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Author Profile: Anthony Bidulka's Date with a Sheesha



Anthony Bidulka's mystery series tells the story of a world-travelling, wine-swilling, wise-cracking, gay Canadian PI living a big life in a small city. *The Russell Quant* series is a multi-award nominee including for the CWC **Arthur Ellis Award**, and was awarded the **Lambda Literary Award** for Best Men's Mystery. Anthony Bidulka has enjoyed time well-spent and misspent in the worlds of academia, accounting, footwear, food services, and farming. In 1999, Anthony Bidulka, BA, BEd, BComm, CA, left a decade-long career as a chartered accountant to pursue writing.

The Russell Quant books are: *Amuse Bouche* (2003), *Flight of Aquavit* (2004), *Tapas on the Ramblas* (2005), *Stain of the Berry* (2006), *Sundowner Ubuntu* (2007), *Aloha, Candy Hearts* (2009), *Date With a Sheesha* (2010.)

CW: When did you first know you wanted to be an author?

AB: Pretty much as soon as I could put pen to paper. As a youngster I was completely entranced by the power of storytelling and my greatest wish was to be someone who could do that. Instead of spending my allowance on candy or toys, I'd buy books and comics. As a teenager, I began writing and illustrating stories for my nieces and nephews. In truth, those were the first books I authored.

CW: Tell us a little about your books.

AB: I write a mystery series, which is not exactly what I set out to do. My first serious attempt at a book—as an adult—was a thriller. While I was waiting for the offers to pour in, I thought it might be a good idea to spend time on something just for the pure love and fun of writing. I created the world of Russell Quant, the first and only half-Ukrainian, half-Irish, wine-swilling, world-travelling, wise-cracking, ex-cop, ex-farm boy, gay, prairie-dwelling, Canadian private eye being written about today anywhere by anyone! (I dare anyone to contradict me.) That was ten years ago. Russell Quant has been my literary companion ever since.

The current release, *Date With a Sheesha*, deals with a young Canadian researcher travelling to the Middle East to buy antique carpets. Unfortunately, he's found dead in a Dubai **souk** wrapped in a carpet. Russell is hired by the young man's father to discover whether this was a simple tourist mugging gone bad as the authorities insist. (Of

course, it is anything but). What follows is a magic carpet ride of an adventure from Saskatchewan to the frankincense fields of Oman and scorching sand dunes of Saudi Arabia.

CW: What research was involved in your book's development?

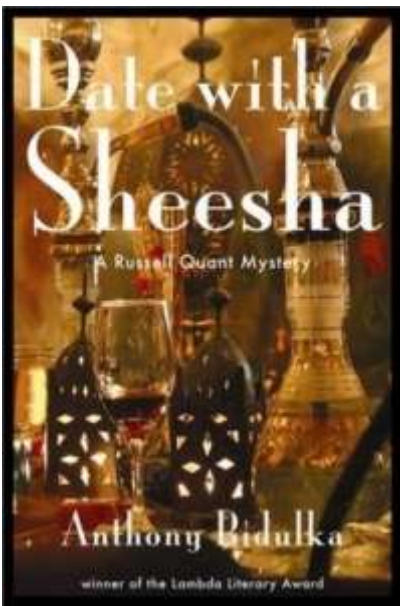
AB: In each of the Russell Quant books, although much of the action takes place in Saskatchewan, Russell always finds himself embroiled in some sort of shenanigans in foreign locales. He's been to the south of France, New York, Africa, Hawaii, and now, the Middle East. Each of the locations is chosen because of time I have spent there snooping about and wondering if this is a good place for murder and/or mayhem.

CW: What's your writing process?

AB: I am very much an outliner. I like having at least a basic structure on which to build. I like knowing where I'm going. That said, I also think the most exciting—and sometimes nail biting aspect of writing fiction is the unknown. Although I create outlines, they are only the bare bones. The flesh is all the rest of the good stuff that comes out as you write the story, develop characters, create a world that only you control. Heady stuff, it is.

Once I have a first draft, I'll go through a number of revisions until the piece gets to the point where I think it is the best it can be. Then I send it to my editor and she tells me why it isn't.

CW: What's the most surprising thing you discovered writing this book?



AB: I've sometimes wondered if writing a series would get boring or formulaic but I don't find that to be true. I'm writing the eighth and I've attempted to give each of the books in the series a slightly different flavour. One is more romantic than the others. One is more of a caper. Another is more of a thriller and one is the scariest of the bunch. It's a delicate balance because, to maintain the essence of what people liked about the series and characters, you don't want to change things up too much. My hope is to keep the series fresh, the readers engaged and on their toes. That keeps me interested and excited to write more about Russell.

CW: What's the hardest part of the publishing process?

AB: Today I think the most difficult part of the publishing process is keeping up with the speed-of-light changes in the industry. How we write, read, publish, and promote the written word is changing into something that was unrecognizable only five, ten years ago.

CW: How has that changed your book marketing?

AB: Extreme change had just begun to show its face as my first book was being published. Oddly enough, this has been a boon to me. I have only known upheaval in this industry. Just looking back over the past eight to nine years, one of the biggest changes is that the majority—the *majority!*—of small independent bookstores at which I gave readings in Canada and the US are now gone. They were the ones willing to give a new Canadian a chance.

Oh yes, the world has changed and we must evolve with it. We used to give away electronic copies of the books for free, thinking that people would never read an entire book on screen, but perhaps it would entice them to buy the hard copy. Many of my colleagues now produce trailers for their books that rival those of blockbuster movies.

I have always seen the key to marketing a book as developing an ever-changing toolbox full of tricks. You try ten things and hope two of them work well. And even so, those two things will likely have to be tossed and replaced with something else before you blink. Daunting? Yes. Exciting? Yes. The essence is to be creative, be communicative, never give up trying.

CW: What do you most enjoy about being an author?

AB: There are so many enjoyable parts of the writing life. The firsts are top of the list. Getting that first signed contract. Seeing your book in galley format. Seeing it in a bookstore window. Getting emails from readers (who aren't related to you!). Having your book reviewed in a major newspaper or magazine. Flying into a city you've never been to before and having people actually show up at a reading just to see you. It's all so wonderful and fun and a truly unique experience.

CW:What advice would you give unpublished writers?

AB: Get involved in the industry. Join writers groups, go to conferences, meet other writers, volunteer on boards and committees. As I've discovered in every part of my life, when you give back, you get back ten times more.

CW:What's your next book project?

AB: A brand new edition of the first book in the Russell Quant series, *Amuse Bouche*, is being released soon. I'm currently working on a few different writing projects, one being the eighth Russell Quant mystery, tentatively titled *Dos Equus*.

CW: Thank you, Anthony! For more information, please visit www.anthonybidulka.com.