

This is the review of *Stain of the Berry* which appears in the current (June) issue of *Wayves*.
The Boogeyman will get you if you don't watch out!

Stain of the Berry
ISBN 1-897178-24-7
by Anthony Bidulka
Insomniac Press

review by Ralph Higgins

Are you scared of the Boogeyman? Maybe you should be. The Boogeyman in *Stain of the Berry* is quite real and he or she is scaring people to death. Someone is stalking victims, placing late night threatening phone calls and sending notes warning of imminent demise. Seems like a practical joke or a case of overactive imagination until the first body is found.

Was it suicide? A fragile personality pushed over the brink by the Boogeyman's macabre sense of humour? Or, is there a killer loose who enjoys toying with his victims before finishing them off? This is the puzzle that gay sleuth, Russell Quant must solve, yet he knows that the closer he follows the killer's trail, the more likely it is that he will become the object of the Boogeyman's attention.

In this, the fourth in the Russell Quant mystery series by talented Saskatchewan writer, Anthony Bidulka, we are presented with a delightfully intricate story that operates on three interconnected layers. First, there is the whodunit of the mystery - find the Boogeyman and stop him before he stops Quant. Second there is the development of Quant's personal life - the heart and hormones part of existence that that both gladdens and frightens him. Does he dare let down his guard to let someone in? Third is the search for his dear friend, Sereena, his enigmatic neighbour who has played an integral part in his recent life and who has -mysteriously - disappeared. Indications are that Sereena does not wish to be found but it is more that curiosity that drives Russell to seek her.

Intuitively, he knows that her fate and his are intertwined but is he prepared to accept the truth that links their lives?

The mystery genre is a celebrated but often maligned one. During the years when Dame Agatha was the reigning queen, it became tradition to purchase a Christie for Christmas. Now it has become fashionable in some circles to dismiss all mystery writers as failed fiction writers who merely follow a formula. Bidulka is clear evidence that writing in the mystery genre does not automatically preclude character development or emotional connection with the reader. The success of any story may be measured by the extent to which we, the readers, care what happens to the characters. In those terms, *Stain of the Berry*, is a grand success - we root for Quant's achievements and we sorrow for his losses. Bidulka has created a believable, likable hero who forges into dangerous territory, pushing through panic and fear by his driving need to discover the truth. And somehow we have the impression that his success depends on our participation. Bidulka's skill makes us the story

so vivid that we feel as if we are the friend holding the flashlight while Quant explores the tunnel ahead.

Ask for *Stain of the Berry* at your local bookstore and visit Anthony Bidulka at www.anthonymbidulka.com.