



Super

Jim Lehrer

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In the tradition of *Murder on the Orient Express*, Jim Lehrer brings together a cast of characters as fascinating as the historic train that will carry them from Chicago to Los Angeles. In its heyday, the Santa Fe railroad's famous Super Chief was so replete with wealth and celebrity that it became known as "The Train of the Stars." And so we find it in April of 1956, embarking from the Windy City for its trip across the Plains to the West Coast.

Climbing aboard is an amazing spectrum of passengers. There's Darwin Rinehart, a once great Hollywood producer whose most recent movie was a total flop and who now faces bankruptcy and shame. In a dark recess of a train car hides a mysterious, disheveled, sickly man who has not paid for a ticket, smuggled inside by an unscrupulous porter. Millionaire Otto Wheeler arrives in a wheelchair; deathly ill, he knows that this will be his last trip on the great train. Clark Gable causes a stir when he steps aboard, and though he's ridden these rails for years, indulging in booze and women with equal fervor, those around him sense that this time, something is different. And finally there's former President Harry Truman, distinguished, congenial, and constantly accompanied, for his protection, by a railroad detective.

As the Super Chief pulls out of Dearborn Station, the passengers—famous and infamous, anonymous and enigmatic—can't possibly imagine what lies ahead. For as the train gains speed, a series of deadly events unfolds.

Full of remarkable detail and passion for a lost world of opulence and all its intrigue and delights, Jim Lehrer's **Super** spins a complex web of suspense. The twists and turns will keep readers turning the pages at top speed to finish one of the most captivating stories of Lehrer's prolific career.

Super Details

Date : Published April 20th 2010 by Random House (first published 2010)

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Author : Jim Lehrer

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Mike says

Light detective novel with non fiction characters. All takes place in the Santa Fe Super train in the days prior to the jet plane and when Hollywood was still king..... short book, light reading.....

Debbie says

This was a very low key kind of book, maybe too low key about a trip on the Super train from Chicago to California. Three deaths are connected to the trip, but this is not a mystery. The theme of the book seems to be the passing of one thing to another: the big screen to the small, big stars to small, train travel to air travel, and I suppose by inference, romance to the lack of romance.

Barbara Nutting says

What a fun romp on the Santa Fe Super Chief - from a very unexpected source, Jim Lehrer!! A fast, fun mystery with so many "real" people it was hard to tell where the fiction began!! He has written many more that I'm looking forward to reading.

Kate Lynn says

I don't usually read mystery novels, so I thought I'd give this one a shot when I found it at a library sale. Man, was I disappointed.

There honestly wasn't a point to the book other than people are good at hiding their true identity? That's all I can come up with. The 'mystery' was solved right after it happened and the person who did it had nothing to do with the main plot. I liked the author's writing style, but the story was a snooze-fest.

Sandy says

Santa Fe railroad employees handle the powerful, the famous and the eccentric aboard the cross-country run of the elegant Super Chief train making its run from Chicago to L.A. in 1956. The story is a curious mix of history, a somewhat awkwardly presented murder mystery, and Hollywood and political personalities. I know the author best as the long-time anchor of the PBS NewsHour, but this is actually the most recent of his 20+ novels (albeit the first of his that I've read). Although I found many of the real-life personalities and details of rail travel of that era interesting, the mystery lacked tension and the characters weren't particularly well developed. And in reading the epilogue, it wasn't at all clear whether the author was writing a coda to his fictional story or trying to explain what was real and what was fiction.

Karen says

April 1956: Climbing aboard the Sante Fe railroad's famous Super Chief is an amazing spectrum of passengers. There's Darwin Rinehart, a once great Hollywood producer who now faces bankruptcy. In a dark recess of a train car hides a mysterious, disheveled man who has not paid for a ticket, smuggled inside by an unscrupulous porter. Millionaire Otto Wheeler arrives in a wheelchair; deathly ill, he knows that this will be his last trip on the great train. Clark Gable causes a stir when he steps aboard, and though he's ridden these rails for years, indulging in booze and women with equal fervor, those around him sense that this time, something is different. And finally there's former President Harry Truman, distinguished, congenial, and constantly accompanied by a railroad detective. As the Super Chief pulls out of Dearborn Station, the passengers—famous and infamous, anonymous and enigmatic—can't possibly imagine what lies ahead. For as the train gains speed, a series of deadly events unfolds.

Kim says

Just awful. Hard to imagine how such a wonderful journalist could write such a terrible book. No real mystery. Incoherent story. Bad characterizations.

