



The Whispering Skull

Jonathan Stroud

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In the six months since Anthony, Lucy, and George survived a night in the most haunted house in England, Lockwood & Co. hasn't made much progress. Quill Kipps and his team of Fittes agents keep swooping in on Lockwood's investigations. Finally, in a fit of anger, Anthony challenges his rival to a contest: the next time the two agencies compete on a job, the losing side will have to admit defeat in the Times newspaper.

Things look up when a new client, Mr. Saunders, hires Lockwood & Co. to be present at the excavation of Edmund Bickerstaff, a Victorian doctor who reportedly tried to communicate with the dead. Saunders needs the coffin sealed with silver to prevent any supernatural trouble. All goes well-until George's curiosity attracts a horrible phantom.

Back home at Portland Row, Lockwood accuses George of making too many careless mistakes. Lucy is distracted by urgent whispers coming from the skull in the ghost jar. Then the team is summoned to DEPRAC headquarters. Kipps is there too, much to Lockwood's annoyance. Bickerstaff's coffin was raided and a strange glass object buried with the corpse has vanished. Inspector Barnes believes the relic to be highly dangerous, and he wants it found.

The Whispering Skull Details

Date : Published September 16th 2014 by Disney Hyperion

ISBN : 9781423164920

Author : Jonathan Stroud

Format : Hardcover 435 pages

Genre : Fantasy, Young Adult, Mystery, Horror, Paranormal, Ghosts

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From Reader Review The Whispering Skull for online ebook

?★Tinjatina★ A Court of Pizza and Laziness says

This series is fantastic. I liked book 1 a bit more but this was great anyway. I hope book 3 will be a 5 star read again. Oh and why the hell is there a different narrator in every Audiobook?!

Unacceptable.*grumbles*

bella ? [bella farren] says

3.5 / 5 stars

"Plan F, we follow Plan F, right now."

'Is that the one where we run away?'

'Not at all. It's the one where we beat a dignified emergency retreat.'"

Once again, I was transported into this book and enjoyed every minute of it. I didn't realise how much I missed Lucy, Lockwood and George until they started bantering again—they're hilarious with their little British insults.

This is the second book in the Lockwood & Co. series, and it picked up where it left off. Lockwood & Co. is London's most ramshackle agency of teenager ghost hunters, in a time where only children and teenage posses the ability to see ghosts. The Lockwood trio, as per usual, fumble their way through with a little bit of skill and a lot of luck, and usually end up with hilarious situations to read about.

During this book the team go head to head with one of the most well-known and organised agency, Fittes, which is headed by the agency's mortal enemy, Quill Kipps. Add in a talking skull with the potential to be a rare kind of ghost that would catapult them to fame and a mirror that can shock people to death, and you have drama.

And who knew a talking skull could be so sassy.

I loved this book, but not quite as much as the first book. With this series, they tend to start slowly but are still entertaining and interesting. I would describe the first half as enjoyable but not gripping, with the last hundred pages or so always turning it into a page turner.

Stroud is extremely descriptive and I love it, it takes no trouble at all to imagine every little thing in the book

and the relationships between characters.

The banter is my favourite part of this book, and the thought that anything will happen to the trio keeps me up at night, authors are scary creatures. Once again, I will vow to delete my GR account and become a hermit.

^^^ this is me every waking second when I'm reading this series.

[s1]
[s2]
[s3]
[s4]

Ginger says

The Whispering Skull is the second book in the *Lockwood & Co.* series and starts off 6 months later after the group survives the night in one of the most haunted houses in England.

Anthony Lockwood, Lucy and George get a new client that wants help with an excavation of a body in an old cemetery. Turns out the body is Edmund Birckerstaff who had died in a violent way years ago and his coffin is sealed in silver.

This is the start of a fun and well paced sequel that includes the mystery of the death of Birckerstaff, his obsessions with communicating with the dead and Lucy's talents of being able to talk to the skull ghost residing in the ghost jar.

