

VIVIAN TEO

Praise for My BFF Is an Alien

"An imaginative and enjoyable story about friendship and standing up for yourself. After reading this book, you'll wish you had an alien BFF too!"

-Low Ying Ping, author of the Mount Emily series

"Really well-written, with great nuggets of descriptive vocabulary. The alien BFF is certainly not what you'd expect of a typical extraterrestrial."

-Lyn Lee, Lil Blue Bottle blog

Praise for My BFF Is an Alien: Sabotage

"Vivian writes clearly and emphatically to her tween/ teen audience and she employs quite a few hooks in the plot that keep the reader moving. I think this schoolgirl genre really works, in keeping stories so real and familiar yet with that extra twist."

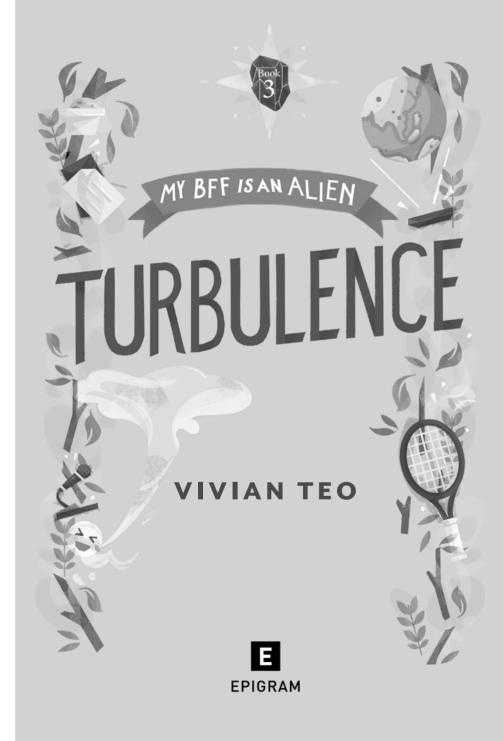
-Hwee Goh, Hwee's Book Share Club

"I liked how Vivian weaved in the topic of social media and used it as a teaching point for readers who are still learning how to navigate the platform safely, and the perils if misused."

-Susan Koh, A Juggling Mom blog

In the series:

My BFF Is an Alien (Book 1) My BFF Is an Alien: Sabotage (Book 2) My BFF Is an Alien: Turbulence (Book 3)



For Emma & Elise, who inspire me to be a better person

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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.

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Chapter 1 NEW CLASS

My heart thumped hard against my chest as I waited for Madam Nafisah to call me to the stage.

"...a student from Secondary Three..."

The words from my principal, who was standing ceremoniously on the podium at the school assembly grounds, flitted sporadically into my ears.

"...won third prize in the National Writing Competition..."

I blew out a few deep breaths. My BFF, Octavia Wu, reached for my hand and squeezed it gently. She knew public speaking was so not my thing.

"...Abriana Yeo from Class 3Bravery!" Madam Nafisah finally announced. Hoots and applause broke out around me while hands clapped my back.

"Good luck!" Octavia shouted above the din. I shot

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her a nervous glance and let go of her hand. I eased past my classmates with shaky legs. I walked dreamlike towards the front of the quadrangle, somewhat aware of the glances in my direction. I made it up the steps to the podium without falling flat on my face.

I shook Madam Nafisah's extended hand and accepted the certificate she held out to me. My principal was grinning broadly, which I wasn't used to because every other time I had seen her up close (after our fiasco at camp in Secondary One, and then the beach clean-up drama in Secondary Two), her face had been dour.

And, ecstatic as I was that my essay, "How Today's Youths Can Solve Climate Change", won third prize in a national school writing competition, I hadn't realised that winning meant having to make a speech in front of the whole school. Had I known, I might have declined the win! (If I could do such a thing.)

Pinching the certificate tightly between my fingers, I stepped towards the mic stand. A panorama of the assembly grounds dotted with pupils in blue and white lay before me. "Erm..." I said into the mic. The boom of my voice took me by surprise. What did I want to say? I had memorised my speech, but as I looked at the seven hundred faces staring back at me, my mind went blank. Ack, I was going to make a fool of myself. Then I caught sight of Octavia just several metres in front of the podium, where she was taking photos of my speech for the Young Writers' Club. With her free hand, she pointed two fingers at me, then turned them to herself;

she was telling me to keep my focus on her.

