



## **The Misadventures of Sulliver Pong**

*Leland Cheuk*

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## **The Misadventures of Sulliver Pong** Leland Cheuk

The Pongs are an American immigrant family that has seen it all. They helped build the transcontinental railroads of the Victorian Age. They were mistakenly interned with Japanese-Americans during World War II. They may even have co-invented the landmark video game that bears the family's last name. But despite all they've endured, each new generation's patriarch has had one thing in common: a penchant for degeneracy. Sulliver Pong was supposed to be the exception. Married and living in Copenhagen, he was supposed to have escaped his toxic hometown of Bordirtoun; and most importantly, its mayor, his father Saul. When Saul visits unannounced, he begins to draw his son back into his corrupt world of city politics and redevelopment schemes. Yoked to his feelings of guilt for his abused mother and his lust for a now-married adolescent crush, book-smart but life-dumb Sulliver finds himself running for mayor against his father--a decision that will carry hilarious and unfortunate consequences for all involved. A laugh-out-loud black comedy about a dysfunctional family that has endured almost every major injustice in Asian-American history, but can't endure each other, Leland Cheuk's irreverent debut is perfect for existing fans of Jonathan Franzen or the Coen Brothers. Download a copy for free, or order the paperback version, at [cclapcenter.com/pong].

## **The Misadventures of Sulliver Pong Details**

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## From Reader Review The Misadventures of Sulliver Pong for online ebook

### Rosalie says

This bleak but weirdly entertaining multigenerational dysfunctional family saga centers on Sulliver Pong, who narrates his life story from a prison cell. But the book draws most of its absurdist—almost dystopian—edge from Sulliver's father, Saul Pong, whose name and image adorn almost every building and vertical surface in Bordirtoun, where he is mayor. There is even an enormous, revolving statue of Saul in the town square—evoking a cult of personality that we may have thought disappeared with the Soviet era. Saul is a cheerfully corrupt, lecherous showboater whose egotism, greed, and utter lack of conscience may have seemed like parody when the author wrote the book. Now, it feels like straight-up realism.

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### Tim Fredrick says

Leland Cheuk's *The Misadventures of Sulliver Pong* is a funny, insightful debut. My two favorite aspects were (1) the lively setting of Bourdirtown, where everything is named after Mayor Pong and the characters who populate it are reminiscent of the best recurring characters of Parks and Recreation's Pawnee, Indiana, and (2) the flashbacks that illuminate the lives of the main character's ancestors, which offer some of the most sensitive and insightful parts of the book. In easy-to-read prose, Cheuk offers a main character that goes beyond many of the anti-hero archetypes so common these days.

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### Lesley says

OK, if you love dark and/or absurdist comedy, you must give this one a read. It's one of those books that keeps upping itself chapter by chapter, paragraph by paragraph — just when you think it can't get any worse for Sulliver Pong, it does. One WTF moment is just a jab leading you into a big fat WTF cross punch right on your chin. Cheuk never lets up, making his characters — and their plights — more and more twisted. Just when you think it can't get any worse for the Pongs and the people of Bourdirtoun, it does. Just like Sulliver Pong's entire life.

Bottom line: this book was hilarious, often cringe-inducing, and absolutely engrossing. Highly recommended.

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### Laura Brown says

Meet Sulliver Pong in this crazy rollicking ride of a novel. Not matter that he has escaped from southern California to Copenhagen, Sulliver Pong, fifth-generation Chinese-American, cannot flee his family, his history, or his own limitations. *The Misadventures of Sulliver Pong* is a smart, satirical take on immigration, lust, family loyalty, entrepreneurialism and politics. The novel moves back and forth in time, covering several generations of Pong patriarchs and their partners, with the focus on Sulliver, the present-day Pong, jailed and encouraged by his lawyer to write his opus. The place is Bordirtoun, a fictional California town on

the border with Mexico, named and (mis)spelled by founder Millmore Pong, the first American Pong, who emigrated from China in 1861.

