

# Crafting a Spy and Espionage Universe: Cross-Platform Worldbuilding in Ejen Ali Franchise

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## Abstract

This paper explores the concept of worldbuilding as applied in the Ejen Ali animation franchise, focusing on its construction of a spy and espionage universe. Worldbuilding, within the framework of transmedia studies, is a storytelling strategy designed to create and sustain narratives across multiple formats. This approach not only ensures consistency across various media but also develops a complex, immersive storyworld that enhances the audience's engagement. Ejen Ali franchise illustrates this technique by extending its spy-themed universe through TV series, cinematic film, comic books, and games. By examining how Ejen Ali employs cross-platform worldbuilding, this paper investigates the creation and evolution of its espionage narrative across diverse formats and the resulting impact on consumer experience.

**Keywords:** *Ejen Ali, Spy and Espionage, transmedia storytelling, worldbuilding, Malaysia, Animation industry*

## 1.0 Introduction

In today's digital landscape, storytelling has evolved beyond single-format narratives, adopting a multi-platform approach known as transmedia storytelling. This technique allows creators to develop expansive and immersive storyworlds that not only engage audiences across different media but also deepen the overall narrative experience. Worldbuilding, on the other hand, involves constructing a cohesive story ecosystem, where each platform—whether it be television, film, comics, or games—contributes unique elements to the overarching narrative. This approach has gained popularity in contemporary media franchises, which increasingly rely on cross-platform storytelling to foster a rich, interconnected universe that enhances audience engagement and builds lasting cultural impact.

The Ejen Ali franchise, originating as an animated TV series in Malaysia, exemplifies worldbuilding through its creation of a complex spy and espionage universe set within the futuristic city of Cyberaya. Since its debut in 2016, *Ejen Ali* has expanded its universe across a variety of media, including films, comics, and mobile games, each contributing to a larger narrative centered around espionage, advanced technology, and covert intelligence. At the heart of this franchise is the journey of Ali, a young boy unexpectedly recruited into a secret intelligence agency, where he navigates missions that blend technological intrigue with ethical challenges. By balancing local cultural themes with global spy tropes, Ejen Ali has built a narrative universe that resonates both locally and internationally, offering audiences an engaging, culturally grounded experience.

This article explores how Ejen Ali franchise employs worldbuilding to create an interconnected, spy-themed universe that resonates with audiences across various platforms. Through an examination of how this storyworld unfolds across television, film, comics, and games, this article investigates the strategies that make Ejen Ali an exemplary model of transmedia storytelling. By analysing the franchise's approach to storytelling, this paper highlights the elements of narrative consistency,

immersive complexity, and cultural resonance that distinguish Ejen Ali within the field of transmedia narratives.

## 2.0 Spy fiction in narrative industry

The theme of espionage and covert operations has cemented itself as a core concept in the global narrative industry, spanning film, literature, television, and interactive media. Key film franchises like *James Bond*, and *The Bourne Identity* exemplify the prominence of this genre, with each franchise innovating within the spy theme to shape and redefine audience expectations [1, 2]. This prevalence underlines a deep cultural fascination with the spy archetype and its enduring appeal, both in its entertainment value and as a medium for examining cultural identities, social values, and technological advancement. The spy narrative, with its blend of action, suspense, and moral ambiguity, serves as both escapist entertainment and a reflective surface for broader societal aspirations and anxieties.

Historically, spy fiction has been influential since the early days of film, evolving to reflect changing political landscapes and technological advancements. According to Spence [3], American spy-themed television series were instrumental in promoting American values and identity, particularly during the Cold War, where technology and religious ideals played significant roles in framing espionage as an essential tool of national defence. Spy fiction of this era, as Spence notes, acted as both entertainment and subtle propaganda, embedding narratives that aligned with American ideological aspirations during a tense geopolitical period. The thematic elements of technology and surveillance, paired with patriotic narratives, echoed the social fabric of the time, demonstrating how spy fiction could effectively convey political and ideological messages through popular media.

