



The Trolley to Yesterday

John Bellairs

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Talking statues, time travel? Johnny and Fergie think the professor is off his rocker until they all end up in Constantinople in 1453 during the Turkish invasion. Can they get back or will they perish in the siege?

The Trolley to Yesterday Details

Date : Published May 31st 1989 by Dial Books (first published January 1st 1989)

ISBN : 9780803705814

Author : John Bellairs

Format : Hardcover

Genre : Fantasy, Mystery, Young Adult, Fiction, Horror, Childrens

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From Reader Review The Trolley to Yesterday for online ebook

David Serxner says

I bought this in paperback when it first came out--which was after I had taken my class on Byzantine art in 1993, so it was neat to recognise things that we had discussed in class in the book. I was not sure how I would like the continuation of the Johnny Dixon and Professor Childermass series of books. Like the Anthony Monday books these get a little predictable in terms of people doubting Johnny. I am still not a fan of Fergie, he just has not grown on me. Still, good books, well paced, and a nice bedtime read!

Meredith says

This is one of those *those* books for me. I dragged my feet about reading chapter books on my own as a kid because I loved comics (grew up on Asterix and Carl Barks' work) and my parents read chapter books to me at night (I was a bit lazy). When I finally felt pressured enough in our extremely book-heavy family to pick up a real chapter book it was some horrible thing about young kids solving a crime.

Luckily the second chapter book I read was Trolley to Yesterday. It was exciting, spooky, and interested me in both science and history. Johnny Dixon is an odd and wonderful main character - not a hero, just a normal kid who liked chess and history. I read, and loved, all of John Bellairs' other Johnny Dixon books.

Oddly enough I've never been partial to any other similar books and definitely don't like the supernatural Stephen King type of books, and I don't like horror movies. They've always seemed tame and predictable, whereas some of the Johnny Dixon books still creep me out even after countless re-readings (Eyes of the Killer Robot is the creepiest, I think).

jeremy says

those splendid moments of youth, spent in utter awe of the discovery of worlds seemingly more extravagant than our own, is amongst the most precious of gifts. it can only serve the soul in a most profound and deserving way to reread the books of our adolescence.

after being unable to locate this for many years, a dear friend sent me an ex-library copy (with touching gift inscription) for the holidays. it has been the better part of two decades since i last thumbed its pages. my sense of the magic & joy within may very well be an overestimation (reading it now as an adult, that is), but rereading it may, more importantly, conjure the more authentic/realized individual one was likely to be in their youth. *the trolley to yesterday*, its title only struck me this very moment.

Joanna Tang says

I thought this book was great. The way the author wrote it made it different. Something I liked was how the author added a twist in the middle and how it connected with history. I wish the author added more details

about the characters' personality. This book reminded me of wars because it was about going back in time to help a country. I would recommend this book because it is interesting and unpredictable.

Marjanne says

This is not one of the better Bellair's novels. It was ok, but I thought it was a little far-fetched and had potential to be much more interesting. There was also a character that kind of appeared out of nowhere and there was little explanation for his presence.

Chris says

There was a time when I was a kid that I really really REALLY loved John Bellairs. Aside from the Edward Gorey photos, I really connected with Bellairs' characters who were misanthropic and sort of sad, but usually able to connect and find odd untraditional friendships. Bellairs was also a crackerjack creepy storyteller with a talent for an end-of-chapter cliffhanger. I spent many days as a kid reading his books, starting with *The Mummy*, *The Will*, and *The Crypt* and working my way through 'em all.

...or so I thought. Somehow, I missed *The Trolley to Yesterday*. Finding it in my school's meager library, I gave it a shot and sadly, of all the Bellairs' books I've read, *The Trolley to Yesterday* is the least of the series.

It seems as though Bellairs decided he wanted to write a historical story about Constantinople and then shoehorned his most popular characters (Johnny Dixon and Professor Childermass) into that book. Plus... I don't know, it's probably dumb for an almost thirty year old to pick at a book intended for kids, but the whole notion of there just happening to be a time travel machine underneath the Professor's house? That seems sort of lame. Especially considering all the OTHER weird stuff the characters have encountered in the past few seasons.

Bellairs is a great writer and I love his books... I just wish this one was one of the better 'uns.

Gina says

I've been meaning to revisit this book for years. Of all the Bellairs books, I think this is the only one that I actually owned, although I read most, if not all, of the others. I remember the beautiful Gorey cover with purple trim very distinctly. Unfortunately, it turns out that this book just isn't that good. It's kind of a fun idea - Connie Willis for elementary schoolers, but the story is a bit weak--and not just because it's meant for children.

Nate D says

I read every Bellairs book in print at the time over the course of fifth grade, and this was my favorite. I think I appreciated the historical grounding. And, you know, the crazy time travel adventures back to the fall of Constantinople.

