



# Book of Secrets

*Ernest Burnett*

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Magic in America? Absolutely! But those who practice it know better than to cast their spells by a waving a wand around. Forced underground, literally and figuratively, the wizards of the United States know that APEX is watching. What is APEX? The Agency for Paranormal Extermination - a top-secret government agency dedicated to the eradication of anything with even a spark of magic, even children!

Fable, Simon, Ozzy and Brick are in the crosshairs. APEX has noticed their unusual talents and the only way they're going to avoid being burned at the stake is by trusting The Shadow Lord and his odd assortment of instructors at Sumner Academy. Their choice is simple. Learn how to use their gifts or die trying...

An excerpt...

"I'm not what you think I am. I don't know anything about magic."

"Your first lesson, Mr. Rudigger." A slight air of menace in The Shadow Lord's tone suggested impatience for the first time since he'd been introduced. "Up to a certain age, magic is instinctive; mostly a defense mechanism to correct a misstep or prevent an injury. It can't be controlled, but it's rarely noticed, so who cares, right?"

The Shadow Lord crossed to Simon's desk and picked up the soccer ball in his formless hands. He tossed it back and forth from one insubstantial hand to the other.

"At some point, a child's ability to wield magical energy transitions from the back of its mind to the front. They do things. Amazing things. Like kick a soccer ball in a corkscrew spin to win the big game in the final seconds. People take notice. When the wrong people take notice, I have to make a choice. Let them kill you or bring you here."

"Why would they kill me?" Simon asked. "I just kicked a soccer ball."

The Shadow Lord tossed Simon's soccer ball straight up, but it didn't fall back down. The ball just floated above his head, spinning slowly like a satellite in orbit.

"It makes these people nervous to think that a person has power over them," The Shadow Lord answered.

"Their only response is to take the power back by making magic a crime."

"But, I don't have magic," Simon insisted as he stared at the floating soccer ball. He was about to add that he couldn't make a soccer ball float in midair, but he didn't even have the chance to blink.

The soccer ball whistled at Simon like a bullet out of a gun. It blasted him right in the face. The distinct hollow 'pang' of the ball hitting a solid surface rang throughout the room.

Fable cringed. Ozzy gasped. Kwambi gulped. Brick shrugged – the old soccer ball-to-the-face game was a regular sport at the Port Angeles Home for Boys. Simon reflexively jerked back, but he didn't feel a thing. The sting that should have come from being smacked in the face was absent. He'd somehow protected himself with magic. He didn't know how, but he did. Is it possible, Simon thought, that I'm capable of... magic?

"The time for handholding has passed," The Shadow Lord continued to the mesmerized recruits. "You are here because if you were not, you would probably be dead... or worse. You are the Recruits. You each have magic, which means very little without the lessons that we teach at this school. Those who don't learn what we teach, usually wind up in the hands of APEX, where they are summarily executed as witches.

I am the Guardian of Secrets. It is my role to make sure that your presence at this school doesn't put other wizards at risk. In short, I will be teaching you how to keep what you are a secret from those who would burn you for it. Literally, burn you at the stake.

Your classes begin tomorrow. Try to get a good night's sleep.”

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