The academic study of spy narratives has also emphasized the genre's unique blend of formulaic elements and nuanced storytelling. Attridge [4] provides a literary analysis of espionage themes through Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), noting how Conrad satirizes the archetypal spy, presenting a protagonist who lacks the charisma and agency of typical heroic figures found in Edwardian spy novels. This divergence serves to critique the idealized heroism often celebrated in spy fiction. Attridge explores how early 20th-century spy literature, particularly the works of authors like E. Phillips Oppenheim and William Le Queux, capitalized on public fascination with "secret history," the notion that clandestine, often morally ambiguous activities significantly influence national decisions behind the scenes. This perspective suggests that spy narratives have long functioned as both reflections of and commentary on society's anxieties about the unseen forces governing world affairs.

*The Science of James Bond: The Super-Villains, Tech, and Spy-Craft Behind the Film and Fiction* by Brake [5] examines the James Bond franchise, underscoring its impact on the spy genre and on broader popular culture. Brake's analysis emphasizes how the franchise combines espionage, cutting-edge technology, and memorable antagonists to create an engaging yet complex narrative. His method is analytical, delving into the plausibility of Bond's gadgets, tactics, and stunts by drawing comparisons to real-world advancements in spycraft and technology. By juxtaposing fantasy elements with tangible scientific possibilities, Brake illustrates how Bond's adventures straddle the line between escapism and realism, a blend that has solidified Bond's position as an influential template for spy fiction. This hybrid approach of fantasy grounded in science reflects Bond's impact in shaping not only the spy genre but also in expanding the narrative possibilities of spy fiction into the realms of science fiction and speculative storytelling.

The globalization of the spy theme is another key area of scholarly interest, revealing how different cultures adapt the archetype to reflect local values and social issues. Horton [6] provides a cross-cultural analysis of the James Bond archetype, showing how the figure of Bond is reimagined in German and Japanese spy fiction to align with each nation's cultural context. In German adaptations, the spy character is often portrayed with moral complexity and introspection, reflecting the nation's cautious approach to nationalism post-World War II. Meanwhile, in Japan, Bond's character is reinterpreted through the lens of samurai ideals, emphasizing loyalty, duty, and honor over individual heroism. Horton's work illustrates that while Bond represents Western ideals of strength and charisma,

international adaptations reshape his character to engage with local cultural identities, creating a dialogue between global and national narratives in the spy genre.

The *Bourne* series offers another shift within the spy narrative, reimagining the genre's protagonist from a suave, technologically equipped agent to a gritty, realistic figure embroiled in personal conflict. Firmansyah [7] examines how *The Bourne Identity* and its sequels deviate from the classic spy hero archetype embodied by Bond, presenting Jason Bourne as an amnesiac who pursues his identity rather than patriotism. This approach appeals to modern audiences by emphasizing themes of individualism and realism, qualities associated with American identity. Firmansyah's analysis shows that Bourne's journey is less about glamorous espionage and more about survival, highlighting ordinary locations, intense hand-to-hand combat, and a rejection of the polished, idealized world that earlier spy heroes inhabited. This down-to-earth portrayal speaks to a more skeptical view of government and power structures, marking *The Bourne Saga* as a significant reinterpretation of the spy narrative that reflects contemporary values and a desire for authenticity over fantasy.

The study of how franchises influence each other in terms of narrative techniques and thematic focus is critical in understanding the evolution of the spy genre. Barker [1] examines how elements of the *Bond* franchise are reinterpreted within *The Bourne* series, focusing on the strategic use of film locations, action sequence design, and the depiction of advanced technologies. This comparative approach reveals how *Bond* and *Bourne* influence one another in crafting settings that are integral to each franchise's unique aesthetic and identity. Additionally, Barker's analysis of action sequences and technological portrayal underscores the adaptive strategies used to meet audience expectations, showing how franchises within the same genre can borrow and reframe elements to create distinctive narratives that resonate with changing tastes. This cross-franchise influence highlights the importance of adaptation in maintaining cultural relevance and sustaining audience engagement within the spy genre.

In analysing the Ejen Ali animation franchise through the lens of transmedia storytelling and worldbuilding, it becomes evident that the spy theme functions as both a narrative structure and a vehicle for cultural messaging. By employing the framework of transmedia storytelling, this study will explore how Ejen Ali constructs an immersive world that incorporates local values, high-stakes espionage, and advanced technology, echoing global spy narratives yet distinctly grounded in Malaysian culture. Literature on spy fiction demonstrates that the genre is uniquely positioned to adapt to diverse cultural narratives, making it an ideal subject for transmedia storytelling that extends across multiple platforms, from animation and comics to games and digital media. As the genre continues to expand within various narrative forms, the Ejen Ali franchise serves as a case study for examining how the spy theme can be tailored to reflect specific cultural identities while engaging with universal themes of secrecy, identity, and loyalty that characterize spy fiction globally.