Most agents can't communicate with a Type 3 ghost so this is a big deal to the overall profession of containing and destroying ghosts.

The *Lockwood & Co.* series is written for middle school age but *Jonathan Stroud* finds a way to write well for all ages and I enjoyed this series from the beginning. I would start with **The Screaming Staircase** so that you can understand the world building of the series, London and the ghost epidemic.

If you're looking for a fun, spooky and fast paced series that involves ghosts and other paranormal topics, you might really like this series!

The characters of Lockwood, Lucy and George are being developed more and the book leaves off on a big cliffhanger. I loved it! I'm looking forward to continuing with the series!

may ☺ says

Y'all wanna know a secret?? I read this book back in June and I seemed to have forgot I had to write a review for it. ? ? ?

There's something with the books in this series that starts off REALLY slow and takes me quite a while to get into, but once I'm into it, I CANNOT PUT IT DOWN.

"It's hard to say no to him. It always is"

- you know you got issues when you're more invested in shipping 13 year olds than actively living your life
- ft. a type 3 whispering skull that is a savage and prefers to roast rather than haunt
- gr6 kids flirting:
 - *He took my hand, and placed in it a necklace...It was really very beautiful.*
 - 'What?' I stared at it. 'Where'd you get this?'
 - 'Just something I had. I suggest you close your mouth when you wear it – it's more elegant that way.'
- Its been 2 months and im still not OVER THAT SCENE
- Kipps being a grade A butthead
- Lbr Lucy can kinda be annoying but she has a good heart
- Lockwood is a precious little baby
- George is still my spirit animal and prefers food to humans
- The mystery is actually pretty creepy
- Idk how middle grade kids are reading this and not crying bc I almost am
- I literally got chills while reading certain parts
- Anyways the beginning dragged and I was falling asleep
- But by the time I reached the 50% mark, I was FLYING THROUGH
- And the ending was WHOA !!
- I wanna read book 3 real real real soon

(s)

