

# SHERLOCK SAM

and the  
**BURGLED  
BOOK** in  
KAMPONG GLAM



By  
A.J.  
LOW

**“There were so many twists and turns! The story of the burgled book definitely kept me guessing. A book about books is cool. I love that I learned a tonne of fun facts because of Nazhar’s interest in history. There was also lots of interesting information about Singaporean culture. As usual, the Supper Club was hilarious.”**

**MAYA, 9, WANTS TO WORK AT INTERPOL**

**“I like how Sherlock Sam and the Supper Club chased clues to find out who stole the antique book and sneakily replaced it with a fake. Reading this book has made me interested in visiting the Malay Heritage Centre to see the exhibitions and learn more about Singapore’s past.”**

**ALYSSA ANNE, 7, WANTS TO BE A VETERINARIAN**

**“This is the first Sherlock Sam book that I’ve read, and I enjoyed it very much. I could not stop giggling at the parts where Sherlock keeps asking for food. I really hope that there will be more Sherlock Sam books in the future.”**

**HANI’AH, 9, WANTS TO BE AN AUTHOR**

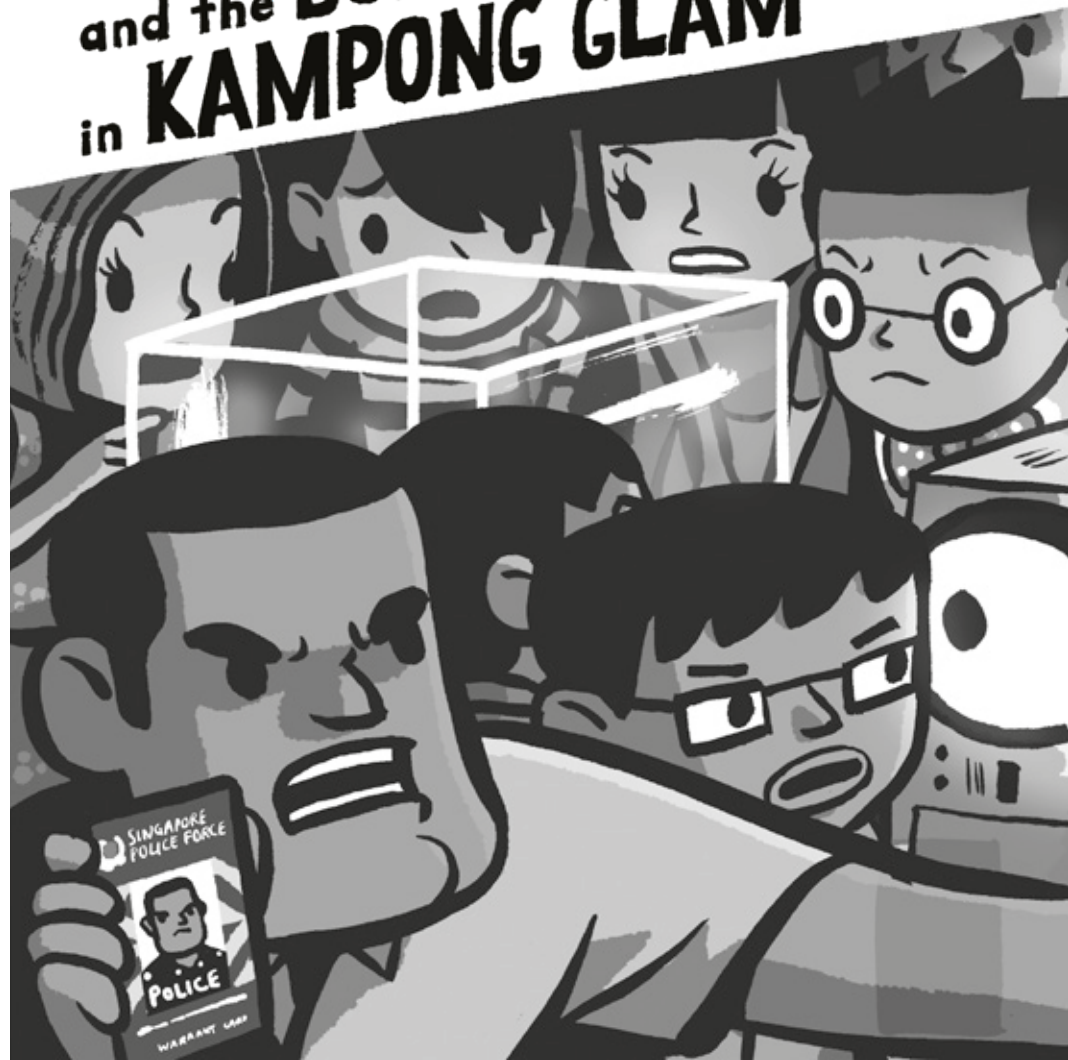
# SHER SAM

By  
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# LOCK

and the **BURGLED BOOK**  
in **KAMPONG GLAM**



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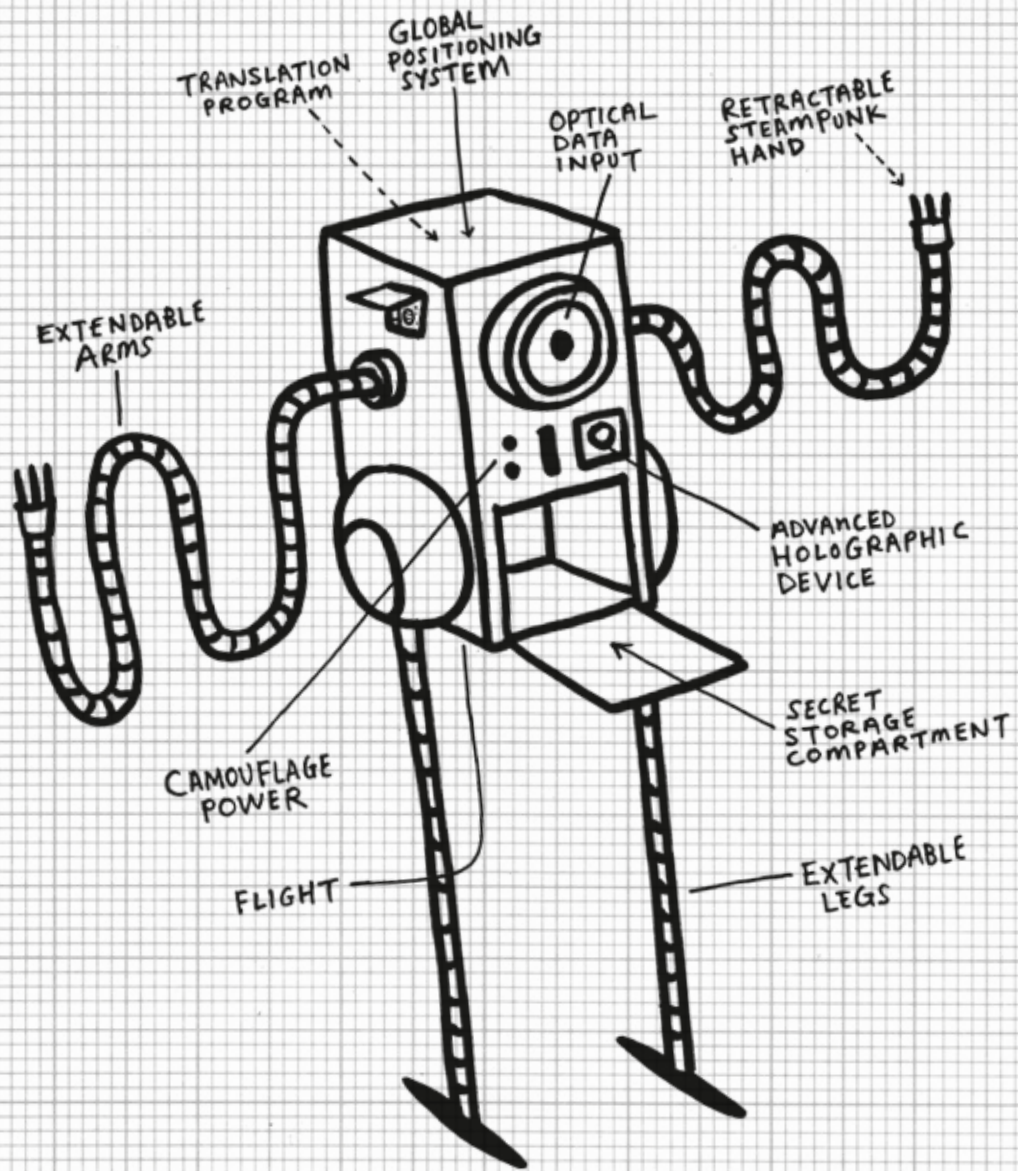
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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

First edition, October 2019.