The scholarship on spy fiction in the narrative industry underscores the genre's ability to reflect and adapt to shifting social, political, and cultural landscapes. Whether through Conrad's literary satire, Bond's glamorous yet scientifically inspired escapades, or Bourne's gritty realism, spy fiction captures a spectrum of cultural values and identities, continuously evolving to meet audience expectations and global tastes. This flexibility allows spy-themed narratives like Ejen Ali to incorporate local nuances while maintaining broad appeal, showcasing how transmedia storytelling can further the genre's reach and impact. Through a combination of literary analysis, cross-cultural studies, and industry comparisons, this paper situates Ejen Ali within the broader context of global spy fiction, using transmedia storytelling to illustrate the genre's adaptability and cultural resonance in contemporary narrative media.

### 3.0 Worldbuilding through transmedia storytelling

In his effort to articulate his description on the phenomenon of media convergence, Jenkins [10] makes a case that the fluidity of content across various medium, resulting from convergence logic have a profound influence over popular culture storytelling. He proposed the term "transmedia storytelling" to describe a content production strategy in which a set of narrative is dispersed into several story arcs

individually prepared for a predetermined yet various media formats with each instalment is a standalone at the same time providing narrative value to the whole overarching. Transmedia storytelling as a concept had become a prevalent scholarly theory used by researchers to analyze the growing popularity of pop culture works, especially those that involve multi-platforms production throughout the globe such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe [8-10], the Star Wars Universe [11, 12], the Dr Who Universe [13], and Harry Potter Universe [14-16].

Transmedia storytelling as proposed by Jenkins might offer a comprehensive theoretical concept to analyze current movement of adopting multiple platforms to expand a story franchise. This is because while transmedia storytelling acknowledges that economic factors remain a strong motivation for this production logic, it puts more emphasis towards narrative features of these multi-platform story franchises. Further into this thought, the transmedia storytelling model not only serves to describe features of any story franchise that uses multiple platforms, but also to provide criteria to determine the quality of said franchise. Jenkins [17] had criticized that production logic imitating “repurposing” or “OSMU model” put too much weight on the franchising aspect of the production activity which are governed too much by economic logic. Consequently, the value and potential of story franchise will deteriorate as redundant works, new rendition of a cultural property without significant narrative value embedded in the output, will flood the market. As Jenkins [18] had noted “redundancy burns up fan interest and caused franchise to fail”.

Transmedia storytelling model recognize that audience in the current convergence age craves new works to provide “new insight into the characters and new experiences of the fictional world” [17, para 7]. With that recognition, franchising a story without consideration of the aesthetic aspects of the storytelling will bore its existing audience. Hence, transmedia storytelling model can determine the value of that new work within a story franchise by analyzing the narrative extension it offers in relation to the whole story. Jenkins’s model on transmedia storytelling outlined conditions of which a story franchise can be considered as an effective transmedia narrative.

In an ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best – so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics; its world might be explored through game play or experienced as an amusement park attraction. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained so you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa. [18]

Using Jenkins’s model, a transmedia narrative should, first, encompass multiple instalments in which each works is optimally produced based on its given platform. Secondly, all instalments must contain additional and expanded narrative material to be enjoyed by its fan. And lastly, each work (or instalment) within a transmedia narrative should be prepared as a standalone and acts as a viable point of entry for new audiences to immerse into the storyworld.

Paving the ways into the theoretical understanding towards transmedia storytelling, Jenkins [10] visit The Matrix franchise and uncover its transmedia nature. He asserts that there are two basic ideas behind transmedia storytelling strategy employed by the creator to develop The Matrix as a media franchise. First, the creators used collaborative and synergistic storytelling where different parties specialized in a certain media platform will each have autonomy to produce an installment in their own respective platform to expand the franchise at the same time coordinated their own storylines between each other so that everything inline as a unified story. Therefore, storylines in the game instalment, the animated content instalment and the film instalments are consistent with one another although every instalment have its own unique plot. Secondly, Jenkins [18] argue that The Matrix as a transmedia narrative rely on the “art of world-making” and to make sure that the fictional storyworld encompassing the franchise is immersible. At the same time, an element called “additive comprehension” is strategically inserted in the franchise where new narrative element is embedded into every new installment to ensure that the storyworld is consistently expanded [18].

