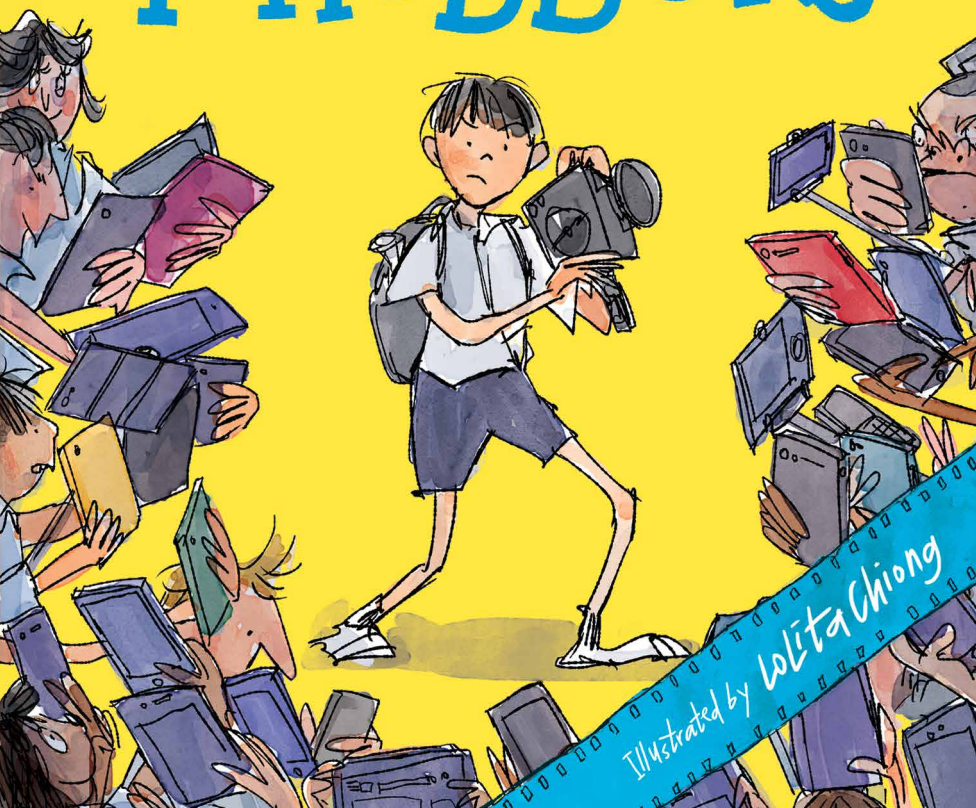


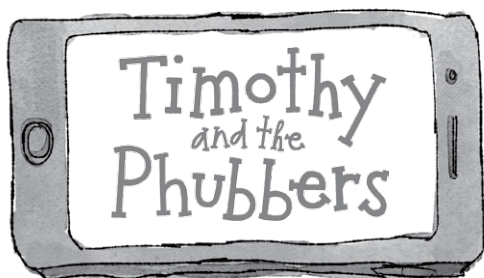
THE FANTASTICALLY FUNNY DEBUT NOVEL BY FILMMAKER

Ken Kwek

Timothy  
and the  
Phubbers



Illustrated by Lolita Chiong



# Timothy and the Phubbers

Ken Kwek

ILLUSTRATED BY

Lolita Chiong



EPIGRAM  
SINGAPORE · LONDON



Text © Ken Kwek 2018  
Illustrations © Lolita Chiong 2018

Published by Epigram Books  
www.epigrambooks.sg

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without prior written permission of the Proprietor or Copyright holder.

**National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

**NAMES**

Kwek, Ken, 1979-, author | Chiong, Lolita, *illustrator*

**TITLE**

Timothy and the Phubbers  
written by Ken Kwek, *illustrated by Lolita Chiong*

**DESCRIPTION**

Singapore: Epigram Books [2018]

**IDENTIFIERS**

OCN 1027471325  
ISBN 978-981-47-5797-3 (paperback)

