

## Bobby Ether and the Academy

**R. Scott Boyer**

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*Tragedy, mystery, and suspense make this scientific coming-of-age story a fascinating read.*

Bobby Ether is thrown for a loop when a seemingly impossible basketball shot goes in. From there, R. Scott Boyer's book, *Bobby Ether and the Academy*, chronicles this fourteen-year-old boy's journey as he runs from people who want to harness his powers for their own needs. Along the way, Bobby learns about his mysterious grandpa, universal energy, and what he is capable of.

The Academy is part school and part monastery for gifted youth. Half the fun is watching this young boy's journey as he faces bullies, uncovers his family history, and learns to control his special gifts. Bobby also has to figure out whom to trust, what the headmistress of the school is up to, and how to unlock the locket his grandfather gave him many years ago.

None of this is about magic. Instead, it's about the world's energy. Boyer deftly explains the basic concept at the heart of the book using science and faith: All universal energy is malleable, especially when broken down into the smallest particles or quarks. Talented humans like Bobby can influence these particles. Science and fantasy merge in fascinating ways here, and Boyer is also not afraid to touch on religion. He explains how belief channels truth; thus, religion is true when people believe in it, and miracles happen when people focus and hope hard enough.

The bite-size chapters are less than ten pages long, but they always end on a cliff-hanger or rich revelation. This creates suspense in the story, as does Boyer's gift for incorporating plot twists. In the blink of an eye, friends become enemies, and enemies become allies.

Boyer's descriptions are matter-of-fact yet specific. Because of this, it is easy to imagine how the "old wood structure" of Bobby's garage creaks and how the "air inside smelt of old paint and turpentine." Sharp descriptions make it easy to imagine the protagonist as well: "big for fourteen, with pale blue eyes" and a "crooked smile." Even Bobby's last name has metaphorical ramifications. In chemistry, ether is colorless and flammable, much like the energy controlled and manipulated by the people around him. However, in nature, the word relates to the clearest sections of sky.

Though the action is taut, more about characters' emotions could be brought into the novel. Before Bobby is eventually taken to the Academy for training, he witnesses his parents' car accident. Despite all of the action and everything he's been through, Bobby's feelings are seldom revealed. Such discussion could have brought up rich points about the different stages of grief. The book ends on a cliff-hanger and does not necessarily create a resolution for this volume of Bobby's story.

The intended audience is difficult to gauge. Bobby's age, thoughts, and actions seem appropriate for youth, but there are some darker moments, including murder, betrayal, and his parents' accident.

From the streets of Los Angeles to forests, underground lairs, and jade mines, this book takes Bobby on the adventure of a lifetime. Everything is connected: people, nature, and energy itself. For Bobby, reshaping reality means

learning how he fits into the world around him.

LISA BOWER (December 10, 2013)

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