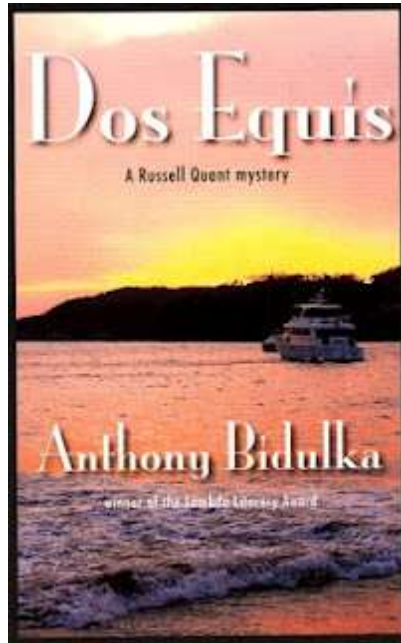


**Dos Equis by Anthony Bidulka**



*Dos Equis* by Anthony Bidulka – Russell Quant has spent a long year away from Saskatoon plagued by regrets over the ending of his last case and in sorrow over the end of a relationship because of his career. The usually chipper sleuth has been very depressed. With the passage of time he has reconciled himself to his losses and is now ready to return home.

Russell provides a poignant reflection:

"It's been said gay people experience a retarded adolescence. We're too busy fighting doubt, fearing revelation, hiding who we are, to deal with the all other "regular" stuff adolescence throws our way. We have to do that later. Maybe this past year had been my time. My adolescence."

In Zihuatanejo, Mexico, his favourite destination in Mexico, he is startled by a phone call from his old antagonist, Jane Cross,

the Regina private detective. She is asking for his help. On his way back to Saskatoon he stops to see her in Regina but is stunned when he finds her dead on the floor of her office.

He has no time to deal with the shock for he is attacked in her office. His assailant escapes but not before leaving a clue unlikely to be detected by a straight male detective. Russell smells the distinctive notes of Tom Ford cologne. While upset over the attack Russell is impressed by his foe's taste in male fragrance.

Back in Saskatoon Russell is greeted eagerly by friends glad to see him return. Only his first dog, Barbra, is aloof. She is not happy he has been away a year.

Russell is determined to help find the killer of Jane. After all, the network of Saskatchewan private detectives, especially gay and lesbian, is tiny.

Searching out the people involved in Jane's last files takes him out of Saskatoon to the village of Muenster. It is a place I know well having graduated from St. Peter's College at the Benedictine abbey adjacent to Muenster. I keep hoping Russell will return to his rural routes for a future adventure based in the country.

At Muenster he speaks to a couple of ladies about Jane discussing her investigation into the death of an elderly and wealthy female neighbour.

The mystery features a winter death well suited to Saskatchewan.

A new man, J.P. Taine, enters Russell's life in an unconventional way and Russell is swiftly smitten. They work together on the investigation.

J.P. and Russell find a document that refers to an ending fee with for an elderly woman. It is a creepy but very clever euphemism for a contracted murder. Anthony, the former accountant, noted that it was a deduction on an income statement.

As they struggle through computer searches J.P. suggests a Saskatchewan winter evening walk to clear their minds. Russell hesitates:

“Are you crazy? It is almost ten at night. Not to mention that with the wind chill it's probably minus forty. And, in case you havcn't noticed, it's snowing like mad out there.”

They go for the walk.

Ultimately Russell, his friends and his family all head south to Zihuatanejo to solve the mystery and enjoy some time away from the brutal Saskatchewan winter. Anthony's descriptions of Zihuatanejo have me ready to jump on the next flight. It would have been even harder to resist going had I been reading the book in January.

Anthony's colourful witty language is best on display with regard to his 70 year old mother, Kay, taking the first airplane flight of her life with his friends, Anthony and Jarod. I described the passage in my post on the book launch.

The characters are better than ever. Anthony has created a vibrant community of friends and relatives for Russell in Saskatchewan.

The mystery itself gave me some problems. The concept was not as credible as I would have liked. It is hard to say more without compromising the story.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed the book. I find myself sailing through Anthony's books eager to learn what is going to happen next in Russell's busy life. (May 6/12)