Sulliver, initially safely in Copenhagen with his Danish wife, thought he'd left Bordirtoun for good, until his manipulative, charismatic father, Saul, shows up and pulls Sulliver back into the dysfunctional family and the exploitative political empire. Sulliver may have the best intentions but he's no saint and faced with a series of choices he may make the wrong ones, even as he fervently wishes to do right. This novel is quick-paced and well-written, imbued with intelligence and humor. Leland Cheuk has a sharp eye for human foibles, bigotry, the immigrant experience and the vagaries of capitalism, taken to the absurd. Once you crack this book open, you won't put down.

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### **Katharine Poll says**

Sullivan Pong is brilliantly drawn: he is a relentlessly unheroic and largely apathetic man who, despite his determination to follow the path of least resistance, manages to hurl himself into drama at every turn.

I've been looking out for this novel hitting the shelves and I wasn't disappointed. There's plenty of meat to this warm-hearted, page turner. Set in the US, with a Chinese American anti-hero as the protagonist, it's a unique hybrid of Aristotle's fatal flaw (but with that much needed hope of redemption), combined with the fast paced humour of a seasoned stand up.

This is a modern day story that eloquently presents that tug of war of conflicted loyalties and perceived debts of family ties. It shows what happens when we try and rebel and be true to ourselves without understanding what it is that's holding us back and how this can often lead us to inadvertently help create the very reality we most fear.

He doesn't care enough about others but, like his long-suffering Danish wife, Lene, I couldn't help caring about him. You'll have to read the book to see if he manages to suit up and do the right thing in the end!

See the teaser film to get a taste for what's in store: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yTaLy...>

P.S. I don't often write reviews but this book is special, both immediately entertaining and with enough depth to keep you thinking and reflecting long after. I spent a short time in Leland Cheuk's company nearly ten year's ago. It was only a few days but it was enough time to realise that Cheuk is a writer who is both funny and thought provoking, unafraid to deal with important themes such as race, migration and family loyalty.

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### **Jason Pettus says**

(DISCLOSURE: I am the owner of the publishing company that published this book.)

The CCLaP train continues running at full steam right now, and I'm happy to announce our upcoming November release, the hilarious yet deeply sobering dysfunctional-family comedy "The Misadventures of Sulliver Pong" by Brooklyn author Leland Cheuk. A black comedy about family relationships in the style of Jonathan Franzen, it's also an examination of all the real abuses that Asian-Americans have had to endure

over the last 200 years, from the railroad-building days of the Victorian Age to the forced settlement camps of World War Two, all of the events seen through the eyes of a series of patriarchs of the terminally doomed Pong family over the generations. At heart a serious look at racial injustices, you nonetheless won't believe how much you'll be laughing all the way through it, with the popular podcaster Cheuk bringing his trademarked left turns and unexpected developments to this full-length literary debut.

As always with CCLaP, we're making the ebook version of "Pong" AVAILABLE FOR FREE TO ANY GOODREADS MEMBER WHO WANTS ONE, so to express an interest just drop me a line at [ilikejason@gmail.com](mailto:ilikejason@gmail.com) or simply send me a message through Goodreads. Word-of-mouth is the number-one way we generate new customers, so your mention of this book here can and does have a huge impact on the total number of copies we eventually sell. The book comes out to the general public on November 16th, but the advance review copy is available as we speak, so don't hesitate to drop me a line if you'd like to read a free sneak-preview copy of this darkly funny, thought-provoking novel!

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### **Pamela Laskin says**

Wow! Not only is this book filled with biting humor, but also incredible poignancy as it confronts the difficulties of an American immigrant family. I found myself alternating between laughter and tears. I cannot recommend it enough; my words would not do justice to the incredible experience of the narrative.