"Erm...good morning, teachers and fellow students," I said, my sight fixed on Octavia, who had her camera up in front of her face. "Erm...I am proud to stand before you today to receive this award... I...count clinching third place in a competition that saw hundreds of entries from schools across Singapore as a huge accolade... But this win is tinged with mixed feelings, as I won because our planet is in peril."

As the words flowed from my mouth, my sight gradually lifted from Octavia to the students behind her, then to the sea of students that stood listening to me. "Since last year, we have been witnessing a spate of extreme weather events—from cold snaps in North America to flash floods in Europe to heatwaves in the Asia Pacific that have affected millions of lives. These severe weather patterns have only increased dramatically going into this new year, and they are occurring closer to home. Just over the course of three months, we have already seen extensive heat in Australia, where temperatures soared to a record 42 degrees Celsius, increased typhoon activity in North Asia and, just a few weeks ago, an unprecedented hailstorm in Malaysia.

"While scientists have attributed these extreme weather occurrences to climate change, I see it as Mother Earth telling us that she is hurting. And if we do not heed her warnings, it is we, our children and our children's children who will suffer the consequences."

I paused, looking solemnly at the crowd before me. "I

didn't set out to win an award when I wrote this feature. I wrote it because we, and future generations, have a right to stand under clear blue skies, to breathe in the smells of a lush green forest, to witness the grandeur of coral reefs, Arctic icebergs and hawksbill turtles. You and I and our future generations do not have to live in constant fear of floods, typhoons and heatwaves if we play our part to fight climate change. We can start by making changes in our daily lives. We can recycle, reduce unnecessary consumption and speak up against harmful practices against the environment. Every one of us can make a difference."

The silence in the quadrangle was deafening. *Chicken backside. Was I that bad?* I waited for peals of laughter to erupt but in the next second, cheers and applause broke out on the assembly grounds. I let out a breath I had been holding. I turned to Madam Nafisah, who was clapping and looking extremely pleased with me. I stepped back and let her take over the mic.

Madam Nafisah moved on with the day's administrative announcements, and I walked back to join my class. The pupils who flanked the aisle smiled at me. I caught sight of my good friends, Shen Jia-ning and Shefali Varma, giving me the thumbs-ups, and I responded with a quick smile.

When I returned to my class' spot in the quadrangle, a few of my classmates clapped me on the back. On my left, Dina Aprida mouthed, "That was awesome".

"Thanks," I replied breathlessly. It was hard to focus

on our principal's announcements while basking in my triumph. Octavia rejoined the class just as Madam Nafisah dismissed us all.

TURBULENCE

"Way to go, Abri!" Octavia exclaimed above the din of chatter and footsteps as everyone started to head back to their classrooms. She put her arms around my shoulders and gave a tight squeeze, and I squealed in delight as relief and pride washed over me. What a way to end the last day of term before the March holidays!



Several of my classmates came by my desk to congratulate me on my award and compliment me on my speech. As they crowded around my desk and the congratulations moved on to idle chatter, my mind wandered to how things had changed in the past few months.

Octavia and I were now in Class 3Bravery, but Jia-ning and Shefali were in Class 3Courage. Last November, after our form teacher, Mrs Ho, announced that we would all be streamed based on our final year results, Octavia had whispered, "Don't worry, I will dumb down my answers in the exams so we can still be in the same class in sec three," with no hint of irony. I didn't know whether to be glad or mad. (What did she mean by "dumb down"?!)

But when we received our report books after our

Secondary Two final year exams, my heart sank. Despite Octavia's best efforts, she was assigned to 3Dynamic (how apt) and I to 3Bravery. My heart dropped further when Jia-ning and Shefali told me they were both assigned to 3Courage, and then it sank into the deepest ocean trench when I heard Jessica Chan and Naomi Goh squeal with joy that they were going to be in 3Bravery. There was some consolation when I heard the other two members of the Circle of Evil—Andrea Cooper and Chaerin Han—bemoaning their separation from their ringleader, having been assigned to 3Excellence (how *un*apt).