Long [19] proposed a similar yet unique approach on his own to analyze transmedia storytelling phenomenon. While Long [19] agrees on the definition of transmedia storytelling proposed by Jenkins,

he puts in more emphasis towards the notion of worldbuilding (Jenkins refer to as “art of worldmaking”) in his exploration towards the concept. He conducted a case study on Jim Henson’s *Labyrinth* (1986) and *The Dark Crystal* (1982) as a subject of transmedia narrative. He proposed that a transmedia narrative is developed with an interplay between worldbuilding, negative capability and migratory cues. For Long [19], worldbuilding, essentially, is the way a storyworld is built considering that it will sustain several storylines prepared to be produced/published across various platforms. Worldbuilding necessitates storyteller to form interconnectedness in developing plots as well as portraying a fictional universe across many installments involving various media format. Additionally, consistency in the portrayal of this fictional universe and the serialization of plot across platform can provide migratory cue that motivate audience to move from one instalment to another. Thus, expanding the storyworld with additional instalment can still be profitable since this additional instalment will optimized the use of interconnected plots and consistent portrayal of fictional universe to keep audience consuming more content.

There are a number of scholars agree that the aesthetic appeal of a story franchise should be highlighted in the process of universe expansion. Ito [20] asserts that linking content from various instalment within a story franchise is important to establish a citational network called “media mix”. For Weaver [21], transmedia storytelling is about empowering audience with choice on how deep they want to be entertained with the storyworld as each instalment must be a standalone, yet unfolding new story elements to its viewers. Both Ito’s and Weaver’s thought posed an important aspect of a transmedia story which is the interlinking feature between various instalments within the franchise. As Ruppel [22] had suggested, this interlinking feature formulate “migratory cues” that incentivizes audience from one instalment to consume another within the franchise. Taking lesson from these scholars, we find it convincing that developing a transmedia narrative (that spanned across various media platforms) as a means of franchise expansion increase the economic potential of said franchise by capturing new audience through wide range of entry points and sustaining existing fans with interlinked stories as well as narrative depth involving multiple creative products that can be enjoyed various ways (depending on modes and affordances offered by given media platforms).

#### 4.0 Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach to examine the formulation of spy theme through transmedia storytelling within the *Ejen Ali* animation franchise, as it offers nuanced insights into this complex, real-world phenomenon. As Tenny, et al. [23] assert, qualitative research seeks an in-depth understanding of real-life issues, addressing the “how” and “why” behind their occurrence. Engaging with individuals who have direct experience in creating or studying such transmedia phenomena further strengthens this approach, as phenomenology—the chosen qualitative approach—effectively captures the perspectives of those involved in or impacted by the subject [23].

A case study research design has been adopted to examine the transmedia storytelling practices of in *Ejen Ali*, in the context of the local animation industry. This approach is suited to exploring *Ejen Ali* as an instance of transmedia storytelling in a specific geographical and cultural setting. Evans, et al. [24] note that case studies are particularly useful for exploring a subject as a microcosm of a larger trend or practice. Following Yin [25], this design is empirical, analysing a contemporary phenomenon within its real-world context, especially where the boundaries between the phenomenon and its setting are blurred. Transmedia storytelling itself, prevalent in global popular culture, varies significantly in practice, shaped by specific socio-cultural and geopolitical contexts [8, 16, 26]. While grounded in shared theoretical principles, practices differ based on unique local influences. This research thus views the *Ejen Ali* franchise as a case study in transmedia storytelling within the Malaysian animation industry, recognizing how regional context affects this narrative structure.

To analyse *Ejen Ali*, the study incorporates a critical worldbuilding perspective, which enables a focused examination of the franchise’s immersive storytelling techniques. Stake [27] emphasizes that the strength of a case study lies in the interpretive examination of phenomena. Supported by this

theoretical foundation, this research investigates Ejen Ali texts, including the portrayal of worldbuilding elements that make the franchise cohesive and engaging. Data collection includes physical artifacts, specifically texts produced by Wau Animation, as foundational elements in the case study. Yin [25] emphasizes that physical artifacts are essential data in case studies, offering concrete cultural insights into the subject. Publicly available *Ejen Ali* media—such as films, TV series, comic books and mobile games—are used as primary data sources, all of which meet ethical standards as accessible cultural materials.