**To Ibrahim Tahir from Wardah Books,  
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(and various television shows and movies) for  
helping us with initial ideas and research, and  
for reading early drafts of the book to help catch  
any mistakes we may have made. (If any other  
mistakes are found in this final version, know  
that we are very sorry and that it is entirely our  
fault, not theirs.) We hope you enjoy reading  
your fictionalised counterparts in this book!**



# CHAPTER ONE

I was getting worried.

A lot of people were running around the Malay Historical Society, and I couldn't find Uncle Harun. I knew he was busy, but I had something very important to ask him. I finally managed to grab hold of him before he ran off again.

"Sorry, Uncle, but when is dinner?" I asked, looking up at him.

"I'm sorry?" he said. "Dinner? We ate mee

rebus before we left the house. Didn't you have three bowls?" Uncle Harun looked like a taller, more grown-up version of Nazhar. The resemblance was uncanny.

"I thought that was just a pre-dinner snack," I replied, my eyes wide.

"Three bowls of mee rebus is a pre-dinner... snack?" Uncle Harun looked to Nazhar, then to Eliza, then back at me. Nazhar was trying hard to keep his face straight.

"It's okay, Uncle," Eliza said. "Please go do what you need to do. I'll make sure he...doesn't starve."

"Uh...okay," Uncle Harun replied. He looked like he wanted to say something more but decided against it. He hurried away.

"Eliza—" I was going to suggest we head over to the Kampong Glam Café. I had read online that their roti jala was legendary. Nazhar told me that another name for it was roti kirai. All I knew was that the soft, thick, fluffy yellow

crepe with curry was delicious.

"Wendy, Jimmy and Watson are waiting for us at Wardah Books," Eliza interrupted me. "Let's try not to bother Uncle Harun too much, okay?"

Mom and Dad were in Taiwan for five days and Wendy, Watson and I had been staying with Nazhar and his dad while they were away. Mom had been invited to a conference to present her molecular gastronomy research and Dad had tagged along, happily proclaiming that he was on holiday while Mom worked. Eliza was right—I really shouldn't cause Uncle Harun any trouble. Dinner could wait. For a little while.

"Did you know Wardah Books is in the same building where the magazine *Mutiara* was published?" Nazhar asked as we walked past the Sultan Mosque and down Bussorah Street. The street was a pedestrian walkway in front of the mosque, and had many Middle Eastern



restaurants as well as stores selling various trinkets. The area was very popular and usually crowded with locals and tourists, and today was no different.

“The Al-Ahmadiyah Press was located there, and among the many great things *Mutiara* printed were some amazing Malay science fiction stories.”

“I didn’t know that, Nazhar. I would love to read some science fiction by Malay writers.” Eliza was walking next to him.

“I don’t think we would be able to understand most of them, though,” Nazhar said. His eyes were bright with historical-fact glee. “*Mutiara* was published in Jawi script until the ’60s, a few years before it stopped publication. Even I would need a translation, though I’d be okay with Malay in Rumi script. Then I could translate for you guys!”

Nazhar got his love of history (and Post-Its) from his dad. Uncle Harun was a history

teacher in a secondary school. Nazhar's mother had passed away when he was five years old and it had been just the two of them ever since. They are very close. Mom and Dad had become really good friends with Uncle Harun, and he was the one who had suggested we stay with him and Nazhar while my parents were away.

Mom's Taiwan conference coincided with a big exhibition at the Malay Historical Society, which was why we were at Kampong Glam. Uncle Harun was volunteering at the exhibition because one of his university friends had discovered the very important book they were now exhibiting. In fact, lots of Uncle Harun's friends were at this exhibition, either working with the MHS or also volunteering.

"Hello, Nazhar!"