**SUBJECTS**

LCSH: High school students—Juvenile fiction  
High schools—Juvenile fiction

**CLASSIFICATION**

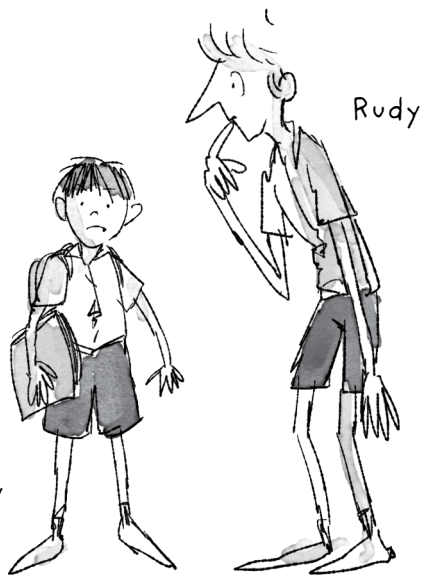
DDC 5823—dc23

**FIRST EDITION**

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

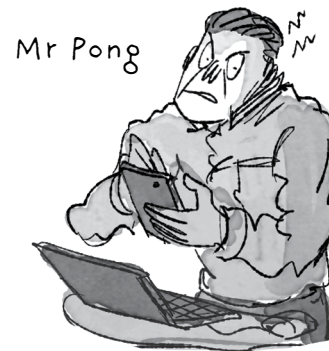


Ken  
For Shan Ming 16:51

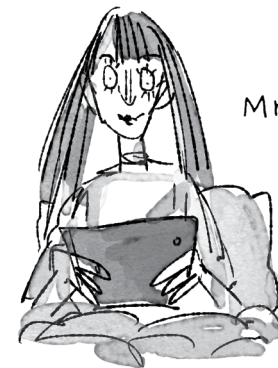


Timothy

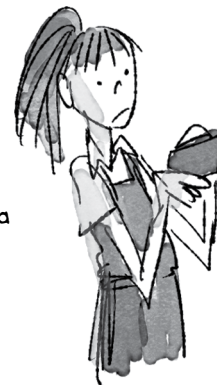
Rudy



Mr Pong



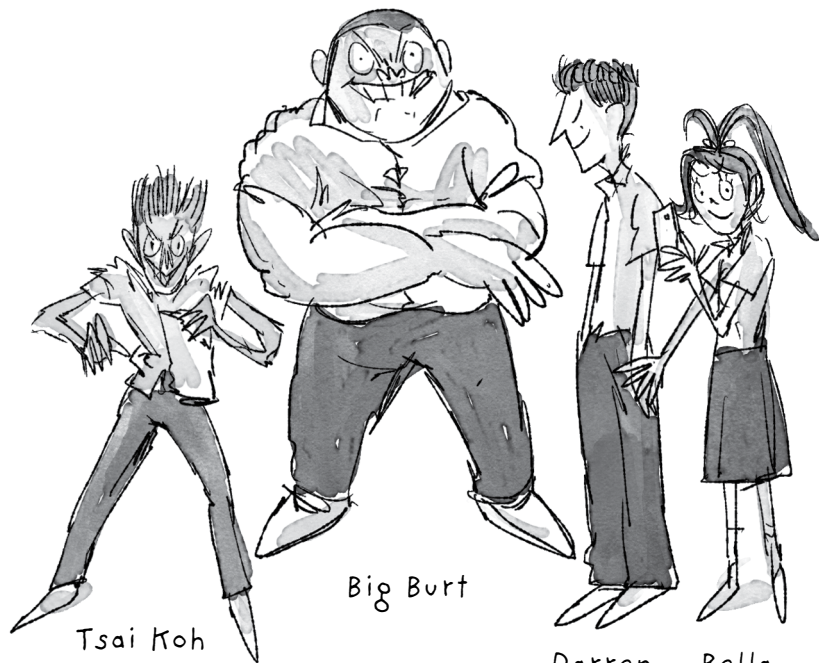
Mrs Pong



Tara



Christina Aguilera



Tsai Koh

Big Burt

Darren

Bella



Gilbert



Wacky

I  
**Blood, Sweat and Flies**

A splodge of red snot oozed from Timothy Pong's nostril and dripped onto the empty plate in front of him. *Great*, he thought. He was having a nosebleed.

Timothy looked to his left and watched as the lanky boy next to him pulled a pinky out from his own nose and touched it to his tongue, as if sampling a hot sauce. The lanky boy was having a nosebleed too.

Timothy shuddered. He was slight and short for a twelve-year-old, with small eyes, a button nose, and a haircut that looked like someone had overturned a ramen bowl on his head. Just ten minutes ago, he had strolled into his new school, trying very hard to look cool and casual (and trying

even harder to hide his quivering nerves).

