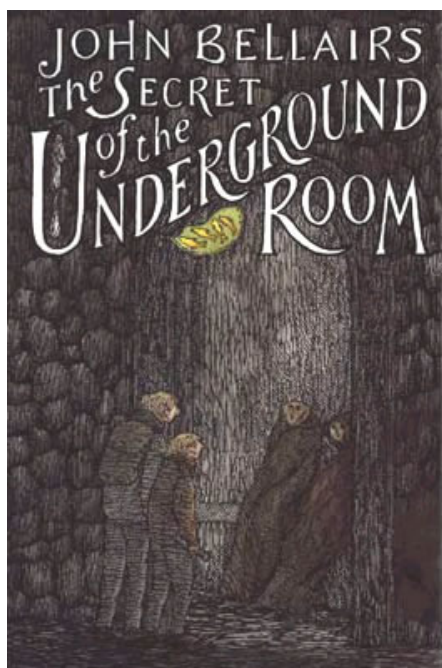




The Secret of the Underground Room

John Bellairs

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The Secret of the Underground Room John Bellairs

Professor Childermass is stunned when Father Higgins claims that a ghost is trying to contact him. Then the priest disappears. When the professor and Johnny catch up to him, they make a terrifying discovery -- Father Higgins is possessed by Masterman, the spirit of a long-dead knight determined to rule the world. And it looks as if Masterman is going to get his way. "Has enough chills to satisfy readers not quite ready for Stephen King."-- *School Library Journal*

The Secret of the Underground Room Details

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From Reader Review The Secret of the Underground Room for online ebook

Chris says

Despite his reputation, I'm just not sold on Bellairs. The characterizations are flat and Johnny Dixon himself isn't much of a proactive hero -- things mainly happen to him, not the other way around. Too many coincidences to swallow in this one, and it really doesn't get interesting until the final stretch.

Marjanne says

A fun Johnny Dixon book, and (of course) a very quick read. The story was interesting. However, Professor Childermas saves and earns a lot more than you would think from the earlier books and (unfortunately) and other character just shows up out of the blue. It is a little unbelievable. Anyhow a fun story.

D. says

The second-to-the-last of Bellairs's books is a strong entry in the series. While not my favorite, it certainly shows that Bellairs still knew how to create a compelling story. In this one, Johnny Dixon, his best friend Fergie, and Professor Childermass are called upon to help Father Higgins discover what's causing strange disturbances in Higgin's new church. As usually happens, Johnny, Fergie, and The Professor find themselves caught up in all sort of creepy happenings, and they have to prevent a long-dead fiend from taking over the world.

There are several nice, creepy moments, but nothing that will give anybody nightmares here.

Recommended for readers who like it creepy, but not TOO creepy.

Poleth Mercado says

I think the author did an amazing job creating suspense and picturing the characters in your head. I thought this book is really easy, scary good, and adventurous. It takes you to an adventure with this professor and two kids trying to get the masterman that is possessing the father. I recommend this book to people who like horror stories. Also, to people who like to read cliff hangers after each chapter because you want to read more. After each chapter it leaves to a, "OMG...I've got to read the next chapter," The author makes it just so good to the middle end of the story by making it thrilling.

Miranda W. 8 Rdg says

The Secret of the Underground Room was an amazing book written by John Bellairs. He used mystery of ghosts to tell the story and let the readers know that this book is extremely scary. It was an easy book and I

recommend this book to people to love to read about possession. This book should become a Newberry award winner.

Andrija says

John Bellairs books (especially the editions with covers and front pieces by Edward Gorey) fed my love of mystery and horror as a child. I tried reading 'normal' books like "The Pitcher with the Glass Arm" and other sports related fiction, it was an edition of *The Mummy*, *The Will and the Crypt* which captured me. I devoured every book Bellairs published in our local library. To this day, I hunt used bookstores for the Edward Gorey editions of those books, keeping them in a special shelf in my house.

The Secret of the Underground Room is not one of his better ones, alas. A very creepy premise involving Father Higgins possessed by a being intent on resurrecting heretical knights is very cool, and there are some very creepy moments in the end, but the book is very slow to start. One could tell this is one of his later books - it doesn't have the eerie verve of the early books. But I'm still glad to have it in my collection.