A tall man with grey-streaked hair, wearing glasses and a loose, buttoned shirt greeted Nazhar as we walked into the bookstore. The

bookstore wasn't very large, but it was packed wall-to-wall with bookshelves, and customers had to squeeze past each other to reach the books. Most of the books were written in English by Malay authors, or about Malay subjects. It was the most popular place on Bussorah.

"Hello, Pakcik Ibrahim!" Nazhar greeted him with a salam. He took the uncle's hand and touched the back of it to his forehead.

"I was trying to explain to your friends"—he motioned to Wendy, Watson and Jimmy—"how important this find is, but it seems Harun has already told them everything about the *Syair Negeri Saribas*. I couldn't even wow them with the fact I saw the actual book yesterday."

"Uncle Harun told us a syair is a type of Malay poetry." Jimmy was holding a Ms Marvel comic he wanted to buy.

"And that a syair can be about anything, including historical events." Wendy was holding three books on Islamic art that she



probably would have to wait for Mom and Dad to return to buy.

“He-said-this-one-was-especially-important-as-it-detailed-the-rise-and-fall-of-a-relatively-unknown-Malay-kingdom,” Watson said.

“Yes! My dad has been very excited about it since Cik Rilla announced she’d found it hidden in the stacks of a French library in Vietnam, of all places,” Nazhar said.

“There’s a reason he’s a teacher,” Uncle Ibrahim said, nodding. “And we’re all extremely excited about the syair. It’s an amazing find.”

“Ibrahim, I need you.” A man about the same height as Uncle Ibrahim, dressed in sleek office wear, entered the bookstore.

“Hello, Pakcik Jamal,” Nazhar said, before greeting him with a salam as well.

“Nazhar, hello!” Uncle Jamal clapped him on the back. “We’re almost ready. Maybe you all should come with us too?” He looked at the group.

“Kak Nurul!” Uncle Ibrahim called up the stairs. “I’m heading out now. Please help to watch the store.”

“Can you not worry so much?” someone shouted back down. “Hairin, Kaizal and Nini are already down there. What am I going to do except get in the way? It’s not like you can afford me anyway.”

Uncle Ibrahim sighed, but didn’t reply. He gave us a pained smile. “Okay, let’s go.”

We walked out of the bookstore and back towards the Malay Historical Society. There were even more people here than on Bussorah Street.

“Wow,” Wendy said as she looked around the large courtyard in front of the historical building. It was full of greenery and seemed like a really cool place to hang out.

“This place is amazing.” Eliza slowly spun around. “I can’t believe I’ve never been here before.”

"My dad and I come for every exhibition here." Nazhar was grinning widely. He looked so happy. He was clearly very proud of his dad.

"Can we come along next time?" Jimmy asked.

"Oh, uh..." Nazhar looked uncomfortable.

"We can't, Jimmy," Eliza said. "It's a special thing Nazhar and Uncle Harun do together, just the two of them."

"Oh, like when Mom and I go to East Coast Park to eat and splash in the water," Jimmy said. "It's just the two of us. Not even Mama or my sisters are allowed to come."

"Yes, exactly like that." Nazhar smiled.

"There you are!" Uncle Harun hurried towards us with two aunties following behind him. The taller auntie had short dark hair and wore a glamorous red dress. The other wore a tudung and an ankle-length dark green dress with long sleeves.

"Guys, you remember my son, Nazhar?"

Uncle Harun gestured at Nazhar. "And these are his school friends."

"So handsome," the glamorous lady said, laughing, as Nazhar greeted her and the other lady. "You look exactly like your dad did when he was young!"

"Hello, Cik Rilla," Nazhar replied. His cheeks were slightly red. "Thank you for inviting us to your exhibition. I'm so excited to see it. I can't believe you found the *Syair Negeri Saribas*."

"Thank you, but it's not just my exhibition," Auntie Rilla said with a cheeky wink. "Jamal and Siti did most of the work."

She suddenly turned to the woman in green. "Speaking of which! Siti, you must be so excited some of your family history is included in this syair."

Auntie Siti looked down at the ground. "Um, yes, very excited." She looked up again and gave a small smile that didn't quite seem to reach her eyes.

"It's too bad your parents couldn't make it," Uncle Jamal said.

"Yes, uh, it was too bad." Auntie Siti seemed uncomfortable talking about this.