I have a sneaking suspicion that the characters would seem pretty flat now, and that the historical accuracy wasn't exactly amazing, but you know what still holds up? The Edward Gorey artwork gracing the covers of all of these, which was my introduction to him.

Greg Kerestan says

After five straight adventures in the gothic horror genre, John Bellairs decided to shake up his formula and try something more "traditional" in young adult publishing: a time-travel adventure starring the heroes of his Johnny Dixon series. This being Bellairs, his version of conventional is still wild and rococo, complete with Egyptian gods, undead Knights Templar, candy bars as repeated plot points, and a setting in medieval Constantinople decidedly outside clichés of ancient Rome or Britain. Not bad, just... not exactly what you come to Bellairs for, and the presence of a comic sidekick felt like a misstep.

Justin K. Rivers says

An interesting departure for Bellairs, eschewing the macabre flavor of his other books. *Trolley* is a comedic adventure in time travel, and has the makings of a classic Doctor Who serial, with lots of imprisonments and narrow escapes from savage hoards. Bellairs' humorous side works well here, and the lighter tone is fun without relinquishing tension. The weakness here is that all the obstacles are, well, obstacles, and not deeper conflict.

I particularly enjoy the surreal details at work, which are unusually bizarre even for Bellairs, such as Brewster, the egyptian god/statue, and the ghost knights with their magical flying talisman. Not to mention the random secret time-traveling trolley in the basement, which is not only implausibly there, but equally implausibly, is never remarked upon again.

D. says

Johnny Dixon and his eccentric friend, Professor Childermass, are back! This time, they get mixed up in time travel, which leads them on a wacky adventure to the fall of Constantinople. And, honestly, "wacky" really is the operative word for this book. Compared to the previous Bellairs books, this one really seems disjointed and more like a weird gothic sci-fi "buddy comedy" than the expected creepy gothic storylines. (Part of this is the strange addition of an Egyptian god as a minor character, but you almost have to read it to understand.) There's still some good action, but the characterization is minimal, and there are some plot points that stretch believability even for a Bellairs novel. (And that's really saying something, let's be honest.) But I think I'm probably being to harsh here. Part of Bellairs's charm as a writer is his grasp of childhood's fears and lack of logic. In the best Bellairs books there's a balance between the adult world and the child world. I'm guessing most 10-13 year olds would really enjoy this book, and not dwell on how weird the plot is at times. Instead, they would focus on Johnny's fears about being lost in time and how he needs to work with the Professor to make things right. Overall, it was a good read, but nowhere near the best of the series.

Lia says

I love Bellairs' scary mysteries. I loved them as a child, too. They were just scary enough so I would make a running leap for the bed in the darkened room, but not scary enough to keep me awake. I also feel like he takes his young characters seriously. That even when the young mind is passionately irrational, it is still real.

I read the copy with Edward Gorey's perfect illustrations. Really, he's the perfect choice.

Britt Holewinski says

I loved John Bellairs growing up...his books were so hard to put down, even for the pre-teen that I was! But *Trolley to Yesterday* was my favorite, more historical than supernatural. Truly a fun book that I should read again as an adult. For all you parents out there with kids who love to read (or not), do them a favor and give them a John Bellairs book...start with the *Johnny Dixon* series, it's the best of the three (Lewis Barnavelt and Anthony Monday being the other two major character series).

Ea Solinas says

Time travel in fantasy is now such a cliche that it's a bit hard to write anything original about it. But John Bellairs managed. "*Trolley to Yesterday*" has a bunch of intriguing twists and unexpected events -- and while it doesn't have as much supernatural content or scary bits, it still is an enjoyable read.

Professor Childermass is acting even more oddly than usual, which is saying something. When Fergie and Johnny try to investigate his weird behavior (including sand on his carpet and talking to himself), they find the professor having a conversation with Brewster, a magical Egyptian statue. He admits his secret: Behind a bricked-up wall is a time-travelling trolley. And the boys hitch a ride when Childermass travels back in time to save the city of Constantinople from invasion.

The problem? They arrive a little too late, and the city is being overrun by Turkish soldiers. As they struggle to make their way back to the trolley and the safety of the future, they encounter the trolley's creator (who accidentally got left behind during one of its previous excursions), a deranged monk, and a group of ghostly Crusaders. But then Johnny is poisoned, and the only cure means going back to Constantinople -- and back into danger.

Usually time travel books are full of cliches, and this one has a few, but you probably won't notice them. Kids who read this book may become interested in the Byzantine Empire -- while Bellairs doesn't present huge amounts of historical detail, he gives enough to be very, very interesting. (There's also a dash of Egyptian stuff too) There's adventure, humor and the odd way of getting around.