4 stars!!

~~~~~

***Continuation buddy reading*** with my Charlotte

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**Sana says**

**This is a reread.**

LOOK I'M CRYING. I AM DYING. THAT ENDING IS SO SWEET AND I JUST WANT TO CRY. The characters, the plot twist, this entire story is just so incredible, hilarious and everything I need in life. I love George, Lucy and Lockwood more than I love myself and that probably sounds really sad lmao. I'm incapable of writing a review bc honestly i don't know how to for this. All you need to know that this series is perfection. So get your butt to read it, if you haven't??

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## Veronique says

4.5

"Well," Lockwood said, "if you judge success by the number of enemies you make, that was a highly successful evening."

I had high expectations for this book, having loved the first one, and thankfully *The Whispering Skull* didn't disappoint. Stroud builds on the previous events as well as on the characters' development. We are once more thrown into ever more thrilling action, suitably creepy, interspersed by scenes focused on our protagonists, while resolving an intriguing mystery. I must admit, I love this trio and their idiosyncrasies. And let's not forget that hilarious skull! More, please!

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## Faye, la Patata says

So you live in a haunted house, and are regularly disturbed by... erm, supernatural beings day in and day out. You have work in the morning, but god forbid that female ghost roaming in the halls freaking you out to the point of pissing your pants. You want to sleep but you can't shake off that weird feeling following you around the house. One day, your patience has been stretched to the point of no return when a hostile entity manifests itself, and you promptly realize that this has to be stopped.

So, who do you call?

### **LOCKWOOD AND CO.!!!**

Friends, what a series this series is turning out to be. I read the first book last year and enjoyed it immensely. Not only does it have a cast of memorable, interesting, and flawed characters, but it has a world and society that are equally intriguing and riveting. It's like having a bunch of Ghostbusters around, trying to put down malicious spirits and entities, but I guess with a lot more intrigue and fun.

I'm not going to go for any specifics because I would hate to spoil the rest of you if you haven't read this yet, but know this: Book 1 was already so good, and Book 2 just got even better! Last book, we met three characters who decided to team up together to fight ghosts and phantoms: Anthony, Lucy, and George. It's so refreshing to see a group of characters not only fun and interesting as a group, but fun and interesting individually as well. They all have their own secrets and quirks, and in this installment we get to know a little more about each of them, and it's awesome how these things are smoothly incorporated in the storyline. **Usually when there's a reveal of something important in a character's past or actions, it can get sidetracked pretty fast and veer away from the main storyline, but Stroud is just so excellent in transitioning and weaving them all together.**

**And that, my friends, is awesome storytelling.**

The plot here is far more sinister this time around, as our trio has to face a more powerful and mysterious foe and may have to team up with their rival teams in order to defeat it. **I loved how the interaction here branched out from the three, and we find them reaching out to other people for help, other individuals**

**with quirky personalities of their own.** It was definitely interesting and I liked the different dynamics and conflicts that were shown - between Kip and Anthony, between Chief Inspector Barnes and the two of them, between George and another smart-dude... BETWEEN GEORGE AND THE TALKING SKULL... man. **It was a blast reading about them, and it's all thanks to the carefully thought-out characterization and development all of them has to go through.**

**Also, did I mention that the ghosts here are not the goody-goody kind?** They are ghosts and they are out for blood. I love how they are not taken lightly and how dangerous they really are, so there is a sense of urgency and danger when it comes to dealing with them. They touch you, and whatever part they touch will rot. They can make hallucinations, they can rip your heart out, you feel their depressing presence and it weighs you down. I love how the author utilises them in all kinds of situations and possibilities, making every scene different and exciting.

Overall, The Whispering Skull is a brilliant second installment to a series that has proven itself promising and consistent in its characterization and storytelling. Am I waiting for the next book? Eagerly.

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### **AliceGoldstein says**

Still so much months to go \*sigh\* \*sigh\*  
Is anybody else seriously starting to feel like this too?:

The perfect sequel! I loved how Lucy starts to understand her powers and that she feels more confident because of them.