Multiple sources of evidence are used in this case study to strengthen data triangulation. According to Yin [25] and other scholars [27-29], case study research relies on various evidence types to reinforce findings. This approach not only ensures a rich dataset but also aligns with Yin's "logic model" analytic technique, where observed events are compared with theoretical expectations outlined in previous section to ensure analytical coherence. The data is analysed using qualitative content analysis, a method defined by Mayring [30] as an empirical and methodologically controlled process that follows content analysis rules without premature quantification. This approach supports systematic and theory-driven text analysis, where categories are iteratively refined [31]. Under this framework, evidence is extracted, categorized, and discussed thematically, aligning with the logic model and contributing to the coherence and depth of the case study findings.

### 5.0 Spy agencies, Espionage, and Heroism

The *Ejen Ali* franchise consists of an expanding story told across a variety of media platforms, including television series, film, comics (both physical and digital format) and mobile games. At the core of this narrative franchise are the TV series and film, which act as the primary narrative channels, developing the central plot. While the TV series and the film can be appreciated as stand-alone experiences, they are intricately connected, with each expanding upon and enriching the other's storyline. The TV series, which initially aired in 2016, released its first two seasons, totaling twenty-six episodes, before the film premiered in 2019. The third season was later released on Disney+ Hotstar in mid-2022, continuing the narrative arc and further developing the franchise's worldbuilding. The first two season of the TV series explores the world of Ali, a young agent who wields a high-tech device called Infinite Retinal Intelligence System (I.R.I.S.). The film, *Ejen Ali: The Movie* (2019), further enhances the storylines revolving I.R.I.S. by including a different villain group from the TV series and portraying its backstories. The conflicts surrounding I.R.I.S. are continued in the third season of the TV series, creating an interconnected narrative experience.

In addition to the main TV series and film, comic instalments and mobile games serve as auxiliary platforms that enrich the storyworld and captivate fans through expanded worldbuilding. For example, the *Ejen Ali* Comic Magazine (*Majalah Komik Ejen Ali*) offers supplementary content, providing fans with additional information about the franchise's universe. Within this comic magazine, the *Sidemission* segment delivers side stories, allowing fans to delve deeper into character backstories and the franchise's technological themes. Furthermore, the webtoon version, accessible online, complements the physical comic by offering unique storylines like *M.A.T.A. Secret Files*, which bridges narrative gaps between the TV series and film, enhancing the broader storyline. The mobile games, particularly *Ejen Ali: Emergency* and *Ejen Ali: Agents' Arena*, introduce new settings, technologies, and conflicts, extending the franchise's universe. While the TV series and film are foundational to the main narrative, the comics, games, and webtoons provide essential contributions to worldbuilding and storyline expansion. These additional platforms do more than offer background material for dedicated fans; they present distinct, complementary narratives that deepen the overall universe. For instance, the *M.A.T.A. Secret Files* webtoon explores character backgrounds and unresolved story elements from the TV series and film, while the mobile games introduce new locations and challenges that eventually feed back into the central narrative.

The spy universe in *Ejen Ali* franchise that encapsulate multiple instalments in various media channel can be seen through the portrayal of plots and scenes that reflects the establishment of secretive organisation, action-packed covert and undercover missions, and the acts of heroism. *Ejen Ali* series in season one primarily focusses of the protagonist, Ali, as a typical Malaysian primary school student

without any prior background of combat skills. However, he does possess good amount of dexterity and a sense of justice as in the first episode he was seen to attempt to save, chaotically, a bullied student and rode his scooter in a skillful way to go to school. His unintentional and coincidental encounter of I.R.I.S. exposed himself to a conflict between an intelligence agency known as Meta Advance Tactical Agency or M.A.T.A. and a villainous hidden-from-public-eyes organization called Numeros. M.A.T.A. is a secret organization aims to protect the city of Cyberaya from any forms of attacks. Numeros, on the other hand, is a villainous group that operates in the shadows, aiming to overthrow M.A.T.A. and seize control of Cyberaya.