I steeled myself for the reality: I won't have my good friends with me (but real friendships would survive being in different classes) *and* had to be in the same class with Jessica and Naomi (but I could handle those two). Then Octavia slammed her report book shut and muttered in my ear, "No way are we going to get separated! I'll make sure of it!"

The next day, Octavia produced a letter from her "therapist" to Mrs Ho. It read,

"I strongly advise that my patient, Octavia Wu, be assigned to the same class as her best friend, Abriana Yeo. There is a need for emotional support following her near-death experience at camp two years ago. This is crucial for the emotional well-being of said patient—who still suffers from occasional nightmares about the incident—and critical in preventing a relapse of depression in said patient."

The last thing Octavia needed from me was emotional support, but Mrs Ho didn't know that. So the fake letter was taken by the school with the utmost seriousness and just like that, my sneaky, ingenious BFF orchestrated her assignment to Class 3Bravery.

One might think that with the Circle of Evil reduced to a semi-circle, Jessica and Naomi's inflated egos and haughtiness (an unmistakable trait of the Circle's members) would be dialled down a notch or two. But you'd be wrong. You see, Jessica and Naomi were now two of the most celebrated athletes in Bukit Timah Secondary Girls' School (BTSGS). Our synchronised swimming team was the national school champion for two consecutive years when it was headed by Jessica. Jessica herself was considered a prodigy in the sport, having also won the solo sync swim category in national school competitions for the past two years. Naomi was the next rising star in the sync swim scene; she came in second place after Jessica for the solo competitions. With the group and solo wins, BTSGS was making an almost clean sweep of sync swim national school trophies in Singapore.

In a surprising turn of events, Naomi took over Jessica as team captain at the beginning of the year, which, according to an interview in our school newsletter, was with Jessica's blessing. Next to a smiling photo of the two, Jessica was quoted saying, "Handing the reins over to Naomi would ensure the development of leadership within the sync swim team, and free up some time for

myself to focus on solo championships and mentoring younger team members. I have absolute confidence that Naomi will continue to fly BTSGS' flag high at the national school championships."

To their credit, sync swim is really one of the toughest sports in the world. One is free to huff and puff with the most unglamorous face while running the hundred-metre dash, but not in sync swim. Their lungs may be bursting from holding their breaths so long and their legs may be cramping from rotating like an eggbeater in the water, but still they have to grit their teeth, smile and maintain the posture of a ballerina. So, even I had to grudgingly admit that those two were at the apex of their chosen sport. And they definitely had no lack of classmates fawning over them, even in our new class.

To be fair, the Circle of Evil had mostly been ignoring Octavia and me—and we, them. The last kerfuffle had happened the year before, after Octavia had supposedly played a lizard prank on Jessica (it had really been a ruse to create a distraction). Then months went by without them casting evil glances or snide remarks at us. It felt so peaceful I was even lulled into extending an olive branch. Even if we weren't friends, we could at least be civil with each other, right?—was what I thought. So when they won the national sync swim championships last November, I bravely went up to them and offered my congratulations. Jessica just eyed me charily and muttered a terse "thanks" before huddling back into her important conversation with her friends. I guess I had

been expecting at least a smile or some form of small talk. Well, I tried.

Octavia had rolled her eyes at my efforts. Unlike me, the only branch Octavia would ever extend to those girls was probably a real one that she could whack them with. Our unofficial truce with the mean girls meant nothing to her. She had been on her guard against them since our camping trip in Secondary One and never let it down. "I wouldn't even trust them to tell me the time!" she once declared. And whenever any of them walked by us I would catch Octavia watching them from the side of her eye, like she was expecting them to suddenly pounce on her.

I got where Octavia was coming from—she did end up in hospital because of them, after all—but sometimes I wondered if she ever tired of always being on guard.



"Alright, girls. Return to your seats, please," came the voice of our form teacher, Fernandes Chicken, as he strode into our classroom. Okay, that wasn't his real name, but his surname, Fernandes, sounded like a restaurant chain that specialised in chicken dishes and that was how his nickname came about. While Fernandes Chicken can be genial and sometimes joked with the class, you wouldn't want to test his patience as he was also our disciplinary

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master. The girls around my desk promptly dispersed.

