

## **Bidulka shows eye for detail**

### **Ned Powers**

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### SUNDOWNER UBUNTU

By Anthony Bidulka,

Insomniac Press, \$21.95

With his fifth in the series of Russell Quant mysteries, Saskatoon's Anthony Bidulka continues to serve up a blend of winning ingredients.

Bidulka's private eye, Quant, usually accepts challenges to solve mysteries in faraway places. In Sundowner Ubuntu, the Saskatoon detective goes to South Africa, searching for a man whose quest for peace, contentment and well-being has taken him away from all the Saskatchewan connections he once had.

With purposeful pursuit and travelling money, Quant does his job efficiently with daring style, scrambling from an exploding truck, dodging bullets and escaping numerous calamities. It would seem all are perpetrated to keep Quant from tracking down his target.

Bidulka builds engaging characters. Some are right in the neighbourhoods of Saskatoon. One is an adventurous woman he meets on the plane; and through connections in South Africa -- sometimes by coincidence -- they wind up together, dangerously close to disaster.

Added to the mix are unique cultural personalities from Africa, some of whom Quant never knows whether to trust.

Most suspicious is a man, identified only by the noise of a dragging lame leg. More visible is a gun-wielding man of mayhem, whose sinister eyes follow Quant from the moment he boards the plane to Africa.

Truly amazing is Bidulka's sense of sights, sounds and smells. Like a good journalist, he gives exquisitely detailed descriptions of the settings and provides history lessons with each intriguing piece of territory.

To know the neighbourhoods in Saskatoon, and explain their background, is natural for a local writer. To get a proper fix on the South African venues, however, Bidulka travelled extensively to discover Cape Town, Johannesburg, Victoria Falls, the game reserves and lodges, and areas where the poorest of the poor live. He gets high marks for homework.

At one point, Quant talks about the mixed tide of "exhilaration, apprehension and appreciation," and that's a fitting description of what any reader will get out of this book.

Bidulka is an expert at adapting his tales to continents and cultures. In four previous books, he lifted Quant off the Prairies and dropped him into exotic settings that included New York, Paris, a Mediterranean cruise, and an adventure near the Arctic Circle.

Bidulka promises there is much left for his alter-ego to discover. For the time being, however, there will be an interruption in the flow of Quant mysteries because Canadian television is developing the possibility of a series of one-hour dramas.

Never one to sit idle, Bidulka is building a fantasy-mystery plot, but with much different characters, for release next year. Quant, in book form, may not reappear until the fall of 2009.

Powers is a Saskatoon freelance writer.

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