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### **Lina Lovegood says**

Fand es wieder mal sehr gut, allerdings muss ich sagen, dass mir der 1. Band besser gefallen hat.

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### **\*Rachelle\* says**

#### **4.5 stars**

This was just wonderful. The action, the romance, the suspense. Agghhh I can't get enough of it! Lockwood, Lucy, and George have become my newest book BFFs. AND THAT ENDING.

So I can't really review this without spoiling the first book, so if you haven't read the first book stop reading this review and go read the book!!

Lucy's Talent becomes more and more intriguing....and in this one, we find out that the ghost in the jar is actually a Type 3 and our girl Lucy can communicate with him. I loved the banter between the two of them.

The ghost is hysterically sarcastic and I feel like we would get along splendidly. But naturally, Lockwood stole the show as The Most Charming Character Ever. And George aka my son got caught up in some bad juju which made my heart sad. However, it was interesting to see how Lucy, Lockwood, and George's friendships changed and grew through this.

Ugh it is 3:30am and I can't brain right now. Suffice it to say, this book is awesome (but I did like the first book a wee bit more....this one got a bit long in places) and everyone should read it.

Bedtime or book 3? Um, yeah the answer is obvious..... Hello again, Lockwood =D

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So I was going to be patient and wait for a copy to become available from my library. I lasted 24 hours. I am now the proud owner of book 2 of my new favorite series =D

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### **Virginia Ronan ♥ Herondale ♥ says**

*"Well," Lockwood said, "if you judge success by the number of enemies you make, that was a highly successful evening."*

Did I ever mention that I love **"Lockwood & Co"**? Those three are so funny and amazing and it was a pleasure to be able to dive back into their world. It felt like I never left it and I had no problem to get back into the game. =)

This time around they were after an object that was pilfered from a mysterious coffin and I was really curious how this story would unfold. I love haunted graveyards and this looked so promising that I vowed only to read the book during the day. (I'm a scaredy cat, remember? \*lol\*)

Well, looking at it in retrospective I shouldn't have worried, the fear factor wasn't very high in that one and I didn't even get goose bumps. Still, this didn't lessen the fun I had while reading the book and my enthusiasm for this series didn't cease. ;-)

*"You didn't actually aim it at all, did you?" Lockwood said.*

*"No."*

*"You just chucked it. In fact, it was pure blind luck that George lost his balance and fell out of the way. That's why he wasn't kebabbed by you."*

*"Yup."*

*He smiled at me.*

See, it are conversations like that which made it so nice to read this book. Lockwood and Lucy have a special chemistry and for some reason George fits into it all more than just perfectly. XD It's just a lovely balance and I really appreciate what Stroud did. =) They are all friends and they take care of each other. No one is left out and they all contribute their parts to the puzzle. Everyone is equal and has some special talents the others can count on. It's just nice! =))

*I stiffened. Lockwood made a small noise between his teeth. George groaned audibly. "We've had near-death experiences," he muttered, "we've had domestic rows, we've had a pitiful amount of sleep. But this is going to drive me over the edge. If I leap on the table and start shrieking, don't try to stop me. Just let me*

*howl.*"

I swear George is such an awesome guy! I love him! Of course I love Lucy and Lockwood too, but George is my fave! Haha! I just love his comments and remarks! Which brings me directly to the next character that kind of grew on me. The skull! \*lol\* Boy, did he give them a run for their money. XD Despite his hostile and rather unfriendly demeanour I still think that he kind of likes them all though. I mean why else would he even talk to them? He seems to be lonely and it's obvious that he enjoys his conversations with Lucy. Can't say the same for Luce though, but yeah that's another story. ;-P

*"You," I said. My throat was dry; I could barely speak.*

*"Not the greatest welcome I've ever had," the voice said, "but accurate. Yes, I can't deny it. Me."*

*"Well, I make that one murder victim, one police interrogation and one conversation with a ghost," George said. "Now that's what I call a busy evening."*

*Lockwood nodded. "To think some people just watch television."*

I think it's safe to say that Lockwood and Co. never had an evening they were able to watch TV, but sometimes you just gotta do your job and they take theirs very seriously. XD So, no TV but a lot of action and mysterious happenings, which is so much better if you ask me. \*lol\*

Did I forget anything? Oh yes, Flo! I really liked her and I hope we'll see more of her in the next three books. She seems to be one of a kind and I think George and her would get along more than just fine. \*LOL\* I wonder how "Locky" got to know her and I can't wait to find out more about his past! Plus the ending!!!! OMG!!! Such a mean cliffhanger! >\_<