It was told that I.R.I.S. was owned by M.A.T.A. and due to its capabilities, Numeros want to obtain I.R.I.S. to achieve their malicious objectives. I.R.I.S. can only be imprinted to one individual at a time. Once it is imprinted to an individual, I.R.I.S. will only be functional to that individual. It was depicted at the end of season one that Numeros had to develop a special device to remove I.R.I.S. from Ali. Although Numeros managed to extract I.R.I.S. from Ali, they failed to confiscate the devices as they are forced to retreat because of the combat pressure by M.A.T.A. agents. Season two of *Ejen Ali* TV series continues the conflict of Numeros and M.A.T.A. Although Numeros failed to get I.R.I.S. in season one, they managed to copy the underlying code of I.R.I.S. and imitate its capabilities by embedding the code to a head gear wore by Numeros leader, Uno. This season ends with Uno death along with Zain, one of the four core leaders of M.A.T.A. The film *Ejen Ali: The Movie* (2019) offered a different storylines and conflict compared to the TV series. In the film, Ali had an encounter with Nikki, which was a long-lost friend of his mother. It has been established in the TV series that Ali's mother is already passed away and he currently live with his father, Dr. Ghazali. The film features the backstory of his mother, Aliya who also a M.A.T.A. agent. To Ali surprises, agent Aliya, his mother, is the one that developed I.R.I.S. during her time fighting terrorist attack with M.A.T.A.

In the film, the main conflict revolved around a rebellious group headed by Niki. This group consist of people from a place at the edge of Cyberaya called Pinggiran. These people were the victim of urbanization of Cyberaya which was the plan of its mayor, Dato' Othman. Frustrated that their home has been systematically demolished, Niki's group plan a revenge plot against Dato' Othman. Using her past relationship with Aliya, Niki takes advantage of Ali naïve personality and use him to get necessary resources for the revenge plot. Niki's plans materialize further when she got the key code of I.R.I.S., which was intended to be given to Ali, and proceed to develop I.R.I.S.-like device to gain more firepower for the revenge plot. Niki's revenge plot failed at the end of the film due to Ali proficiency of using the original I.R.I.S. In 2022, *Ejen Ali* franchise was expanded further with the released on the third season of *Ejen Ali* TV series spanning for 13 episodes. With Uno death in season 2, Numeros have taken different leadership and continue to terrorize Cyberaya and sabotage MATA's agency. While their focus is not solely to obtain I.R.I.S., the objective of taking control M.A.T.A. and Cyberaya still in motion. In season three, there is a change in roles between characters. With absent of Uno resulting with his death is season two, Numeros was headed by Cinco, Uno's right hand in the previous season and with the absent of Dato' Othman resulting from hospitalization due to injury during Niki's attack in the film, newly appointed acting mayor, Dato' Hisyam was introduced in season three.

The *Ejen Ali* franchise demonstrates a sophisticated and interconnected transmedia narrative, with its story unfolding across TV series and film. The franchise's ability to weave independent yet interrelated storylines across these formats creates a richly layered narrative that engages audiences while building an expansive spy universe. Central to the storyline are recurring themes of espionage, heroism, and high-stakes conflicts involving secretive organizations, each with distinct goals and ideologies. Through the ongoing battles between M.A.T.A., the covert intelligence agency, and Numeros, the hidden villainous faction, *Ejen Ali* franchise explores not only the protagonist's journey from an everyday student to a young spy but also the ethical and personal complexities of the spy world. The third season's narrative continuation following the film illustrates the franchise's commitment to cohesive worldbuilding, with serialized elements and character development creating a dynamic and immersive viewing experience. Overall, *Ejen Ali* has established itself as a compelling spy-themed franchise that effectively blends individual and serialized narratives to enrich its storyworld across multiple platforms, offering fans an engaging, ever-expanding universe.

## 6.0 Fictional cutting-edge technologies and Malaysia

The consistent portrayal of high-end fictional technologies and blending them with existing real element and aspect of Malaysia forms the thematic backbone of the Ejen Ali franchise, manifesting across both the installments in various media formats. This theme is vividly brought to life in the portrayal of fictional city of Cyberaya and the establishment of special facilities for M.A.T.A. Cyberaya serves as the primary setting for the Ejen Ali spy universe, blending the recognizable elements of real-world Malaysia with advanced, futuristic technology. From the very first episode of the series, "Mission I.R.I.S.," the producers emphasize this blend of realism and futurism by showcasing quintessential Malaysian elements such as a sidewalk stall selling Nasi Lemak (coconut rice) and a traditional primary school classroom led by a Malay teacher in hijab. These familiar scenes are juxtaposed against the hidden, high-tech world of M.A.T.A., a super-secret spy agency dedicated to protecting Cyberaya from various threats.

