

## Book Banter by Julie Kobussen

Having had the privilege of bantering back and forth with the accomplished Saskatchewan author, Anthony Bidulka, has really peaked my interest in his Russell Quant series. I have plans to purchase each of the other four, Amuse Bouche being the first (previously reviewed), and sit down over the Easter break to devour them. For me it's like popping those ripe summer cherries into my mouth. One after another, I remove the stem, chew the sweet dripping fruit and spit out the pit. As my hand is already reaching for the next, just like the pages I'll be turning ceaselessly until I've finished the stash of sweet treats. I especially look forward to Stain of the Berry: A Russell Quant Mystery within which you will find the amazing arctic luxury retreat of the "crazy rich", described in question two by this featured author.

Q&A with Anthony Bidulka continued...

1. Each time I picked up Amuse Bouche a nostalgic feeling came over me as if I were returning to the neighbourhood where I grew up. Living in Saskatoon, do you go out of your way to find new hidden niches in the community, or do you include places that are familiar to you when planning your Russell Quant settings?

I like to think of Saskatoon and Saskatchewan overall to some extent as another character in the books. At first, when I conceptualized this series, I thought a lot about that old adage write what you know. I knew Saskatoon, but I've also been inspired by parts of her that I never knew and am just discovering. Once I realized that the books were becoming successful outside Saskatchewan and outside of Canada, I focused even more on telling a tale about this city and this province. So I thrill to the idea of presenting a Saskatoon and a Saskatchewan many people might not expect.

2. When researching for foreign settings do you find the internet a useful research tool or do you base most of those settings on personal experience?

The internet is a wonderful tool for writers in terms of research, and I certainly use it a great deal. But in terms of the travel/locale aspects of the books, most of that comes from personal experience.

Each of these adventures is based, in part, on a trip I have taken. And it raises the chicken-and-egg question: does travel influence writing or writing influence travel? My answer is the former.

...In the five books of the series to date, there is one instance where Russell boldly goes where I have never been. In that case, it was a nice meeting of storyline requirement and a rather unique location I'd heard about. A well-heeled friend of ours is invited once a year to private luxury getaway home in the arctic. The place is so remote that it is only reachable and liveable for several short weeks each year. They fly in their guests and all the necessities, including a full wine cellar and a chef. (Now that's crazy rich, right?) The idea of it interested me and fit in nicely with a pseudo-abduction I'd planned for my main character. After writing about trips I'd been on, the challenge of penning a place I'd never been to appealed to me. It gave my writing and research muscles a little bit of exercise we all know changing up your exercise routine now and again is a good thing and I think it worked out okay. Still, my preference remains to write of places I've seen, smelled, breathed the air and tasted the food of. Not only does it help me get the small details right and hopefully infuse the writing with realism, personally it is a lovely way of marrying two of my favourite activities: writing and travel.