"Well, you have all heard Abriana's rousing speech earlier on," Mr Fernandes said, as he stood in front of the class beaming at me. "I'd like to say, well done, Abriana. Third place in a national competition is no easy feat. You've done BTSGS and Class 3Bravery proud. Shall we all give Abriana another round of applause?"

My classmates broke into cheers and clapped loudly. I turned in my seat to face them and smiled in gratitude. Among the sea of happy faces and applauding hands, though, was one girl pretending to read her textbook and another staring at the blackboard with her arms folded—Naomi and Jessica!

As Mr Fernandes began our maths lesson, their blasé attitudes towards my win nipped at me. I know you can't force people to feel happy for you, and they weren't my friends, but would it kill them to acknowledge my achievement? That's when I realised that no matter what I did, those mean girls would never see me as their equal.



Chapter 2 POPULAR

When Octavia and I arrived holding our trays of sushi at our usual table at the canteen, Jia-ning had just placed her phone down on the table.

"I've uploaded the photos Octavia had sent me of Abri on MyStories," she announced, referring to the popular social media platform we all used.

"Oh, thanks!" I said, making a mental note to check the post later on my phone, which was in the school locker. Mum and Dad finally gave me our family spare phone—it really was about time! "Shefali, have your parents decided on whether to drive to Genting Highlands for the March holidays?" I asked, before biting into my California roll.

"My mum's still undecided," Shefali said. "She said the weather's rather unpredictable these days. She doesn't

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know whether it'll be safe to drive up the mountains. We are definitely still driving to Kuala Lumpur, but I so wish we could go to Genting to enjoy the cool weather!"

"Your mum's right. The weather's becoming freakier these days. Better to be careful. This year there was already a hailstorm in Malaysia," I warned.

"Snow in Thailand," Octavia chimed in.

"Flash floods in the Philippines," I continued.

"Lightning storm last week in Singapore," Octavia added.

"Eh, are you trying to dampen our holiday mood?" Jia-ning gave Octavia and me an exaggerated glare, which we knew better than to take seriously. Unlike us, who were going to be stuck here in Singapore, Jia-ning was going to Bali for the holidays.

I shrugged. "Just stating the facts!" At that moment, I noticed in my peripheral vision two girls standing nearby. Were they waiting for our table? Since when did we not have enough tables in the canteen?

The girls, who looked like Secondary One students, were holding their phones and smiling shyly at me. The one with blue-rimmed glasses spoke first. "Are...are you Abriana Yeo?"

"Er, yeah?"

"Can we take a photo with you? We are huge fans of yours. Your speech and that essay you wrote were so inspiring!" blurted the other girl with big eyes and two braids, as she clasped her phone against her chest with both hands.

"Er, I only won third prize but yeah, okay," I told them, feeling somewhat perplexed. Then I quickly turned to Octavia. "Any food on my face?" I asked. She shook her head, looking bemused.

I stood up, and the two girls leaned in. The one with glasses took a wefie first. "My turn!" the big-eyed one said quickly and positioned themselves for another shot.

"Thank you so much!" the two girls said together.

"Sure, no problem," I replied, smiling.

As they turned to leave, one of them squealed to the other, "She's so nice!"

My mouth quirked up at her compliment. As I sat back down, I noticed my friends staring at me with funny looks on their faces. "What was *that* about?" Shefali asked. Before I could answer (not that I had an answer), there was a tap on my shoulder. There were three other girls standing behind me. I recognised them from the other Secondary Three classes.

"Abriana, can we also take a photo with you?" one of them asked sweetly.

"Of course," I said, though this was starting to feel a little unreal. But what was even more unbelievable was that a queue of students had formed near our table! Maybe I was dreaming.

I turned to my friends. Jia-ning and Shefali were covering their mouths trying to stifle their laughter, while Octavia was taking a photo of me and the queue. "For the school newsletter," she said cheekily. I guess I wasn't dreaming.

After taking what must have been my seventh wefie, I heard a familiar voice behind me. "Girls, what's going on here?" I turned round to see Mrs Matthews, our English teacher who was also the Young Writers' Club's teacherin-charge. "Abriana is having a break. You are all eating into her recess time. Come on, let the poor girl finish her food," she told the queuing girls firmly but nicely.

The girls scattered. I felt bad because some of them looked disappointed. "Abriana, looks like you've got yourself a fan club!" said Mrs Matthews.