Johnny and Fergie remain the surprisingly courageous duo of previous books, the shy boy and his brasher, jokier pal. Professor Childermass is crusty, sometimes a bit irrational, but very lovable. And Brewster (a deity of Upper and Lower Egypt) really steals the show with his dry little comments. .

This book probably has one of the lowest amounts of supernatural stuff of Bellairs' books. Certainly it doesn't have much in the way of horror. But there is a great twist about halfway through, where our heroes are aided

by a group of ghostly Crusaders, who are trying to make amends for sacking the city centuries before. I suppose Brewster technically counts as supernatural, and he provides a lot of the humor (such as translating a Turkish soldier's words as "Butter and eggs, and a pound of cheese!").

"Trolley To Yesterday" isn't Bellairs' best novel, but it is an intriguing and informative historical book that adults may enjoy as well, especially if they're Byzantine buffs. Good fun.

Elizabeth says

I remember loving the incredibly spooky Bellairs books I read as a kid, all from the Louis B. series, but I never read any others, so I don't know how spooky or scary a kid would find this one, or whether I'd find those other books spooky now. The book had a slow start and I almost put it down. It did get more exciting but it was choppy, and would probably be hard to follow for a kid who didn't know the relevant history, which would include the Crusades, the fall of Constantinople to the Turks, the 1890s, and the 1950s. I'm curious how the books I remember so fondly will seem to me now, but also a little afraid, on the basis of this book, to try them and be disillusioned.

Kris says

This book was less scary and more action thrills in nature, the ghosts this time around were benign helping to save Johnny's life rather than end it. Overall, for the history nerd, it's a decent representation of the last days of Constantinople on a level that kids can grasp. There are realistic levels of violence, fanaticism and fear as the heroes race around trying to save their lives and the lives of a group of people trapped by the violence.

Lisa says

I loved all John Bellairs books as a kid & teen, including this one. Reading it again, I was surprised to realize how willy-nilly the plot is and how broadly the characters are painted. The protagonists--an elderly professor and two teenage boys in 1950s Massachusetts--spend most of the story being diverted from their goal, which is to travel back in time and stop 15th century Turkish invaders from killing residents of Constantinople who have taken refuge in the Hagia Sophia (a famous church). I have such clear memories of who each character is, but Bellairs doesn't actually give them much depth in this book. Finally, I was surprised by how cavalierly the story treats the deaths of "extras" and "others". I appreciate that John Bellairs books are about fun and mystery, but even so it seemed like a little more soul-searching would have been appropriate considering the tragedy occurring in the background, and I was uncomfortable with how completely "Turk" equalled "villain". I guess that was the biggest surprise--as a kid, I didn't fully appreciate how completely lacking the story is in introspection.

Obviously my memory isn't the best--but I'm pretty sure that most of Bellairs' other books really did have tighter plots and would hold up better. I remember that most of his books were set in the characters' small hometowns, and I wonder if this book just feels a bit off because the setting was unusual for Bellairs.

Twyla says

My favorite part was when Johnny, Fergie, the professor, and Mr. Townsend all made it back to their own time safely. My least favorite part was when Fergie wanted to travel in time behind the professor's back. My favorite character was Brewster, because he was very helpful when they needed, even if he wasn't there to help at all times. My least favorite character was Fergie, because he kept doing things that were dangerous, and things that he could have gotten into trouble for.

Calista says

I love this series. What I'm wondering is this; is there another set of books out there where there are women in a gothic mystery for teens? There are no women in these first 6 books or female characters really besides gramma. I see there is a female character in the Lewis series, so there is that. I would love to read something like this with some women. I think that's why I like Ivy pocket.

I don't know anything about Constantinople and its history. This book was more history of the city and what happened than I had known. This book is a time travel piece. A trolley is a time machine and it goes back to the fall of Constantinople in the 1400s. Our 3 characters get swept up in the siege of the city.

I have to admit, I knew the trio would get back to the present, but I couldn't figure out how they would get back. It made me a nervous.

This is well written, but it is still not my favorite in the series. There were ghosts and magic relics and magic items in this story. It still didn't have the same creepy factor the others have had. I was entertained by the book and I look forward to reading the next one next month.

Amy says

I'm so upset that I didn't like this book. I loved this author when I was young and wanted to reread one of my old favorites. When I got halfway through, I doubted I'd actually read this book when I was younger, but it was just the first one by him I saw at the library available for check out. Anyway, if you don't mind completely inconceivable plot lines, potentially incorrect historical references and poorly established characters, then maybe this is for you... or maybe if you're 10 like I was when I would have read it the first time. ;) Not one that gets better with age. Maybe next up, The Phantom Tollbooth or A Wrinkle in Time. I think I'd be happier at the end of the book anyway.