I need to read the next book!!! Sorry guys!!! \*runs off to pre-order "**The Hollow Boy**" from the library\*

P.S: @mo chroi: I'm glad you persuaded me to read it! ;-) It was fun! <3

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### **Frankie Lovely says**

**4 stars**

**Review to come**

Still great but I didn't love it as much as the first.

This one had a big of a drag in the middle.

But still an awesome series for all ages!!

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### **Stacey (prettybooks) says**

I forgot how much I love Lockwood, George and Lucy. They're one of my favourite trios in children's fiction at the moment, rivalling the most famous of them all. Each character shines, from Lockwood's inexplicable ability to act and think both like a teenage boy and an old man, George's chaotic dedication to researching

archives and consuming biscuits, and Lucy's impressive intelligence and determination to solve even the most dangerous of cases and support her argumentative friends. She's been working at Lockwood & Co. for a year now – and they'd be lost without her.

*The Whispering Skull* shares a lot less backstory than *The Screaming Staircase* because the reader is already familiar with the Problem and different types of ghosts, meaning we're thrown straight into the mystery. This time, powerful supernatural artefacts across London have been stolen, and their warders brutally murdered. Lockwood & Co. have messed up yet another case and are feeling dejected after their triumph solving the mystery of the screaming staircase. That is, until they are called to investigate serious paranormal activity at Kensal Green Cemetery. A suspicious grave of a Victorian doctor has been discovered and inside it, a mirror made of bones with mysterious powers. It has been stolen in the night and it's up to Lockwood & Co. to solve the case. They must reluctantly work alongside fellow detectives – the Fittes Agency – with a little healthy (and humiliating) competition. *And* with help from the mysterious whispering skull, housed in a jar in the Lockwood & Co. residence – one of the strongest characters in the book!

*The Whispering Skull* is a worthy sequel to *The Screaming Staircase*. It's full of mystery, adventure, humour – and lots of ghosts! I loved getting to know the trio even more, especially the reserved Anthony Lockwood. I enjoyed watching Lucy's crush on Lockwood develop, with tension that rivals young adult contemporary romance ('He'd looked smarter in his time, but I can't say he'd ever looked better to me.')! It is such a fun series – with the character interactions being a memorable highlight – and I have heard that the third book, *The Hollow Boy*, is the best so far. I should probably pick it up soon, yes?

**"Well, I make that one murder victim, one police interrogation and one conversation with a ghost," George said. "Now that's what I call a busy evening." Lockwood nodded. "To think some people just watch television."**

*Thank you to the publisher for providing this book for review!*

*I also reviewed this book over on Pretty Books.*

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### **Gesine says**

3,5 Sterne ?

Ich glaube mir hätte das Buch besser gefallen, wenn ich mehr Zeit gehabt hätte. So habe ich es immer nur auf meinen täglichen Bahnfahrten und in meiner Mittagspause gelesen. Der Anfang hat sich auf jeden Fall gezogen und es wurde erst ab der Hälfte richtig spannend. Ab da hätte ich es am liebsten in einem Stück durchgelesen. Die Charaktere sind einfach wundervoll und konnten mir mit ihrem Sarkasmus immer ein Lächeln ins Gesicht zaubern. Am Ende ist natürlich wieder etwas passiert weswegen man unbedingt den nächsten Band lesen will. Der sprechende Schädel verdient mit seiner wunderbar gemeinen Art auch noch einen Extrapunkt.

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### **Darth J says**

So this sequel finds Lockwood and Co. on the hunt for an artifact known as the bone mirror (which has powers that are speculated upon, but never fully explained):

They are guided by a glowing green head in a jar:

Along the way, they find themselves in a restricted library:

And then sword-fighting ensues because they carry rapiers around everywhere for some reason:

Then there's a final showdown with a shadowy figure:

I have to say the storytelling seemed quite scalloped to me, in that there are many lulls and info dumps punctuated by peaks of action. The cover artwork is excellent, but the interior illustrations need more contrast to actually see what they are. All in all, this was just an okay book for me.

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**alyssa says**

