

Book Review: Everyone on This Train is a Suspect
By Benjamin Stevenson

Ernest Cunningham is at it again. And that can only mean author Benjamin Stevenson has followed up his superbly written murder-mystery, “Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone,” with a sequel that is every bit the equal of the original Cunningham caper.

In “Everyone on This Train is a Suspect,” Cunningham – who serves as both the story’s narrator and author – is attending the Australian Mystery Writers’ 50th Anniversary Festival. The festival takes place on a train. But not just any train. This is The Ghan, a high-class, tourism-oriented passenger train that operates between the northern and southern coasts of Australia with (pretty much) nothing in between but the continent’s vast desert.

Cunningham is one of a half dozen mystery writers who has been invited to attend the festival. Early on, he frequently wonders why he was invited to attend along with the other more accomplished writers. And having been given a large advance in anticipation of his next novel, he’s stuck as to what to write about. But as you can imagine, that writer’s block moment is quickly resolved when one of the writers is murdered. Of course, the remaining writers not only know how to solve a murder, but how to successfully commit one as well – hence the book’s title.

Do too many cooks spoil the broth? Well, imagine five mystery writers, each with his or her ego and motive, attempting to solve the mystery. Chaos quickly ensues, and trust becomes a fleeting commodity. And despite liberally dropping clues throughout the story, Stevenson will keep you guessing right up to the very end.

“Everyone on This Train is a Suspect” is written in the same light, conversational, first-person style where Cunningham – the narrator – is actively writing the book as it’s being read – or at least it feels that way. It’s part of what makes Stevenson’s mysteries so enjoyable to read. And because he keeps you guessing, he also keeps you turning the pages, wanting more.

Stevenson’s presentation of the book feels like the reader has been invited to attend the festival. There’s a layout of the train, a map of the train’s route, even a copy of the festival’s program with brief biographies of the attending writers.

And just when you think the story is about to end, surprise – it doesn’t. But that’s all I’ll say about that.

I give “Everyone on This Train is a Suspect” 4.5 out of 5 stars – deducting half a star for the slightly slower pace of the first 50 pages. But after that, it’s like a runaway train. And I definitely encourage reading the first book, first. You can find a review of “Everyone in My Family Has Killed Someone” under the Archives tab. Enjoy!