Hilary says

Wow. I used to love the John Bellairs books as a child and I read them all voraciously. It's sad to find out now that he's actually a REALLY bad and formulaic writer. From the mysterious long-lost brother (who happens to know magic and be fabulously wealthy), to the deus ex machina of the preist at the end, there is only one word to describe this book: Ouch. Truly and seriously ouch.

Laurel says

Yup, starting my year by rereading Bellairs. It struck me how much these books are basically H.P. Lovecraft-meets-Shirley Jackson for strange fussy children — the obsession with geographical detail! The vague but precise period setting! The accepted presence, slightly surprising but ultimately matter-of-fact, of unearthly forces! Among the best of New England gothic. I don't know why these haven't been reissued yet in a deluxe box set with all the deluxe Edward Gorey illustrations, because I would eat. that. up.

Alec Hawkins says

These are YA books written in a time when author's and publishers were still trying to figure out how to write supernatural horror for children. This book contains some of the scariest moments in all of Bellairs work ('Salem's Lot level chills in this one) and the gang goes to England! Tons of fun.

Ea Solinas says

Gruff and lovable Father Higgins is one of the better supporting characters in John Bellairs' many books.

And in "The Secret of the Underground Room," the evil-battling priest slips into the spotlight in an intriguing ghost story. Though not Bellairs' best, it's a chilling and fast-paced thriller for the pre-Stephen King set -- sleepwalking, undead pirates, and a situation that Johnny and Professor Childermass can put right.

Johnny Dixon is depressed when his friend Father Higgins is transferred to a different parish. Father Higgins isn't much happier, since he dislikes his new congregation, and his estranged mother has just died. Soon he visits his friends Johnny and Professor Childermass, claiming that a ghost has been trying to contact him, that he is sleepwalking, and he shows them a strange glassy half-plate with golden fishes in it, and a cryptic rhyme.

Soon afterward, Father Higgins vanishes. The professor, Johnny, and Fergie go to England in an effort to track him -- and find that he is in the grip of a demonic dead knight, part of the pirate De Marisco knights that died long ago -- after some sold their souls to the devil. Now the evil knight known as Masterman is trying to set his old comrades free...

"The Secret of the Underground Room" has all the staples of a good Bellairs book -- evil creatures that will either destroy the world or conquer it, spinechilling cliffhangers, cryptic rhymes, and a lot of witty banter between Childermass and other characters. But the strongest part of it is the good-hearted characters who are never quite overwhelmed by evil.

Perhaps its greatest weaknesses are that the pacing seems to meander, and some of the plot twists are a bit strained. (Where did Bellairs get the line, "And in case you're wondering, he has developed his powers of ESP"?) But he imbues the story with an eerie, unnerving quality, where dark shadowy things can be found in half-forgotten places.

Johnny and Fergie are good as always, the meek Charlie Brown altar boy and the cocky gutsy kid who complement each other like peanut-butter and jelly. Father Higgins is given extra dimension, provided with his sad past with his estranged mother and his wish that he had reconciled with her. And Professor Childermass is his usual grumpy, irritable, generous and brave self.

"Secret of the Underground Room" is not Bellairs' best, but it's definitely a solid ghost-story with plenty of wit and chills.

Brian Rogers says

In my "lets read children's lit I should have read" quest I picked up a few John Bellairs books from the library book sale. He had come highly recommended, and the House With a Clock in its Walls was pretty good. This, on the converse, was an interminable slog of poor pacing, plot advancement via a succession of un-grounded hypothesis, pure supposition and deus ex machina topped off with a cherry of anticlimax. It was only its short length and sheer stubbornness on my part that I didn't abandon it halfway through.

Ugh. This sucker goes back to the library.