"Me?" I laughed dryly. "I don't think so." An Abriana Yeo Fan Club? I could only imagine Octavia, Jia-ning and Shefali in such a club.

"I was just thinking," Mrs Matthews said, hand on her chin, "maybe you could hold an after-school feature-writing session, and after that, those who want to could stay back for photos and autographs." I almost burst out in laughter when Mrs Matthews said "photos and autographs" but didn't because she was looking all serious. She wasn't joking!

"The session would be beneficial for the girls in terms of building their writing skills, and it would be good publicity for the club. You would be putting your popularity to good use. Have a think about it over the March holidays, and see if you have any good ideas for the session. We can discuss after the break, alright?" she said, smiling.

That was a lot to take in, but I agreed anyhow. I sat back down after Mrs Matthews left. Octavia, Jia-ning and Shefali were focused on Octavia's phone as she showed them the photos she took of me and my "fan club" queue. As for me, I was still trying to wrap my head around what Mrs Matthews said—I was popular.



"Do you have to look at your phone while walking?" Octavia asked, obviously annoyed as we walked across the concourse towards the school gate.

"I just want to see the post on my speech," I said, not looking up as I opened the MyStories app and tapped on the BTSGS Secondary Three cohort page. And there they were—one of me receiving the certificate from Madam Nafisah and another of me giving the speech. Octavia chose the right photos to send to Jia-ning. I was usually rather unphotogenic, but I looked nice in both, and by nice I meant I didn't close my eyes or look goofy, which was usually the case in candid shots.

"103 'likes'," I told Octavia, which was about half the Secondary Three cohort, "and twenty comments!" I scrolled through the comments, which were all nice ones like "Well done, Abri!", "So proud of you!!" and "The pride of BTSGS!" That last one was from Jia-ning. I laughed out loud at it, then I stumbled forward and almost dropped my phone!

I looked back and saw that I had kicked an umbrella

that had been left resting on a pillar near the school gate. "Hey, why didn't you warn me?" I asked Octavia accusingly. Good thing I didn't fall or drop my phone!

"Serves you right for walking and looking at your phone at the same time," she said wryly. "If you had fallen, at least you would have learnt your lesson."

I shot daggers at Octavia, then proceeded to put my phone into my bag. Even if my near accident had been my own fault, did she have to be so insensitive with her words?

As we neared the school gate, it dawned on me that it was Friday. Which meant *he* would be there. I searched the faces at the pavement and, in a matter of seconds, spotted Fynn Goh leaning against a lamppost. Though he was looking down at his phone, I recognised his blue-and-white Bukit Timah Junior College uniform, tousled black hair and tanned skin. Every Friday he waited for Naomi, his younger sister and my former BFF, so that they could go for after-school enrichment lessons together.

Should I call out to him, I wondered. But before I could, he looked up. "Oh—hey, Abri! Hey, Octavia!" Fynn called out, his winsome smile bringing out the dimples on each cheek. Even his voice was nice.

"Hey, Fynn." I returned with a wide grin while Octavia gave the perfunctory nod she usually reserved for him. Even though Octavia was never friendly towards Fynn (because he was Naomi's brother), he never failed to greet her courteously.

"So, last day of term, huh?" he said with a twinkle in his eye. "Are you guys going anywhere for the holidays?"

"No, we're not. What about you?" I asked, while Octavia stood next to me, looking bored.

"We're going to Tokyo—just a short trip," he said. "Do you want anything from Japan? Oh, Naomi probably asked you already." He laughed and scratched the back of his head.

I just smiled weakly. I guessed he still had no idea Naomi and I weren't friends anymore. I had known Fynn since I was in primary school, when Naomi and I were BFFs, and I would go to her house for playdates. Not that he looked anything then like he did now with his height and broad shoulders. His phone buzzed, and he glanced at it. "Are you on MyStories?" He looked back at me. "We should keep in touch."

"Oh yeah, I am," I said. "My account name is storywritinggirl."

Fynn tapped quickly on his phone. "This one?" He showed me my profile picture, which only showed my eyes. I nodded. "Okay, I've added you. Are you on MyStories too, Octavia?"

"No," Octavia lied. "Abri, can we go? I'm starving!"