The uncles and aunties had gone to university together. They had stayed in touch all this time because of their love of history (only Uncle Harun and Auntie Siti were dedicated Post-It fans, though). Uncle Jamal and Auntie Siti now worked for the Malay Historical Society, while Auntie Rilla was working at a university and travelled the world researching ancient Malay texts.

"Any chance we can get a sneak peek before the unveiling, Rilla?" Uncle Harun asked with a wide grin. "You know Nazhar and I would love just a few minutes alone with it."

Auntie Rilla laughed, her eyes twinkling. "Sorry, but I'm afraid not, Harun. Jamal and I just made a final check to secure the room. It's been a bit difficult maintaining the room at the

right temperature and I don't want anything to go wrong at the last minute."

Uncle Harun looked crestfallen.

"But you'll be the very first to see it once we start, okay?" Auntie Rilla said with a smile. She patted Uncle Harun on his arm.

"That reminds me, I need to check on the cameras," Auntie Siti said. "Make sure the one inside doesn't conk out again." She waved at us and went inside the Visitors' Centre.

Auntie Rilla's cheerful demeanour suddenly changed. She frowned. "What's he doing here?" she muttered before abruptly walking away.

"Who is that?" Uncle Harun asked Uncle Jamal, who craned his neck to look. He then sighed heavily and quickly excused himself. He hurried towards the man who had seemed to anger Auntie Rilla.

"I'm going to make sure the buffet tables are ready at the exhibition," Uncle Ibrahim said. "Do you want to get a preview of the food

instead, Harun?"

"YES!" I said, earning myself a glare from my sister. I grinned. You can't blame a hungry boy for trying. I only had three bowls of mee rebus, after all.

"Why don't you guys wait here in the courtyard for a bit. There can't be too many people in the foyer of the Visitors' Centre before the unveiling because it's right outside the exhibition area," Uncle Ibrahim smiled, pushing his glasses up.

It was a cool night, so we didn't mind waiting outside.

"Officer Siva!" Jimmy yelled, waving at the familiar figure walking towards us. He was wearing a dark blue polo shirt and brown pants.

Officer Siva reached us just as Uncle Harun and Uncle Ibrahim were leaving. Nazhar's dad called out, "Siva! I'll be back in a minute!"

Officer Siva nodded at him, then smiled at us.

"I didn't know you'd be coming, Officer

Siva," I said. "Did Mom and Dad send you to keep an eye on us?"

"Why, Sherlock? Are you up to something that I need to keep an eye on?"

"When-is-he-not-up-to-something-that-everyone-needs-to-keep-an-eye-on?" Watson said, turning his big eye towards me. Eliza and Wendy snickered.

"Harun invited me," Officer Siva said, laughing. "Since I'm not working tonight, I thought I'd come and see what he was so excited about."

A short while later, Auntie Rilla, Uncle Jamal and Auntie Siti returned. Auntie Rilla's face was flushed and she looked agitated.

"I can't believe he had the cheek to come," she huffed, crossing her arms over her chest.

"Just ignore him, Rilla." Auntie Siti patted her on the shoulder.

I wanted to introduce Officer Siva, who was standing around awkwardly because he didn't

know anyone there other than the Supper Club and Uncle Harun, but Auntie Rilla didn't seem to be in the mood to meet anyone new.

"Yah. You know what he's like," Uncle Jamal said. "Don't let him spoil your evening."

"Charles Lee is a menace to historians and anthropologists all over the world," Auntie Rilla continued to fume. "He wants to own history and lock it away so that no one else can see it."

"Charles Lee, the collector?" Nazhar asked. "Abah doesn't like him either."

"Who does?" Auntie Rilla looked at Nazhar. She seemed surprised that he knew of Charles Lee. "That man won't be happy until he owns every piece of history so that only he and his rich friends can see them."

"We should head over to the exhibition room, Rilla," Uncle Jamal said. "It's almost 7pm."

Uncle Ibrahim came back then. "The buffet is ready to go," he said.

Auntie Rilla nodded and then looked around. "Eh? Where's Harun?" she asked.

"I don't know, actually," Uncle Ibrahim replied. "He was with me, but then I had to deal with the caterers and lost track of him."