Technological advancement is another recurring theme that plays a critical role in the Ejen Ali his is particularly evident in the *Ejen Ali: The Movie* (2019) film where Ali questions why the humanoid robots used by Cyberaya's law enforcement (Cyberaya's police force) were newly announced when M.A.T.A. had already been using them for a decade. Agent Rama's response highlights Cyberaya's position at the forefront of technological innovation, where the latest advancements are reserved for M.A.T.A., with outdated technology being released to the public. This focus on cutting-edge technology is not just a backdrop but a central element of the story, driving the plot and the development of the characters. For instance, the I.R.I.S. device, introduced as a key piece of technology in the first season, becomes a pivotal element in the franchise's worldbuilding. Initially, I.R.I.S. is shown to enhance its user's capabilities by providing real-time information and control over surrounding technology. Ali, despite being an inexperienced agent, uses I.R.I.S. to defeat formidable foes like Numeros' henchmen, Doz and Trez. As the series progresses, the capabilities of I.R.I.S. are further explored, particularly its "override mode," which allows the user to control surrounding technology at the cost of their consciousness and energy.

In season two of the TV series, the true potential of I.R.I.S. is revealed through the character of Uno, who explains that the device's actual function is to connect with Cyberaya's mainframe and control its connected technologies. This revelation adds depth to the storyworld, setting the stage for the cinematic film where I.R.I.S.'s origins and its creator, Ali's mother, Aliya, are explored. The film delves into the conflict that led to Aliya's death, a result of her excessive use of I.R.I.S.'s override mode, which taxed her brain to the point of fatal injury. This backstory not only enriches the narrative but also deepens the emotional stakes for Ali, who must navigate the legacy of his mother's invention. Interestingly, in season three, the focus shifts away from I.R.I.S. as Ali is forced to return the device to M.A.T.A., which then decides to award it to the winner of the Arena tournament, a storyline that becomes central to this season. Without I.R.I.S., Ali is compelled to innovate, upgrading his suit with electromagnetic controls, and incorporating his mother's weapon system, a spinning top, into his combat arsenal. This adaptation reflects the ongoing theme of technological evolution within the franchise, as characters continually enhance their capabilities with new tech. The tournament itself raises questions about who will ultimately wield I.R.I.S., with Alicia emerging as the winner, leaving audiences eager to see how she will handle the powerful device.

The comic book instalments also play a role in the development of Ejen Ali Spy Universe in terms of the portrayal of technologies. For example, in *Majalah Komik Ejen Ali: Misi 47*, there is a section that includes metatextual element of the franchise. In this issue, this section delves into the details of I.R.I.S. and its various versions, including "override mode," "override mode (white)," Ejen Aliya's version, and "override mode (blue)." Additionally, another instalment of short comics in digital format was introduced by Wau Animation studio called "MATA Secret Files". This latest instalment made its digital debut on the webtoons.com platform, presented as a concise comic strip story, readily available to fans at no cost. However, only the initial two chapters, specifically *MATA Secret Files: Post Mission Neo, Logs (Part 1)* and *MATA Secret Files: Post Mission Neo, Logs (Part 2)*, found their place in the final two issues of the Ejen Ali comic magazine (*Majalah Komik Ejen Ali*), issue 51 and 52. This comic



instalment takes on a distinctive role in expanding Ejen Ali spy universe. It serves as a medium to bridge narrative gaps between the main storylines presented in the Ejen Ali television series and film.

One of the most compelling aspects of *MATA Secret Files* lies in its ability to fill narrative gaps within the *Ejen Ali* universe. A prime example is seen in the story arc titled *Post Mission Neo, Logs (Part 1 & 2)*. In the *Ejen Ali* film, viewers were left with an emotional revelation: Ejen Bakar had granted Ejen Ali access to internal M.A.T.A records, particularly those related to Ali's mother, Ejen Aliya. This memorable plot point is further explored in *Post Mission Neo, Logs*, where Ejen Bakar entrusted Ali with a USB drive containing additional video logs from Ali's mother, shedding light on her involvement in the development of a new technology and weapon she used in combat.

