

## Rich *Silverwing* Sequel

*Sunwing*. Kenneth Opper. HarperCollins, 1999. 243 pp. \$14.95 paper. ISBN 0-00648166-3.

What is a bat's utopia? Why, a place where "the trees never lose their leaves, the stream never freezes. It's forever warm as a summer night, with as many insects as you could ever hope to eat." In *Sunwing*, lured by siren bat voices, Shade and his fellow bats fly through the trapdoor of the Human Building containing this utopia. However, the suspicious Shade wonders: "If it's Paradise, why isn't there a way out?" Besides, the bugs don't taste quite right.

*Sunwing* is the stunning sequel to *Silverwing*, and is more ambitious in scope. Once again Shade encounters his nemesis, the giant cannibal bat Goth. But Shade manages more than mere survival: he saves the sun and brings the bats, exiled from its rays, back into daylight.

In *Sunwing*, Kenneth Opper plays with ideas of utopia. The bat utopia turns out to be a place where humans experiment on bats, getting them to carry explosives. This is based on Project X-Ray, a real plan during World War II to use bats to carry explosive devices. (It backfired when the bats escaped and bombed Army buildings!) Shade escapes and travels to the jungle, where he discovers the cannibal bats' plan to extinguish the sun.

The book is fast-paced, compelling and inventive. Shade has grown up a little since *Silverwing*. His ability to use sound has developed: in a gripping fight sequence with Goth, he uses it to make optical illusions. Opper creates a feeling of real evil, but leavens it with his great sense of humour. His writing is rich with just the right amount of detail. He brings to life a complete world, and you can almost taste the mosquitoes. The change from the northern forest to the jungle — with huge bugs that can kill a young bat — is vividly described. These bats are all individuals; I particularly like the sharp-witted Marina. The relationship between Shade and Chinook is nuanced, as Shade is by turns impressed and annoyed by his sometime rival. Father and son relationships are played out in the bat, rat and owl worlds as fathers and sons are lost and found.

Shade saves the day, but not single-handedly: he forms alliances with the owls and rats, sworn enemies of bats. He moves from the fake utopia that came about with no effort, to a real one founded by courage and negotiation. Opper thus shows the young reader the value of cooperation without preaching.

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## Combating Racism through Friendship

*Maybe Tomorrow*. Joan Weir. Stoddart Kids, 2000. 209 pp. \$7.99 paper. ISBN 0-7736-7486-1. *Rebecca*. Carol Matas. Scholastic Canada Ltd., 2000. 152 pp. \$5.99 paper. ISBN 0-439-98718-0.