



## The Ability

*M.M. Vaughan*

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**Delve into the extraordinary abilities of the twelve-year-old mind in this thrilling start to a middle-grade series that expands the possibilities of power.**

No one has any confidence in twelve-year-old Christopher Lane. His teachers discount him as a liar and a thief, and his mom doesn't have the energy to deal with him. But a mysterious visit from the Ministry of Education indicates that Chris might have some potential after all: He is invited to attend the prestigious Myers Holt Academy.

When Christopher begins at his new school, he is astounded at what he can do. It seems that age twelve is a special time for the human brain, which is capable of remarkable feats—as also evidenced by Chris's peers Ernest and Mortimer Genver, who, at the direction of their vengeful and manipulative mother, are testing the boundaries of the human mind.

But all this experimentation has consequences, and Chris soon finds himself forced to face them—or his new life will be over before it can begin.

## The Ability Details

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## From Reader Review The Ability for online ebook

### Christina (A Reader of Fictions) says

I am a total sucker for middle grade novels about special schools and kids with powers. Perhaps it's because I grew up reading Harry Potter, and am still on the hunt for that elusive book that will mean as much to me, though I know that will likely not happen, because I'm an adult now and less able to appreciate the magic. Still, for all that I'm not likely to find something as amazing as Harry Potter is, my middle grade choices have yet to fail me. *The Ability* is a darker-than-usual middle grade novel with humor and action aplenty.

The main hero of *The Ability* is young Christopher Lane, just turning twelve years old and at wit's end for how to take care of himself and his mother, ruined by the death of his father. Like so many scrappy heroes, everything falls to Chris. He struggles in school, marked as a troublemaker and is finally expelled for a weird incident where he somehow beats up a bully without touching him. But, thankfully, salvation comes in the form of a test to study at an elite, strange prep school, Myers Holt Academy, which Chris passes with flying colors. After his test, the proctor presents him with a surprise birthday cake.

Note: Chris is not a wizard.

Now, there are certainly a few shades of Harry Potter obviously, like the cake, but *The Ability* does not read like a retelling. What's most similar is actually the tone, more than the story itself. Harry Potter begins as a fairly light story for children, but then becomes progressively darker as the children age. *The Ability* is not a kid's book and I would recommend it for the upper end of the middle grade age group. There's some death and injury, and some ethical lines that get crossed. I really liked how dark this was, and that there are shades of gray to the characters. The bad guys aren't just evil; they have backgrounds that explain how they became the way they are. Similarly, the children and their teachers are flawed and imperfect.

There's a lot of humor in *The Ability* too. Most of the funny moments center around Rex, definitely the least likable of the six kids in this class at Myers Holt Academy. However, just like the other five students, the readers can't help but be glad that Rex is there, because he's so funny, both accidentally and on purpose, even if many of his jokes are rather mean-spirited. There are also some more standard middle grade jokes, like food fights and that sort of thing. The funniest moment for me, though, was this scene where Chris is sent to a fancy department store to buy some new clothes and the salesman is all snooty telling him to get his grubby hands out of his department, until a manager comes and tells him who Chris is.

I wanted him to storm out while saying this.

Anyway, the powers that the kids have are also really cool. See, Myers Holt Academy, as one expects, is totally not a normal school. In fact, they train kids to work for the government in the super secret branch MI18. In this world, twelve-year-olds have unique abilities, where they can use a larger portion of their brains. What's really cool and unique is that these powers only manifest for a single year, though any information learned during this period will be retained for life. Basically, these kids are selected because they have more potential, but all kids age 12 have increased capacity. At Myers Holt Academy, they learn telekinesis, distance viewing, and mind reading/control. This is both cool and terrifying because I would not want children to have that much power, which is also why Sir Bentley, the head of the school, gives them lectures about using their power responsibly all the time.

Speaking of how terrifying kids with powers are, the kids they are fighting are so creepy. They're these twins who will stop at nothing to please their crazy step-mother. Yet, as evil as they are, you sort of get how they got that way and it's just sad all around, but they do need to be stopped. Vaughan does a great job setting up the bad guys and not making them laughable like so many middle grade villains are, because they don't run around spouting monologues about their evil plans.

The only drawback to *The Ability* is that the opening chapters are a bit confusing, because you're immediately introduced to a whole bunch of characters, and it takes a while to sort out who's who and how everything connects. The first chapter takes place 30 years before the rest of the book, and is important set up, and it's followed by a few chapters in which it's hard to tell which kid the narrative will primarily be following. This does get sorted out, but the beginning was a bit rough. Aside from that, though the kids themselves did have nice individual arcs, I would have liked a bit more focus on the friendships between the kids.

*The Ability* is a great read for more mature middle graders. It's a great choice for those who enjoyed Trenton Lee Stewart's *The Mysterious Benedict Society*, as well as Harry Potter. I will be looking forward to the next installment!

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### **Dorian says**

I work in a bookstore and a kid recommended this to me. Usually it's the other way round! Kid was right--it's a GREAT read! It's great fun and works on different levels - for kids, there's the action-packed story, a deliciously evil family and tons of 'i wish i could do that'! For teenagers and adults, there's a whole other level to read this book on - the desperate and complex situation of the protagonist and the way he deals with that and - what blew me away - the concept of the unique city of in the mind. Seriously great book. Having read to the end and seen how it's all been set up, I have a feeling the second book is going to be incredible.

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### **Fitzwilliam says**

Don't - and I'm saying this as an English teacher - get all literary on this. This is fast and full of detail - the kind of book kids can read again and again. It might not win any literary awards but that's fine by me, not all books worth reading have to. The kind of kids I teach - boys mostly - NEED more books like this! More serious and thought-provoking than *Mysterious Benedict Society* (which I love too btw), less of that Harry Potter magic that sometimes puts boys off. I KNOW this is a book my class is going to go nuts over in the fall.