Additionally, the mobile game specifically the *Ejen Ali: Emergency* also contributes to the portrayal and expansion of Ejen Ali spy universe. The gameplay allows player (user) to control a character and navigate them through several series of espionage-themes plots. Among several storylines available in this game that player can choose and play, there is one storyline called '*Mission Inferno*' that portrayed the advance energy usage of Cyberaya. The conflict in *Mission Inferno* centers around the Cyberaya Geothermal Power Plant, which is one of several power plants in Cyberaya. Notably, this location is introduced in the game and does not being mentioned in either TV series or film. However, there are other power plants mentioned in TV series. In the TV series episode *Mission: Gegas Protocol* (2016, season 1, episode 7), the power plants discussed were the solar power plant, hydroelectric power plant, and wind power plant. Additionally, while this episode depicts Numeros' attempt to steal Azurium (another fictional source of energy), the game *Mission Inferno* provide different yet quite similar storyline, showcasing Trez's pursuit of geothermal energy, instead of Azurium (as in episode *Mission: Gegas Protocol*) to develop new weaponry for Numeros. This distinction highlights how the mobile game expands the storyworld by introducing previously unexplored elements and providing additional context regarding the pursuit to obtain power and weaponry by the villain, Numeros organization.

Ejen Ali franchise skillfully blends advanced fictional technologies with authentic Malaysian cultural elements, creating a distinctive and immersive world. The futuristic city of Cyberaya serves as the central setting, merging high-tech innovations with recognizable aspects of Malaysian life, such as traditional food stalls and school environments. This fusion of familiar Malaysian scenes with cutting-edge technologies, like the I.R.I.S. device, enriches the franchise's worldbuilding. The story extends across various platforms, including comics, mobile games, and digital webtoons, each contributing unique layers to the portrayal of Cyberaya's technological landscape. This integration of Malaysian cultural markers with fictional advancements provides a dynamic and culturally grounded universe, enhancing the franchise's appeal while showcasing Malaysia's identity within a high-tech narrative.

## 7.0 Conclusion

Ejen Ali franchise exemplifies the transformative potential of transmedia storytelling, showcasing how a cohesive and immersive narrative universe can captivate and engage audiences across multiple platforms. By integrating interconnected storylines across TV series, film, comics, mobile games, and webtoons, the franchise has built a richly layered, spy-themed world where themes of espionage, heroism, and ethical complexity come to life. Through the covert agency M.A.T.A. and its ongoing battle with Numeros, Ejen Ali presents narratives that explore both personal growth and societal issues, elevating the franchise beyond entertainment into a culturally resonant and sophisticated storyline that appeals on multiple levels.

A notable achievement of Ejen Ali is its seamless fusion of fictional high-tech espionage with Malaysian cultural elements, which sets it apart within the global animation landscape. By situating its futuristic city of Cyberaya within a distinctly Malaysian cultural framework, the franchise delivers a unique, culturally grounded experience. This blend of local identity and advanced technology not only engages audiences but also positions Ejen Ali as a representative of Malaysia's cultural narratives in an increasingly globalized media space. For the media industry, Ejen Ali serves as a model for how transmedia storytelling can amplify local stories and themes, enabling them to resonate with both regional and international audiences.

The success of Ejen Ali also underscores significant implications for future research and the media industry. For scholars, the franchise provides a valuable case study on the role of transmedia storytelling in preserving cultural identity while appealing to a global audience. Future research could explore how other cultural contexts adapt transmedia strategies to tell regionally grounded stories in global markets or how these strategies influence audience perceptions of cultural authenticity. Additionally, as more franchises look to expand their universes across diverse media, Ejen Ali illustrates the importance of consistent worldbuilding and meaningful cultural integration as factors that can enhance audience engagement and contribute to a franchise's long-term success. As Ejen Ali continues to evolve, its innovative worldbuilding and commitment to a cohesive transmedia narrative ensure its lasting impact and engagement with audiences, solidifying its place in the ever-growing field of transmedia storytelling. This case exemplifies how cross-platform storytelling can not only deepen audience immersion but also expand the cultural reach of local narratives in the digital age, offering a valuable roadmap for future transmedia initiatives in diverse cultural settings.

## 8.0 References

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