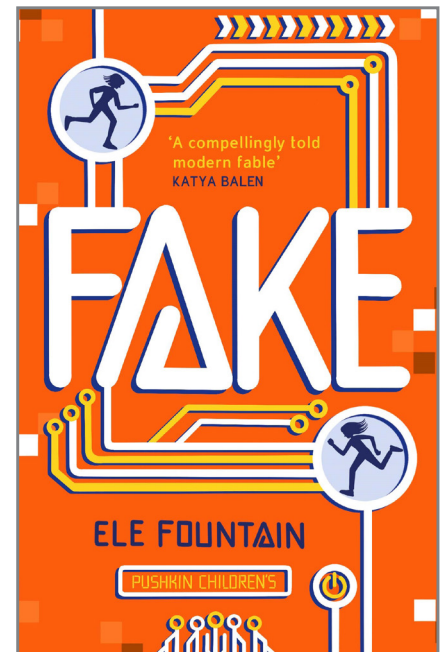# Fake

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ISBN: 9781782692904

RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Secondary

SYNOPSIS

Failing antibiotics have shifted society online. As big tech companies begin to dominate life, the boundaries between real and virtual have blurred. At 14, Jess is attending school for the first time. Meeting other children and making real friends is something she's dreamed of for years. But Jess misses her family, especially her sister Chloe, who is in poor health.

When mysterious trouble starts at home, Jess turns to the digital world to fix things. She is a brilliant coder and programmer. But Jess takes her skills into forbidden territory and while trying to help her family, discovers explosive truths. These truths reveal just how manipulated reality has become.

With her family's lives in the balance, Jess must defy everything she's been told to help them—before it's too late.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ele Fountain worked as an editor in children's publishing where she helped launch and nurture the careers of many prize-winning and bestselling authors. Ele's debut novel, *Boy 87*, won four awards and was nominated for nine more, including the Waterstones Children's Book Prize, and *Lost* won the 2021 Portsmouth Book Award. She lives in Hampshire with her husband and two daughters.

STUDY NOTES

- What do you think the titles of the chapters tell us about what Jess and her family are feeling?
  - Chapter one is called END and chapter two SHOCK while chapter three, in which Jess arrives at her new school, is called BEGINNING. Do the titles give any clues about the emotions Jess is experiencing on leaving her family for the first time?
- What does the advice Jess's mother give her as she drops her off at school, and Jess's reply, tell you about their relationship? Find examples of other conversations and actions in the novel that show Jess's parents trust and encouragement in their children to be themselves.
- What in the story tells us that Jess's family is not wealthy? How does their lack of money affect the way they look after Chloe when she is unwell?
- What is it about the things that Jess takes to school that suggests the family are very careful about how they spend money?
- In small groups, discuss whether you think a family more rich and powerful than Jess's could be as easily deleted.
- When Jess gets to school, she starts to doubt some of the things she has been led to believe. What happens that

makes Jess question the ideas she has lived with as truth—ideas such as not starting school until you are 14?

- Do you think by the end of the book Jess realises just how much social control is exercised over her life?
- 'You cannot buy the revolution. You cannot make the revolution. You can only be the revolution. It is in your spirit, or it is nowhere.' Ursula K. le Guin. How does this quote relate to the story in *Fake*?
- Research a famous rebellion or revolution that has happened in real life. What cause did the rebels or revolutionaries stand for? Can rebellions or revolutions be peaceful?
- Form small groups to discuss the pros and cons of a virtual world. Think of five things that are positive and five that are negative and then discuss your lists.
- Thinking about the theme of equality in the book, do you think that everyone would agree with the positive and negative aspects of virtual life you've chosen? Might differing circumstances make a difference (for example, access to equipment, or the amount of free time different people have)?
- How do you think making friends 'virtually' might differ from making friends 'in person'?
- When Jess is talking to Ana after they arrived at the school (p 46) we find out that Jess does not take health supplements while Ana takes them every day. What impact does this information have on the girls' perceptions of one another?
- Read pp 54 and 55 again and think about how Jess's actions impact others around her and their opinions of her.
- How important are Jess's friendships in helping her get to the truth?
  - Read the chapter entitled GONE: does the important exchange in this chapter rely on trust and friendship?
  - Are all the characters involved acting with the same motivation?
- In small groups, talk about things that are important for you to share with your friends—things like your favourite sports and musicians, and things related to your families. Are there things that would make it hard for you to be friends with someone? How do you think you could overcome those issues?
- What is a cypher and why is it used?
- Create your own cypher and write a review of *Fake* using that cypher to share with your group.