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### **Erika Dreifus says**

I had this on my Kindle for a couple of months and kept meaning to move it to the top of the TBR list. (I met the author a number of years ago when he was an MFA student, so I already knew a bit about his smarts & talent.) But we all know how it is--a lot of books we keep meaning to read....This week, though, I read this stunning essay: [http://www.salon.com/2016/02/15/i\\_want\\_to\\_be\\_a\\_writer/](http://www.salon.com/2016/02/15/i_want_to_be_a_writer/)....

And so, finally, I started reading the book. I am so glad that I did. An excellent read.

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### **Doug Stotland says**

I laughed out loud, I cringed visibly, I laughed more outlined, cringed more visibly, etc, etc...

The characters and Borditoun were vivid for me within the first 50 pages which is always ends up as a good book for me. The pace, character names and absurd world reminded me of Inherent Vice with a more concrete and easier to follow plot.

Leland also provided a regular dose of phrases and sentences that I felt compelled to read out loud to my wife (she got annoyed after a while). We also discussed a few episodes from the book and agreed we're not such bad parents after all.

Where it fell short of 5 stars for me: I wanted more insight on the organized crime and to get to know at least one of the organized criminals. Would it have killed Leland to write 100 pages more to develop the scheme,

history and characters?

That said, I'm very glad I read this book and am looking forward to the author's next one. I'm a fan.

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### **Joseph O'Brien says**

Sulliver Pong, All-American screw-up, imprisoned not just by his own passivity & poor decisions, but by generations of his family's and country's, too. Not exactly a model citizen, but Leland Cheuk makes our hero sympathetic enough that I still pulled for him every mis-step of the way. Plus, Leland's humor is elegantly wry and the heart is authentic, keeping things grounded & moving even in the story's more farcical moments. And now that it's all over, I kind of wish the Pong family had its own Arrested Development-like series.

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### **Aaron says**

“The fantasies that stay with me even today are the ones I had doing silly things to make her smile”

Narratives built on top of intergenerational conflicts within immigrant families may seem played out, especially in Asian American offerings. Yet the collective journey through which Leland Cheuk's debut novel, *The Misadventures of Sulliver Pong*, grinds up those tropes into numerous permutations across a century and a half of American history earns the reader's attention with its sardonic wit and immersive characterizations.

The highly charged and richly explored interpersonal dysfunctions between each pairing of husband and wife, or parent and child in this opus wring the character dynamics free from the familiar clashes of “cultural values”. This prevents the respective players from manifesting as mere metaphors for respective eras, and ground them as individually divergent decisions made over an ever-limited set of incompatible life options.

Similarly, Cheuk deftly avoids the obviousness of presenting Asian stereotypes head-on, by depicting them with a more visceral approach that puts the reader in the same painful headspace as the character. For example, rather than calling out the demeaning assumption that Asian men possess undersized genitalia, the novel curses its titular character with chronic groin pulls that intrude upon his already-dormant sex life, in addition to his health in general. Sulliver's masculinity is sub-par by his own admission, yet his personal failings never need feel specific to any ethnic or cultural background.

As character foils to Sulliver, the relative alpha males that dot the narrative landscape are broadly drawn, yet are given just enough backstory of their own to flesh out the thinking behind their decisions, and the gestation of their personalities. We meet these antiheroes, such as Sully's father, mogul cum corrupt politician Saul, both in the nadir of their lives, as well as in their formative primes. Every key cog in the Pong line is briefly summarized in the opening chapters, and is then given his own turn as temporary protagonist in the bittersweet tales that unfold.

None of these characters are made readily palatable for literary consumption, and so the experience hinges on reader's ability to relate to their amorality despite an abundance of self-awareness of both sides of the page. Successfully doing so yields a deep discomfort, but Cheuk leaves just enough room for potential redemptions throughout to bolster the reader's resolve. The dramatic swings are measured yet kept enough at

arm's length that one is never quite sure how they will come about, even when the text has made quite clear that they are imminent.