Dustin Brown says

So I'd forgotten about this 'series' (they're all standalones, with the same handful of characters) that I read as a kid. Well, 11 year old anyway. What with the current scandals, a story about a 13 year old whose best friends are a 70-something professor and a catholic priest of unspecified age might be seen as creepy, in pratice they aren't. Not in this book, in any case. This was not one of Bellairs' finest (but is was the last) but it was a good re-introduction. I'm looking forward, now, to 'A House With a Clock Within Its Walls' and 'The Eyes of the Killer Robot'. A little darkness, some magic (white and black), riddles, Catholic traditions, likeable characters and an early 1950's setting make these books worth reading. But don't start with this one.

Justin K. Rivers says

The last Prof. Childermass/Johnny Dixon story that Bellairs wrote before he died, it is also one of the shortest. But Bellairs makes every moment count, with some very high and personal stakes involved in the fate of Father Higgins, and a strange, atmospheric trip to a ruined castle in England. Again, Bellairs weakens his story by some unimpressive coincidences, and the resolution did not quite seem earned. But the concept and the chill-factor are Bellairs at his best.

Daniel says

Bellairs' penultimate gothic horror for children is quite bittersweet. On the one hand it's nice to see the characters in a new adventure that features a trip to England full of interesting historical details. But on the other, the overall plot seems a jumbled mess that is never quite 'believably' made cohesive. Events happen quick and the ultimate conclusion(s) both end in lackluster fashions. Despite its flaws I'll take it over one less Bellairs book, and there are a few moments of spine-tingling macabre that Bellairs became known for. I actually thought this was his last, only to find now there is one more I hadn't realized existed...

Kris says

In spite of a couple of out-of-the-blue deus ex machina moments the book was one of the better. The suspense was gripping and the pacing much improved over the meandering pace of the early book. The action was smooth and the sense of menace very well done.

Arthur says

I found this great series when *The Curse of the Blue Figurine*, and *The Mummy, the Will, and the Crypt* were reprinted by Puffin, and through a book club.

Unfortunately Bellairs died, fortunately the series is co-authored to its finish with Brad Strickland.

Themes run from monsters to superstitious magic. To my surprise religious beliefs play a strong part too.

Woven with zeal of mystery. Add adventure. In this latest installment, the last solely by Bellairs, Father Higgins disappears. Rod Childermass, Fergus and Johnny search in England for the Pastor, incidentally he is possessed by a evil spirit. They meet with Rod's thought to be dead brother Humphrey.

Casey says

I stumbled upon a whole shelf of Bellairs' books at a school library. The Edward Gorey covers grabbed me right away. I love Masterpiece Mystery and have a Gorey calendar with postcards that I occasionally send when I'm feeling gothic. This book was really cool. It featured possession, England, a Catholic priest, thought dead brothers and a 50s setting that was so much fun to inhabit for a while. I can't believe that I never knew about Gorey until now. I would have loved him when I was a kid.

Marie says

Not one of my favorites (of Bellairs) but still a fun read. Slow start, and the young protagonists Johnny and Fergie end up simply being there for the action, rather than taking much part in the actual culmination (though they get themselves there in the first place). The suspense, though is as chilling as any of Bellairs' books. And of course, they're just as good for adults as for kids.

Calista says

This book is the 8th in the Johnny Dixon series and it takes Johnny over the pond to Bristol, England and the Isle of Lundy. Their good friend Father Higgins has been possessed by a powerful spirit. They have to find a way to break the spell. The Professor and Fergie work with Johnny to save the world from this evil spirit.

John Bellairs sets a great tone and he has excellent pacing. John is simply a master at writing spooky for younger children. He hits all the right notes. If only there were some women in these stories. That is what is missing.

This one was a good read and it does the series proud. I really enjoy these books. They are wonderful and need to continue to be read.

D.M. Dutcher says

Not one of his best.

Johnny and his friend Professor Childermass find that their priest friend is suffering from what looks to be a ghost. That ghost has malevolent plans for him, and soon the two of them are racing to England to prevent the resurrection of an unholy evil. Unfortunately the plot is unsatisfying, and the book feels rushed; events just happen instead of being foreshadowed, and plot elements come out of nowhere. It's still an enjoyable book, and one of the few series to treat Catholicism respectfully while not skimping on spooky chills.