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### **Lucy Beck says**

AWESOME BOOK!!!! The story is about a boy called Chris who finds out he can enter people's minds. The minds in *The Ability* are like cities and each city is different for every person. The characters are really believable and interesting. For example, at the beginning, you think that Rex is a bully but as you read on you learn that Rex is actually really funny and just gets things wrong. Chris has a really hard life but he is such a nice person even though he's gone through everything that he has had to go through. *The Ability* is funny, smart, sad (a bit) and clever. I think anybody who liked *The Mysterious Benedict Society* or Harry

Potter (there is no magic in The Ability but there are similarities like it being in England and having special powers) will LOVE this!!!

<3 <3 <3 <3 <3

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### **Ruth says**

Reminds me of "The Mysterious Benedict Society" series by Trenton Lee Stewart.

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### **Tracy says**

I just finished reading this before writing a review, and while the prologue put me off a little, I found myself referring to it as I continued into the story. I don't want to say too much about it, because I will be writing a review, but the characters are good, the development of the story is good, and the end leaves the door open for another novel. I am not a reader of fantasy, but I do love mysteries, and I enjoyed this title quite a bit.

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### **Tony Keefer says**

Very enjoyable middle grade read. Protagonist Christopher Lane learns that he has very unique abilities such as mind reading and telekenesis. He along with some of his new classmates at a special school are being trained how to control their powers and eventually they all team together to foil the dastardly plans of a former student at their school.

Overall the characters and the plot were very strong. I anticipate a sequel or two based on the ending. Too bad I will have to wait a while.

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### **Chloe says**

I love the idea of the school and how they read people's minds by walking through buildings and streets! Amazing book!

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### **Anna W. says**

Best book ever according to my son! He got his copy a day before release and, not only did he finish it but he's already started to read it again - that's how much he loved it.

I can see how this will be a 5 star or 1 star book - 1 star from adults who are uncomfortable with the dark content (and boy is it dark at times!) and 5 stars from anybody who gets how much kids will like it for exactly that reason! It's funny too.

On a side note, from a parent point of view, it brought up some great issues for us to discuss. It also had

some interesting concepts with the whole mind thing that even got me thinking! And, now this is just a personal thing, but I really liked that it wasn't all informal and slapstick - think more like Harry Potter than Diary of Wimpy Kid.

Overall, I have to say this author knew exactly what she was doing when she wrote this - she got it just right. S. is already asking about when the next one will come out!

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### **Anna Ellis says**

I haven't read this (yet) but my 12 year old just finished it today and is in love with it! What I like, as a parent, is that this book has been the catalyst for some of the deepest conversations about ethics/morality, family and responsibility that I have ever had with her. She's loved reading it and I've loved her reading it. Both of us are looking forward to number two!

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### **Darth J says**

I really enjoyed everything about this book. First off, the style reminded me of the kind of books I read in elementary school that were written in that magical period of the 1950s-1970s. Second, I know a lot of people will want to compare this book to *Harry Potter*, but for me it felt more like *Matilda* meets *X-Men: First Class*, by way of The Adventures of the Bailey School Kids series.

So here's the premise:

6 twelve year olds are chosen to attend a special school where they can learn to strengthen their Ability. What exactly is their Ability, you ask? Well, it's a combination of telekinesis

telepathy/mind control

and speed reading

The kids are set up as a kind of task force against a set of creepy twins and their adopted gothic mother, a former student left for dead on a mission 30 years ago who is now back for revenge.

This is one of the best MG books I've read in a while. It's well written, smart, and has the feel of a modern classic. It was just everything that I've been looking for in a book in this genre.

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### **Mallory T says**

Wow! Great book!!! If you love anything about England (like me) - this book is a must-have. Really fun. Bit like Harry Potter but older. I really recommend it. i can't wait for book 2!!!

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### **Bella says**

The excitement at my school about this author is unprecedented! A group of students went to see her speak when she came to visit from England on her book tour and it has had a snowball effect. I finally got round to reading it and can see exactly why the book has had such a reaction - it is fast-paced, full of details about the mind that are original and clever and full of humor. There are criticisms - I do think that some of the side characters need fleshing out (but it is the first in a series) and the prologue is a little confusing on first reading but these are just minor issues. Personally I loved it - great fun and the most awesome concept. Even better, it's the first time I've seen kids this excited about a book since Harry Potter - we have five people waiting to take the book out! We have ordered a class set for the library and teachers are talking about doing work around it next year to take advantage of the buzz around this. Next HUGE book - wait and see!

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### **Scarlett says**

this book is sooooooooo amazing!!!!!! I can't wait for the next one -is ernest is going to be evil now??!!??!!

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### **Josey says**

M.M. Vaughan's "The Ability" is the answer to the frequently asked question: "what should I read after Harry Potter?"

A book with great promise and a beautifully illustrated cover, The Ability follows the trials and tribulations of Christopher Lane, a child who, like Harry, comes from a dysfunctional home. Chris is instantly likeable and pitiable, from his bravery in dealing with his father's death and his mother's mental illness, to his willingness to step up and be more responsible than any 12-year-old boy should ever have to be. After being expelled from school, Chris ends up at the exclusive Myers Holt Academy, where he's told he will be working for the government by using special powers he did not know he possessed, including telepathy. He spends a lot of time walking around the illusionary streets and buildings that make up the minds of people who are suspected of being involved in enemy plans.

Read the rest of my review at [www.awrinkleinthepages.com](http://www.awrinkleinthepages.com). Review will be posted on 05/23/2013.

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