philippines, and the publisher of the annual “Philippine Speculative Fiction” anthology. His novel “Salamanca” won both the Book Development Association of the Philippines’ Gintong Aklat award, as well as the Grand Prize in the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature. He has nine more Palancas to his name, two Manila Critics’ Circle National Book Awards, the Philippine Free Press Literary Award, and the Philippine Graphic/Fiction Award. His short fiction has been collected in “The Kite of the Stars and Other Stories”, and been published in venues both national and international, including “The Year’s Best Fantasy & Horror”, “Rabid Transit: Menagerie”, “Latitude”, and “The Apex Book of World SF”.*

*It seemed fitting to end the anthology with this story. Sometimes, I feel like there’s a tendency—even amongst Filipinos—to view the Philippines as a footnote on the world stage. Yet there’s so much that is unique and beautiful in Philippine culture, if only we would take the time to learn it. Philippine mythology has much to offer the world. This anthology, we hope, has opened a doorway. We invite you to step through it.*



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### **Excerpt from my interview with Professor Herminia Meñez Coben**

*Professor Herminia Meñez Coben has a Ph.D. in Folklore and Folklife from the University of Pennsylvania, was Professor of American Multicultural Studies at California State University, Sonoma, and taught “Philippine Folklore and Society” at the University of California, Los Angeles. She is the author of “Folklore Communication Among Filipinos in California” (1980), “Explorations in Philippine Folklore” (1996) and “Verbal Arts in Philippine Indigenous Communities: Poetics, Society, and History” (2009).*

**Do you have any favorites from the stories you’ve encountered in your studies of the various indigenous oral traditions?**

My favorite stories and characters come from the epics. [The epics featured] women warriors, certainly, but also characters such as Mungan, the shaman from the Bukidnon and Ilianen Manobo. Leper and healer both, she gives her people the betelnut of immortality, which enables them to ascend to the Skyworld, while she remains on earth forever to guide future inhabitants on the path toward a life without death. I think that one of the short stories I’ll write will be about her.



### **Excerpt from my interview with Professor Fernando N. Zialcita**

*Fernando N. Zialcita is a Professor at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of the Ateneo de Manila University, and is the head of its Cultural Heritage Studies Program. He is active in the battle to preserve our cultural identity, particularly our intangible heritage. He is also one of the co-authors of the “Soul Book”, one of the few attempts made in recent history at a popular introduction to Philippine mythology. He helped organize the Ateneo’s “Songs of Memory: International Conference on Epics and Ballads”, and he graciously allowed me to interview him after the events of the conference.*

**In one of your other books, “Authentic but Not Exotic”, you wrote about certain misconceptions Filipinos and non-Filipinos alike have about Filipino culture. What are some of those misconceptions about Philippine mythology and pre-history?**

There’s a tendency to project monotheism into the past. I doubt many of our ancestors were monotheistic. Let me go back again to the material base of culture. You would expect monotheism to appear in a place where there is centralized authority, since



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religion is often related to social and political structures. But the pre-Hispanic was very decentralized, many different polities and many different leaders. So monotheism of the Judaic kind would be doubtful, although it is to be expected that some gods would be considered more powerful than others.

**But that wouldn't mean that this god could somehow give orders to the other gods.**

Right. Of course, there was monotheism with those communities that adhered to Islam, but Islam was only in the Philippines around a century or so earlier than Catholicism, so it's still a "new" religion.