#### **4.5 Stars**

**Rating:** ★ ★ ★ ★ and a half / 5 stars

**Lead Male Character:** ★ ★ ★ ★ / 5 stars

**Lead Female Character:** ★ ★ ★ ★ / 5 stars

**Plotline:** ★ ★ ★ ★ / 5 stars

**Genre:** Mystery, middle-grade, thriller, action, adventure, ghosts

**Will I recommend this book to others?:** Of course!

**Will I reread this book?:** Yes!

**Overall story summed up in one word:** Marvelous!

There are just some books out there that are so good that words can't do it any justice. You simply have to pick up the book and read it for yourself to see. With that being said, The Whispering Skull falls under this category. It's really difficult for me to explain with words what a beauty this book is unless you read it yourself. Now I'm just going to tell you this: **If you haven't done so yet, PICK UP THIS SERIES (The Whispering Skull is book two and the first book is The Screaming Staircase). Though I'm barely on the second book, I already know this series has a lot of potential. It's beautifully written and it definitely sucks you in from page one and you would never want to put the book down!**

Please read this and you won't regret it one bit!

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I'm totally not ashamed to say that I am now officially **Lockwood trash** thanks so my babe, Sauna ? (I'll link when I get home :)

Oh and before I forget, **Mr. Anthony Lockwood and I are getting married soon and you all are invited!** RSVP now due to limited seats! Hope to see everyone there! :D

Cora ? Tea Party Princess says

5 Words: Creepy, friendship, secrets, adventure, GHOSTS!

I love this creepy alternative world that Jonathan Stroud has created. It's dark and twisted and I can't get enough.

These books are creepy. These books are excellent.

The Whispering Skill is just as well written as the first Lockwood & Co. and doesn't fall into that second book trap. If anything, this one is filled with even more heart-pounding action!

And I love Lucy.

She's just as kick-ass as she was the first time round, still a complex character. We learn more about her, and I loved the slow ebb of information throughout the story. She's strong and she's special, but in a *good* way.

Lockwood is still as infuriatingly mysterious, but I felt he started to grate on me a little - what's so bad that he has to hide it? (Speaking of... THAT ENDING?!)

George is repulsive, just as he was in the late book. Urgh *shudders* those mannerisms of his.

I read this pretty much in one sitting, with a supply of tea and a craving for a jam doughnut.

I received a copy of this for free via NetGalley for review purposes.

Em says

my personality literally changes minute by minute but i will never stop being more emotionally invested in this series than i am in any of the relationships i have with my family members!!!

continuation buddy read with: this muggle

Eilonwy says

Having gained a bit of a reputation for solving the problem of the Screaming Staircase, Lockwood & Company get hired to tackle another troublesome ghost -- this time, in direct competition with their arch enemies, the Fittes Agency.

I don't want to say too much about this second book in this series. It continues in the same vein as the previous volume, with equal mixes of humor, tension, mystery, and complicated plot threads that tie together in the most unexpected ways. I greatly enjoyed it.

Well, mostly.

The good news is that the fat-shaming which annoyed me so much in the first book is gone; I think there's one, maybe two references to George's size, and they're just statements, basically establishing that he is still fat, the end, no judgement or slurring.

The bad news is, there are several girl-hating comments which just ticked me off no end. Lucy hates one of the Fittes agents for being blond, slim, and pouty, for instance, and asserts that these are "three good reasons to dislike her." Um, sorry, because no, they're not; but the text never questions that this is how girls do and should feel about each other.

The one that rankles me most, though, is when Lucy & Co. are trying to identify just who The Whispering Skull might have been in life, and when they guess a woman's name, they get this response: "*You think I might be a girl?*" *the voice spat.* "*What cheek!*" I'm pretty sure that if you were to substitute a variety of other descriptions here: "You think I might be black? Gay? Jewish? Catholic? Lebanese? A Gypsy? A midget? Retarded? Handicapped? What cheek!" they would have been edited right out as obvious hate speech. And yet this misogynistic statement is allowed to stand and slap female readers in the face.

IMO, it's one thing to read all the snarkiness and insults in the Bartimaeus books by this author, since my understanding is that in their proper plane, djinn have no corporeal shape or gender or race or any of the other characteristics to which we humans apply prejudice. But the body-shaming and gender-bashing of actual people in these Lockwood books bothers me. I want to ask the author, "Why sink to this level when, as so many other people have already pointed out, there are so many REAL reasons to hate people?" And this leaves me worried as to what what I have to look forward to in the next installment.

That said, I really did enjoy every other moment of this book, and recommend it. But it bothers me that this series has these problematic elements.

Madeline says

