

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.

Robert Janes has capitalized on three subjects which have proven irresistible for generations of mystery fans, including young readers nurtured on the likes of Encyclopedia Brown, the Hardy boys, and Nancy Drew. The suspense and atmosphere of excitement which delights aficionados of the genre sometimes supersedes what most would regard as requisite in other writing for children; but Janes' three works avoid most of the pitfalls of overly contrived plots, fragmented details, episodic action, stereotypical characters, and poor style which can mar mystery stories.

Janes's three mysteries feature the same four thoroughly adolescent children who become involved in thoroughly adult machinations in three distinctive Canadian settings. Although such formulaic overtones conjure ghosts of Stratemeyer past, Janes does more than release a quartet of precocious youngsters on a lapsed adult world, and his books have much to offer his 8 to 12 year-old readers far beyond superficial titillation. The novel's primary characters, and especially the somewhat coddled Rolly and the acrophobic Alice, reveal vulnerabilities and youthful eccentricities which allow them to evoke understanding or even self-identification for the adolescent reader. In addition, Janes's fast-paced plots frame both universal themes, such as loyalty and friendship, and more topical issues, including the threat to the environment of toxic waste in *Danger on the river*, and space-age industrial espionage in *Spies for dinner*.

In the most recent of the three novels, *Murder in the market*, the four teenagers have been hired to help sell farm produce in the St. Lawrence market district of Toronto — a mundane enough prospect for a summer job. Their employer, however, dabbles in the occult, and soon Rolly and his friends are not only involved with mysterious prophecies, but a jewel heist, Chinatown racketeers, and sundry other desperate criminals. Janes offers a realistic picture of the less attractive side of a modern city, and does not hesitate to broach unsavory subjects such as drugs, illegal gambling, street people, and organized crime. Janes is not the overt moralist, however, and he includes these topical concerns in a logically constructed plot in which Rolly and Jim, and Alice and Katie are naturally involved.

In spite of the intrigue and danger which soon envelop the main characters, Janes controls the tone sufficiently to prevent its becoming a mere commentary on the decadence of Toronto's inner city. Rolly, who plays the major role in the book, is something of a likeable bungler, and his comic plodding through the attendant adventures provides some assurance to the young reader that in spite of the book's title, no permanent harm will occur. It is a weakness of the book that this is accomplished through an improbable *volte face* of an erstwhile villain, and that Rolly is presumed to be a murder victim only to be resurrected several pages after his supposed demise. Still, these occurrences are part of Janes's mystery fare, and in all three books noted here, he succeeds in offering his audience an evocative

atmosphere, highly-spiced action, and a relatively accurate depiction of teenage life.

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## L'EVASION ET L'EDUCATION

**La note de passage**, François Gravel. Montréal, Boréal Express, 1985, 199 pp. 11,95\$ relié. ISBN 2-89052-124-9.

Le quotidien ne suffit pas à certains hommes. Asphyxiés par le rythme du métro-boulot-dodo, ceux-ci rêvent d'une vie affranchie des limites et de la banalité. Ce besoin d'évasion (qu'exploitent sans vergogne les mass media), vieux comme la chute d'Adam, se rit des méridiens comme des siècles. Il constitue un des grands axes de compréhension de toute littérature. Dans le premier roman de François Gravel, *La Note de Passage*, ce besoin d'évasion surgit à intervalles réguliers sous la forme d'un monde parallèle, concurrent de celui de la réalité. Grâce à son jeu sur l'envers et l'endroit, et grâce à son adaptation originale du thème de l'évasion, le romancier capte l'intérêt du lecteur qui suit allègrement les aventures de cégépiens au pays des merveilles.

Ce merveilleux lointain où le "sésame ouvre-toi", concession aux moeurs de l'époque, prend la forme de champignons hallucinogènes se présente comme un monde onirique des plus délirants. Lénine, devenu un mécanicien à la langue coupée, conduit les initiés dans une locomotive à vapeur vers une Albanie mythique gouvernée par l'illustre Hoxi Xoxa. Une fois rendus (ou plutôt, une fois "partis"), ceux-ci peuvent interpréter "Roll Over Beethoven" en compagnie de John Lennon, discuter avec Marx, ivre mort, ou visiter en compagnie d'une hôtesse libidineuse les chambres du manoir, à moins que cette visite ne soit un traquenard de l'énigmatique Charles-Albert Lachapelle, le maître de céans.

Ces pérégrinations, fruit d'une imagination luxuriante, colorent le roman d'une teinte surréaliste. Nous y retrouvons aussi la caractéristique commune à tous les romans dits "d'évasion": l'abolition de la durée quotidienne grise et banale, sa transfiguration en un temps dense et heureux. Imagination et quête du bonheur ne cessent de se conjuguer pour créer cette "vraie vie" qu'évoque Rimbaud et qui se trouve "ailleurs". Comment,