Timothy had an enormous appetite despite his small stature. His parents had neglected to give him breakfast that morning, so his first mission was to find the canteen.

It was 7.00am, half an hour before the first bell rang at Bangsvale Secondary School. Timothy scanned the menu of the Malay rice stall, then the Chinese noodle stall and the Indian vegetarian stall, before deciding on some *dim sum* from the

snack stall. He ordered two large buns (one pork and one chicken) and a mug of Milo, then settled down at the nearest table to eat.

As he bit into the pork bun, he noticed a skinny, scruffy Eurasian boy staring at him with big, hungry eyes. Timothy sighed and so, it seemed, did his stomach which let out an almighty groan as he picked up the chicken bun and held it out.

“Want one?” said Timothy. “I’m Pong, Timothy Pong.”



“Thanks,” said the other boy, “I’m Rudy Baptista—”

Before Rudy could say anything else, a tubby, pimpled brute swiped both buns right out of Timothy’s hands. His name was Big Burt and he was at least five times the size of Timothy. Big Burt loomed over Timothy with his two accomplices: Darren, who looked like a Chinese Justin Bieber, and Tsai Koh, who just looked feral.

“Ooooh, look, Tsai Koh, fresh meat!” said Big Burt, tossing him one of the buns.

Tsai Koh snarled and tore into the bun with his teeth, his eyes darting about wildly. Timothy thought Tsai Koh was a psycho. Which was understandable.

Big Burt stuffed the other bun into his ginormous mouth and swallowed it in one go. Then he picked up Timothy’s mug of Milo, gulped it down and let out a loud, triumphant burp.

Timothy was too terrified to say anything and kept quiet but Rudy rose to his feet. Rudy was almost double the height of Big Burt. Though he was much ganglier and looked like an empty tube of toothpaste. Still, his height was impressive.

“You can’t do that!” Rudy squeaked.

Timothy grimaced. Any potential to intimidate Big Burt was quashed by the shrill voice of a damsel in distress that Rudy had also been “blessed” with.

“It’s his food! Pay him back!” screeched Rudy, with about as much authority as a kitten meowing.

Big Burt laughed. “*You can’t do that! It’s his food! Pay him back!*” he mocked.

By now a few other students, mostly first- and second-years, had gathered at a safe distance to gawk at the inevitable showdown brewing between the two new boys and the older bullies. Someone passed a bag of popcorn around.



Big Burt nudged his mate, “Darren, what shall we do with these babies?”

Darren flicked his hair with a toss of his head, clicked his tongue and sized up the new first-years, his eyes gleaming. “Tsk tsk tsk... This is *our* table,” he said, leaning in. “You have to pay rent to sit at our table. Understand? Five dollars per sitting.”

“Five dollars?” said Timothy.

At that, Timothy got up to leave. He motioned Rudy to go with him, but Tsai Koh pushed them back down into their seats.

Darren snapped his fingers and held out his hand for cash.

“N-no,” Timothy stammered, trying but failing to summon courage in his voice. Cold sweat started oozing from his pores. “We’re not g-giving you our m-money.”

“No?” said Big Burt.

“Owoooooo!” howled Tsai Koh as he moved



in on Timothy and Rudy and mashed their faces together so that their noses squished like grapes in a juice press.

The students who had gathered to watch the action winced. It was the hardest nose-squish in the history of nose-squishes. It sucked the air right out of Timothy and Rudy so they couldn't even yelp. They squirmed in pain as Tsai Koh held their heads together, whilst Darren rifled through their pockets and fished out their wallets.

"Tell anyone and you're *dead*," said Darren. He turned and glared at the crowd which dispersed within seconds. An empty popcorn bag fluttered to the ground.

Tsai Koh released his grip. Rudy blinked away the tears in his eyes, and could just make out a blurry Big Burt and Darren turning away. As suddenly as they had appeared, all three bullies scarpereed off.

*Those were my first ten minutes of secondary school,*

thought Timothy, glumly. *I'm doomed.*

It was 7.10am. Timothy took a tissue out from his pocket and wiped his bloody nose. Rudy stared blankly into space with blood dribbling down his chin.

"You're dripping onto the plate," said Timothy.

"Sorry," said Rudy.