I read the first book in the Lockwood & Co series over a year ago, mainly out of nostalgia - I was a huge fan of Jonathan Stroud's Bartimaeus series when I was younger, and it was fun to discover Stroud's newer series. It had everything I expected from a Stroud book: scary paranormal stuff, sassy banter, fast-paced action, and a setting that I *still* cannot stop imagining as Victorian England. (I think it's the fact that the kids use rapiers as weapons that's throwing me off, but there's honestly no reason for me to get the time period so wrong, except for the fact that this series feels so much like a Victorian Gothic-style ghost story.)

The first book in the series was purely a nostalgia-driven delight for me, so I was excited to dive back into the story. Maybe this was just a weaker story - other reviews seem to agree that it wasn't as strong as the first

book - or maybe the joy at finding a new Stroud series had worn off. Either way, I found a lot more things to nitpick about this one, and even though it was a solid, fun ghost story, I didn't enjoy it as much.

The story picks up six months after the events of *The Screaming Staircase*. Lockwood & Co, the ragtag agency consisting of teenage ghost hunters Anthony Lockwood, Lucy Carlyle, and George Cubbins, are still struggling to compete with the larger ghost-hunting agencies. Their latest case concerns the recently-excavated body of Edmund Bickerstaff, a Victorian doctor who was obsessed with trying to contact spirits. A powerful object was buried with him, and is quickly stolen. Lucy and the others have to track down the object and destroy it, while also trying to figure out the exact circumstances of Bickerstaff's death. Meanwhile, the skull in a jar that they acquired in *The Screaming Staircase* is communicating with Lucy, and getting more involved in her life.

It's all good, scary fun - there's a talking skull that's kept in a jar, for Christ's sake! But it's not as tightly constructed as the first book, and I kept finding issues. For one thing, Stroud has a lot of plot points to juggle, and some of them get forgotten for too long. At the beginning of the book, Lockwood makes a bet with a rival agency that will pit his agency against theirs, and the loser will have to publicly admit defeat. By the time they get around to actually doing this (the two agencies fighting ghosts together) the bet just seems unnecessary and stupid. There's no central haunted setpiece, like the haunted house in *The Screaming Staircase*, so the final ghost-hunting adventure feels a little less impressive. And, as I noted in my review of *The Screaming Staircase*, the murder-mystery subplot is pretty weak - once again, the kids are trying to figure out how someone died, and once again, the solution is pretty simple and anti-climactic, and I didn't even care anymore.

There was just a lot of stuff that felt like it was dashed off in a hurry, and Stroud didn't bother to spend the time making it better. At one point, the kids have to steal an object from the bad guy, and their plan is so insultingly simple and never should have worked, but it goes off without a hitch. Similarly, the ending felt *way* too easy. (view spoiler)

But the biggest issue was the central three characters. Lucy is the strongest, but she's also the narrator, which means we get to be inside her head the whole time, so obviously she's going to be the most fleshed-out. Lockwood remains mysterious, or at least Lucy keeps telling us that he is, but the problem is that whatever Lockwood's deep dark secrets might be, Stroud isn't revealing anything, and the total lack of information just makes me not care. Oh, Lockwood has a secret room in the house that no one is allowed to go into? Look Stroud, we're kind of busy with the ghost investigation right now, can we put a pin in that?

And then there's George. Poor, forgotten George. After leaving him out of almost all the action in *The Screaming Staircase*, Stroud apparently decided to fix the problem by giving us an overdose of George. But it doesn't work, because George is always either a non-entity, or he's wildly inconsistent. Apparently George's primary personality trait is his intellectual curiosity (did we see that in *The Screaming Staircase*? I can't even remember), and in *The Whispering Skull* we learn that he got fired from his previous job for asking too many questions about the agency. Okay, so George is curious, and that curiosity provides a major plot point. Here's the problem: remember Lockwood's mysterious Room of Secrets? George, based on everything Stroud has established about him, should be going crazy trying to figure out what's in there. But does he? When he and Lucy are discussing what might be in the room, George is just like, nope, not curious at all, that's Lockwood's business and I don't need to know. What the hell? It's pretty clear that Stroud doesn't really have a clear idea of George as a character, which is not a problem that we should be having in the second book of a series.

So overall, not nearly as fun or well-done as the first book. But I'm still going to read the third one, because

of course this one ends on the world's biggest cliffhanger. Because Jonathan Stroud is a jerk.