Ultimately, the hero of the piece must find a way both to stop running from, and avoid being defined by, his sullied family history. This is another way of depicting the identity crisis that has long been synonymous with the immigrant experience in America, but is by no means tired or rote?—?these challenges remain as relevant as ever, especially as personal possibilities evolve around them. By de- and reconstructing our expectations for the eternal Second Generation, these first-born Americans across time, *Sulliver Pong* lets us laugh at our shared mistakes while owning them without fear.

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### **Lindsey says**

This is Leland Cheuk's first novel, which really blew my mind while I was reading because it was very sophisticated for a first effort. The book was pretty dense but not in a bad way. There was no filler text. Everything was crucial to the progress of the story. Every sentence gave you insight into the world the characters were living in. No words were wasted or thrown away. The story was sad, hilarious, touching, rage-inducing, anxiety-ridden; in short it was just like real life if real life were composed of a series of unbelievably bad luck and unintended consequences. I loved the story but the characters were the real star. The Pongs were brilliant. I deeply identified with Sulliver and his relationship with an overbearing parent. On one hand I felt sorry for him but on the other hand I felt anger at his inability to keep his father from forcing him to (unwittingly) participate in his schemes. Even Sulliver's scheming, sleazy father is a complicated character who you end up feeling pity for, despite the fact that his underhandedness is the reason for Sulliver's misfortune. Everything about the book was fantastic. Really well done.

I received an ARC of this book in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Andrew says**

I'm a winner of this book through GoodReads First Reads Giveaways! Rating: 3.5 stars

Sulliver Pong is lured back to Bordirtoun by his corrupt politician father, Saul Pong, when Saul embellishes lies about Sulliver's mother not being well. Sulliver goes halfway around the world from Copenhagen to America to find out his father lied, and is in fact scheming to bring Sulliver into his political games and have him help run his work as mayor.

Sulliver reunites with old friends, attempts to hang on to his marriage with Lene who stays in Copenhagen, convince his mother that she shouldn't stand by his father, who abuses her frequently, and ends up making the decision to run for mayor of Bordirtoun after seeing how his father is treating citizens, tearing away their homes and forcing them to live in the barracks of an old internment camp. At first with the help of his friends in his campaign, Sulliver is going strong in the race, but motives begin to shift as Sulliver and his father begin to make it a personal war to each other through the media, secrets exposed, lies told, the whole nine

yards.

Sulliver is writing these turns of events from prison, where he has been falsely accused of attempted murder of his father. In between his story, we get a brief history of his ancestors, who all seem to play a part in the present events.

There were many parts that made me laugh, and it was very good. I'd say it's a 3.5 stars from me. One thing that bugs me so much is that Sulliver did make some really dumb decisions over such small things, such as lying or leaving out details to his wife Lene, when there was no good reason to bother making anything up over the things that happened the first time he was in Bordirtoun. Though I guess that was also just to show the things he has in common with his father and other ancestors who seem to repeat this mistake? Either way, it bothered me, especially because I felt like other than that, he seemed like a reasonable person, aside from his doubts of him and Lene's marriage and tempting thoughts involving Taryn.

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### **Maggie Mines says**

I began this book and then set it aside. About half way through I was becoming bored with the story and didn't finish it although I marked it read. Yesterday I picked it back up again and finished it and was glad I did. I had a fresh perspective and enjoyed it as I did when I first began the book. Apologies to the author for not being timely with a review but I don't like writing one where I wasn't enjoying the book. Very happy to have finished the book and I would recommend it.

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### **Kari says**

\*\* I received this book in a Goodreads giveaway. \*\*

This book turned out to be a real pleasure to read. I devoured it over a few days, letting only work get in my way. Sulliver Pong, the novel's protagonist, comes from a long line of f\*\*\*-ups in the Pong family tree; and true to form, he makes a series of poor choices that left me shaking my head. The family dysfunction is over the top, and stories from Sulliver's ancestors intersperse his own sad, absurd tale on how he ended up in prison. Darkly humorous and very, very funny.

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