Right then, Naomi appeared. Close behind her were Jessica, Chaerin and Andrea. "Gor," she called her brother, then eyed Octavia and me suspiciously. How long had they been standing there?

"Hi, Jessica, Chaerin, Andrea!" Fynn waved to Naomi's friends with the same cheery smile he always gave me. I felt a little deflated—clearly he was that way with everyone. I noticed the three girls waving and smiling demurely at Fynn, completely opposite to their smug demeanours in school.

"Bye, Fynn! Have a good holiday!" I called out.

I heard Fynn shout, "Bye, Abri!" as Octavia dragged me down the footpath.

"Why do you always do that?" I grumbled.

"I didn't know you like being around those mean girls," she said sarcastically.

"Of course I don't. I meant, why do you always have to be so curt to Fynn. He is not like those girls." Octavia always hurried me to leave when we bumped into Fynn, but those few minutes on Fridays were the only time I ever got to see him.

Octavia was silent for a while. "You should be concentrating on your studies, not boys right now," she said, finally.

I gasped loudly, then stared at her. "Mum, are you in there? Why have you disguised yourself as Octavia?" That earned a chuckle from Octavia.

"Abri, I know you like Fynn, but boys like him are too friendly, either intentionally or unintentionally, towards girls. It gives girls the wrong idea."

"And when did you become an expert on boys?" I retorted.

"I'm not. I'm just able to see what you can't because you're too lovestruck."

"Eeww, I'm not in love! Don't be gross!" I'd read

enough young adult novels and watched enough movies to know that I probably had a crush on Fynn, like how I had crushed on Tom Holland as Spider-Man. That feeling goes away when you don't see that person anymore. Maybe when I no longer saw him outside our school gate, that feeling would go away.

Octavia ignored my protest and continued to lecture me. "Besides, he's Naomi's brother. We shouldn't get too close to *those people*."

I wanted to argue that Fynn wasn't like them, but I knew given her bias towards him, Octavia wasn't going to listen. To her, anyone close to those mean girls was just as bad as they were. That was why I hardly talked to her about Fynn. As much as we were best friends, some things were still better left unsaid.

Acknowledgements

I hope you have enjoyed *Turbulence* as much as I had writing it. While I have equal love for all the books in this series, being able to show how Abri and Octavia have grown and how their friendship has evolved in this book has made *Turbulence* my favourite one to write.

My immense gratitude to Epigram Books and all involved in the publishing and marketing of this book, in particular, Lynette Teo—thank you for your foresight and proficient editing that took my stories to a whole new level.

To my family, friends and fans of the series who had voted for *My BFF Is an Alien* at the POPULAR Readers' Choice Awards 2020, which helped it to clinch the third prize in the English (Children) category: your support and encouragement make me want to keep writing stories for children for as long as my imagination allows me to. Thank you for your love.



About the Author

Vivian Teo worked as a financial journalist and editor for fourteen years at major US and UK trade publications. She became a freelance writer to spend more time with her two daughters and to write about things close to her heart. This led to My BFF Is an Alien, her first middle-grade series.

She now enjoys writing about parenting and education issues for parenting websites, and blogging on her own parenting/lifestyle website, The Stuff Childhoods Are Made Of, at www.vivianteo.com.

Vivian is an alumnus of the University of Melbourne and Methodist Girls' School. Like Abri, she started off quite friendless and unathletic in secondary school but graduated with a tribe of good friends and fond memories of performing Chinese dance and cheerleading. However, she doesn't miss homework and exams.

Follow Vivian Teo on Facebook @VivianTeoAuthor and Instagram @VivianTeoWriter.



Coming in 2022...

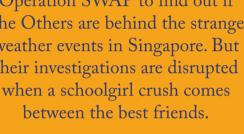
My BFF Is an Alien: Invasion

The Others are raging vicious storms across the island of Singapore, causing plenty of hurt and destruction, and it's up to Abriana and Octavia to stop them. But when these powerful beings can transform themselves into *anyone*—their classmates, their parents, their closest friends—the girls don't know who they can trust.

Available soon at epigrambookshop.sg



Operation SWAP to find out if The Others are behind the strange weather events in Singapore. But their investigations are disrupted when a schoolgirl crush comes between the best friends.





"Interesting and full of intrigue!" **Shang Kailing**, 11







