ForeWord Reviews

JUVENILE FICTION

Ghost Train
Anne Capeci
Paul Casale, illustrator
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In 1926, avalanches were a constant threat to the Great Northern Railroad in Scenic, Washington. The railroad company decided to build an eight-mile tunnel that would make snow slides less of a hazard through this area, so recruits and their families were brought in to work and live in a camp-like settlement. Old family photos and stories of the author's relatives who lived in the Scenic camp provided the inspiration and setting for this book, which is the third in the Cascade Mountain Railroad Mysteries series.

Silk trains were special expresses during the early twentieth century that transported delicate and easily-spoiled raw silk from the West Coast to the Eastern U.S. silk mills. Only stopping for fuel and water, these trains were faster and had priority over other trains. The silk train is called a ghost train because it is not on the master railroad schedule.

This mystery for readers aged seven through ten involves four young friends who find a gun and a note in an old fabric bag beneath one of the train cabins. The note—"electric storm not on schedule—wait for my signal—the goat will pay"—did not make sense to them. The kids had heard their parents refer to the railroad company as the Iron Goat, but an electric storm sounded like bad weather and waiting for a signal seemed to indicate "some kind of secret plan." The electric storm turned out to be a silk train, The Northern Lightening, and the plan was that this train would be robbed by two of the workers-one who would signal the other-and the Great Northern Railroad, the Iron Goat, would be liable for the loss.

This fast-paced mystery story leaves each short chapter cliff-hanging so that the reader is enticed to continue. The characters are true-to-life, mischievous youngsters that today's youth can easily identify with. The author has mixed in plenty of factual information about western railroads, silk trains, life in a 1920s railroad camp, and the importance of the telegraph, so the story can be used in an elementary social studies classroom as well as being a strong addition to any elementary library's historical fiction and mystery collections.

Capeci is the author of many award-winning books for upper elementary students,

including the much-loved *Wishbone Mystery* series and the *Magic School Bus Chapter Books*. The illustrations help young readers to imagine the mountainous scenery from the text and the layout of the camp. Reluctant readers will also appreciate the easy vocabulary and continuous action in this book.

Linda Cooley