"I'm sure he'll be back for the launch," Uncle Jamal said. "Maybe he went to the toilet? C'mon, everyone. Let's go inside!"

We walked into the Visitors' Centre and I immediately saw the trays lining the buffet table. I made a mental note to sit close to the door when we went into the inner room—all the better to be first in line. Nazhar's dad was looking at the food as well, a huge grin across his face. He seemed as excited as I was about what we were going to eat later. I guessed two bowls of mee rebus for pre-dinner wasn't enough for him. Tucked away around a corner, I also saw what appeared to be a temporary structure draped in black. It seemed out of place with the rest of the room.

“Where were you, Abah?” Nazhar asked, walking over to his dad.

“I was... I was looking for the toilet,” Uncle Harun said. He ran his hand through his hair and smiled sheepishly. “They’re going to let us in soon. Rilla reserved VIP seats for us at the front!”

There was only one set of double doors from the foyer into the inner exhibition room, which seemed like a fire hazard to me. Officer Siva followed us and Uncle Harun introduced him to his friends. Auntie Rilla seemed intrigued that he was a superintendent with the Singapore Police Force and kept asking him questions about his job.

Auntie Siti went to unlock the double doors, but then looked puzzled. She shrugged and opened them, allowing the assembled people to go inside. There were rows of chairs set up in front of a podium and a standing glass case covered with a dark purple velvet cloth that appeared slightly askew.

We went inside the exhibition room, which had gleaming, dark wood polished floors.



We took our seats as the lights dimmed and melodious traditional Malay music started to play. It was all very dramatic. A bright spotlight suddenly shone at the centre of the room. It was so bright I had to squint. When my eyes adjusted, I realised that Auntie Rilla was standing behind the podium.

She was smiling and thanked everyone for attending. She gave a short history of the *Syair Negeri Saribas* and its importance to further understanding Malay history in the region. She ended by saying, "I know everyone, especially my close friends, are very eager to see this extraordinary find. So without further ado, I present to you—the *Syair Negeri Saribas!*"

She pulled the velvet covering off the glass display and presented a large, very old-looking book.

Everyone gasped. A bespectacled older Chinese man surged out of his seat and started to make his way forward. I noticed Auntie

Rilla frown. She shook her head and pointed him back to his seat. The man rolled his eyes, but only retreated when Uncle Jamal moved towards him.

"As the text is old and fragile, I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask all of you to form a queue to view it," Auntie Siti announced from behind Auntie Rilla. I hadn't even seen her there. Her stealth factor was x10.

Auntie Rilla smiled, her eyes crinkling, and gestured at Uncle Harun, who nodded awkwardly before making his way up. She was standing next to the glass case when she looked down at the book. Her face suddenly changed, and she gasped loudly, her right hand flying to her mouth.

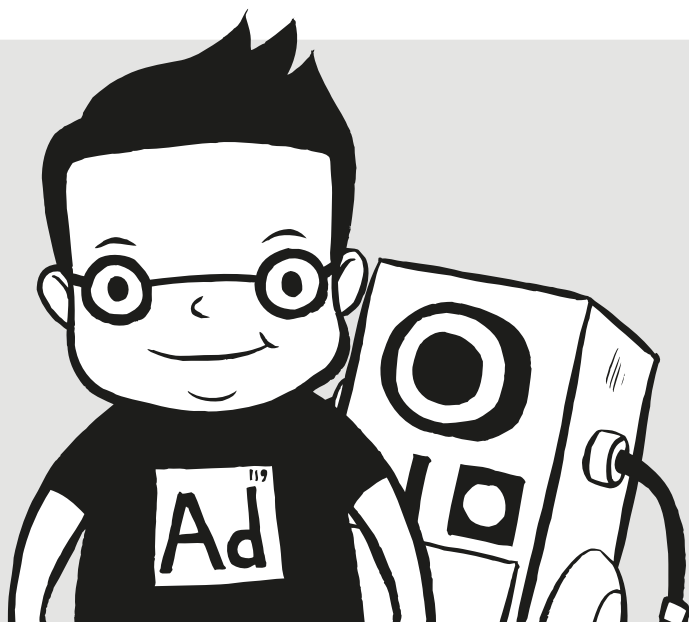
"This isn't my book! This is a fake!"

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