"Don't be sorry. Want a tissue?"

"Is it edible?"

"No, it's for wiping your nose."

"Oh, then no, thanks."

Like his new friend, Rudy had also arrived at school that morning on an empty stomach. Mr and Mrs Baptista were terrible cooks who couldn't differentiate salt from sugar. They ran a food stall in their neighbourhood hawker centre.

"I can't believe we got robbed," said Timothy.

"My wallet was empty so technically only you got robbed," said Rudy.

The fact that one of the wallets the bullies had run off with was completely empty comforted the boys slightly.

“I’m gonna be in 1B,” said Timothy.

“Awesome. Me too,” said Rudy.

The two boys looked down at the plate where their blood now mingled.

“We’re not just classmates, we’re blood brothers now,” said Rudy.



Timothy realised there was an upside to the situation: he had, very quickly, found a cool new friend. The boys bumped fists.

“Too bad about the buns. I’m so hungry I could eat a fly,” said Rudy. And with that he spanked a fly on the table and popped it into his mouth.

Timothy looked at Rudy. His new friend was cool, but he was also disgusting.

2  
Mud-Bogeys

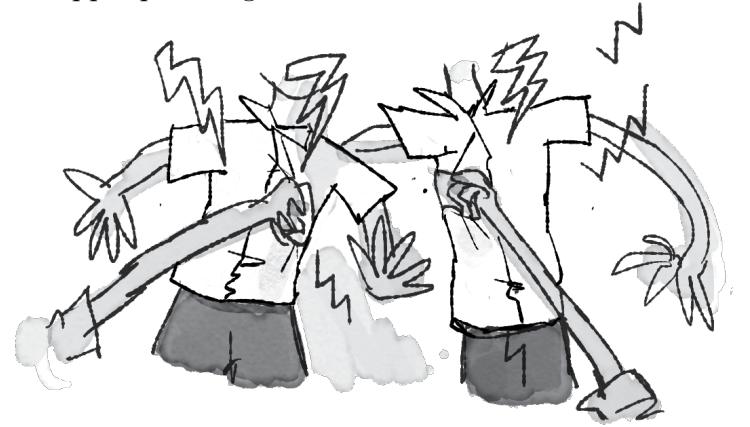
Timothy and Rudy's showdown with the older bullies was the talk of Bangsvale Secondary School.

The two friends had soon gained a reputation as the newbies who, like Caesar (not Caesar the Roman emperor, but Caesar the chimp from *Planet of the Apes*), had the gall to say "no" to their terrorisers.

Word of their heroism (or lunacy, depending on how you look at it) had a mixed effect: they made a few new friends, especially among the science geeks (more on them, later), and it attracted some rather unwanted attention, too.

In their first month of school, Timothy and Rudy endured:

An episode of malicious nipple-pinching.



A hailstorm of exploding mangoes.



An “accident”  
with superglue.



A case of personal  
property damage.

Three attempted  
kisses from girls  
with bad breath.



There were other attacks that are simply too ugly to illustrate.

Apart from attending classes, doing homework and doing more homework, it seemed Timothy and Rudy spent all their time in school dodging assaults from bullies and hugs from rotten-smelling girls. It was exhausting.

“If this is what a month is like, how are we going to survive four years?” It was the fourth Friday of the first term and Timothy was counting off the days and weeks left of school like a prisoner counting down his time left behind bars.

The boys were in the gym changing room, cleaning mud and grass off their faces. Or rather, Timothy was cleaning mud and grass off his face, and Rudy was eating the mud and grass.

Earlier, Tsai Koh had ambushed Rudy in the school field. He kicked Rudy’s soccer ball out of the field – out of the school, in fact – then shoved his

“Silly, irreverent...and utterly relatable.  
A fun and exciting read!”

Monica Lim, co-author of the  
bestselling *Secrets of Singapore* series



Timothy Pong is sick of the older kids shoving his face in mud, stealing his lunch, and posting videos of him online with his pants down – the most embarrassing thirty seconds of fame ever! Even worse, he can't tell his parents as he doesn't have a phone and the Pongs' only form of communication is via the family WhatsApp group. Luckily Timothy has a few ideas – and a rather unusual weapon – up his sleeve...



MIDDLE GRADE

ISBN-13: 978-981-47-5797-3



9 789814 757973

[www.epigrambooks.sg](http://www.epigrambooks.sg)