

nos villes.

En face des criminels, l'auteur campe fermement les gens de bien: le vieux colonel de Lamorandière, dépossédé de son château, infirme, mais d'un grand courage; Tom Cormier qui consent à aider son ami jusqu'à la mort; et surtout Bertrand Simard. Tous trois devraient susciter l'admiration des jeunes lecteurs et les inciter au respect de la justice et de la loi.

La peinture du mal ainsi faite est-elle exempte de dangers pour la jeunesse? Je le croirais volontiers. En effet, si violente que soit au fond l'action, elle reste suffisamment abstraite pour ne pas traumatiser les jeunes lecteurs. C'est là un roman policier et d'aventures sans érotisme, sans sadisme visible, sans vulgarité. L'auteur glisse discrètement sur les scènes qui auraient pu être cauchemardesques.

Un autre bon point: cette lutte des forces du bien contre les forces du mal est présentée de façon assez crédible. L'action se passe au Nouveau-Brunswick. Si les bandits restent passablement conventionnels, les honnêtes gens sont bien vivants, avec leurs qualités, mais aussi avec leurs travers, leurs défauts, leurs préjugés historiques.

Cette habile composition est heureusement servie par une langue correcte, simple, sans prétention, parfois familière, toujours exempte de vulgarité. On relève tout au plus trois ou quatre maladroites.

Les bonnes qualités de ce roman sont en partie gâtées par un défaut dans le fond. L'intervention peu réfléchie et solitaire de Bertrand est certainement une erreur criminelle en dépit de ses nobles intentions. Il finit d'ailleurs par s'en rendre compte, mais trop tard, et, surtout, il exprime un regret plutôt qu'un repentir. C'est là, je crois, un manque important qu'il faudrait avoir soin d'expliquer aux jeunes lecteurs.

Cette réserve faite, je me réjouis que ce petit roman d'aventures, bien troussé, sans doute destiné aux jeunes de douze à quinze ans, donne l'occasion de discuter avec eux de certains problèmes de la société d'aujourd'hui, notamment des dangers de la drogue et de la lutte contre le crime.

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## CANADIAN-SET MYSTERIES

**Vampires in Ottawa**, Eric Wilson. A Tom and Liz Austen Mystery. Collins, 1984. 119 pp. \$3.50 paper. ISBN 0-00-222858-0; **Spirit in the Rainforest**, Eric Wilson. A Tom and Liz Austen Mystery. Collins, 1984. 152 pp.

\$13.95 cloth. ISBN 0-00222856-4; **The unmasking of 'Ksan**, Eric Wilson. Collins, 1986. 120 pp. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-00-223116-6; **Summer of discovery**, Eric Wilson. Collins, 1984. 129 pp. \$3.50 paper. ISBN 0-00222850-5.

The protagonists are subjected to a seemingly life threatening scene in the first few paragraphs of almost every Eric Wilson book. In *Vampires of Ottawa* Liz Austen is in a cell on death row. In *Spirit in the Rainforest* Tom Austen is buried just before midnight, up to his neck, in the path of a large bulldozer. And a bear attacks Graham in the opening paragraph of *The unmasking of 'Ksan*. No specific threat to life starts *Summer of discovery*, but "Ian Danoff is afraid". The reader soon discovers that the life threatening aspect in each of these opening scenes is a hoax.

Eric Wilson writes mystery novels for children ages 10-14. Two of the books in this review are about Tom and Liz Austen, teenagers who live in Winnipeg and spend a good deal of their time solving mysteries across Canada, together and individually. The other two also involve teenage detectives.

Tom and Liz don't go out of their way looking for mysteries to solve — they just seem to stumble into them. When Liz goes to Ottawa to represent Manitoba in the National Public Speaking Contest for schools, she becomes involved in the mystery of a large estate called Blackwater and its owner Baron Nicolai Zaba. Zaba is from Romania, Dracula's home country. The Baron is being threatened by a vampire and, since Liz's speech topic is Vampires, she is most interested and capable of solving the mystery of the *Vampires of Ottawa*.

Tom goes to Ucluelet to visit some family friends and becomes involved with Nikki and Bunni's effort to save Nearby Island from being logged. There is more to this island and its rainforest than Vernya Anastasia Tosca's desire to have her island logged. There is an abandoned girls' school on the island and a creepy voice crying "Beware, Beware". When Vernya is murdered, Liz joins Tom, and together they solve the mystery of the *Spirit in the Rainforest*.

*The unmasking of 'Ksan* is also situated in British Columbia but here Wilson introduces a different detective. Graham, who lives in Hazelton in Northwestern British Columbia with his minister father, goes to school with Dawn, who is very involved in her native Indian culture. One night during a performance at the Gitksan cultural centre, a valuable raven mask is stolen. Dawn and Graham try to find the robber.

*Summer of discovery*, unlike Wilson's other books, does not concern a murder or burglary. It is more about self-discovery, with some mystery added. Ian Danoff is sent to summer camp. Camp Easter Seal, in Saskatchewan, is different from ordinary summer camps — all the campers are

handicapped. During his stay Ian sets out to discover the mystery of the haunted buildings by the lake, his counsellor's mysterious disappearances at night, and quite a lot about himself.

Of the four books, *Vampires of Ottawa* was the poorest. It took far too long to get into the plot and I constantly had the sense that Liz was taking me on a guided tour of Ottawa. *Spirit in the Rainforest* and *The unmasking of 'Ksan* have some good twists in the plots to keep the reader's interest. One really cannot compare the introspective *Summer of discovery* with the others. Perhaps Wilson is writing some of his experiences as a Camp Easter Seal counsellor.

Wilson uses vivid imagery to excess. He starts far too many sentences with prepositional phrases: "Hoping I wasn't acting like a simp, I walked to the limo and got inside"; "Watched by even more security guards, we went into the gallery and sat down". It appears that Wilson is trying to write a good story for school children while keeping to grammatically correct form. Unfortunately the result is stilted.

As a librarian, I am constantly on the lookout for mystery stories that have the action of Agatha Christie, the language style of Dick Francis and the length of Eric Wilson. Students at the grade 5-7 reading level who are mystery fans want a good, swift-moving story which is short and easy to read. Wilson generally gives them that. He is to be commended also, for being unafraid of setting his stories in Canada. Too many novelists make their settings nebulous so as to fit into the U.S. market. If Wilson throws away some of his prepositional phrases, his stories will flow much more smoothly and he will gain more fans.

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## HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER MYSTERY

**Danger on the river**, J. Robert Janes. Reprinted by Totem Books, 1984. 151 pp. \$2.95 paper. ISBN 0-00-217376-X; **Spies for dinner**, J. Robert Janes. Collins Publishers, 1984. 181 pp. \$13.95 cloth. ISBN 0-00-222840-8; **Murder in the market**, J. Robert Janes. Collins Publishers, 1985. 202 pp. \$13.95 cloth. ISBN 0-00-222857-2.

As the titles of his three mystery novels for juvenile readers suggest, J.