Kathy says

OK, I'm ignorant. I had no idea Jim Lehrer was an author. I just picked this up from the New Books section of the library. Turns out, it's his 20th book. What a bad former bookseller I am!

The action takes place on a train called the Super Chief which traveled across the US and was known as "The Train of the Stars". Characters include Clark Gable, Harry Truman, a mysterious stowaway, a Santa Fe airlines detective, an ill millionaire and several more Hollywood types. Two murders later, the story concludes in a surprising manner.

Lehrer's epilogue states that the characters were all real but I couldn't find reference to a few of them so who knows? It was a good story, regardless.

Jennie says

my mom recommended and bought this book for me to read. it was an entertaining and cute story about trains, murder, and old hollywood. i thought it was most appropriate to start this on one of my many amtrak trips: the environment was perfect! this reads like an old black-and-white movie -- it's full of characters and a bit ridiculous. you never know who will show up or what might happen next. not surprising, as lehrer is known for PBS news hour, it mentions real people, places, and things. so you learn a little bit as well!

Pamela Strickland says

Quick read, interesting narrative, nice contrast to my 'heavier' reading.

Cheryl says

Historical novel set on the Super Chief luxury train in 1956. Although a murder is the main focus of the plot, underneath it's about much more. The end of the Hollywood Golden Age, and people beginning to question the actions of those in authority are also important parts of the story. What was happening on the train was also a reflection of what was starting to happen in the country at that time.

If this sounds like a heavy and serious story, it's not. You can simply enjoy this as a murder mystery. Fans of classic Hollywood films might enjoy this book, too, since some of the characters are real-life actors of that era. A unique, enjoyable read.

Ernie says

If you are a fan of fiction, railroad history, murder mysteries and a Hollywood buff, it is all rolled into one for you in this small, and quick read. The setting brings you back to the twilight of the golden era of the diesel-train era. Overall, I find it well written. The plot is rather simplistic, and a bit unrealistic as to how legal or criminal matters might be handled. With that said, it makes for a quick, escapist read to that time period. Railroad buffs and those smitten with Hollywood intrigue from the golden days of big studio legends will find this appealing as well. If that is your cup of tea, by all means, take a sip and enjoy.

Nick Duretta says

This is a cute conceit--a quasi-mystery involving (among others) Harry Truman, Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert on the Super Chief train from Chicago to L.A. But there's really not much here. Few of the mysteries brought up in the story are actually resolved in any meaningful way. A fun read, but ultimately rather disappointing.

Susan says

Probably 10-15 years ago now, I checked out a book from my local library based mainly on its intriguing cover and the fact that it had one of those crinkly cellophane protectors that I love. But also in part because the author was Jim Lehrer, and I remembered him as a newsman from TV. The book was Purple Dots. I got lost in the story and although the details have become fuzzy I often still refer to it in conversation as one of my favorites. I've learned a bit more about the author as well over the years and have come to respect him as a compelling journalist, trustworthy newscaster, and even as just an overall "nice man". I hadn't read any more fiction by Jim Lehrer until a couple weeks ago, when I found myself in the same library and something made me stumble upon his name in the Fiction section.

Super was the book I picked up this time. Another glossy, crinkly, snazzy cover. The story sounded interesting. It was. What started as a very simple read turned into a tangled web of intertwined stories that involved Harry Truman, Clark Gable, a struggling movie producer, and a dying atomic investigator, among others, all weaving into and around each other on board the Super Chief, Train of the Stars, as it was known in its heyday. I couldn't put it down. My first impressions of a simplistic, strange, made up tale based on what may have been mere impressions of the famous subjects morphed slowly into respect for the story and each of the characters in different ways. Lehrer described their personalities in such a way that they began to materialize in my head. I began to feel deeply sorry for some of them and angry at others. I became wrapped up in their escapades. The end left me very sad but with a smile on my face. The best part? It's all based on truth. And one would be hard pressed to find a more reliable source of truth than Jim Lehrer. Any book that leaves me feeling the way this one did, searching for more information, not wanting to let go of the characters, writing a review(!), is my idea of great fiction. Can't wait to add this to my collection. And continue on with Lehrer's prolific writing. The man has written 20 novels. I have many more to go!Super

Anne says

Travel the Super Chief, the Train of the Stars, from Chicago to Los Angeles in 1956. You will meet a former President, Harry Truman, several movie stars, a well-known journalist (not Mr. Lehrer) and other lesser known characters. Stow-aways, murder and impersonation. It is all in a day's, or night's, work on the Super Chief.
